DIDASKALIA

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Didaskalia is an electronic journal dedicated to the study of all aspects of ancient Greek and Roman performance.

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About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλίαι. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

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Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 10 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

Remembering Kate Bosher

John Given
East Carolina University

As *Didaskalia* Volume 8 began with a tribute to the journal's dear friend, Douglass Parker, so *Didaskalia* 10 begins with a lament for a too-soon-departed editorial-board colleague, Kathryn G. Bosher. Kate passed away on March 23, 2013, after a brief battle with metastatic lung cancer. She was 38, and is survived by her husband Dale Winling and their young son Ernest. She had been an Assistant Professor of Classics at Northwestern University since 2006, and was poised to take up a position at Ohio State University in fall 2013. Her education was at the University of Toronto (B.A. and M.A.) and the University of Michigan (Ph.D.), where she completed her dissertation on "Theater of the Periphery: The Social and Political History of Early Theater in Sicily" (2006).

Kate Bosher, 1974-2013

The periphery. It is where Kate's research interests lay. She endeavored to bring to light theatrical moments that had been lost in the shadows of more famous events. She toured Sicily on her own, to discover theaters forgotten because of scholars' Athenocentric perspective and to discover plays performed away from the bright lights of the City Dionysia. Peripheral materials in Classical Studies are fragmentary, obscure, even unintelligible. Arguments about the periphery engage in speculation. They are the product of a scholarly optimism about recovering the unrecoverable. But Kate was not by nature a scholarly optimist. Her meticulous arguments about her intractable Sicilian material found undeniably real connections. Kate's work provides a solid foundation for generations of scholars of ancient Greek theater away from Athens. Her edited volume, Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy, was an important beginning. Edith Hall, in her Times Literary Supplement review, wrote, "The significance of an early and independent tradition of theater in Magna Graecia has indeed long been acknowledged by homegrown Italian archaeologists and German philological specialists in Greek dialects. But Theater Outside Athens, by adding literary history into the mix, and making the key debates accessible in English, will draw far wider attention to the theater-mad Greeks of south Italy." At Kate's funeral, there was much talk of publishing her dissertation posthumously; it is a publication that will benefit us all.

The periphery. Kate also understood it chronologically. Her recent work was moving into the reception of Greek drama in the Americas. While resident at Northwestern, she performed important archival work in Chicago to illuminate the Second City's engagement with Greek theater. Even her reception studies focused on the peripheral within the field. Rather than explore the semi-well-known tragedies produced, for example, by Jane Addams's Hull House, Kate found in 19th-century programs and scrapbooks a lowbrow tradition of classically themed burlesques and Roman gladiatorial sagas. For Kate, popular and commercial theater deserved as much attention as theater claiming greater cultural capital. These interests led her to spearhead a new project, The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas, a forthcoming book edited by Kate, Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell, and Patrice Rankine. As Prof. McConnell noted in a recent email to the volume's contributors, the book's "impetus" was Kate's. Her spirit infuses the shape of the project. Kate kindly invited me to write a chapter on Greek comedy in

American musical theater. In a spirit typical of her wide-ranging mind, she concocted an idea for a chapter by combining the lesser-studied ancient theatrical genre and a modern popular genre that, until recently, had been almost wholly neglected by theater historians. My final correspondence from Kate was an acknowledgement of my completed chapter, and it concluded with a hope “to see you at some point soon.”

The periphery. It’s also how Kate saw herself in others’ lives. I met Kate when she first came to Ann Arbor. I vividly remember speaking to her at the opening reception—standing in the corner of the room away from most of the hubbub. That was not atypical. Kate never sought the spotlight. I have far more memories of her in small settings than at boisterous social events. Whether meeting for coffee, reading Euripides, or continuing our annual tradition of birthday ice cream sundaes—our birthdays were two days apart, and we were sure to celebrate both!—Kate always made you feel like the center of the world, and she was happy to share in the glow of your light. Yet news of Kate’s death left her friends in shock. She had told very few people that she was ill. As we all immediately realized, it was Kate’s final act of selflessness, her final chance to eschew the spotlight. Kate did not like people to make a fuss over her. Her decision to fade away quietly made total sense. Even to friends who knew her well, she rarely spoke of herself. While I had known of her devotion to rowing, for instance, only from her obituary did I learn that she had rowed for Canada’s national team as a teenager, and that during grad school she had “won the Royal Canadian Henley championship women’s single scull and the women’s elite single scull at the U.S. Rowing National Championship Regatta in 2004.” Telling of those accomplishments would have necessitated public celebrations, just as telling of her illness would have necessitated public lamentations. Indeed, as I write these words, I feel guilty. Kate would surely not have wanted this tribute. Write it I must, though; for, with all her expertise in peripheral scholarly matters, Kate was wrong about her peripheral place in our lives. Our loss is at the very center of our hearts.

Seneca's *Thyestes*

Directed by Claire Catenaccio
April 4-6, 2013
Minor Latham Playhouse, Barnard College
New York, New York

Review by **Timothy Hanford**
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

The Barnard College/Columbia University Ancient Drama Group offered a spirited and stimulating performance of Seneca's tragic masterpiece *Thyestes*.[1] Thanks to the Matthew Allen Kramer Fund, there have been productions of ancient drama in their original Greek or Latin at Barnard/Columbia since 1977. The *Thyestes*, like last year's *Alcestis*, was directed by Claire Catenaccio, under the guidance of Helene Foley. Ashley Simone was lead producer for this year's performance. The cast and crew mostly consisted of Barnard and Columbia undergraduate and graduate students, but, as in past productions, students and faculty from various institutions in the New York City area were also involved.

The messengers, played by (left to right) Talia Varonos-Pavlopoulos, Kara Takashige Boehm, Solveig Gold, and Phil Stamato. Photo by Joseph Henry Ritter.

Seneca's *Thyestes* has as its subject the shocking revenge of Atreus, mythical Greek king of Argos, on his brother Thyestes, who once seduced Atreus's wife and subsequently usurped his brother's throne. At the beginning of the play, Atreus is again king of Argos, and Thyestes is in exile. In the prologue, the ghost of Tantalus, the notorious filicide punished by the gods, grandfather to Atreus and Thyestes, is summoned from the underworld and forced by the Fury to infect the house of Pelops with yet another cycle of murder and cooking of human flesh. From there, we witness Atreus planning his revenge and luring his brother and nephews into the trap: Atreus deviously welcomes his brother back to Argos, but meanwhile manages to kill Thyestes's sons and serve them as food to his brother. The play ends with the revelation of Thyestes's unspeakable feast on his children. In four odes interspersed throughout the play, the chorus ruminates on various related subjects, such as Tantalus's punishment in the underworld, the nature of kingship, and the cosmic chaos which the chorus witnesses in the wake of the brothers' unequaled crimes.

Atreus, played by Gavin McGown. Photo by Joseph Henry Ritter.

How could one perform such a horrific 'freak show' onstage for a 21st century audience? This production made the bold choice of employing a circus metaphor for much of the play, in which Atreus was intriguingly portrayed as 'ringmaster' (and old-time magician) for the ensuing drama. This metaphor strongly activated the sense of horrific exhibitionism present in Seneca's tragedy, particularly in the last two acts. However, it was not employed exclusively throughout the play; for example, the first act, and in fact all the choral odes, had little clear connection to this circus theme. To be fair, Senecan tragedy often seems to be made up of disparate elements; in particular, the chorus often seems unaware of the actual events in the dramatic episodes, and is probably offstage during these episodes, as it was in this production. Also, the choice of the circus metaphor necessitated rather bright stage lighting, which this production used; one could argue that the bleak subject matter of the play sometimes called for darker, more frightening illumination. In fact, the circus motif, as it was employed in this production, at times felt too 'upbeat' and boisterous for Seneca's very disconcerting material. That said, this motif did effectively allow the audience to contemplate Seneca's tragedy as a 'show' in the fullest sense, meant to entertain its audience, with all the difficult issues that notion implies, given the nefarious and nightmarish nature of the *Thyestes*.

Thyestes, played by Ridge Montes. Photo by Joseph Henry Ritter.

Furthermore, as Polyxeni Strolonga reminded this reviewer, the actors were moderately successful in bringing out the strains of black humor present within the play, sometimes eliciting laughter from the audience. Here too the play is problematic: are we to laugh with the actors, at them, or not at all? In the last act, for example, when Thyestes requests that he be reunited with his sons, not knowing that he just ingested their flesh, Atreus reassures him by saying *satiaberis, ne metue* ('you will be satisfied, do not fear,' 980). We the audience could very well laugh: Atreus's words play on the various meanings of the verb *satio* ('satisfy the appetite, fill up, gratify, sate'). We could also imagine Atreus's words as directed to us the audience: we too will 'get our fill' of the grisly spectacle Atreus is about to unveil.

Seneca's five-act play was performed in an economical 90 minutes without intermission (approximately 100–200 lines were cut from the original text of about 1100 lines). The first act effectively set the stage for Atreus's coming revenge. Tantalus (Matthew McGowan) and the Fury (Katharina Volk) frighteningly evoked terror and sadism respectively. In the second act, we first saw Atreus, played expressively by Gavin McGown, peering into a mirror, a nice touch given his introspective initial monologue. The attendant, played by Mathias Hanses, provided a calm contrast to Atreus's mania.

The third act introduced us to Thyestes, played by Ridge Montes, filled with hesitation about returning to Argos and visiting his brother. Of Thyestes's three sons, Tantalus Jr. was played by Talia Varonos-Pavlopoulos, while the other two sons (*personae mutae*) were displayed as walking puppets approximately two feet in height. The use of puppets was inventive, carefully done, and in keeping with the carnival theme, but also somewhat confusing, given that one son was played by a live actor.

The fourth act, containing the messenger's extended description of the murder and cooking of the sons, was arguably the high point of the performance. Rather than being performed by one messenger, the role was ably divided into four parts (played by Solveig Gold, Kara Takashige Boehm, Talia Varonos-Pavlopoulos, and Phil Stamato); each actor lent a shocking buffoonery to the horrific subject matter, just the sort of mix the production was aiming for.

In the final, climactic scene of the play, in which Atreus revels in his revenge and Thyestes recoils at his recent meal, Gavin McGown effectively displayed Atreus's sense of fiendish mastery, while Ridge Montes explored the depths of a father's despair, at one point dramatically crouching on the stage as if to vomit. Atreus did not reveal the heads and hands of the sons to his brother; instead, a large layer cake was employed, which, when split open, appeared to be made up of the sons' entrails. This device seemed to contradict line 764 of Seneca's play, where the messenger notes that Atreus in his butchery saves the heads and hands, presumably for this purpose (*tantum ora servat et datas fidei manus*).

The play was delivered entirely in Latin, with English surtitles. While such a linguistic format can pose challenges to both performers and audience, the Barnard/Columbia Ancient Drama Group rose to the occasion, expertly negotiating Seneca's iambic trimeters and choral meters. While actors spoke the Latin with varying pronunciation, some trilling their r's or nasalizing their vowels more than others, this variety in no way detracted from the performance; the actors and singers truly brought Seneca's Latin to life. The English translation (by Ursula Poole and Claire Catenaccio) was concise and effective. Occasionally the size of the theater and the height of the projection screen caused the actors onstage to obscure the surtitles, making it difficult to follow the English. (Last year's *Alcestis* production was in the Glicker-Milstein Theatre, also on the Barnard campus, a larger space with better sightlines.)

The set design was simple, with colorful, abstract paper wall hangings. The instrumental music, composed by Kate Brassel, was provided by a live four-person ensemble, consisting of piano, saxophone, and percussion. The music was an eclectic mixture of modernist pieces, including playful references to pop culture; the presence of the ensemble at far stage left added to the dynamics of the action visible to the audience.

The chorus was divided into two sets of four singers and six dancers. The singing melodies (also composed by Brassel) were experimental and did not shy away from dissonance; the chorus sometimes quickened the pace of its singing to show excitement. During the choral odes, the dancers occupied the center of the stage, were expressive, and moved in elaborate patterns, sometimes miming the action that was being described in words. Both singers and dancers were dressed in bright white, a choice that did not fit exactly with the bleak and lurid tones of the play.

The actors' costumes were impressive and worked well given the setting of the *Thyestes*. While one of the highlights was the golden dress worn by the Fury in the first act, complete with an elaborate headdress and light-green shawl, most of the costumes tended toward the circus theme. Both Atreus and Thyestes wore vintage dark suits, the messengers were dressed in clownish fashion, and Tantalus was frightfully arrayed in a bloodstained white frock. The makeup was expressive, evoking a haunted carnival; patches of dark and light hues on the actors' faces echoed the use of masks in ancient drama.

The members of the Barnard/Columbia Ancient Drama Group took a difficult yet compelling ancient Roman tragedy and truly made it their own. The production was a sophisticated mixture of various elements that consistently reflected a great deal of effort and enthusiasm on the part of those involved. Seneca's tragedies are not frequently performed, especially in their original Latin. One recurrent issue in scholarship on Senecan tragedy is whether the plays were originally intended for reading, private recitation, or full stage performance. This production of the *Thyestes* powerfully demonstrated that Senecan tragedy can and indeed should be performed onstage.[2]

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notes

[1] Editor's note: Michael Goyette reviews the same production in Number 3 of this volume (pages 6–9).

[2] On the issue of ancient and later performance of Senecan tragedy, see, for example, Anthony Boyle's monograph *Tragic Seneca* (Routledge, 1997), especially pages 11–12, with accompanying notes; also *Seneca in Performance* (Duckworth, 2000), edited by George W. M. Harrison.

Seneca's *Thyestes*

Directed by Claire Catenaccio
April 4-6, 2013
Minor Latham Playhouse, Barnard College
New York, New York

Review by **Michael Goyette**
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

This production marks the Barnard Columbia Ancient Drama Group's thirty-seventh consecutive annual performance of a Greek or Roman drama in the original language, and it is one of the few performances of Seneca's *Thyestes* in the United States in recent years.[1] While there have been recent performances of *Thyestes* in France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, England, and other European countries, the most recent U.S. production of the play, according to the *Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama*, is a 1988 performance by Harvard University's Classical Club. Given Seneca's current popularity among classicists, and the appeal of this play in particular, it is surprising to find such a gap in performance history. What is clear, however, is that this production heralds a welcome and engrossing return to the stage for *Thyestes*.

From left to right, Joe Sheppard, Talia Varonos-Pavlopoulos, Lantie Tom, and Cristina Perez puppeteering and playing the children of Thyestes. Photo by Joseph Henry Ritter.

Beyond the novelty of being performed in Latin (with English supertitles, translated by director Clare Catenaccio and fellow Columbia graduate student Ursula Poole, and projected on a screen above the stage), what is most striking about this production is its creativity, which is evident in all aspects of the production. Having attended the Barnard Columbia Ancient Drama Group's 2012 production of Euripides's *Alcestis*, I came to the performance with high ex pectations for creativity, but these expectations were exceeded. The innovation of this year's production is perhaps most obvious in its playing around with the idea of the magician. For starters, the cover of the program depicts Atreus and Thyestes as kings facing each other, superimposed onto a king-of-hearts playing card. This unexpected imagery prepares us for a fresh take on Seneca's play even before we step into the black-box theater. The juxtaposition of the two kings on the playing card emphasizes, of course, the dualistic and dichotomous nature of the royal brothers, well known to readers of Seneca's play. The symbolism of the playing card also gives a nod to the magician persona that Atreus assumes, along with other facets of magical performance in the production. Atreus's attendant, for instance, is presented as a modern magician's assistant, manning a magic table covered by a velvety red garment. Atreus later incorporates this garment into his costume when his duplicity is finally revealed in the final act of the play. In the second act, the attendant also furnishes Atreus with a wand-like staff and a collapsible magician's hat, underscoring the subterfuge at work.

This is the feast
their father could not finish.

Thyestes, played by Ridge Montes. Photo by Joseph Henry Ritter.

The production is well served by minimalist set design, consisting only of a group of long, rectangular banners hanging at the back of the stage. Seven of the banners hang vertically, flanked on each side by a banner hanging diagonally inward. Together they vaguely suggest the form of pillars and a roof for the palace of Mycenae. The banners are decorated with splotches of pinkish-red and yellow paint, perhaps invoking notions of bloodshed and digestive juices apropos to the play. Throughout the duration of the performance, a four-piece musical ensemble sits at stage left—a saxophonist, a percussionist, and two pianists.

The performance opens with an eerie saxophone prelude. This haunting introduction sets the tone for the often somber and unnerving music throughout the play. This mood is partly established by the generally subdued composition for the percussion and piano parts. I found the saxophone particularly expressive, especially at the very beginning of the play and also at the climax, when Thyestes discovers the true nature of the feast as the saxophone blares wild, jarring trill notes. Also notable is the ensemble's repeated playing of the melody to "Pure Imagination," a tune from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971). This tune can be heard as Atreus plots his revenge at various points in the play, apparently in keeping with the portrayal of Atreus as an eccentric magician type (although he is obviously far more devious than Willy Wonka). The playing of this melody and certain light-hearted musical effects help bring a little mirth to the performance.

One of the most impressive aspects of this production is the acting. Ridge Montes's convincing embodiment of the pitiable Thyestes and Gavin McGown's menacing Atreus stand out among the exceptional performances all around. Because of their physical resemblance, Montes and McGown are well-cast as brothers. McGown plays a derisive, disturbed Atreus who can elicit both horror and hilarity, as he does with his maniacal laughter near the end of the play. Montes's acting skills are also on full display in the final act, which begins, to the audience's amusement, with his singing like a drunken buffoon following his "reconciliation" with Atreus. After taking a sip from his wine glass, Thyestes spits out his drink and undergoes an abrupt change in mood as feelings of unease set in. This rapid transition from buffoon to tragic figure is not easy to accomplish, but Montes does it convincingly. This production at times treads the line between moods of comedy and tragedy, and a major reason for its success in doing so is the talent of the actors. One could easily believe that they are full-time professionals, not a cast composed of undergraduate students, graduate students, and professors.

Regarding the pronunciation of the Latin, much credit must be given to the actors for accurately memorizing large passages of text. From the very first act of the play, which features Tantalus's shade (Matthew McGowan) and the Fury (Katharina Volk), it is clear that the production has high standards for the delivery of the Latin. Both actors' pronunciation is remarkably clear and expressive, and one never has to strain to make out individual words. This excellence in elocution is sustained by the other members of the cast, as well as by the chorus, throughout the duration of the performance.

The choral performances are divided into singing and dancing parts, with each choral ode featuring varying numbers of singers and dancers. The first choral ode, for example, features three singers and three dancers, while the second features four dancers and one singer. As with the acted parts, the Latin in all of the choral songs is clearly articulated—no small feat given the chorus' experimentation with various vocal effects. The very long third choral ode, for example, involves two singers synchronized in highly staccato singing that gradually builds in intensity—a well-coordinated performance that heightens the anticipation of Atreus's fulfillment of revenge. The chorus also performs parts of certain odes in rounds, another commendable and successful experiment in this production. One of the chorus members, Caleb Simone, merits special praise for his lucid enunciation and mellifluous voice. Simone's talents are on exhibit in the second choral ode, a solo performance that vibrantly accompanies the four dancers on stage.

Building up to the climactic act of the play, the final choral performance is the most grand in scale, with all six dancers and four singers on stage. This chorus, which also has sections performed in rounds, brings Matthew McGowan on stage for the first time since he played Tantalus's shade in the first act. For me, this appearance serves as a clever reminder of Tantalus (the grandfather of Atreus) immediately before his family experiences a gruesome feast very similar to the one served up by Tantalus. As for the dancers, their body movements and gestures consistently convey the appropriate emotions, and meld well with the singing and musical accompaniment.

Color is an important aspect of this production, especially in the costumes. The hues of red and white are predominant from the first act, in which Tantalus's shade dons a white tunic that is tattered and stained with blood-red streaks. I take it as no accident that these streaks match the splashes of crimson on some of the banners hanging over the stage. In the first act Tantalus's shade is joined on stage by the Fury, clad in a spectacular gold dress and a diadem. The diadem is an especially dazzling accessory, with rays projecting outward as if to suggest a rising sun, and serpentine coils dangling below in the form of locks resembling those of a Medusa. Both Atreus and Thyestes are outfitted in white jackets and black pants, with the brothers subtly distinguished by the different types of ties they wear (Atreus sports a bow tie, and Thyestes a long traditional necktie). In addition, Atreus wears his jacket tight to his chest and fully buttoned, whereas Thyestes's jacket is open, with a red rose pinned to the left breast pocket. As stated earlier, Atreus acquires his own red accessory in the final act, when donning the velvet garment that was draped over the "magician's table"; I take this to imply that he becomes literally clothed in his bloody vengeance. The color red is also seen in the snazzy suspenders worn over all-black clothing by the four members of the musical ensemble.

Like many modern presentations of ancient drama, this production uses face painting on its actors, rather than masks as in ancient drama. The styles of face painting still manage to evoke masked countenances, and the painted faces effectively highlight the disposition of the characters. Thyestes, for instance, is further differentiated from his brother by the tear painted under his left eye, while touches of gray on Atreus's face accentuate his grisly nature. In addition, the faces painted on the brothers and on the group of messengers in the fourth act vaguely recall the visage of a mime or even a medieval court jester. This effect, along with Atreus's magician persona, calls attention to notions of court entertainment—perhaps a creative way of reflecting how the plot of this play revolves around Atreus's deceptive "entertainment" of his brother.

Also highly creative is the use of stage props. Especially noteworthy are the wooden puppets that represent Thyestes's children in the fourth act of the play. These puppets, whose arms and legs are controlled by a group of skilled puppeteers, underscore how Thyestes's children are manipulated very much like pawns in the plot. In this sense, Atreus is portrayed not only as a wayward magician, but also as a puppet master directing the action of the play. One can appreciate not only how the artistic medium of puppetry is used as a metaphor for Atreus's role in the play, but also the technical craft and execution of the puppetry routines as well.

In addition to being represented by puppets, Thyestes's children are also represented by a group of messengers. In the fourth act of Seneca's text, a single messenger reports how the children were slaughtered and served up to Thyestes in a feast; in this production, three separate actors, each wearing a red vest, represent the messenger's part collectively. During the messenger speech describing Atreus's horrific acts of killing, two of the actors playing the messenger begin to act out the deaths of the children as described by the other messenger actor. The fate of the children is thus given special weight and is depicted in multiple ways. Playfulness in both the puppetry routine and the scene with the group of messengers also adds a bit of levity to the terror of the situation.

The constantly building sense of anticipation reaches its zenith in the final scene, when the ill-fated feast is brought out for Thyestes to consume. A large, three-tiered cake is rolled out onto the stage on what looks like a stretcher or hospital bed, which I take to foreshadow Thyestes's impending feelings of sickness. When the cake is brought out, Thyestes sings in his buffoonish way while wearing a large wreath of white lilies. These lilies carry on the theme of white in the play's color scheme, and may also symbolize innocence and safety (or a false sense thereof). These were some of the connotations of lilies in the mythology and cult worship of Hera/Juno. As for the cake itself, Atreus finally reveals the true nature of the feast by exposing the interior of the giant confection, which is constructed in two halves attached by a hinge. The laying open of the cake dramatically reveals what look like entrails, organs, and even skulls stuffed inside. When the stage fades to dark at the end of the play, some of these body parts emit a neon glow, leaving the audience with a final haunting image.

On the whole, this interpretation of *Thyestes* is full of artistic subtleties that cannot be fully appreciated with only one viewing, as was my experience. With regard to its creativity, and its occasional blurring of the line between moods of tragedy and comedy, the production takes on an almost Euripidean spirit of inventiveness. These imaginative elements are refreshing, yet at the same time they never steer too far from the sense of the Senecan text. The use of the original Latin helps maintain this faithfulness, and makes the high standards of performance all the more impressive. One only wishes that a theatrical run longer than three nights were possible, as I am certain that repeated viewings would reward the viewer with new insights and continued enjoyment.

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note

[1] Editor's note: Timothy Hanford reviews the same production in Number 2 of this volume (pages 3–5).

Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*

Directed by George Kovacs
January 30-31 and February 1-2, 2013
Nozhem First People's Performance Space, Gzowski College, University of Trent
February 9, 2013
George Ignatieff Theatre, Trinity College, University of Toronto

Review by **Timothy Wutrich**
Case Western Reserve University

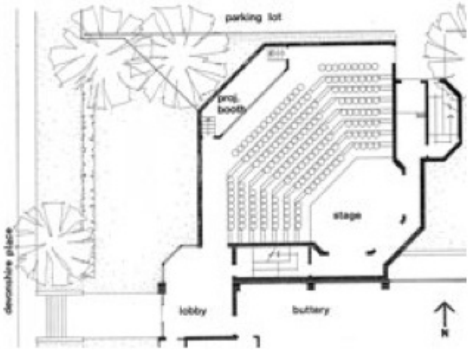
Kevin Price (left) as Agamemnon and Nate Axcell (right) as Menelaos

The Classics Drama Group (CDG), founded in 1993 by Martin Boyne at Trent University, has presented an ancient Greek drama on campus every year since 1994. While Euripides has been a favorite with the company's directors, 2013 marks the first time in the group's twenty-year history that it has performed Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis*. The CDG production of *IA*, therefore, provided a rare opportunity to see the play in North America. Notwithstanding a production in Estonia reviewed in the previous issue of *Didaskalia*, *IA* remains one of the lesser-seen Euripidean plays. In contrast, while productions of *IA* have been few, scholarship on the play has been constant. How fortunate, then, that the CDG production came to light through the efforts of a scholar-artist who is both an authority on the text of Euripides's *IA* and who has sound credentials as a director and actor. George Kovacs, Assistant Professor of Ancient History and Classics at Trent University and Director of the CDG, offered Toronto theatergoers an artistically and intellectually engaging version of *IA*. Kovacs had written his doctoral thesis, *Iphigenia at Aulis: Myth, Performance, and Reception*, on *IA*; the CDG production permitted him to test his academic ideas in the theater. The opening scene between Agamemnon and his slave, the chariot entrance of Klytemnestra and her children, and the final Messenger scene describing the mysterious rescue of Iphigenia—passages of the play subjected to intense scholarly debate and frequently considered spurious—all appeared in this production. The result was an outstanding theatrical experience which gave spirited form to a late, problematic play by Euripides, whom Aristotle called "the most tragic of the poets."[1] Moreover, in a manner worthy of Euripides, the production, while offering an unequivocal interpretation of the play's mysterious final scene, compelled the modern audience to reevaluate its own understanding of the Homeric heroic tradition.

Translation

Most North American productions of Greek tragedy are given in English translation. While modern, educated audiences are aware that the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were written in ancient Greek, the myths and the characters that appear in them are generally familiar to North American theatergoers. Yet no successful director will choose a translation lightly. Writing about the use of modern translations for the stage in *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*, Simon Goldhill remarks that "the script and the style of performance are mutually implicative choices" and that "the first answer to 'what is the best translation [i.e. of any given Greek tragedy]?' must always be 'for what type of performance?'"[2] The modern critic of Greek tragedy in performance, therefore, ought to consider choice of translation together with other elements in evaluating a production.

Choices of translations abound even for a play which, like *IA*, is not often staged. Consider for a moment three commonly available poetic translations of *IA*. Even a cursory glance at a key speech in the play, Iphigenia's proclamation of the necessity of her death (1395–1401), reveals how differently contemporary translators can render the same text, and how the choice of translation is a director's first major artistic statement in a theatrical production. The Chicago series contains a translation of the complete text by Charles R. Walker. Walker's version in free verse frequently approaches iambic pentameter and, according to the translator, was made as "an acting version in English for the modern stage."[3] Walker's translation, although over fifty years old, has aged reasonably well and retains the form of a dramatic poem for the stage. Here is Walker's version:



Plan of the George Ignatieff Theatre, Trinity College, University of Toronto

IPHIGENIA
          O Mother, if Artemis
Wishes to take the life of my body,
Shall I, who am mortal, oppose
The divine will? No—that is unthinkable!
To Greece I give this body of mine.
Slay it in sacrifice and conquer Troy.
These things coming to pass, Mother, will be
A remembrance for you. They will be
My children, my marriage; through the years
My good name and my glory. It is
A right thing that Greeks rule barbarians,
Not barbarians Greeks.
               It is right,
And why? They are bondsmen and slaves, and we,
Mother, are Greeks and are free.
               (Charles R. Walker, 1394–1403)

Walker sticks reasonably close to the Greek, although he elaborates and adds to the text, making his lines weighty. His tone is not stiff, but it is formal, and he has his Iphigenia address the rhetorical question to her mother (μῆτερ not appearing in the original Greek question). Iphigenia will give her body to Greece (δίδωμι σῶμα τοὐμὸν Ἑλλάδι) and it will be a "remembrance" for her mother (the Greek has μνημεῖα, "monument"); the things Iphigenia does will serve as her children, her marriage, her good name, and her glory (καὶ παῖδες οὗτοι καὶ γάμοι καὶ δόξ᾽ ἐμή). Walker's next sentence translates the Greek literally; then he adds a rhetorical question—"and why?"—not in the Greek. Walker's final two

The CDG cast of IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

lines in this passage translate βαρβάρων δ᾽ Ἕλληνας ἄρχειν εἰκός, ἀλλ᾽ οὐ βαρβάρους, / μῆτερ, Ἑλλήνων: τὸ μὲν γὰρ δοῦλον, οἳ δ᾽ ἐλεύθεροι, which might be literally rendered "It is right that Greeks rule Barbarians, but not, Mother, / that barbarians rule Greeks: For they are slaves, and these are free." Here Walker expands the Greek, giving us two words to translate δοῦλον, one of them ("bondsmen") rather archaic sounding.

George Kovacs, Director of IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

Likewise Paul Roche set out to bring *IA* into English as a dramatic poem. In the introductory remarks on "The Challenge of Translating" in his volume *Euripides: Ten Plays* (1998), Roche states that his "principle of faithful re-creation (for re-creation it must be if it is to live) is that one language best translates another when it is least like it and most true to its own genius."[4] Roche also translates the received text with performance in mind. Here is Roche's version of Iphigenia's speech:

> **IPHIGENIA**
> If Artemis is determined to have my carcass
>   shall I a mortal female cheat the goddess?
> No, I give my body to Hellas.
> So sacrifice me and sack Troy.
> That will be my memorial through the ages.
> That will be my marriage, my children, my fame.
> For the Greeks to govern barbarians is but natural,
>   and nowise, mother, for barbarians to govern Greeks.
> They are born slaves. Greeks are born free.
>   (Paul Roche)

Klytemnestra (Jocelyn Ruano) speaks with the Old Servant (Najma Aden-Ali).

Roche's translation moves more swiftly than Walker's, yet lacks grandeur. Would a young girl really refer to her own body as a "carcass," even if she imagined herself dead? Moreover, in the Greek Iphigenia does not entertain the possibility that she could "cheat" Artemis, but merely asks rhetorically whether she could get in the way (ἐμποδὼν γενήσομαι). Further, Iphigenia's injunction to "Sacrifice me and sack Troy" has alliterative strength, but misses the righteous tone of a martyr who imagines conquering an enemy. Overall, Roche's version is fast and forceful, but lacks the dignified tone one might expect from an exceptional young person convinced that she has a mission that is somehow greater than she.

Finally, *IA* appears in the volume *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides* translated by Mary-Kay Gamel. Gamel, like Walker and Roche, translates the received text. Then she writes "This is a prose translation, fairly literal, not intended for the stage; it follows the diction and word order of the original closely, with little attempt to evoke the poetic effects of the original."[5] Professor Gamel's description of her translation seems surprisingly understated. Her prose approaches free verse and, while literal, sounds like idiomatic English, even powerful and poetic English at that. Finally, although Gamel claims that her version of *IA* was "not intended for the stage," Kovacs selected it for the CDG production and it served the production well. Gamel translates the speech thus:

> **IPHIGENIA**
> If Artemis wishes to take my body,
> will I, a mortal, stand in the way of a goddess?
> No! Impossible! I give my body to Greece.
> Make the sacrifice! Eradicate Troy! For a long time to
> come
> that will be my monument, my children, my marriage,
> my fame!
> It's proper for Greeks to rule barbarians, Mother, not
> barbarians Greeks,
> because they are slaves, but Greeks are free!
> (Mary Kay Gamel, 1395–1401)

Gamel's version, like Walker's, manages to capture the formal tone of the young martyr. At the same time, Gamel's Iphigenia speaks simply and to the point. The result is a dignified idiomatic speech that sounds like something a real teenager might say to her mother in a moment of heightened emotion. With Goldhill's above-cited remarks in mind, one could answer that Gamel's translation was the right choice for this production.

Klytemnestra (Jocelyn Ruano) supplicates Achilles (Gabriel Hudson).

Performance space

Over its twenty-year history, the CDG has performed in various theaters, using The Pit at Lady Eaton College until 2005, when the company began to stage plays at Nozhem: First Peoples Performance Space in Gzowski College. The program notes explain that the CDG often takes its productions to other universities in Canada, including Trinity College in the University of Toronto, where I saw the road production of *IA* at the university's George Ignatieff Theatre on a cold but sunny Saturday afternoon in February just after a major blizzard had hit the Eastern United States and Canada.

Achilles (Gabriel Hudson)

The George Ignatieff Theatre is a small university theater. The auditorium holds 180 spectators within its dark, wood-paneled walls. The plan of the auditorium reveals a fan-shaped, gently raked space, separated into three sections: a large central section flanked by two small side sections, each section divided by an aisle of 12 steps. The dark, wooden boards of the stage thrust out a few feet towards the audience on three sides. The stage is not deep, nor is it elevated more than a foot or so. Three shallow steps connect the stage directly to the floor of the auditorium. No orchestra pit or other area divides the stage from the audience: this theater offers an intimate environment. Three portals covered with black curtains form the stage's back wall, yet they were not used for entrances or exits in this show. Instead, actors entered from behind dark-blue curtains, stage right and stage left. The stage was lit from lights hung directly over the small stage, while three further beams with lights illuminated the stage, one directly over the farthest downstage edge of the stage on all three sides, and two others facing the stage on all three sides of the

Jocelyn Ruano (left) as Klytemnestra and Anastasia Kaschenko (right) as Iphigenia arrive at Aulis in their chariot.

thrust just over the first rows of audience seating. An aisle runs behind the back row of seats, separating the technical booth from the auditorium, and leading to exits right and left. The house right entrance was used during the show for the entrance of the chariot bearing Klytemnestra, Iphigenia, and Orestes.

The small scale of the George Ignatieff Theatre posed a potential problem for the CDG's production of *IA*. Euripides's play thrusts audiences into the middle of a stormy, early episode in the Trojan myth cycle and features prominently five major figures from Greek mythology: Agamemnon, Menelaos, Klytemnestra, Iphigenia, and Achilles. Such a play would seem to require a large space to hold such gigantic characters and such primal epic action as the preparation for human sacrifice before the Trojan War. On one hand, therefore, the production risked being cramped in a space better suited to the realistic domestic drama of Ibsen, Shaw, or Tennessee Williams. Yet on the other hand, seeing Euripides's recasting of the larger-than-life Homeric characters on a small stage emphasizes a key point about the play: the Euripidean characters are fallible human beings in a domestic tragedy. The Homeric names and reputations do not change the fact that Euripides presents characters in a drama that could happen anywhere, anytime: a man plans to kill his daughter when he realizes that her death will advance his career; his wife discovers his scheme and burns with rage and resentment; a young idealist wants to do the right thing but is not quite sure what that is or how to do it; and an innocent young girl, full of love for her parents, makes an astonishingly brave decision when all the adults around her fail to do so. It is to the credit of Kovacs and the actors of the CDG that they made these large characters work in this small theater.

The actors and performance

Just before 3:00 p.m. the house opened for general seating. The sound of a solo acoustic guitar welcomed the audience into the theater. The music had a folksy, western, new-age sound, with arpeggios and chord progressions played softly and brightly in major keys. The sound was gentle, relaxed, and peaceful, not really the type of music one would associate with the tragic or the Greeks, but it was inviting. The audience began to filter into the space slowly and steadily for fifteen minutes. The audience was multi-generational, multi-racial, and international. About seventy people were in the audience when the house doors closed and the show began at 3:20 p.m.

As the music continued, the soldiers (Lane McGarrity and Stephen Sanderson)[6] and the Messengers (Nick Zawadzki and Kayla Reinhard) emerged from the wings in silence and began to set the stage. They erected a large white canvas tent center stage and then flanked the tent with a row of six colorful gonfalons placed in stands on each side of the stage. Agamemnon (Kevin Price) appeared onstage at this time, holding a gonfalon before planting it in the stage-left holder. As the music stopped, the Servant (Najma Aden-Ali) emerged and the play began. The text of *IA* begins with structural abnormalities: the opening lines appear in the anapestic meter, although one would expect iambic trimeter, and the prologue delivered by a single character, also expected in Euripides, is delayed.[7] Kovacs staged the

Iphigenia (Anastasia Kaschenko) greets her father Agamemnon (Kevin Price) at Aulis.

received text while making unexpected choices in other aspects of the production. For instance, he cast a short, dark-skinned woman dressed *as* a woman—Euripides's text calls for an old man (ὁ πρεσβύτης)—as the Servant to play opposite the tall, light-skinned Agamemnon, thus accentuating differences between Agamemnon and his slave. The casting choice is not trivial and raises questions. Why would a woman servant be in the commander's tent, if she were not a concubine? Shouldn't her presence make Klytemnestra jealous, the Klytemnestra who ten years in the future will kill Cassandra partially out of jealousy? Moreover, should the racial contrast be a cue for the audience to be thinking about race relations at the beginning of the play? The production did not explore or resolve these questions.

As Agamemnon sends the Servant to deliver a revised message to Klytemnestra and prevent her from coming to Aulis, the chorus of women from Chalkis appears. The CDG chorus featured eleven women (Mandy Novosedlik, Lindsay Cronkite, Emma Fair, Christine Gilbert-Harrison, Sadie McLean, Jenna Lawson, Grace MacDonald, Monika Trzeciakowski, Pippa O'Brien, Bingbin Cheng, and Kayla Reinhard). Dressed in a variety of solid-color tunics that ranged in tint from pistachio to dusty rose, from peach to beige, the chorus added color to the stage picture. Here the youthfulness of the student actors served the text perfectly. As the women of the chorus talked about the heroes gathered at Aulis, they recalled the young people of many periods preoccupied with the search for celebrities. They expressed enthusiastically their desire to see the great warriors and were absolutely giddy with the thought of "The one whose lightly running feet / go fast as wind – Achilles, son of Thetis, / Chiron's pupil."[8] When Menelaos (Nate Axcell) appeared on stage to confront Agamemnon about reversing his decision, the chorus divided and stood on each side of the tent, framing the stage picture and suggesting division visually while drawing focus to the debating brothers. The chorus moved elegantly, spoke clearly and beautifully, and in spite of the small space they had for movement, fit meaningfully in the action of the play. The fact that the chorus did not seem out of place in this late Euripidean play compels one to reexamine the conventional opinion that the chorus had become an embarrassment in late tragedy.[9]

Kovacs succeeded in creating many memorable stage pictures. In the debate between Agamemnon and Menelaos, for example (334–401), Kovacs's casting and costuming choices allowed for visual differences to underline the ideological differences between the two characters. The taller, thinner Agamemnon, clad in a beige tunic and red cape, scowled at his shorter, stouter brother, who wore a red tunic and a beige sash and pouted as his brother castigated him for wanting Helen back at any cost. The arrival of Messenger I (Nick Zawadzki) interrupted their debate with the announcement of the imminent arrival of Klytemnestra, Iphigenia, and Orestes, and a new stage picture emerged: the Messenger beaming with pride at bearing what he thought was good news and the Atreidae visibly disturbed by his message. After his speech, the picture changed again. Agamemnon fell to his knees, giving Menelaos the dominant stage position as he now towered above his brother and reached out to him with the words, "Brother, let me touch your right hand."[10] The arrival of Klytemnestra (Jocelyn Ruano) and Iphigenia (Anastasia Kaschenko), in a chariot pulled in through the house-right auditorium door by the Soldiers, created a stirring change in rhythm and provided the necessary spectacle, as the Chorus rushed offstage to meet them. In the ensuing scene, Jocelyn Ruano as Klytemnestra captured in an excellent manner the chatty excitement of a Greek matron preparing her daughter for marriage, while Anastasia Kashenko deftly played a young girl not quite sure what to expect.

The scene in which Agamemnon's family arrived, however, posed the next potential problem for the actors, for this scene requires the representation of several different generations onstage simultaneously. For the crisis to develop in *IA*, a discernible age difference needs to be apparent between Iphigenia and her parents and, to a lesser degree, between the Old Servant and Klytemnestra. Iphigenia's youthful innocence must contrast sharply with Agamemnon's worldly experience. An audience needs to see a generation gap in order to grasp the horror of Agamemnon's decision. How can this *mature* man send this *young* girl to her death? Later, when the Servant denounces Agamemnon to Klytemnestra, the Servant's age and length of service are important factors. However, in spite of the high quality of the acting overall, it was difficult to suspend disbelief in regard to age distinctions in a production where the realistic mode predominated. Costumes, stage properties, and the set evoked antiquity. The actors' diction was high without sounding unnatural or stagey. Movement flowed simply and naturally: there was no attempt at "ritualistic" or "stylized" gestures, and even dance-like moves made by the chorus seemed like the actions of young, impressionable women in love with the idea of foreign heroes. Yet, given the realistic mode of acting, nothing could hide the fact that Agamemnon and Iphigenia were too close in age to be father and daughter, and the "old" Servant and the royal couple she served were all about the same age.

Nevertheless, in spite of this, the young actors did well in performing challenging roles. Jocelyn Ruano, in particular, deserves praise for finding the right tone and projecting the dignity, experience, pain, and general complexity of the Klytemnestra character. Indeed, her scene with Achilles (Gabriel Hudson) showcased her talent. We watched as Klytemnestra was transformed before us from a proud queen, happy to see the young man she imagined would be her son-in-law, to one embarrassed at her mistake, to one humbled and forced to beg as a suppliant on her knees in the hope of saving her daughter's life. This Klytemnestra was aware of the irony in her situation and of the necessity of making the right moves to counter Agamemnon's devious plans. In the scene in which she confronts Agamemnon regarding his true intentions, Ms. Ruano captured the stunned outrage of a betrayed wife, just as Mr. Price played well the defensive reaction of an Agamemnon who can only glare and make a high-sounding speech about his duty to the army and the force of divine will. After Agamemnon's departure, Iphigenia was left to mourn her fate with her mother. Ms. Kaschenko's delivery here seemed understated, but perhaps that was better than if she had taken it over the top in a scene that could so easily have erupted into hysteria. Achilles' reappearance soon after made clear the futility and even absurdity of any rescue plan, as he related to Klytemnestra the desire of the Greeks for the sacrifice to proceed. At this juncture, Iphigenia has a difficult task to perform: to break an apparent stalemate and sacrifice herself, moving from dreading death to embracing it. The character transformation has bothered critics since Aristotle.[11] Ms. Kaschenko pulled it off. Indeed, as she progressed in her long speech (1368–1401), she gained power and credibility, the otherworldliness of the character accentuated on stage by a bright white spotlight that engulfed her.

Earlier, I mentioned the textual problems in *IA* and how Kovacs dealt with those at the very beginning and about one-third into the play. The end of the manuscript is also in bad shape.[12] Moreover, the denouement of the received text has rarely pleased scholars, critics, translators, readers, or directors. After Iphigenia's final exit, the text as it stands introduces a Messenger (here Messenger II, played by Kayla Reinhard) who announces to Klytemnestra that the gods have rescued Iphigenia at the moment of sacrifice. Agamemnon reappears to tell his wife that she can rejoice now that their daughter is with the gods; he instructs her to go home, while he himself sails for Troy. Kovacs kept all of this material in the CDG production, a sound decision on two counts. First, in keeping the controversial ending, Kovacs let viewers decide whether the ending seems organic. His decision resembles the choices an editor of the Greek text or a modern translator needs to make. Second, in keeping the scene, Kovacs offered his most direct statement about the meaning of the play and his interpretation of the characters Agamemnon, Klytemnestra, and Iphigenia. Kayla Reinhard's Messenger reflected the enthusiasm of someone moved by a mystical experience, while Kevin Price's Agamemnon projected a man driven by coldblooded *Realpolitik*. But for me, the most powerful image in the Toronto production was the creation of the final stage picture. As Agamemnon departed, the soldiers took down and packed up the large white tent. The Chorus hesitated a moment to take in all that had come to pass, but then they too exited. Jocelyn Ruano's Klytemnestra was left alone on stage, in tears and angry, clutching herself and boiling with rage. She knew that Agamemnon had fabricated this mythic rescue, a shameless attempt to cover his lie, pacify his wife, and try to buy himself a good conscience in the bargain. This was the moment when Klytemnestra's resentment began.

Direction

George Kovacs offered his audience an excellent *Iphigenia in Aulis*. He approached the play as an expert philologist and as a skilled *homme de théâtre*. As a philologist, he offered a provocative reading of the play, including parts of the text that some consider spurious. The result shows that the received text works in production and renders a cohesive narrative: audiences listened to the delayed prologue more carefully after first meeting the Servant and Agamemnon; the showy entrance of Klytemnestra and Iphigenia provided visual interest a third of the way through the play; and the reported rescue of Iphigenia and its reception by Klytemnestra left no doubt as to Agamemnon's culpability in the murder of his child to advance his career. Fittingly, Kovacs's work as a philologist informed his work as a theater artist who has a keen sense for creating powerful stage pictures. A sparse yet colorful set design, paired with colorful Greek costumes, supported the blocking. The only aspect of the production that seemed less than successful was the music. At the start of the play, the music was too North American and too modern; then it disappeared altogether. But this criticism itself seems out of place in a production that was on the whole tight and well-conceived. Most importantly, Kovacs directed his young cast to speak clearly and emotionally and to move believably through the action of a complex and problematic play.

Conclusion

With this production of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, The Classics Drama Group has added another Euripidean play to its list of accomplishments, enhancing its reputation for presenting Euripides's plays in North America. *IA* ought to be seen more: it is an important play that offers the mature Euripides's view of the prologue to the Trojan War and his reevaluation of characters well-known from Homer and earlier tragedy. The text affords actors some challenging roles and makes for exciting and intellectually stimulating theater. The CDG provided the opportunity to see this remarkable play and gave an outstanding performance.

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notes

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a29-30.

[2] Goldhill, Simon, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today* (Chicago, 2007), 162.

[3] Walker, Charles R., "Introduction to *Iphigenia in Aulis*," in *Euripides IV* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 211.

[4] Roche, Paul, *Euripides: Ten Plays* (New York: Signet, 1998), xviii.

[5] Blondell, Ruby, Mary-Kay Gamel, Nancy S. Rabinowitz, and Bella Zweig, translators and editors, *Women*

on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides (New York: Routledge, 1999), 327.

[6] Dylan Morningstar was also cast as one of the soldiers but did not appear in the Toronto production.

[7] Gamel (451n3) comments on the unusual opening of the play and directs the reader to basic scholarship on the problems.

[8] Gamel's translation (335).

[9] See for instance H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 289.

[10] Gamel's translation (344).

[11] *Poetics* 1454a26-33.

[11] Gamel (477n220) calls attention to the textual problems after line 1531.

Combat Veterans, Neuroscience, and the Tragic Mask: Euripides's *Herakles*

Translated and adapted by Peter Meineck
Directed by Desiree Sanchez
July 22–24, 2012
Aquila Theatre Group
Michael Cacoyannis Foundation
Athens, Greece
(reviewed performance: July 23, 2012)

Review by Natasha Mercouri

Euripides's *Herakles* is the play Peter Meineck and Aquila Theatre chose to adapt to the American contemporary reality of war. In the Euripidean original, Herakles, the mythic hero, returns home after the completion of his last labor: descending into the Underworld and bringing the guard dog Cerberus up into the light. During his absence at Thebes a civil war was raging and Lycus came to the throne. Herakles's family was condemned to death. Herakles, against all odds, came back to Thebes to protect his family and restore order. But Iris and Lyssa, under Hera's command, drove Herakles mad and made him kill his family. When he came to his senses, his father Amphitryon explained everything and Herakles left the city only after his committed friend Theseus offered help and hospitality. Amphitryon was assigned the task of burying the dead.

Arthur Bartow (right) as Amphitryon and Sophie Wright (left) as Daughter of Herakles. Photo by Miguel Drake-Mclaughlin.

Nathan Flower (left) as Lykos and Elizabeth Wakehouse (right) as Megara. Photo by Miguel Drake-Mclaughlin.

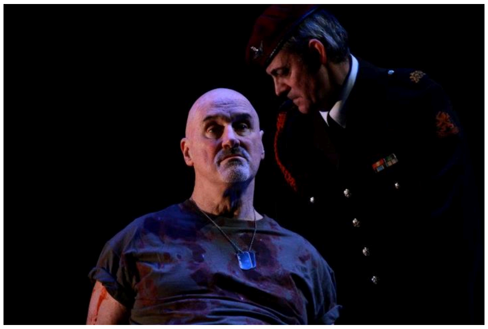
This performance is part of "Ancient Greeks / Modern Lives",[1] a national program of the National Endowment for the Humanities that has been led since 2010 by the Aquila Theatre and includes several events. Ancient Greek texts are stage read and followed by open discussions. The aim of the program is to engage modern audiences in a dialogue with the classical texts about issues relevant to American society. The combat trauma experienced by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans stands at the forefront of America's contemporary reality. Families, friends and communities around the U.S.A. have been facing difficulties in helping veterans rehabilitate. Soldiers are diagnosed with PTSD symptoms such as social withdrawal, isolation and suicidal tendencies, depression, insomnia or fragmented sleep, hyperactivity, alcohol and drug abuse, rage, acts of violence, etc. It is vital for combat veterans to feel welcome and to be encouraged to tell their stories, to speak their truth, to communalize their trauma.

Ancient Greek drama becomes the medium that facilitates the communication between the traumatized and their environment. Jonathan Shay's book *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* provides a theoretical framework for the project. The author argues that a primary purpose of ancient Greek theater was to reintegrate warriors into a democratic society. Ancient Greek drama is a form of storytelling and healing. The same is true of Aquila Theatre and this adaptation of *Herakles*. The project intends to make American audiences “war literate,” to inform people about war and its consequences and to heal “The painful paradox […] that fighting for one’s country can render one unfit to be its citizen”.[2] “Herakles may be an extreme mythic example but we must all live with the consequences of sending young men and women away to fight, whether or not we agree with the reasons for the wars or the politicians who sent them. Herakles is an ancient message from a society traumatized by years of brutal war. In this respect the Greeks still have much to teach us.”[3] In our case the reception of Ancient Greek drama becomes a political interpretation of a wounded modern society and acts as a means of social intervention.

Elizabeth Wakehouse as Megara. Photo by Miguel Drake-Mclaughlin.

Nathan Flower as Lykos. Photo by Miguel Drake-Mclaughlin.

It is worth describing how veterans’ voices and physical presence were used in the performance. Instead of using a chorus, Peter Meineck drew questions from each choral ode, addressed them to World War II, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and filmed their answers/testimonies. The screening replaced the chorus. Although the videos were quite extensive and at times detrimental to the rhythm of the performance, the communication of the ancient message to a modern audience became explicit. It was strikingly obvious that older veterans had deeply processed their war experience; therefore they could narrate and also come to conclusions in articulate thought and speech. On the contrary, the youngest veteran present, although a university graduate, could not form a well-structured sentence, a failure typical of a man who has not come to terms with his traumatic past. Theseus’s part was assigned to a Vietnam veteran, Brian Delate, whose testimony was also filmed and integrated into the performance.



Brian Delate (left) as Theseus/Chorus. Photo by Miguel Drake-Mclaughlin.

The performance used masks especially made for the occasion, designed according to the research of Peter Meineck.[4] In his paper “The Neuroscience of the Tragic Mask” he proves that the tragic mask functions properly only if its expression is *ambiguous*, so that it “challenges normal human neural responses and produces a higher cognitive experience.” Study of the Pronomos vase[5] led him to conclude that tragic masks do not have fixed characteristics. On the contrary, their ambiguity is what activates the viewer’s mirror neurons. The angle from which the mask is seen and its manipulation by a skilled actor engage the spectator’s foveal and peripheral vision, urging him/her to “make emotional and situational judgments.”[6]

The use of mask dictates the actors’ movement, their location on stage, their speech (voice and spoken word), and the accompanying music. It favors frontal acting and demands an amplified way of acting in order to communicate emotion and *mythos* effectively. Meineck believes—and this was strongly supported during the workshop—that when wearing the mask, one can speak only the truth of the emotions. When an actor uses the mask, he/she is “forced“ by it to tell the truth with his body. For example, anger in words and facial expressions looks milder to the audience that anger bodily enacted. The mask frees the actor from cerebral activity, urges him/her to use the "raw material" of his/her body so as to make the truth of the characters and the text visible. In order to follow the dictates of the mask, the director used physical theatre techniques to enhance corporeality and build up enactment.

The Modern Greek audience, although unfamiliar with war culture and combat trauma (Greece's last conflict was the Civil War that ended in 1949), and especially with the way American soldiers suffer from it, received the experiment of Aquila Theatre very well. After the performances there were vivid discussions in which spectators made challenging remarks, for example, on the concept and the efficacy of the project, its reception within American communities, American audiences' knowledge of the play and of ancient Greek drama in general, etc.

To sum up, *Herakles* was an innovative production, orientated to the interaction between the past and the present, classic authors and modern spectators, narrators and audiences, individuals and community, art and life.

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notes

[1] Ancient Greeks-Modern Lives http://ancientgreeksmodernlives.org/ [accessed 28/4/2013].

[2] Shay, Jonathan, *Achilles in Vietnam: The Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1993), p. xx, http://www.enotes.com/achilles-vietnam-salem/achilles-vietnam [accessed 28/4/2013].

[3] See webpage(http://www.mcf.gr/en/whats_on/?ev=iraklis_mainomenos_toi_eiripidi_se_metafrasi_diaskeii_toi_peter_meineck_aquila_theatre_apo_ti_nea_iorki) for more information on the production. See also uploaded filming of the press conference and the promo [accessed 28/4/2013].

[4] Meineck, Peter, "The Neuroscience of the Tragic Mask", paper presented at The Athens Dialogues, 24-27 November 2012, Athens, The Onassis Foundation, 1.2,http://athensdialogues.chs.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/athensdialogues.woa/wa/dist?dis=82 [accessed 28/4/2013].

[5] http://cir.campania.beniculturali.it/museoarcheologiconazionale/thematic-views/image-gallery/RA84/view [accessed 28/4/2013].

[6] Meineck, 6.7.

A Conversation About the Aquila *Herakles*

Herakles
by Euripides
Translated by Peter Meineck
Directed by Desiree Sanchez
Film by Miguel Drake-McLaughlin
Aquila Theatre GroupBrooklyn Academy of Music
March 30, 2013

Discussion by Amy R. Cohen, Randolph College, and **John H. Starks, Jr.,** SUNY Binghamtam.

> After seeing the Aquila production of *Herakles* (the Athens production of which is reviewed at *Didaskalia 10.05*), Cohen and Starks sat down for a conversation.

ARC: I'm Amy Cohen.

JHS: And I'm John Starks.

ARC: We both saw the Aquila production of *Herakles* on March 30th at BAM in Brooklyn, and we wanted to talk about it. So, what did you think, John?

JHS: I thought it was interesting, and I would begin with my take on the chorus, which I know has been worked in a couple of different formats nowadays, using interviewing as a way of addressing how to make these plays civic conversations, particularly with veterans. I enjoyed that a great deal. I thought that the different types of dialogue going on among the various veterans were of course personally poignant, but they also came together to create a civic whole, even though they were individual voices.

ARC: Yes, clearly the veterans were recorded in different places.

JHS: Exactly. But because of the editing process that was used, they wound up becoming a unified chorus around themes as the show progressed. And in that sense, this chorus genuinely replicates the way that the chorus seems to operate in so many Greek tragedies. I won't try to make it a blanket statement, but here it served the purpose of the production in ways that were remarkably consistent with the ways that choruses are often constructed. In many ways a Greek chorus can seem distant from its play, and yet winds up still engaging with its content. For example, the "Ode to Man" in Sophocles's *Antigone*: I think how we often want to abstract that from its original context, and yet we see what its whole does as a choral statement independent of the episodes around it.

ARC: I'm really glad you said that. It's helpful to me because I was enthralled by the chorus and those interviews. I was struck by the veterans' openness as well as by their difficulty in being open. I couldn't take my eyes away, but I'm glad you said what you said about those segments' being connected to the rest of the play because that was my difficulty with them: they didn't seem connected at all.

JHS: I had a hard time at first getting into the alternation between the episodes and the chorus. I was having transitional issues in the early stages, but by the end of the show, I was waiting for those transitions.

ARC: But were you waiting to come back to the play in front of us?

JHS: To some degree yes, but I had actually gotten to the point where I was waiting for the chorus.

ARC: I was too, a bit. One of the thoughts I had was that when Mary-Kay Gamel and Jana Adamitis did *Ajax* at Christopher Newport University in 2011, their chorus had read things about veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan and were instructed to make their own characters and come up with their own ways of talking about those wars, so that their production had a feeling very much like that of these interviews that we saw in *Herakles*. It's much the same in *Theatre of War*, the Bryan Doerries project, in which the play is followed by actual veterans—and some of the actors themselves have been veterans—talking in their own words about their experiences. I didn't get to see the *Ajax* in Boston at A.R.T., but I've seen clips from it, and I've read a lot about it, and there, too, the chorus was represented by real people on large-screen video above the action. So I was seeing, remembering all of those different versions of the same thing. I see the power of such a treatment. I wondered at it with *Herakles* because *Herakles* seems to me to be different—he battles monsters, not people. I think that was one of the things, as powerful as it was, that made it hard for me to connect the choral interviews with the play. But I will say that the people who saw the play with me didn't know those things about Herakles and took the assertion that he was a warrior coming home from difficult circumstances at face value, just as it was presented, and found the connections very strong.

JHS: I think the way that I connected the chorus and episodes was in discussion afterward with another audience member on the issue of Herakles—I was having trouble connecting Herakles's madness with his heroic mythology and with the chorus' responses. But the person I was speaking with was addressing it very well, saying that Herakles's struggle with death is brought up so many times that you can move that into many different contexts and that his struggle with his mortality is what we have from the beginning, from the conversation about him before he even enters the stage. Megara and Amphitryon are talking about the fact that he's dead, and then he's not. He's brought back to life. But what kind of life is it? He's gone to hell and back. I'll just use the reference: think of *Apocalypse Now* as the referential point for that kind of war madness that doesn't necessarily in its context look like it has to be war trauma; it's just gone off the deep end of "I've seen death"—

ARC: —"I've seen death, and I'm supposed to be a person again."

JHS: Exactly, and I'm supposed to somehow be a real person, a whole person again, and if that's the reality that Herakles is dealing with in coming back, that's why—and this is again why I was having trouble, until talking after the show—I had trouble sympathizing with Herakles, especially when it looked like Theseus just let him off; but then Theseus was rescued from death by him.

ARC: That's true.

JHS: And so both of them were dealing with the trauma of "I was dead," and in Theseus's case, "you saved me." And "I owe you everything that I've got now to try to make you better."

ARC: And to bring it back to the reality of the interviewed chorus, "The only other person who's going to understand what I've been through is someone who's been in the Underworld and come back, because there's not anybody else in the group."

JHS: No, it's a very small group. To face down death and actually come back, to survive it. And maybe that's what *Herakles* is about.

ARC: In that respect—moving away from my "he doesn't go to war" criticism—I think, then, the chorus really resonates with his experience.

JHS: And it becomes more poignant of course when you see Herakles's reaction to Lykos, because then it has more of a possible war context, because Lykos has been engaged in the usurpation, and then you put in an element of war, and there is reference to the soldiers of Thebes as being part of this reality all around it. Herakles's own—even if we take it outside of Euripides's context—his own relationship with Thebes is so fraught with issues, he's always battling to connect himself to anywhere.

ARC: That's true.

JHS: And so, Herakles is in many ways a constant warrior. If he sees, as the madness comes on, that Eurystheus and Eurystheus' family are his problem, that's a constant battle of his; they're his physical reality. It's Hera too. He's got that issue with the gods that he's addressing at the same time, but there is a physical reality of Eurystheus being an oppressor. And if you just shift that slightly away from the monster context into the human context, then it starts to take the approach of *rationalizing* the monsters, for want of a better word. The monsters are not monsters; they are our demons. And he has demons that, in this particular play, get the better of him.

ARC: I love where you've brought me about the chorus, but let's talk a little bit about some of the other staging choices. I loved the use of the children—that Iris and Madness inhabited the children. What other things did you see that you liked or wondered about?

JHS: I'll take the ones that I really liked first, starting with Herakles. One thing that pulled Herakles into that war mode for me, that *did* make it work, was the way he entered the stage each time, especially when he was alone. He was always stalking; he was always in military mode. He was always rifle-ready, and the moment that struck me the most is when he just gets caught off guard asleep, and then all of a sudden his son shows up to him and is babbling as Iris, and that winds up putting him in that other reality. So that transposition really worked very well. And then you've got the chorus, and all of a sudden you have moved into the next episode, and you weren't paying any attention to the fact that your actor just got into position very gradually, exactly where he needed to be, usually downstage and near the audience. Those actors were not there every single moment, but they were there at exactly the moment they needed to be and had gotten there through their own character appropriateness.

ARC: It wasn't just getting into position.

JHS: Exactly. As an audience member, but also as a director, I'm very conscious of movement that pushes the show forward. Herakles always did that. Amphitryon always did that. Their entrance onto the stage was always exactly right, and Amphitryon had to change it so much. He had to go back and forth between his admiration and affection and fear and concern, say, from the top of the show; the fear of returning in the end; the admission that this was his son, even after all the madness had taken hold of him, and that he needed to be restrained. And there Herakles is with his father, and his father still feels that absolute need to acknowledge the bond that he had. It's extremely moving. So Herakles, in spite of creating a distance—I had a real distance with him—I can see how another audience member might feel a real compassion, a much stronger compassion because of that blankness he presented. I think that's the ambiguity of how each audience member is going to respond differently to any individual characterization. It can draw you in, or it can repel you. You're going to respond: one way or the other you're going to be responding to Herakles.

ARC: I think I was struck by his size. I've been thinking a lot about size, but, especially with the giant video screen, he seemed small, which is not how you think of Herakles. He seemed small, but I think that works with all the other things the play was trying to do about how to come back and be a human being after you've done these things that are too big or beyond. And so, I think ultimately his smallness did make me sympathize with him more; it made me connect with him a little bit more, even as I was thinking, "but I expect my Herakles to be big," and he wasn't; he was human sized and coming back to a family, and that was fitting with that family. And I think that—I noticed this in the clips I've seen about the A.R.T. *Ajax* and in this production to a lesser extent—there's a scale problem with the giant video and the people, and it makes the people not as big as they should be. So it's not just Herakles who wasn't as big as I expected him to be, although he was perhaps the right size for this production, as I said before.

JHS: He wasn't hurting in the muscle department . . .

ARC: No, he wasn't. He was a strong guy, well-cast on that point, but there's a problem: we're so focused on screens, and especially a giant one, that we kind of automatically think—or maybe *I* automatically think—that's the real thing, that's the thing you're supposed to be looking at, and then it sometimes makes the actors, who are really there, smaller and less present and less important than I want them to be, than I know they can be. And so that's my sort of inherent trouble with the mixing of the two.

JHS: Yeah, I can see that. I didn't personally have that issue.

ARC: I think perhaps this one worked; it didn't have that problem in the same way as the A.R.T. *Ajax* (which, again, I didn't actually see).

JHS: And I was struck by how the actor playing Theseus was our link between the two aspects of the play: how in that actor (who was also a member of the chorus) the choral separation and Theseus as war veteran and victor over the Underworld were pulled together in a single actor. I was really glad that the actor did not appear as a character until after the last time we had seen him as a chorus member. And in that sense, his veteran experience started to make more sense of Theseus's final scene, even though at the time I wasn't fully there: it took me a while to absorb it. I was struck by his stepping out of the chorus.

ARC: Right, which you really don't expect because of the giant video and then the regular-sized people.

JHS: Right, but he tied the two pieces together. Although then it becomes disconcerting that Theseus winds up reminding Herakles of all those things—how to come back and be a human being—in order to shake him back into his real purpose. And I think that's what I found jarring (and it's cultural, I think), like the discussion that happened in the talkback afterward about his weapon being returned to him in the original. His weapon was not returned to him in this production, and if we take that original reading, you can see exactly how that would work into the original as "you really must be yourself again, you must." Theseus tells him he's too important. That constant reminder that he is too important is supposed to get him back to his greater civic duty, and that's what I found disconcerting when I had been drawn in some ways into his personal affection, then broken by his trauma.

ARC: Maybe that's where some of my difficulty with this play and these ideas trying to fit together comes from. But I'm still worrying over them, which I think is a good sign about the play. I think that means the play is doing really interesting things.

JHS: I think so too.

ARC: What did you think was going on with this masks? Of course this would have been my question if I'd been able to stay for more of the talkback.

JHS: Framing device.

ARC: I've been trying to think if there's a way they fit with some of these other things we've been talking about, about who you are in different places, since the actors started with masks and then removed them.

JHS: I saw it as a way of moving us out of our cultural assumptions—for instance, our dismay at seeing the gun given back to the damaged warrior—into another set of cultural assumptions. If we have that kind of reaction, then we may find ourselves thinking it's too much about us and not enough a replication, a conversation that's going on among Athenians. And the masks at the beginning and very end wound up framing the play as "other" while at the same time there's no sense within the whole construct of the play that we were supposed to be separated from it entirely. Now, what's unfortunate, I suppose, is that I have now made the comment that the mask winds up distancing us.

ARC: Unfortunate because you're talking to *me*, a proponent of masked performance?

JHS: Yes, exactly!

ARC: Right, because when I use masks in my productions, we wear them the entire time, and we do find that we draw people in. But I think when you use masks as this *Herakles* did, it *is* distancing, because it's saying that this a separate thing, it's not the real part.

JHS: Exactly. It's striking. We've started, and we're in a different reality than you might have expected.

ARC: I think you just said, then, that mask puts us in a different cultural expectation, but then the play and the chorus expected us to be thinking about our culture now.

JHS: That's true.

ARC: But maybe it gave us a slightly safer distance from which to do it, which is when we're thinking about these different projects and productions that are trying to encourage us, 21st-century Americans, the ones who don't have to go to war, to think about what our military people have to deal with. Is mask part of the way to make it feel okay at all to be dealing with those ideas of war and death that we are so uncomfortable with?

JHS: Are you asking if mask starts the play off with a sense of distance and discomfort that you then have to start addressing at some point?

ARC: Or maybe distance and therefore buffer.

JHS: Oh yes, exactly. Distance from a war that's ongoing that we're not actually having to really do any suffering for.

ARC: Then the masks would put us in this other space, sort of let our guard down about what we're seeing because it's foreign.

JHS: But when the mask comes off, we've entered the house.

ARC: We've entered the house; we're already there, we're stuck now.

JHS: Right.

ARC: I think it might work on that level.

JHS: But why does it go back on? At the end?

ARC: To let us put our coats on. . . ?

JHS: Tell us the play's over. . . ? But Amphitryon's final line said the play was over; you knew that was the final line.

ARC: I don't think it's about the playing being over; we know when the play's over.

JHS: Is it about “Who’s going to bury me?” I mean, that was his last line.

ARC: No, if it’s something to do with giving that particular audience buffer space to let us be in the house and deal with these issues, maybe putting it back on is letting us put enough of our protective “not paying attention to these issues” back on to go back out in the world and get on the subway again.

JHS: And function.

ARC: Function, which is of course what a lot of the play and especially the chorus was about.

JHS: That all those people ultimately realized they had to function. Or were brought back by somebody to function.

ARC: And as we talk about it, it seems to me that it’s mask in the other sense of a cover persona, and one of the things I think was so powerful about the interviews—the chorus interviews with the veterans—is that they had taken those masks off. At that point they have to function as human beings with a normal life; they have to take that protective persona mask off. And for those interviews they did, some with great difficulty, show us what was underneath.

JHS: Indeed, they did.

ARC: So perhaps the masks at the beginning and at the end had something to do with that. If that's the case I wish the same thing had been done with Herakles. If it was about that, Amphitryon didn’t need to be hiding what was underneath. He’s the one who most had the mask. Megara had it. . .

JHS: Briefly. And the children.

ARC: And the children.

JHS: But just for walking on silently. They never said anything from the mask, as far as I can remember.

ARC: No, they didn’t speak until later.

JHS: I think the way the masks were removed in the first scene partially explains why masks were used. We were definitely being led through a process of “this is something other, and yet now we’re personalizing it,” because the moment the mask was taken off, it was quite clear why. This was the family unmasking itself.

ARC: That’s true. They had to be on their guard against Lykos.

JHS: Exactly. So that made sense; you’re right, so what does the framing device do for us as a whole?

ARC: And for the rest of the play.

JHS: For the rest of the play, once the masks are off, never to be returned until Amphitryon puts a single mask back on at the end. Maybe it is his final line that actually does inspire that. That is, he really doesn’t know who’s going to take care of him now; there’s no one left to take care of him, and so as a result, he does have to put that back on, but that’s us using the mask in a modern sense as a mask.

ARC: Well, yes.

JHS: And so is it then appeasing our sense of what a mask does? Like I said, causing a sense of otherness, a cue that "this is not what you’re accustomed to." So were we being drawn into something other, or were we being told, as you suggested, to be on the lookout for masks up and masks down?

ARC: It could be both.

JHS: It could be both, absolutely.

ARC: I think there was more potential there, that they could have done more with it.

JHS: As I said before—and this is not the production's issue—in many ways I found the most difficult character to take in as a whole was Theseus. And mostly because I know he was the reintegration of Herakles back into society. I guess in some ways I wasn't yet ready for him to do that. He was a deus ex machina.

ARC: You wanted more play.

JHS: I needed more time to introduce Herakles back into society. By the time I had gotten him to that point, I realized he's gone through a lot, but we haven't had enough time to digest what he's done culturally and that he may be dangerous again. In fact, he acknowledges that: he says himself that he fears what he might be. Well, if he fears it, then why are we going to reintroduce him, or why is Theseus going to reintroduce him? Is that really going to be his salvation? Or as Theseus said, is it really much more about the greater good that you do being so much grander than your destructive power?

ARC: So is that a need you felt again because of who we are as Americans now?

JHS: To just give him back his sense of being through the heroic deed that he actually engaged in, if we were talking about war trauma. Isn't that part of it? To feel that what you did meant something rather than nothing? If what you did meant nothing, then I would think you're going to have a harder time integrating because you'll feel scorned or ashamed or blamed or misguided. But if you feel a patriotic sense of duty, that you did accomplish everything that you were tasked with, in spite of the fact that it tore you apart to this level, you would have a different reaction. Because I haven't experienced that, maybe I was being drawn by Theseus's response into a world that I needed to be drawn into. To think about that aspect of the warrior's reintegration.

ARC: Instead of whom he's going to threaten now.

JHS: Exactly. I was worried about his threat potential instead of his healing. I think that's a very real response that we have to that person. Theseus probably had the rare response as the one who'd experienced it.

ARC: Bringing it back even to modern warriors, how do we take care of this warrior? What do we need to do for this warrior so he becomes a whole person again?

JHS: Right.

ARC: And can be part of society and cannot be a threat.

JHS: But notice that he doesn't want to be a threat. He wants to be safe, but more than anything else he is concerned that his family be buried properly, so culturally he winds up handing off the duty of son to his father, and notice how this abdication causes real problems with his sense of the duty between father and son as well. He realizes he has now not been able to fulfill his duty because of his pollution and his actions, and he's left that pain once again to the people that are at home.

ARC: I think the production was really successful in communicating that pain, which is not always our foremost concern in our modern society. We don't deal with death very well; we don't think about those things all the time, and I think the production was really successful in making us attend to those issues.

And my discomfort at the end was very much about the things left undone and unable to be done. I wasn't particularly worried about Herakles's becoming a threat; that's not where my feelings went. I was more moved by that pain of "Who's going to bury me?" and the pain of Herakles's not being able to do his duty.

JHS: I think that's what the script winds up suggesting should be our concern by that point, and I think that's where I was not making the cultural leap the way that I might have, the way I should have been guided to it—because certainly the chorus was taking it in those directions—and it's not as if they weren't leading me toward the conclusion that this warrior needs support and help. One example of audience discomfort, a discomfort with a plausibly uncomfortable topic, was the ranger. After his first conversation, his profanities increased rapidly and were then constant, and they are the dialogue of pain.

ARC: Right, yes.

JHS: And what I found at the same time disconcerting and exactly the way it should have been is that people's nervous laughter at that became part of the difficulty of digesting exactly what is going on with this person in a great deal of pain. He was just trying to put the next image either out of his head, through his head—he was just trying to express himself. . .

ARC: Right, and profanity was the only way he could get it out.

JHS: The words, they just were too hard. Every word was a struggle.

ARC: But you're right that the laughter in the audience, which did finally dissipate—

JHS: A little bit.

ARC: A little bit. The laughter in the audience was a real sign of how distant we are from that experience.

JHS: Exactly. That's what I felt too.

ARC: And that the production was extremely successful at scratching away at that and making us have to deal with it.

JHS: In some ways, didn't we wind up, then, ultimately thinking, "Oh, most of these other veterans in the chorus, they're fine," in spite of the horrors that they have just described to us rather calmly? Now, we think, "*they're* fine." But we look at *the ranger*, and we think, "there's something wrong there." And we want the person reintegrated, but we want him to seem normal.

ARC: Right.

JHS: If he seems out of the norm, then it jars us back into having to think about the realities that he dealt with. And that's where I was: I was hearing his pain and therefore sympathizing with him instead of feeling the alarm, but the alarm itself winds up being part of the absorption of what he said. Some people may not have gotten past that at all. That is, they just thought he's some "other," and maybe they turned away from him, whereas they might have felt more sympathetic toward the older veteran who winds up talking about the horror he's seen and seems to be slowly proceeding through it and describing it in ways that are tortured at some level, certainly, but seem calm enough for us to take them in.

ARC: He's had time.

JHS: But he [the ranger] didn't have the time. He hadn't had the time to deal with that.

ARC: But still different from the veteran filmed in the diner, who was of the same generation.

JHS: That's true. And he seemed jolly and responsive.

ARC: He seemed to be handling it differently.

JHS: Exactly. He had a very different reality.

ARC: I think this must be one of the places where the fact that I knew [the ranger personally] made me not feel threatened by him. I think I was more torn up by his pain because I know him, and I hadn't seen that side of him. But it hadn't occurred to me that the brokenness—in the way that you're talking about it—didn't strike me in quite the same way because I've seen him in other situations. So you know, in a way, I didn't experience the same reaction to him as the rest of the audience.

JHS: Right. But since the people in the original production were civic warriors and civic chorus members, fifth-century Athenian audience members might have known them, even though they were masked. We don't really know how well known the identities of the performers must have been. Surely the chorus was assigned to a show, so if there was an awareness of who was in the chorus, the audience might very well have been able to connect in the ways that you're talking about.

ARC: And maybe also in the way that I connected, where I knew a couple of them, but not the other ones.

JHS: Exactly.

ARC: That's interesting. I never thought about that.

JHS: Whereas I was maybe the foreigner, attending the Dionysia!

ARC: Is there anything else we should discuss?

JHS: I think I heard in the talkback and from Helene [Foley] some concerns about the portrayal of Megara, and I concur with them. I think that her heroism was there, but it was hard for it to come out.

ARC: She was always already crying.

JHS: She was so weepy. Yes, there was a lot of weepiness. I'm not saying she couldn't be like that, but I agree with Helene that it's a shift from the original that in some ways does take away from the woman that Euripides developed.

ARC: Yes, whom I would like to see some time.

JHS: Right, because otherwise it left all the strength and the back and forth between strength and weakness to Amphitryon.

ARC: That's true.

JHS: It really left Amphitryon as the core, which I agree is his function, but Megara's actions are so very appropriate for the context in which she's responding to the violence of her husband and the potential violence of Lykos.

ARC: Yes.

JHS: So she's the one who's trying to figure out how to do the right thing.

ARC: I think she could have been cast that way; her performance could have been along those stronger lines and added to all the other things we've been talking about and not taken away from them. She could have been more clearly a strong protector of her family in the context of a returning husband who might be dangerous himself, and such a role would have emphasized some of the things the rest of the play was doing. I agree.

JHS: It's always so great to see a play that you haven't had a lot of preconceived thought about.

ARC: That's true. It leads to great conversations. Thank you, John.

JHS: Thank you, Amy.

The Odyssey on Angel Island

Conceived and directed by Ava Roy
Original score by Charlie Gulke
May 12 — July 1, 2012
We Players
Angel Island State Park, California
(reviewed performance: June 2, 2012)

Review by **Al Duncan**
University of Utah

The Odyssey on Angel Island presented a reshaped Homeric *Odyssey* with creative and substantial modifications for the theater. The production followed Telemachus as he undertakes an extended journey in search of clues about his father, retracing the wanderings of Odysseus in the process. With scenes presented at numerous locations along a four-hour walking tour of Angel Island, a California State Park with panoramic views of the San Francisco Bay, the production showcased the beauty and historical importance of the park.

Image 1: Telemachus, played by James Udom. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Put on by We Players, a theatrical troupe founded by the show's director, Ava Roy, and dedicated to "transforming public spaces into realms of participatory theater," the *Odyssey on Angel Island* (henceforth, *OAI*) transported its audience from Ithaka to the Cyclops's cave and back, engaging Aeolus, sirens, Lotos-Eaters, Circe, and Calypso on the way.[1]

Image 2: Games, Servants, and Suitors at Ithaka. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Effective and evocative use of space was a highlight of the *OAI*, which exploited the episodic nature of *Odyssey* Books 9–12 to lead the audience on a six-mile scenic tour along the island's Perimeter Road. Walking interludes between each fixed location often allowed for graceful, if sometimes slow, transitions—not only between performance spaces, but also between performance modes. Each scene had its own distinct character and mood, ranging from more or less traditional static theatrical performance to voyeuristic encounters with *tableaux vivants*, anthropological observations of bizarre ritual, and moments of hands-on participation reminiscent of children's theater.

Because of the production's numerous changes of location and mood over the protracted performance, noteworthy decisions regarding staging and storytelling occurred in every scene. An episodic review, accordingly, can best convey the narrative flow and design behind the presentation, though I fear the sprawling nature of the show has resulted in a similarly profuse review. In the end, I will offer summary thoughts on the many strengths and very few weaknesses the *OAI* as a whole, and comment on how the production illuminated some of the challenges and opportunities encountered in transforming Homeric epic across cultures, genres, and performance modes.

A Feast at Ithaka (In front of Angel Island Visitor Center)

From the outset, the play's setting on Angel Island presented a number of difficulties cleverly overcome in production. Ferries (from San Francisco, Oakland, and nearby Tiburon in Marin County) brought audience members and other day-trippers to the island's northwest side, docking in short succession on a small pier in Ayala Cove (Image 1). Rather than hold the show until the whole audience was present, early arrivals were rewarded with half an hour of *ad lib* interactive theater. Upon disembarking, each audience member was greeted with a playbill/map of the island as well as a tote bag filled with unexplained supplies.

Image 3: Melanthius, played by Nathaniel Justiniano. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

After a short walk we were welcomed to the lively forecourt of Ithaka. There, Penelope's jolly suitors intermingled with the new arrivals, sharing almonds and other light snacks, drinking songs, impromptu dance, and games of tug-of-war (Image 2). The ensemble cast of suitors, played mostly by women sporting period-neutral, loose-fitting browns and equipped with swashbuckling mien and adhesive Van Dykes, cordially but insistently invited new arrivals to take part in the merriment and feast. The suitors' inclusive cajoling, in the style of *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*, made spectators immediately and at times unwillingly complicit in the consumption of Odysseus's wealth. Like Persephone in the underworld or Eve in Eden, with a bite we were brought within a predetermined course of events.

Image 4: A partially-disguised Athena, played by Julie Douglas. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

The shift from the omniscient narrative of epic to the embodied, embroiled, and individual vantage points of participatory theater had profound effects. On Angel Island, Homer's overweening suitors became more complex and sympathetic. Vivacious, droll, attractive—it was hard to blame any but the most egregious of the suitors for their revelry. Like the audience among whom they walked and fraternized, the suitors were simply out to have a good time. We audience members, having both paid a substantial ticket price and endured choppy surf just to arrive, felt entitled to the spoils.

Image 5: Telemachus, hardly in need of Bildung, played by James Udom. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

The audience's willingness to go along with the suitors was further enabled by their collective assent to "make-believe." The realities underneath the costumes and fantasy had an impact on the ethics and aesthetics of performance. Since the suitors were clearly women beneath the whiskers and tough-guy attitudes, their threat of forced sexuality and violence—upon Penelope, her maids, even the audience—felt somewhat insubstantial. The suitors' power was social: the audience, expecting to follow cues and directions, could hardly avoid falling under their command.

From the opening free-form festivities, a sequential narrative gradually began to coalesce. Phemius, a curly-haired folk singer with acoustic guitar, began to sing "The Fall of Troy"—the first of a handful of original songs in the production, composed by Charlie Gulke, with memorable hooks. By the third chorus and, as often, following the suitors' boisterous lead, the audience was mostly singing along.

But in part because of its repeated hook, the "The Fall of Troy" offered few details about the sad homecomings of the Achaeans, focusing instead on events of the Trojan War itself. As a result, when Penelope bursts into the scene to halt Phemius mid-performance, her emotional interruption came across as strikingly under-motivated. There was little of that famous circumspection and endurance which characterize the Homeric queen. This was perhaps the sole moment in the *OAI* where epic was poorly or awkwardly adapted to the stage. An Iron-Age bard could simply report how Phemius "sang about the Achaeans' sad return from Troy" (*Od.* 1.326-7). But to express the "same" event, drama much prefers to embody the performance, using pathetic lyrics to pull at the heart-strings—not only Penelope's but those of the audience as well. Annalistic reporting, even in song, is simply not enough.

Brusquely cutting off Penelope at this point was not Telemachus, but an unruly suitor named Melanthius—a real Thersites of a man with protruding yellowed teeth, squalid hair and dress, a hobbled gait, and prominent scars (Image 3). Derisible alike in appearance and manners, Melanthius proved an able jester, a source of comic relief that was much appreciated in this awkward interchange between Telemachus and Penelope in front of the suitors. Melanthius was equipped with salacious retorts and punchlines for every occasion. The suitors on Angel Island's Ithaka were more than just overweening: they were amusing.

Following the Homeric order of events, Athena next arrived disguised as a beggar, a silver headband serving as a "visual aside" to signal her divinity exclusively to the audience (Image 4)—and possibly also to sensitive souls like Telemachus. By means of this quiet introduction to the language of the *OAI*'s costume (immortals were consistently marked either by silver, gold, or sparkles), Athena's identity and purpose were unobtrusively but immediately recognizable to those familiar with the epic. The story could therefore begin *in medias res*, without a divine council, and direct our focus straightaway on Telemachus instead of his father.

Image 6: Telemachus, played by James Udom, leads his audience-crew around the island. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Image 7: Actors and audience dance together in the round in Aiolia. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

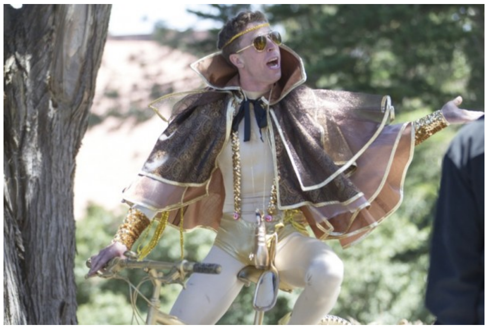
Image 8: Hermes, played by Ross Travis, in divine panoply. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

The second avatar in which Athena encounters Telemachus in the Homeric *Odyssey*—that of Mentor—might have posed knottier problems for production. While Homer may simply inform us that Athena comes to Telemachus "appearing in body and voice like Mentor" (*Od.* 2.268), theater and film typically must laboriously set up such changes of internal identity. We Players came up with a clever and topical solution: using a steep slope on the island, Athena silently stood several yards above the aged Mentor, himself several yards above Telemachus, dramatically schematizing the chains of divine influence and paternal command so familiar from the *Odyssey*. As Athena silently raised her arm over the action unfolding below, it became clear that Mentor, his demeanor suddenly changed, was channeling her words. With this deft maneuver, the *OAI* also sidestepped a potential objection to the Homeric epic: Why do two "Mentors" fail to cause confusion on Ithaka?

Image 9: A Lotos-Eater, played by Joan Howard, hanging on to an Endicott Battery anchor. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Having been instructed by Athena/Mentor to form a search party for news of his father, Telemachus—in this production a handsome, strong, but guarded youth hardly in need of *Bildung* (Image 5)—asks for volunteers to accompany him on his journey. The audience (on this Saturday, mainly middle-aged patrons clearly familiar with Homer's *Odyssey* and apprehending their cue) raised their voices and hands in favor of following Telemachus, leaving the suitors behind to revel and jeer.

Image 10: A divine council meets atop the quarry. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Aiolia (Camp Reynolds, West Garrison Parade Ground)

Image 11: Actor Ross Travis helps the crew out of the Cyclops' cave. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

After a 15 minute walk, the first of many such strolls (Image 6), Telemachus and his audience-crew arrive at Aiolia, land of the winds. The scene took place in the lower half of a sloping military parade ground at the historic Camp Reynolds, a rectangular sward opening out to the west. Photographers (of whom there were more than a few in our party) were quick to snap postcard-ready shots of the Golden Gate Bridge and sunny Sausalito before joining the action. The lower lawn swarmed with playful sprites—quickly discernible as the erstwhile suitors, though now wearing iridescent blues, greens, and purples—who equipped the audience with streamers and hoops. No one could help feeling like a child again in such a Neverland, surrounded by so many Tinkerbells. King Aeolus (the erstwhile Melanthius), with booming voice and glittering mascara, was bringer of jollity and master of ceremonies, commanding all to form a giant circle and join in a hastily rehearsed dance in the round (Image 7).

Such youthful play might well come as a surprise to those familiar with the sparse description of Aiolia of *Odyssey* 10. *In situ* the dance, sprites, colors, and movement all stood in marked, yet fitting, contrast to the rectilinear and militaristic parade ground, flanked along its length by whitewashed, clapboarded, and decidedly dead barracks. Though Aiolia was certainly not the first stop made by Odysseus and his crew after departing from Troy, the juxtaposition of human and divine kingdoms was dramatically effective. We the audience found ourselves once again unannounced guests at a party, but this time the king was present to bid us freely join in the merriment, even providing Telemachus with a parting gift: a bag of winds to speed us on our way after Odysseus.

A large, century-old brick building at the dock served as our ship. We crowded in, finding seats wherever we could in preparation for the “voyage.” At the fateful moment when the winds were let out of the bag, frantic drumming erupted from above and blackout cloths fell over the windows. We were thrust into darkness and, with the incessant pounding from above, felt uncomfortably claustrophobic. When through the obscurity Telemachus opened an unnoticed door, the shaft of light and clear exit created detectable relief among the audience. Stagecraft had injected fear and perceived physical urgency into the performance while keeping the all-ages audience safely seated and—insofar as an audience *can* be—passive. A mere fifty hexameters of Homeric narrative thus became one of the more energetic moments in the *OAI*.

Image 12: Zeus, played by Nathaniel Justiniano, offers crew members a choice. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Siren (Battery Ledyard)

Next on our walk around the perimeter of the island we passed a vignette, nearly a hundred feet below and away from the road, of a siren in a billowing nightgown chained to the remains of a concrete Endicott artillery battery on a scraggy bluff, with the Golden Gate and San Francisco in the background. The scene partially captured the dangerous and uncanny allure of the Homeric sirens, but the distance precluded any immediate fear of being lured to our deaths and, with the wind, kept us from hearing any singing, though we had no wax in our ears.

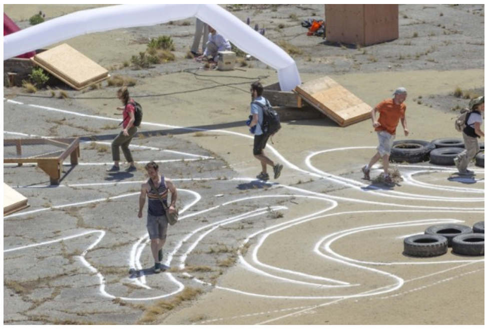

Image 13: Stuck between a rock and hard place: heroic crew members face Scylla and Charybdis. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

This *tableau vivant* was poorly contextualized. Reference to the playbill/map was needed to understand that this was, in fact, a siren, and not simply a dream-like image of a struggling Penelope, as both roles were played by the same actor. According to the playbill, the sirens on Angel Island were indeed a mirage, “[tempting] travelers by taking the shape of their desires.” With the production’s focalization through Telemachus, it was natural (though certainly not inevitable) to interpret the appearance of this siren as a Freudian desire, and the scene, at least to this reviewer, came across as somewhat Oedipal, even sadomasochistic. If it was Odysseus’s rather normative desire while stranded on Calypso’s island to see his wife (*Od.* 5.209-210), the audience on Angel Island was prompted to ask whether it was Telemachus’s subconscious desire, or perhaps our own, to gaze upon his sexualized mother in bondage.

The Lotos-Eaters (Battery Wallace)

Minutes later, directed in our quest by sundry spritely gods (outfitted with gold lamé and a bicycle to match, Image 8) we arrived at the Land of the Lotos-Eaters. There we came upon a ritual scene taking place in another decommissioned battery. Invited to sit on the upper levels of the quasi-brutalist concrete, we looked on, around and below, as actors transported water with Sisyphean purpose from certain vessels to others, each vocally contributing to a low and monotonous "ahh" (Image 9). There was no “eating” as such, and it was explained (again in the playbill) that the Lotos-Eaters “drink the nectar of the forest in search of the Great Spirit.” The scene ostensibly represented a religious service in pursuit of some form of communion, but the blank expressions and hum of the actors, combined with the methodical pouring of water, came across as strikingly funereal, particularly to classicists familiar with the role of water in Greek mortuary practice.

The post-apocalyptic ceremony reached its climax in a shrieking, unintelligible prophecy. A draught of the nectar was poured into the mouth of a sybil. With arms strung up to heavy iron rings by white cloths, the woman raved and spasmed in the battery's hull in an aesthetically striking, and thoroughly uncomfortable, spectacle somewhat reminiscent of the beginning of *Aeneid* book six.

In opposition to the blithely contented Lotophagoi of the *Odyssey*, as well as our preceding gaieties on Angel Island's Ithaka and Aiolia, this strange cult seemed to offer little chance our band might dally under its thrall. The Lotos-Eaters of *OAI* represented a dark side of the fantasy world into which we had entered, a gloomy sobriety that counterbalanced the mirth and mayhem of suitors and immortals. When Telemachus called out suddenly, "Friends, we must go. It is not safe here," he did not have to ask twice.

Image 14: Architecture and music, here provided by violinist Danielle Bricker, gave a sense of the uncanny to Circe's palace. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Image 15: Circe, played by Julie Douglas, beckons Telemachus and his crew. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

A Divine Council (Old Quarry)

We ascended from the quasi-infernal land of the Lotos-Eaters into the realm of the immortals, stumbling upon Mount Olympus. Perched atop the crags of an old quarry, stones from which were used to build the infamous prison on Alcatraz, a small quorum of gods had met to discuss Odysseus's fate (Image 10). Thirty yards away, above and beyond the audience, the Olympians employed outsized voices and gestures for the benefit of us mortals below. The intentional over-acting—combined with low-brow humor, notably in the form of Hermes' pelvic thrusts when recounting Odysseus's amorous exploits—was pitch-perfect camp. The comic gods sped our emotional recovery in the wake of the bizarre and troubling rituals of the Lotos-Eaters. The divine council underscored the separation between sans-souci immortals and suffering mortals often observed in the Homeric epics.

The Cyclops's Cave (Battery Drew)

Telemachus and our company continued next toward the Cyclops' cave, an underground bunker attached to the former Battery Drew. Before entering, Telemachus warned us with a knowing wink that claustrophobes might want to sit this adventure out and "stand guard" while the rest crowded into the unlit cave. Once the majority of us were crammed like sardines inside, the door slammed shut from behind. The audience, once again, was suddenly plunged into total darkness. Only when the nervous murmurs of the audience crew died down did we begin to hear the pained sobs of the Cyclops, apparently still somewhere within the echoic bunker, mourning the loss of his eye at the hands of "Nobody." Telemachus, avoiding the unnecessary confrontation with the monster which his father had recklessly baited, discreetly instructed us to reach inside our provisions sacks, where matches were found to light our exodus. Leaving the bunker by a second door (Image 11; in this way, the cave was more like Philoctetes' than Polyphemus'), we were greeted by a giant stake with blood-stained tip, pointing us toward those standing guard.

There was not a single sheep nor any clear and present danger in this Cyclops's cave. But the tools of theater—light and darkness, dramatic irony, memory, and audience competence—made a compelling story out of what was essentially a forensic or archaeological endeavor.

In tracing Odysseus's footsteps, we confronted the lasting impact of the hero's energetic and serial wanderings. While King Aeolus might have sung Odysseus's praises to Telemachus during our visit, Polyphemus (apparently still ignorant of his attacker's real name, thereby abandoning the Homeric curse against Odysseus) was a real, if invisible, victim of Odyssean violence. Like detectives on a breadcrumb trail, the audience was left to ask what kind of man we were tracking.

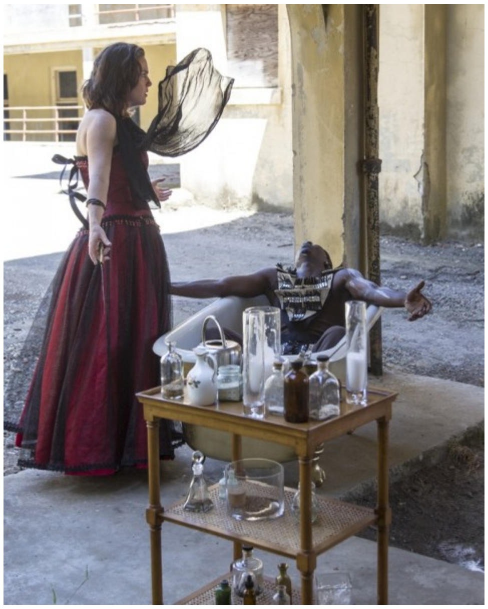

Image 16: Julie Douglass as Circe and James Udom as Telemachus engage in ritual purification. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Scylla and Charybdis (Nike Missile Site)

Reunited only for a short time, the audience was met at a fork in the road by a solitary Zeus who offered a choice of three routes, varying in the degree of physical exertion required (Image 12). The most athletic "heroes" were invited to follow Telemachus and run a quarter mile to the site of a former Nike Missile battery. After hastily but duly signing a waiver, these heroes were faced with a dynamic obstacle course. Managed by a dirty brute (Charybdis), the swirling course featured crawls through corrugated pipes, high-stepping through tires, and climbs over rope nets, all under the shadow of a thirty foot air-dancer balloon (Scylla) which, while not threatening in the least, added visual energy and movement to the course as Charybdis pounded steadily on a large drum (Image 13). A second group of heroes observed and cheered the spectacle from a cliff overlooking the site, while the remaining third of the expedition walked ahead to a musical performance in a church at Fort McDowell.

Image 17: Spirits of the dead inhabit the abandoned upper stories of the Post Hospital. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

The choice of adventures was in keeping with the participatory nature of the production and, coming at approximately the half-way point of the performance, was well-timed to offer either rest or further stimulation to those who may not have been naturally suited to the pacing of the *OAI*.

Circe's Palace (Post Hospital, part of Fort McDowell, East Garrison)

The audience reunited at a three-story abandoned building, the former Post Hospital of Fort McDowell (Image 14), in which a ground-level room held a banquet table loaded with almonds, dried fruit, and cheeses. Nearly three hours into the production at this point, we eagerly helped ourselves to the good things before us, like Odysseus's unruly crew. While munching, one could wander through the building's decay—around broken tiles, peering through holes in walls with peeling paint and splotched stucco. The eeriness of the skeletal structure was enhanced by the production: stuffed birds, sun-bleached horn racks, and other animal remains created the unsettling feel of a taxidermist's parlor. An upright-bass player, standing alone in a doorless closet, droned on with a scratchy, irregular timbre.

The magical Circe at length appeared in a rather gothic prom dress (Image 15), trying a bit too hard to seductively welcome Telemachus who, even without *moly* in hand, was prepared for the sorceress's advances and turned them to his advantage. After purifying Telemachus in a clawfoot tub (Image 16), Circe pointed the way to the Underworld, which—to the relief of Telemachus's sole-sore crew—was part of the same building complex.

Image 18: A lonesome siren, played by Libby Kelly, lets an amorous note fall from an upper window. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Underworld (Post Hospital, part of Fort McDowell, East Garrison)

In a multi-story ritual in the open courtyard of the former hospital, Telemachus convened with the souls of the dead, taking the search for clues of his father to the very opposite end of the island. Supernumerary dead appeared in dirt-brown tribalesque costumes, floating and twisting waifishly above us on the second floor, where their presence was appropriately menacing, if somewhat inappropriately elevated (Image 17).

Image 19: Calypso, played by Caroline Parsons, welcomes Odysseus to her beachside cabana. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Ritual structures of performance helped map the translation of epic narrative onto drama. Slow, methodical, and mysterious, these moments controlled the pace of production, setting moods of dread and somber expectation. The intellectual fruits of director Ava Roy's self-designed undergraduate major at nearby Stanford, *Ritual and Performance in Aesthetic Education*, were evident in this production. The emotional pendulum of the performance, oscillating between the poles of mirth and dread, mystery and conflict, gave a sense of forward movement combined with artistic repetition which, with the periodic walks, kept the marathon performance from becoming too dull.

Image 20: Ross Travis as Hermes makes a spectacular arrival to Calypso's shore. (Photo: Lauren Matley)

Siren's Reprise (Barracks, part of Fort McDowell, East Garrison)

We next set out to confront Calypso, who we were informed had been holding Odysseus captive. In transit, we passed a second siren, again remote (Image 18). No longer chained, this phantasm wandered listlessly along the upper floors and empty window frames of an old military barracks, dropping amorous notes that glided, leaf-like in the breeze, to the ground. Again, the context and meaning of the siren's presence were unclear. And once again, it was tempting to interpret the image as an abandoned and lovelorn Penelope, on this occasion emotionally rather than physically repressed.

Regardless of whether one interpreted the siren as Penelope in particular, or else as an anonymous and distantly erotic female, the siren's dreamlike appearances projected the queen's predicament on Ithaka—loss, loneliness, stasis—and helped maintain the locational dialogue between home and periphery, Ithaka and foreign lands, so essential to the narrative structure of the *Odyssey*.

Calypso (Quarry Beach)

The final stop on the outbound journey placed us on Quarry Beach, which offered a southward vista stretching the entire span of the Bay Bridge from Oakland to San Francisco. Lazing around an impromptu shelter of roughly cut branches and white sheets, a lovely Calypso in green and blue—colors reminiscent of the sprites of Aiolia (Image 19)—was a lounge singer, backed-up by the talented but small band of musicians featured before in several scenes. The mood was that of a 1940s beach cabana, and the audience was put in the position of haggard tourists stumbling into a local venue filled with intrigued, if nonplussed, locals.

For the first time since we had left Ithaka, the scene was populated by vibrant extras with what might be called a "grown-up" theme. One could imagine Odysseus happily choosing such a place—filled with the pleasures of sun, surf, song, and divine sex—for a vacation home. And yet the materials for the hero's escape lay before our eyes. Though this may not have been a conscious intention of the production, the rough-cut timber and airy sheets which formed Calypso's beachside hut could easily be imagined, broken down and reconstituted, as a raft to carry Odysseus on his journey home.

Image 21: Melanthius, played by Nathaniel Justiniano, lies mortally wounded by Odysseus. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

Image 22: James Udom as Telemachus and Libby Kelly as Penelope, left with only a note from Odysseus. (Photo: Mark and Tracy Photography)

We ourselves were falling for Calypso's charms and song when Hermes, pelvis yet again thrust forward, arrived not by raft but by motorboat (Image 20) and made known the will of the gods through a loudspeaker: Like Odysseus before, we must now be let go.

The production of this scene was impressive, even beyond the musical accompaniment. It was clear that the actor playing Hermes could not hear his cues over the sputter of the outboard motor, so his megaphone pronouncements followed subtle visual cues from Calypso and Telemachus. The well-timed arrival of the motorboat was in some respects the climax of the entire production: jovial, exuberant, authoritative, it was literally the turning point (as the boat cut left and right across the waves) in the course of events, sending Telemachus back to Ithaka. Divine modes of transit (bicycle, motorboat) and divine modes of communication (physically distanced, loud, and over-the-top) marked the gods' superiority over us pedestrian, quietly murmuring mortals.

Homecoming in Ithaka (Outside of Angel Island Visitor Center)

After taking our own vehicularly enhanced ride around the remaining perimeter of the island, we at last returned to Ithaka. There we found the most audacious of the suitors, Melanthius, gruesomely maimed, bathed in his own blood, sitting on the ground outside the palace (Image 21). As noted at the outset, the character was a true Thersites—an ugly trash talker, now violently struck down by Odysseus, whose homecoming we had apparently just missed. Melanthius's comeuppance, like Thersites's, invited an ethically ambiguous response from our 21st-century audience. While this man was certainly a nuisance, summary violent punishment does not well accord with our notions of justice or due process. His wounds, seemingly mortal, prompted a sense of survivor's guilt. We too, after all, had partaken of the free food and festivities at Ithaka.

No longer in the palace and certainly not testing his wife with knowledge of his arboreal bed frame, Odysseus had already left Penelope, now twice abandoned (Image 22). The absent hero's motivations, as often, were unclear. The carnage left behind, this time on his own land, appeared to be the result of an indiscriminate, possibly post-traumatic, rage. This—from what the audience could piece together of the survivors' speeches—was no simple wanderlust, no Tennysonian rejection of rusting unburnished at home. Odysseus's return to Angel Island's Ithaka was simply the latest in a long series of aggravated assault.

As the play came to a close, we were left without a clear sense of who, exactly, this Odysseus we had been tracking was: a hero, madman, or somewhere in between? That we never encountered the man himself, but only his destruction and dalliances, was central to the production's emotional and moral effects. No noticeable allusion was openly made to the rather nefarious Odysseus of Attic tragedy, but the self-interested and violent malfeasant of Sophocles's *Philoctetes* might well have fit the mold left by Angel Island's absent father.

The disconnect between the Homeric and dramatic Odysseuses did cause some tension in the *OAI*. Throughout the production, as in the Homeric epic, Telemachus's resemblance to his father was noted by Odysseus's old acquaintances. But our cautious and heroically nondescript leader could not readily be reconciled with the wreckage left by his father. Even before the return to Ithaka, it was hard to imagine that a cordial reunion between father and son would be in the future. The character of Odysseus seems almost doomed to a violent or mad incarnation in tragedy. He is a hero who, despite his cunning, becomes more akin to the mad Heracles than the politic Theseus when thrust upon the stage.

General Points of Interest

Even with the marathon length of the *Odyssey on Angel Island*, parts of the Homeric narrative were notably absent. Most significantly, the Phaeacians were completely deleted. In this island filled with divinities and monsters, there may not have been conceptual space for a human court outside of Ithaka, our point of departure from and return to the "real world." More pragmatically, given the experiential nature of the production, there was no need for an oral recounting of Odysseus's wanderings, which is perhaps the most essential "action" to take place on the Homeric Scheria.

However, with no Phaeacians there could be no Nausicaa, which was a bit of a shame. Circumspect, nubile, and thoroughly unobjectionable in the epic, Nausicaa might have served as an appropriate romantic pairing for Telemachus. Indeed, such matchmaking between Odysseus's "legitimate" and "secondary" families has fascinated carriers of the epic tradition since at least the lost cyclic epic, *Telegony*, in which Telemachus marries Circe and Penelope, in turn, weds Telegonus, Circe's son by Odysseus. But in general the *OAI* eschewed romance. What eroticism *was* present was typically marked by female seniority or maternalism (the women Telemachus met on the journey were, after all, divine consorts of Odysseus), contributing to general subtext of a Freudian struggle against the father.

Telemachus's encounters with Nestor and Menelaus were also cut, leaving out those reminiscences of the Trojan War which cast a positive light on Odysseus's cunning. Beyond the praise of certain suspect figures, such as Aeolus and Circe, there was little to suggest that Odysseus was a decent man. Angel

Island's Telemachus, without distinct adventures of his own but rather retracing his dad's footsteps, was denied the possibility for mutual admiration and wonder between father and son upon their reunion.

Strengths

Like the rest of We Players' efforts, the *Odyssey on Angel Island* was a remarkable, one-of-a-kind production carefully crafted around a specific, culturally important space. The ensemble cast was uniformly strong, with a standout performance by Nathaniel Justiniano, whose outsized energy and many vivid characters (Melanthius, Aeolus, Zeus, and Polyphemus) filled the expansive locations of the production. James Udom as Telemachus was appropriately (that is, boringly) heroic. Cautious yet strong, Udom's Telemachus became a likable and unobtrusive vehicle for the audience's experience, a figure whose sly winks and shared glances with members of the audience fostered wordless bonds between captain and crew.

The directorial execution of this perambulatory production was nearly flawless. A strictly chronological sequence of events in the Homeric *Odyssey*—even those in Books 9-12—will almost inevitably be episodic and dull. It is the baroque structures of the epic narrative that allow the bard to foreground the pauses, parallelisms, and simultaneity which together contribute substantially to the poem's suspense and general effectiveness. On Angel Island, in a production frequently punctuated by collective moment, sufficient time was given to critique, consider, and inwardly digest the sequence of events, chronological and episodic though they were. The inherent structures (physical, aesthetic, and practical) of a day-hike loop became a hodological skeleton upon which the imaginary "theater" of the production could be fleshed out. The *OAI* managed a beautiful marriage of location and story.

The location was nearly a character itself. The rich though repeatedly violent and unjust history of Angel Island—as missile battery site, fort, immigration and internment center—subtly underscored several themes within the *Odyssey*. The performance included no history lesson, and the playbill only briefly summarized the island's past uses, but the settings themselves, decrepit but still formidable and even beautiful in their decay, silently provoked the question: How many Japanese-Americans, in addition to prisoners of war from Germany, Italy, and Japan, looked out longingly from the beaches and bluffs of Angel Island, so many Odysseuses held captive against their will?

More traditional theatrical adaptations of the *Odyssey*, such as Oliver Taplin's excellent *Wanderings of Odysseus*, tend to get bogged down with words, despite often inventive and effective staging. As Aristotle recognized, even with their many thematic and formal similarities, epic is not adapted easily to the poetics of the theater. We Players' participatory brand of theater came as close as possible, within a performance mode which one could easily recognize as theater, to the imaginary experience afforded by listening to the Homeric bard. Ostensibly members of Telemachus's crew, we the audience—in our modern clothes and with scant agency in the course of events—were only partially incorporated into the fictional world. This ambiguity provided us with an aesthetically powerful vantage point: present but detached, we floated like spectral observers, immersed in the fantasy.

Weaknesses

And yet, the audience's immersion without complete incorporation in the performance compromised some of the narrative's ethical power. Without any of the stock methods for creating a Brechtian "alienation effect," the audience's partial presence in the scene—a motley crew with our jeans, backpacks, and sunblock—was a constant reminder that everything about the *OAI* was, more or less transparently, fictional. When we encountered a spectacle of suffering, be it the monstrous Polyphemus or the cadger Melanthius, our emotional responses were accordingly curtailed. It would have been interesting, if logistically complex, for the audience to have donned costumes and assumed characters in order to more fully create the fantasy world. The fact that the audience, repeatedly circling up around the action, were in constant view of one another had other limiting effects. Unable to shed a tear discreetly as they could in the relative privacy of an auditorium seat, and subject to the relentless demand for movement, audience members had little room to “let go” psychologically or to indulge in a moment of personal catharsis.

Despite its many efficiencies, the *Odyssey on Angel Island* was in the end a sprawling production. The actors—and, in this free-form theater, one could say the play itself—were self-consciously aware of their overextension. Telemachus’s constant refrain, “Friends, you must hurry,” was needed to herd the audience across the island, but his cajoling grated more with every repetition. Physical and mental stamina were required not only to experience but also to appreciate the show. The reflection that this four-hour long, midday production still took less time than a typical tragic tetralogy was sobering. As Edith Hall has noted, Attic tragedy’s “Suffering Under the Sun” was not limited to the events unfolding onstage, but was felt by those in the seats as well. On account of the time commitment demanded from the audience as well as a location with substantial local history and significance, the *OAI* managed to capture much of the festival nature of Attic tragedy in a natural and unobtrusive way.

Conclusion

In sum, We Players’ *Odyssey on Angel Island* took an intelligent spin on Homer’s *Odyssey* that was custom-fitted to its location, using ritual and participation to create a compelling dramatic production from a non-theatrical story. The *OAI* exploited theater’s inclination toward memory and discovery to recast Odysseus’s adventures within a historical past. Making use of Angel Island’s picturesque architectural remains and fraught but important history, the production blended theater with forensics, re-enactment with archaeology. Despite the audience’s best efforts to catch up with the warrior, Odysseus’s exploits had always already occurred, leaving only traces for our guide, Telemachus, to discover and follow through inquiry or exploration. Constructed out of events familiar from even cursory knowledge of the *Odyssey*, the *OAI* worked carefully around—as it engaged closely with—Homeric epic. In so doing, it was a worthy inheritor of a theatrical tradition forged in fifth-century Athens, but was very much present and alive in the San Francisco Bay.

[For their support, suggestions, and generosity the author would like to thank Mary-Kay Gamel, with whom he attended the production, David Jacobson, and Ava Roy.]

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notes

[1] I follow the spelling of names found in the playbill, even where divergent (cf. Aeolus and Aiolia).

49th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, and Aristophanes's *The Ecclesiazusae*

May 11 to June 23, 2013
XLIX Ciclo di Spettacoli Classici
Teatro Greco di Siracusa
Syracuse, Italy

Reviewed by **Caterina Barone**
University of Padova

Photo by Franca Centaro.

Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, directed by Daniele Salvo and Cristina Pezzoli respectively, and Aristophanes's *Ecclesiazusae*, directed and performed by Vicenzo Pirrotta, are the plays in the 49th cycle of classical performances staged from 11 May to 23 June 2013 at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the theatre's Organising Committee, founded by Mario Tommaso Gargallo in 1913 to promote the production of theatrical works from antiquity. The common denominator of the texts chosen for this cycle is the political dimension of their content, expressed to different degrees and with different outcomes.

It is always difficult to square the circle between the sacred intensity of tragedy and the theatricality required by the sheer size of Syracuse's ancient theatre. With *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Daniele Salvo once again took up the challenge after tackling *Oedipus Coloneus* (2009) and *Ajax* (2010), and he did so by continuing along the lines he had traced in those previous productions: full use of scenic space, meticulous choreography of the chorus, and use of special effects.

His *Oedipus* starts with a bang. As music played at full volume through speakers around the theatre makes its impact, suppliants crowd onto the stage and, guided by the priest, plead with the king to intervene against the devastation of the plague. They are distressed, covered in rags, and stumbling; piles of bodies are being taken away on a cart. In their midst looms the disturbing silhouette of the winged Sphinx, its face ghostly, its presence threatening. A semi-circular wall in grey stone (used in all three plays, the work of Maurizio Balò, who is also the designer of the rigorously black monochrome costumes in the *Oedipus*) defines the area of the action where three staircases disappear into a metaphysical void. Above it all there dominates an enormous head: hollow, with empty eye sockets from which blood will drip at the end of the play. It is the head of the Sphinx, a symbol in our eyes of the double meaning of the tragedy: on the one hand Oedipus' desire to dominate reality and his rational search for the truth, and on the other a descent into the depths of the protagonist's psyche, a journey into the meanderings of the subconscious.

Oedipus penetrates these depths as if seeking refuge and emerges to unknowingly pronounce the curse against himself. In the end he will be broken in body and soul. Daniele Pecci, as the protagonist, embodies a man at the peak of his strength, proudly confident in himself, violent in the exercise of his powers to the extent of assaulting those who oppose him, and sensually attached to his wife-mother Jocasta (played by Laura Marinoni with commitment and sensitivity), in whose arms he seeks a comfort that is also maternal. But his Oedipus remains superficial and does not succeed in fully rendering the character's complexity, despite the penetrating accuracy of the translation by Guido Paduano, a knowledgeable scholar of the Sophoclean hero. The figure of the enlightened sovereign, who comes to the aid of his people at the beginning of the tragedy, turns sour when he comes into conflict with Tiresias and then with Creon, to the point where his relationship of trust with the community breaks down. Oedipus is left alone in search of his own identity, and is transformed from a guarantor of the common good into his own implacable persecutor. But in this production, the outward appearance of strong images seems to prevail, as in the scene where Oedipus, with clear Shakespearian references, is tormented by the ghosts of those who have crossed his path, from the old man that saved his life to his wife-mother.

Better suited to their conflicting roles are Ugo Pagliai playing the part of Tiresias and Maurizio Donadoni as Creon, both actors putting to good use their past experience in this difficult theatrical space. The cast is completed by Melania Giglio (whose magnificent voice gives life to the ghost of the Sphinx), Mauro Avogadro (who plays both the priest and Laius' servant), Francesco Biscione (first messenger), and Graziano Piazza (second messenger).

The most interesting and original part of the direction is the chorus of Theban elders, conceived by the director as a sort of double of the protagonist, with mixed effectiveness. The precise choreography by Antonio Bartusi wove a subtext which consistently matched the chorus' words, unveiling their hypocrisy and cowardice. But the tendency to paroxystic gestures and a constant search for horrific effects (for example, the latex masks with monstrous features, reminiscent of Freddy Krueger, protagonist of the *Nightmare* films) offset these successes. These and other special effects, particularly in the finale, take the play into a Hollywood dimension, supported by Marco Podda's music, a mixture of different impressions that suggest the torments and movements of the soul.

Despite its limitations, Daniele Salvo's direction has the merit of making tragedy more enjoyable to the large audience for Greek theatre, in particular young people, who responded to its visual language with convinced and enthusiastic applause.

In her first essay in directing at Syracuse, Cristina Pezzoli says she favours steady intonation and measured gestures in her *Antigone*, resisting the temptation to have actors howling and racing from one part of the stage to the other that sometimes afflicts newcomers to Greek theatre. Her intention is to approach the myth without indulging in the excessive emotion and preconceptions which have gathered over time around the figure of Sophocles's heroine. Pezzoli prefers instead to examine the deep sources of the antagonism between the two main characters, and she therefore makes a controversial choice: the introduction of a prologue from Euripides's *Phoenician Women*, spoken by Jocasta's ghost (Natalia Magni). Meant by the director to shed light on what has happened before, and in particular the roles of Etocles and Polynices, the prologue has a didactic purpose that in practice seems redundant: Creon's first intervention is in this sense sufficiently explanatory.

Focusing on the political weight of Polynices, this production aims to investigate and interpret the motivations of the tragic conflict without taking a pre-conceived position in favour of Antigone, whilst at the same time giving multi-faceted expression to the behaviour of Creon, a role to which Maurizio Donadoni brings accents of vibrant humanity and which Anna Beltrametti's lucid translation suitably highlights.

Ilenia Maccarrone's Antigone is rational and determined. She confronts first her sister and then Creon himself with a firmness that yields neither to the pleading of Ismene (Valentina Cenni) nor to the King's threats. She is also resolute in challenging the chorus of Theban men, and denounces its connivance and guilty silence, sharply reminding it of its responsibilities. She gives way to emotion only at the end, when faced with the inevitability of death.

By comparison, Creon's attitude is not stubbornly inflexible: he embraces Antigone as a father would when he discovers her guilt, and then desperately questions her. He is distressed but argues logically. He wants to bring the young girl to reason, just as, after her sentence, he will seek to persuade his son Haemon (Matteo Cremon), justifying his harshness by a politician's need to do his duty. From steadiness to anger, the director draws out his painful trajectory until his meeting with Tiresias, powerfully performed by Isa Danieli, whose prophetic warnings destroy the sovereign's self-assurance. In the finale, the weight of his own guilt crushes the King, even visually, as, too late, he realises the negative consequences of his inflexibility.

In the complex economy of the play, the weakest element is the chorus, which, beginning with its Islamic-type clothes (designed by Nanà Cecchi), does not fit the context, and whose function seems uncertain. Even Stefano Bollani's score for piano with percussion (played live by Michele Rabbia), although commendable, is in places dissonant. The cast is completed by Gianluca Gobbi (whose performance brings a comic touch to the subservient terror of the guard), Paolo Li Volsi (the messenger), and Elena Polic Greco (Eurydice).

Vincenzo Pirrotta has given a good account of himself in the difficult double roles of director and performer of Aristophanes's comedy, *Ecclesiazusae*. His decisive focus on modern-day politics was aided by Andrea Capra's translation with its numerous references to the names (twisted) of well-known party hacks and incursions into in the pseudo-juridical language practised by those who wish to influence their audience. Altogether, the wordplay is colloquial, journalistic in parts, scattered with neologisms, and frankly vulgar.

The theme of power to women—chosen by the playwright not as a feminist gesture but in order to attack the political instability of his Athens—becomes in the play an icon of today's debate on the role of women in politics and, broadly speaking, in society itself. This is the meaning of the chorus' address on violence against women (written from scratch by Pirrotta), of the feminist slogans shouted out by the leading characters (Doriana La Fauci, Carmelinda Gentile, Elena Polic Greco, Melania Giglio, Simonetta Cartia, Sara Dho, Antonietta Carbonetti, Clelia Piscitello, Amalia Contarini), and of the burqas that hide their colourful and vibrant clothes (designed by Giuseppina Maurizi), whose revelation, after the women take power, translates into an explosion of positive energy. Luca Mauceri's score, which combines archaic and contemporary echoes, is inseparable from the chorus' action, as lively and explosive as the women's dances. The whirling movements choreographed by Alessandra Razzino merge various cultures—Mediterranean, Oriental, Russian—into an all-embracing vision of the female condition.

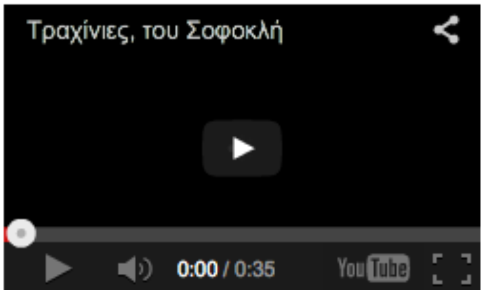
The protagonist is acted with distinction by Anna Bonaiuto, who puts her artistic maturity to the service of Praxagora's critical awareness and pragmatism. She is dynamic and wise, cunning and constructive in driving the action, maternal and seductive towards her husband. Blepyrus is the comical hero who acts as her counterpart, suspicious but then ready to follow his wife's political programme with genuine enthusiasm. Pirrotta portrays him with virtuosity in a finely measured balance between bodily solidity and liberating laughter, as in the exhilarating scatological dialogue with Cremen, cleverly resolved with the help of music and song. He is supported masterfully by the male actors Enzo Curcurù (a neighbour), Alessandro Romano (Cremen), and Antonio Alveario (escapee, dishonest citizen, boy).

The result is an exhilarating and flavoursome performance that positively combines tradition and modernity, and succeeds in balancing Aristophanes's merciless satire and political commitment with the civic relevance that can strengthen contemporary theatre.

Sophocles's *Trachiniae*

Adapted and directed by Thomas Moschopoulos
The National Theatre of Greece
Festival of Epidaurus, Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus
August 9–10, 2013

Reviewed by **Vicky Manteli**
Hellenic Open University



Trailer from Εθνικό Θεάτρο
youtube.com/watch?fv=GGzpuY4dM7o

Sophocles's *Trachiniae* is commonly regarded as a tragedy of late learning, knowledge derived from experience, the realisation of how oracles are fulfilled, ignorance opposed to tragic pathos, love contrasted to physical pain, the mutability of human happiness and the inevitability of human death. All these are themes underlying the structure of the play. Sophocles's play can also be viewed as a *nostos-tragedy* in which exodus is awaited as "the focus and conclusion of the tragedy"[1], an elaborate study of the reversals that Heracles must experience. Despite being a play of subtle irony, *Trachiniae* clearly manifests two opposed worlds of different values, the world of civilisation and *oikos* represented by the waiting Deianeira and the outside world of ruthless barbarism represented by the wandering Heracles. Between these two extremes, aware of the destructive power of *eros* which led to the demise of the tragic heroes, the chorus calls attention to reason rather than to the myth.

In the 2013 production of the play by the National Theatre of Greece,[2] this point was accentuated through a perfectly skilled and energetically choreographed 16-member chorus (music coach Melina Peonidou, movement by Christos Papadopoulos). The text adaptation (by the director himself)[3] also gave prominence to the vicissitudes of fortune imposed upon mortals by Zeus. For example, lines in the parodos that emphasize the constant alternation between joy and sorrow were repeated. Repetition could also be sensed in the odes praising Heracles. The director (Thomas Moschopoulos) provided a prose translation hampered by quite a few awkward anachronistic choices. However, the text was rendered in a variety of stylistic conventions. For example, all characters deliver their speech in domesticated prose except for Heracles, who interprets the opening lines of the exodus as a libretto. As for Lichas, he recites the story of Heracles and Eurytus in hip-hop style.

This was only the second time that the National Theatre of Greece had staged Sophocles's *Trachiniae*,[4] the first having been in 1970. Another Modern Greek staging of Sophocles's rarely produced play was in 2004 by the State Theatre of Northern Greece. In the 2013 production, the director offered a didactic, quite explanatory approach to the play, in what I assume was an attempt to communicate the background and the myth of *Trachiniae* to the large uninitiated audiences of the Greek open-air theatres. For example, before the play opens the audience watches the women of the chorus taking turns to narrate Heracles's twelve labours amidst the discomforting loudness of percussion and flutes. The director also gave lighting a central role (lighting design by Lefteris Pavlopoulos), thus accentuating the 'diptych' structure of the play. In the first part, in a dimly lit orchestra reminiscent of the mystery and serenity of night, Deianeira (Anna Mascha) unfolds the story of her youth and the anxieties of her marital life, exposes feelings of everlasting concern, and receives advice about her decision-making and the importance of deliberation from the young women of the chorus. In the exodus abundant spotlights bathe the mourning women of Trachis, perched on the felled oak tree in the allusive scenic space next to the pain-stricken hero (Argiris Xafis).

I would suggest that the lighting as well as the set design and costumes (both designed by Elli Papageorgakopoulou) contributed to the director's accentuated interpretation of the female and the male heroes and the values they represent. Consequently, lights were dimmed and soft spot-lighting was used during particularly dramatic scenes in which Deianeira controls the dramatic action. The idea of the play as a homecoming drama was enforced through the night atmosphere of the opening scene in which Deianeira, the Nurse, and the women of the chorus all enter carrying storm-lanterns. By contrast, intense lighting provided visual cues to the rivalry between the male characters and the portrayal of decay and disease in the scenes between Lichas and the Messenger, Hyllus and Heracles, and the exodus. An allegorical scenic object, namely a huge split tree trunk lying center stage on the orchestra floor, functioned variously during the performance. It served as a corridor for Deianeira to enter from the house and a site for her confessions to the chorus. In addition, male characters (the Messenger, Lichas, and Hyllus) stood on the tree trunk while making important announcements. In the end, this symbol of barren nature became Heracles's last recourse as the chorus first carried him on it, then helped him stand on it – his back to the audience, arms stretched open wide, eyes fixed on the sky — and supported him towards his exit.

However, other scenic objects were either not fully exploited in the performance or had a vague and ambiguous symbolism. A case in point was the neon-lit frame which stood in the background and was occasionally used as an entrance/exit door. Another odd choice was the yellow flokati rugs unfolded and scattered on the orchestra floor by the women of the chorus praising Cypris in the first stasimon. In fact, the rugs, which filled the stage of the open-air theatre, could be viewed as ambiguous props in the hands of the women of Trachis in certain lively choreographed parts or as a decorative set for them to roll on. In the exodus they covered the focal scenic object of the performance, namely the felled tree.

As for costuming choices, these allowed for visual differences to underline two distinct aesthetic and acting styles. On the one hand, the grey knit dresses for the female chorus and the Nurse's tight, wholly black hooded costume were suggestive of sombreness and simplicity. In particular, the chorus's costumes with their commonness and suggestiveness of school uniformity stressed the conventional and balanced view of the young women of Trachis toward some of the play's key ideas (action, knowledge, experience). Contrasted to Deianeira's tight gown and red scarf, which highlighted class and a subdued sexuality, Iole's absolute nakedness manifested the blossom of youth. On the other hand, Lichas's and Heracles's costumes (see below) were rather obtrusive, jarring the eye and quite disruptive of the tragic atmosphere.

In discussing interpretation issues of the play, Easterling focuses on Heracles's ambiguous representation and the exodus, which does not conclude with the hero's apotheosis on Mt. Oeta. She also discusses the play's core theme in terms of the elements that unite the male and female tragic heroes rather than set them apart.[5] The director made some bold decisions in relation to these questions, and some of them seemed off-key. First of all, it seems to me that Moschopoulos failed to block effectively the dialogic scene between Hyllus and Heracles. The representation of the hero's son was so fragile and human that it drew a sharp contrast to the grotesque rendering of a monstrous Heracles: Hyllus's (Thanos Tokakis) weak rhetorical skills as well as awkward movement and expression presented a clear antithesis to a loud-mouthed and unrestrained Heracles (Argyris Xafis). This weakened the tragic dimension of the confrontation between the two men and the intimacy of the father-son relationship. Hyllus's overt pain and grief also kept him from being a symbol of reconciliation or a new-age hero.

Most important, in Moschopoulos's direction, Heracles's symbolic status as a demigod was subverted by a rather parodic representation of the hero. Argyris Xafis played his part for laughs, and his antics undermined the gravity of Heracles's public persona, making him a hero more suited to manga comics than to tragedy. His rhetoric was particularly weakened by his operatic delivery in the opening lines of the exodus. This acting did not convey Heracles's renewed heroism acquired through his tragic interpretation of the oracles. The performer's grotesque appearance was substantiated by means of a conspicuous bloodstained wedding dress featuring a padded muscle chest and arms, cothurni, and make-up more appropriate for heroes of action-adventure comics and sci-fi films. A long, shaggy wig further lent Heracles the quality of an unkempt figure going into decline. All these features produced a feeling of embarrassment among the viewers, who, unable to empathize with a grotesque hero's pain, sooner or later started chuckling. In sharp contrast to Heracles's representation, the rendering of Deianeira (Anna Mascha) bordered on the style of medieval fairy tales. A barefoot delicate queen dressed in a grey gown of fine wool and red scarf, she was full of refined emotions about the captives sent back home by Heracles, "too sensitive and lacking a defense against misfortune,"[6] pregnant with unwavering love for her husband and constant anxiety about his absence. The strength of her performance grew as she managed to depict Deianeira's self-composed and regal manner, a compound of inexperience, compassion upon seeing Heracles's mistress Iole, vulnerability in her love for her husband, resolution to take action in order to regain Heracles's love through the charm given to her by the centaur Nessus, foreboding as she realizes too late that she was fooled by Nessus and the robe she sent as a gift to Heracles is poisoned, and despair upon being informed of Heracles's suffering. Mascha's acting was a careful study of the role, with emphasis on Deianeira's predicament rather than her moral dilemma. That was, perhaps, the director's point in getting the performer to approach Iole (Eleni Boukli), strip her naked by removing her grey felt blanket, and cover her nakedness with her own red scarf. On the performance level this initiative underlines the themes of passion, sexuality, and revenge rather than deliberation and caution. It seems to me, then, that on seeing Iole Deianeira becomes motivated through passion. Since the act of stripping someone in public is cruel and humiliating, Deianeira's resolution should be seen as an act of revenge against Iole. In addition, stripping her husband's lover and covering her with her own scarf could symbolically mean that Deianeira is sacrificing her own sexuality.

If Mascha's acting bordered on the tragic and managed to elicit a certain feeling of empathy among the audience, the portrayals of the Messenger and Lichas were parodically exploited. I wonder if the point of this contrast was to highlight the ideological differences between the male and female characters, making the latter more attractive. In his double role as the Messenger and the Old Man, Kostas Berikopoulos's combination of self-sarcasm and self-confidence provided comic relief in the dialogic scenes with Deianeira and in the confrontation with Lichas (Giorgos Chrysostomou). Heracles's herald was coarse and streetwise as he mischievously touched the faces of a couple of Trachis women. In his confrontation with the Messenger he stormed. His macho portrayal was on a par with his conspicuous outfit and look: an off-green fur waistcoat, tatoos on the arms, half-shaven scalp, and heavy make-up around the eyes.

I have discussed above two distinct aesthetic lines in the representations of Deianeira and Heracles in the National Theatre's production, which embodied the conflict between them and, to my mind, seemed rather off-key. Nevertheless, in a different vein, Moschopoulos's direction opted for emphasizing passion in the play, as a unifying element between the female and male tragic heroes. Consequently, instead of foregrounding the venomous garment which proves fatal for both heroes, Moschopoulos makes the presence of the silent Iole as audible as possible. In her first encounter with Deianeira she is left naked on the foreground of the scenic space and has to exit all the way back half-covered in the queen's scarf. Then just before the end of the play Iole enters again – this time in a long, see-through white dress – solemnly walks barefoot along the circle of the orchestra, and disappears leaving Heracles in agonizing pain. In this way, winning the objectifying gaze of the audience, Iole projects herself as the absolute object which connects (but also destroys) Deianeira and Heracles.

If there is a concept underlying Moschopoulos's direction of *Trachiniae*, it seems inspired by the chorus of the vibrant young women acting as narrators and guides to the dramatis personae and the audience. The production made clear that the chorus observed the drama of the heroes critically while at the same time putting their faith in the myth. The message resonated strongly: as the collective body of the city, the chorus painfully experiences the debunking of its heroes and their myths and vehemently engages in the dispute over divine protection and love. Since the women of the chorus were never posed merely decoratively during the scenes, their poses and proximity to the actors brought meaning to the drama as they depicted real reactions of sympathy and stressed the importance of common sense. They also demonstrated a variety of movement and gesture. Clear in their recitations of the odes and melodious in their singing in unison or separately, the sixteen young women of the chorus did an admirable job. To this end they got support from the atonal music (composed by Kornillios Selamsis), a quaint mixture of primitive and artistic sounds, orchestrated with sax, percussions, and flutes (performed live by Guido de Flaviis, Thodoris Vazakas, and Giorgos Skrivanos).

In short, the 2013 National Theatre's production of *Trachiniae* can be viewed as an interesting revival of one of Sophocles's most obscure tragedies. My only objection is that, mainly because of Heracles's caricature, it did not provide a true depiction of man's limitations and mortality. I would have also welcomed a closer connection between the chorus and Hyllus, posing them as the alternative heroes of a new generation in a world of reason (*logos*) rather than myth.

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notes

[1] Oliver Taplin, *The stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 84.

[2] Images and a promo video clip are available from the National Theatre's website at http://www.n-t.gr/en/events/trahinies/.

[3] In discussing the recent tradition of the translation of classical tragedies produced by the National Theatre of Greece, Stephanopoulos (2011: 309) remarks that during the last decade translations have been more than not often commissioned to directors, playwrights and poets, rather than to classical philologists as earlier. Theodoros Stephanopoulos, "Modern Greek Translations of Ancient Greek Tragedies: Some Observations and Questions," *Logeion. A Journal of Ancient Theatre 1* (2011): 307-317, accessed June 27, 2012, http://www.logeion.upatras.gr/images/Stephanopoulos_Metaphrase_tragwdias.pdf.

[4] The production premiered on August 9, 2013 at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus and received a second performance on August 10, 2013. It then went on tour and was performed in ancient theatres and other outdoor venues across Greece. See the official site of the National Theatre of Greece: http://www.n-t.gr/el/events/trahinies/, accessed September 11, 2013.

[5] Patricia E. Easterling, ed., *Sophocles Trachiniae* (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 'Introduction'.

[6] J. Michael Walton, *Living Greek Theatre. A Handook of Classical Performance and Modern Production* (New York- Westport, Connecticut-London: Greenwood Press), 73.

Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*

Directed by Sheila Daniels
Summer 2013
Intiman Theater, Seattle, WA

Reviewed by **Brett M. Rogers**
University of Puget Sound

Company of LYSISTRATA. Photo by Chris Bennion

This past decade of continuous warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq has left an indelible mark on contemporary American theater, its turmoil and death breathing renewed life into re-performances and adaptations of ancient Greek drama in particular. A decade ago, The *Lysistrata* Project promoted thousands of public readings of the drama (on March 3, 2003) in opposition to the (then-planned) invasion into Iraq. Numerous productions of Greek tragedies, such as Euripides's *Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*, have cropped up in response to reporting about the costs of war. Long-standing government-supported theatrical programs, such as Theater of War and Ancient Greeks / Modern Lives, have used staged readings of Greek drama to facilitate dialogue among soldiers, veterans, and civilians about the experience of warfare and its consequences across the United States and abroad. For as much as Greek drama has shaped the history of theater in the West, it is perhaps not a stretch to say that events in the Middle East have significantly shaped much of this present generation's understanding of Greek drama.

Into this climate came the Seattle-based Intiman Theater's recent production of the ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes (first produced in 411 BCE). *Lysistrata* was produced as part of Intiman's four-show repertory theatre festival for summer 2013, its final performance on September 12th, 2013. As director Sheila Daniels noted in the program and iterated in a talk-back held after the final performance, her initial impetus was to stage a production that addressed the war in Afghanistan, inspired both by her experience growing up in a family of military veterans and by interviews she had conducted with veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq two years earlier. While many directors choose to produce a Greek drama in the mythic past, or in an unreal time and space, in order to invite comparison to and reflection on contemporary warfare, Daniels's *Lysistrata* remained adamantly fixed on our present day, making it impossible throughout the performance to lose sight of the current war in Afghanistan.

Nowhere was this clearer than in the production's choice of setting. As the audience first entered into the theater, they found the stage designed to look like a modern military base camp. Actors of both sexes, dressed in fatigues, were already moving about on stage – preparing large pieces of equipment, doing push ups and other exercise drills, playfully rough housing. In one vignette, after a short inspection of the "soldiers" onstage, a "Commanding Officer" (Charles Legett) dismissed the soldiers, then called to the audience: "As you were." Through this twenty-minute prelude, the audience was drawn into life on a base camp in Afghanistan. (It is noteworthy that Daniels enlisted two military consultants for this production, one of whom, Carole Lynn Castillo, contributed writing to the play's program. As Daniels noted in the talk-back, she wanted to make sure actors followed proper protocols; for example, "soldiers" were taught not to salute the "CO" onstage, since such a gesture is prohibited in base camp, lest an enemy sniper be able to identify a high-ranking target.) Finally, the "CO" re-emerged to welcome the enlisted audience to this performance, inviting them to turn off communication devices ("'cause the enemy might be listening"), then drawing them into a call-and-answer routine. Through all this, the audience came to the realization that Lysistrata itself is not the play, but rather a play within a play, a "Soldier Show" being put on by "soldiers" in the midst of life on an Army base in Afghanistan. For an hour and a half, the real-life audience was thus invited to view itself as being on active duty in the U.S. Army.

Similarly, costumes worked to keep the audience in the present day of the fictional base camp rather than in *Lysistrata*'s 411 BCE. The costumes for the Greek comedy had been designed to look as if they had been cobbled together from the camp's leftover supplies, a bricolage of helmets, protective vests, and patches from military fatigues. Even the many phalluses flopping about invoked life on the base, made up of random machine parts, oil filters, and brightly colored water guns. Interestingly, some costumes invoked contemporary cinematic ideas about what constitutes an "ancient Greek warrior." Hence the Spartans looked like they have just stepped off the screen of Zak Snyder's *300*, scantily clad in bright red like militaristic Vegas show girls, while the Archon (Matt Reed) looked more like a mid-century caricature of an Eastern potentate than an Athenian official. Every character wore standard-issue military boots and socks, as if these were the cothurni or buskins of the modern theater of war.

I discuss the set, setting, costumes, and pre-show vignettes at such length because, with these external frames added to Aristophanes's script, Daniels and company turned the comedy into not merely a display to be laughed at, but a communal experience to be laughed with. *Lysistrata* invited the audience, as "soldiers," to laugh with its fellow "soldiers." Such a shared experience became crucial to the success of this *Lysistrata*, since the concluding scenes in the production relied upon this sense of belonging in order to turn Aristophanes's comedy into a tragedy that refused to let audiences escape the human costs of war (more on this below).

This is not to say that this modernized version of *Lysistrata* did not also, in true comic spirit, "bring the fun." Several significant modifications to the script made jokes accessible to the modern audience. (As Daniels declared in the talk-back, the script itself was stitched together from multiple translations, each scene drawing from a different translation depending on its fit for each "beat" in the show.) References abounded to contemporary technologies of hygiene (i.e., the use of tampons as weapons) and recent political slogans (e.g., shouts of "Yes we can"). This *Lysistrata* made especial use of popular culture as a vehicle for humor and song in place of the choral odes in the Aristophanic script. In one choral ode, the men's chorus offered, in the spirit of David Letterman, a deliberately offensive list of "Top Ten Reasons Why Whiskey is Better Than a Woman." Most of the choral odes, however, were swapped out in exchange for karaoke performances of modern pop songs – including the use of a wireless microphone, along with its flat amplified sound – treating audiences to renditions of hits by such artists as Beyoncé ("Single Ladies"), the Cranberries ("Zombie" for the women's oath), and Green Day (from *American Idiot*), among others; particularly inspired was the choice of "Add It Up" by the Violent Femmes, capturing the adolescent sexual frustration of literally blue-balled Cinesias (Tim Gouran) and the men's chorus before the 'resolution' scene with Peace (Benjamin Wippel in drag). Sometimes the drive to make a tired pop-culture reference came at the expense of the flow of the performance, such as an awkward light-saber fight between the Athenian and Spartan ambassadors using their phalluses – a gag handled more deftly by Mel Brooks in *Spaceballs* (1987) – and the abrupt use of film scores in the play's final scenes, including the Superman theme and the majestic "Throne Room" score from *Star Wars*. Perhaps the only obviously ancient joke to have survived in the script revisions was the infamous reference to the sexual position known as the "lioness on a cheese-grater" – a joke whose very obscurity must have been so funny to Daniels and company that it is repeated later in the play (as opposed to Aristophanes's single use at lines 231–2).[1]

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of this *Lysistrata* was its handling of contemporary social issues, in particular gender and sex. *Lysistrata* is a notoriously difficult play from a twentieth- and twenty-first-century perspective; some audiences see *Lysistrata* as offering the possibility for the empowerment of women's voices in politics, while others read *Lysistrata* as a male-identified fantasy that ends in sexual objectification and the reification of traditional gender norms. Daniels's production dealt with this complexity in several ways. First, this production made playful use of drag, featuring not just male actors as female characters, such as Opisthenia the Corinthian (Brian Culbertson) and the aforementioned Peace, but also a female actor as the male character who sports the biggest phallus onstage, the Spartan Herald (Chelsea Callahan); in the talk-back, Daniels claimed this was done in the spirit of gender equality. Such egalitarian ideals were intriguingly reinforced in the external frame of the play, wherein uniformed male and female soldiers appeared mostly androgynous, emphasizing the importance of regimentation in physical appearance among soldiers. Second, the earlier scenes featuring the two hemi-choruses of women and men, in particular the long debate between Lysistrata (Shontina "Tina" Vernon) and the Archon, had been deftly rewritten and performed so as to resonate with contemporary debates about the sexes; prominent and skillful use of modern slurs against women in turn amplified the poise and resoluteness of Vernon's impressive and strikingly modern-sounding Lysistrata. Midway through the production, it seemed as though this *Lysistrata* might have been boldly taking what one might call a pro-feminist stance far beyond what we find in the Aristophanic script. Fuller exploration of this stance in contrast with the troubling reconciliation scene, however, was ultimately foreclosed not by the events in the Aristophanic script itself, but rather by the stark re-emergence onstage of the war in Afghanistan.

The final scene, then, offered the single most significant alteration to the Aristophanic script. In Daniels's production, the final celebratory exodos of the Greek play was abruptly interrupted by an assault on the base camp. (In anticipation of the end, there was a similar interruption of the camp show about halfway through the play, during which we heard gunfire; order was quickly restored and the play recommenced.) In this final sequence, the actors in the camp show quickly evacuated the stage, running to fortify the defenses in the camp. The lights went out, the audience heard explosions and confused radio chatter. As the soldiers return to the stage, we discovered that the female soldier who had played Myrrhine (Kamaria Hallums-Harris) in the camp show had been killed during the attack. Myrrhine was carried onstage, at which point Lysistrata held her in her arms, singing the ballad "Scarlet Ribbons (For Her Hair)" as she kneeled over the body. As Lysistrata lamented, the other soldiers onstage came to a standstill and began chanting the U.S. Soldier's Creed in unison.[2] The resultant effect was both powerful and disconcerting, bringing into sharp relief the contrast between a classical Greek woman or civilian's experience of warfare (lamentation, care for the dead) and the soldier's experience of battle (the call to discipline in the face of confusion, destruction, and death). This ending thus rejected Aristophanes's celebratory *exodos*, both a reminder that the Peloponnesian War did not in fact end in 411 BCE and a strong assertion of Daniels's initial vision that this be a play about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus while this *Lysistrata* might have searched for comic relief in the midst of warfare and suffering, it was hard to see Daniels's ending as anything other than a tragedy that, as one line from the Soldier's Creed reminds us, "will always place the mission first."

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notes

[1] On this infamously obscure reference and the complexities involved in its interpretation, see Cashman Kerr Prince (2009), "The Lioness and the Cheese-Grater (Ar. Lys. 231-232)," Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica, 4th series, 7.2.149-175.

[2] Here is the full text of the Soldier's Creed, taken from the official website of the U.S. Army (www.army.mil/values/soldiers.html, accessed October 12, 2013):I am an American Soldier. I am a warrior

and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values. I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade. I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills. I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself. I am an expert and I am a professional. I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat. I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life. I am an American Soldier.

The Paper Cinema's Odyssey and *The Odyssey*

The Paper Cinema's Odyssey
Artistic Direction by Nicholas Rawling
Musical Direction by Christopher Reed
February 14 – March 19, 2013
Battersea Arts Centre, London

The Odyssey
Directed by Tim Carroll
February 22 – 23, 2013
Creation Theatre and The Factory
47/49 Tanner Street, London

Reviewed by **Stephe Harrop**
Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance

In the past two decades (since the production of Derek Walcott's *The Odyssey* by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1992) the UK has experienced a significant re-engagement with the *Odyssey* as a dramatic story and as the basis for theatrical performance. Multiple versions of the epic's narrative have been presented and contested (in what Taplin dubs 'versions and reversions and metaversions and paraversions of Homer')[1] in stage productions as varied as *The Odyssey* (Footsbarn Travelling Theatre, 1995), *A Ramayan Odyssey* (Tara Arts, 2001), *The Odyssey* (Lyric Hammersmith, 2006), *The Penelopiad* (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2007), *The Odyssey* (Theatre Ad Infinitum, 2009) and *Penelope* (Druid Theatre, 2010).[2] Other companies have elected to explore the ancient epic in alternative ways, treating the Odyssey as a stimulus for collective, multi-media creativity (*Shetland Odyssey*, Tête à Tête and CHROMA, 2006), peripatetic, multi-cultural storytelling (*An Island Odyssey*, Scottish International Storytelling Festival, 2011) or the immersive, participatory exploration of a particular locale (*The Odyssey*, Teatro Vivo at The Albany, 2012).

This latter group of projects highlights an increasingly important aspect of the contemporary performance reception of the *Odyssey* in the UK, with growing numbers of practitioners and companies moving away from the straightforward dramatisation (or revisionist dramatic contestation) of Homer's epic tale, and towards a deepening engagement with epic storytelling as a distinctive category of performance practice. These projects have increasingly foregrounded the techniques and practices, and the active audiences, of epic storytelling, as well as the tales being told, opening up new landscapes for the exploration of ancient epic in live re-performance. Two productions currently playing in London may be taken as typifying this trend, demonstrating a developing focus on the flexible narrative structures and in-performance composition of Homeric epic, as well as the ripping yarn of the *Odyssey*'s plot.

The Paper Cinema's Odyssey, returning to Battersea Arts Centre after a nationwide tour, is an almost-wordless cinematic evocation of Odysseus's wanderings and homecoming, its spiky hand-drawn protagonists and their atmospheric world sketched, assembled and animated in the course of each live re-performance. It is a virtuoso feat of live creation, with a team of two puppeteers and three musicians conjuring an ancient epic from a heap of cardboard cut-outs, a series of hand-sketched images, and a motley array of instruments including piano, violin, crisp packet, musical saw, melodica and power drill.

The musty, crumbling gloom of a former Council Chamber provides a fitting backdrop for the unassuming, deceptively ramshackle and always provisional character of this re-animation of ancient epic. To the left of the dimly-lit performance space, Nicholas Rawling and Imogen Charleston crouch, intent, beside a pair of cameras, manipulating a dizzying sequence of hand-drawn black-and-white puppets and cut-out backdrops, while to the right the band (Christopher Reed, Quinta and Hazel Mills) move from instrument to instrument, producing a series of melodies and motifs by turns jaunty, sinister, witty and haunting. At the heart of the performance space is the projector screen, upon which these disparate elements merge with uncanny precision and skill to create a seamless, dream-like synthesis of sound, image and motion.

What's particularly striking about this spatial configuration is the choice it offers to the show's audience: do you watch the animation developing on the screen—ostensibly the finished 'product' of *The Paper Cinema's Odyssey*—or the team of artists whose real-time work is producing this narrative of Odysseus's homecoming? Or do you observe some combination of the two? As Rawling explained in a 2010 interview:

> The audience sees us scrabbling around at the front making a film with the sound effects and musical score taking shape right in front of their eyes. It's about placing the audience in a dual world where they witness both the real-time construction of the film and the finished product at the same time.[3]

In this re-performance of the *Odyssey*, the film's animators and accompanists are always present and visible, physically located between the audience and the projector screen, even walking across the performance space now and then to reach different instruments or animation tables. The real-time re-creation of the ancient tale, the meticulous skill and focus of its makers, and their shared absorption in the rhythms of the story (the animators' heads twitching, and their hands moving, in precise time to the show's atmospheric live score)[4] are integral and inseparable parts of the visual spectacle of this *Odyssey*.

In this sense, *The Paper Cinema's Odyssey* might be described as a very 'oral' re-visioning of Homeric epic. Although this may seem a strange claim to make for an animation almost devoid of the spoken word (the odd monosyllable – 'splaaash' or 'ssssh' – being the limit of the show's verbal score), this is a re-performance of ancient epic myth built upon the creative, real-time interplay between fixed and fluid components of epic narrative. The show's prologue, for example, skilfully combines pre-fabricated text-blocks and live, hand-drawn visuals. A shadowed hand sketches the contours of a rugged, bearded face, while the words 'Odysseus, King & Hero' are shakily projected alongside, followed by the phrase 'Penelope, Faithful Wife', accompanying a second free-hand line-drawing of a woman's face, framed by long black hair.[5] This live re-combination of the pre-fabricated and the free-hand echoes some of the distinctive characteristics of oral epic performance identified by Parry and Lord in the early twentieth century, and elaborated by later scholars of oral poetics.

Parry and Lord's major insight, derived from the close study of modern epic-singers working within living traditions,[6] was to identify Homer as 'a poet singer among poet singers',[7]and to interpret the distinctive metric, linguistic and structural patterns of Homeric epic as signs of oral-poetic composition, characterized by the flexible, in-performance combination of traditional compositional units and the individual singer's real-time poetic invention.[8] Considered in this light, the opening of *The Paper Cinema's Odyssey* reveals some intriguing kinships with oral-poetic readings of ancient epic practice. Its pre-fabricated textual legends ('King & Hero', 'Faithful Wife') function like the inherited poetic formulae of traditional epic performance, economically and authoritatively evoking character archetypes assumed to be familiar to the assembled audience, while the artist's free-hand drawing recalls the individual, in-performance crafting of an epic tale by each successive oral artist.[9]

Echoes of ancient oral-poetic construction can be found elsewhere, too. The familiar Homeric epithet is gently parodied in a repeated sequence depicting the rising sun adorned with an aureole of little fingers (each complete with fingernails), accompanied by a tremulous and piercing musical motif which the soundtrack CD knowingly labels 'The Rosy Fingered Dawn'.[10] Like the oral-poetic Odyssey outlined by Parry and Lord, *The Paper Cinema's Odyssey* is an original artwork created from a collection of pre-existing images and archetypes, deployed in sequence and re-sequence by the skilled hands of knowledgeable and intensely-concentrated artists, whose own creativity operates within the inherited contours of traditional epic narrative to construct a singular re-performance of a well-known tale. Like the inherited compositional units of oral poetry, the emergent film's cut-out puppets are lifeless, meaningless, a heap of inanimate cardboard, until they are deployed within their appropriate epic context.

A picture of a teenage boy taping a 'Missing' poster to a lamppost (Telemachus advertising for news of Odysseus as if he were a lost cat), greeted with laughter at its first appearance, becomes (upon repetition) a shorthand signifier for years of loneliness, frustration and fear. Poseidon's trident, tattooed (along with the word DAD) on the arm of a blinded giant, looming threateningly from the heavens, or forcing an unconscious Odysseus beneath the rising waves, comes to stand for all the dangers of Odysseus's homeward journey, while a cartoon owl, pictured on a broach or on a ship's sails, snuggled in the luggage rack of a bus, or helpfully pointing directing wings from a tree-branch, reminds watchers of the unseen, benevolent presence of Athene. The image of Penelope encircled by her wolfish suitors' snarling, sharp-toothed muzzles is echoed in the curve of the waves which repeatedly threaten to overwhelm the returning Odysseus, while a small wolf swinging from a chandelier (another audience favourite, greeted with laughter—though possibly darkening laughter—upon each iteration) comes to symbolise all that's amiss in an Ithaca minus Odysseus.[11] To draw on the terminology developed by Foley, these are the individual 'words' (a 'unified utterance' or 'word-group' possessed of idiomatic significance—'a larger-than-literal responsibility'—within the context of oral poetics)[12] which, deployed cumulatively and in skilful combination, come to constitute the meaning of this particular epic performance.[13]

All of this marks *The Paper Cinema's Odyssey* as an accomplished instance of modern performance which, in developing its own distinctive style of epic storytelling, creates parallels with some of the central principles of ancient oral-poetic composition. Some of the 'words' which contribute to the accumulating meaning of *The Paper Cinema's Odyssey* have their roots in Homeric imagery. The film's lupine suitors, for example, would seem to derive from English translations of Athene's description of the eager aspirants to Penelope's hand as a 'wolf pack'.[14] Others are borrowed from contemporary popular culture (the cast of *Easy Rider* make a cameo appearance at one point), while some seem to belong specifically to The Paper Cinema's own idiosyncratic, oddly endearing re-visioning of the *Odyssey*. But all contribute to a powerful sense of this *Odyssey* as an emergent entity being created before our eyes, in a cumulative process of combination, juxtaposition and accretion, a sophisticated layering of 'words' which (in the context of epic performance) come to convey much more than their literal meanings.

If *The Paper Cinema's Odyssey* is a re-making of ancient epic that recalls some distinctively Homeric modes of in-performance composition, then *The Odyssey* (co-produced by Creation Theatre and The Factory) represents a comparably process-focussed approach to the live re-performance of ancient epic narrative. The Factory has previously devised irregular, pop-up performances of *Hamlet* and *The Seagull*, in which revolving casts of actors, allotted their roles via pre-show games of chance, make unfamiliar spaces their stage, and incorporate random props (brought along by the audience) into each one-off re-staging of a classic text.[15] Unsurprisingly, then, this is an *Odyssey* which places the live acting company, and their interactions with a particular, co-present audience, at the centre of the evolving performance. Collectively, they improvise a new version of Odysseus's story each time, in response to a series of challenges and constraints generated by audience members pulling shards of pottery (each inscribed with a specific instruction) out of a passed-around hat. It's tempting to read these shards as emblematic of both the fragmented tradition of ancient epic performance, and of this performance's creative premise that even such fractured remnants might be re-combined and re-configured in order to create a new and cohesive narrative artwork.

In a 2010 text explaining the genesis of this approach to Homeric epic, Tim Carroll (director of *The*

Odyssey) draws clear connections between ideas of ancient oral-poetic practice and his aspirations for this new, theatrically experimental re-telling of Odysseus's homecoming:

> This principle of the fixed and the flowing is manifested in every part of the poem. Just as the formulas are fixed while their use is flowing, so Odysseus's journeys flow around the Mediterranean while Penelope remains fixed on Ithaca.
>
> And this, I hope, is how it will be with our performance. The events of the story we have to tell are fixed; the circumstances in which we tell them will flow unpredictably. We have learnt some fixed elements, especially of song and dance; but how these 'formulas' combine to tell the story will change from one performance to the next. Like 'Homer', we will have to decide in the moment which stories to tell and which to leave out; and, like 'Homer', we will have to adapt the telling of our stories to many different circumstances.[16]

The resulting work is a self-consciously protean *Odyssey*, which explicitly challenges its actors (recruited from a flexible, constantly-evolving pool of participants) to draw on an unpredictable combination of pre-rehearsed elements (songs, dances, memorised poems) and spontaneous improvisation in their re-presentation of ancient epic tales. The work is minimalist and peripatetic: it has recently 'popped-up' in a bookshop in Oxford, and at the Bristol Old Vic theatre, and is now temporarily occupying a converted South-London warehouse, in which rows of spectators, arranged on four sides of an empty floor, make uneasy, expectant eye-contact across the playing-space, while the laid-back, un-costumed company wander, warm up by rolling hoops or throwing and catching sticks, smile, chat, greet friends, and make jokes.

This is an *Odyssey* which explicitly aims at making 'a connection between the material, the story, and our own lives, and the lives of the audience'.[17] At regular intervals, audience members are charmed or cajoled into offering characters advice, entering the performance space to become actors or live puppets, sharing autobiographical stories, and loaning personal items which will come to define the story's major characters. On this occasion, for instance, Odysseus (the role split among several company members) is identified by the fact that he or she wears a woolly hat, and carries a toy owl (happy accident or knowing symbolic offering?) borrowed from a front-row spectator. Actors occasionally pause in their re-telling of the Homeric *Odyssey* to recount their own tales of struggle or sorrow. The effect is complex, unstable, multi-layered, multi-vocal; sometimes frenetic, opaque or chaotic, sometimes shocking, sometimes touching.

Recent discourses in the performance reception of ancient tragedy have led to a heightened awareness that performance can only take place 'in and through the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators', and that each distinct, individual performance arises 'out of their encounter and interaction'. Fischer-Lichte describes this interaction as 'an *autopoietic* process, which is characterised by a high degree of contingency'.[18] And what's true of tragic performance is even more the case for the un-fixed, un-scripted re-performance of ancient epic, as evoked by Jensen:

> It is direct; addresser and addressee are face to face. They can see hear, smell and touch each other, and they mutually influence each other as the performance proceeds. The experience is shared, and joy, melancholy, fear, or aggression is contagious among the participants. The success of a singer depends on his ability to catch the interest of his audience and keep it. He is intent on meeting their demands and is all the time attentive to their reactions. If they show signs of being bored, he introduces something exciting or, on the contrary, abbreviates his narrative and hastens to the end.[19]

In this model of in-performance epic composition, 'the spectators generate meaning in a performance by virtue of the peculiar fact that they themselves partake in creating the process they wish to understand.'[20] Creation Theatre and The Factory's *The Odyssey* similarly aims to be a performance event which engages and explores the *autopoiesis* of epic storytelling, making audience choices and provocations a prominent feature of the evolving drama, forcing performers to respond rapidly to an ever-changing set of conditions and challenges.

Inevitably, this doesn't always come off. Sometimes, a key segment of narrative gets rushed, fumbled, or simply drowned out among too many competing ideas and voices. At other times, the sheer complexity of the task in hand seems to be pushing the company into an inwardly focussed, self-absorbed style of improvisation, which lacks the direct audience address of ancient epic storytelling. Occasionally the pressure of compressing the whole twenty-four 'books' of the *Odyssey* into a two-hour performance (despite Carroll's awareness that a putative oral-poetic 'Homer' would rarely, if ever, have attempted to perform a 'whole' epic)[21] is evident, with critical details getting skipped, crucial introductions being rushed, and an action's causes or consequences overlooked. But, then again, there are the magical moments when, somehow, it all works beautifully.

Amid *The Odyssey's* plethora of surprises, gags and (occasionally) gimmicks, the best moments are often those of relative stillness and simplicity, a handful of uncluttered utterances and exchanges which allow the show's performers the space to combine real depth of artistry, and sustained personal engagement with the ancient poem's themes, with flashes of improvisatory wit. A wary, earthy, weary Laertes, pictured in snapshot among his vines, or a snatch of Demodocus's song casting a momentary spell of grief over a robustly comic Phaeacia, plunges the performance into an intensely imagined world which transcends the superficial jokiness of much of the show's more frantic on-the-hoof devising. When Penelope, holding fiercely tight to her returned husband, begins to recount an audience-member's personal tale of being on an aeroplane caught in a storm, and insists this happened to 'me', the worlds of here and there, the mundane and the epic, the real and the imagined are tangled into a single tight, taut knot of fear, love and longing. Perhaps paradoxically, it is in these moments (rather than in its more obviously participatory segments) that *The Odyssey* most successfully achieves the kind of intense imaginative and emotional interplay between performers and audience which characterises the intensely *autopoietic* oral-poetic performance of ancient epic.

Neither of these productions aspires to be an accurate representation of ancient epic practice, even supposing such a thing were possible. *The Paper Cinema's Odyssey* makes full use of modern film technologies in the sophisticated achievement of its charmingly hand-made aesthetic, while Creation Theatre and The Factory's *The Odyssey* draws on the skill-sets and vocabularies of contemporary actor-training, devising and physical theatre. However, both deploy these disparate modern techniques and technologies in order to engage with the principles (as much as the narrative subjects) of epic storytelling, developing versions of ancient epic in which the gradual, real-time emergence of a unique and unrepeatable performance becomes part of the spectacle and pleasure of epic spectatorship.

In both cases, the dramatic 'product' emerges in the course of a performance which does not repeat, but rather re-generates, an epic narrative. And both are engaged in an exploration of ancient epic which goes beyond re-telling the stories of the *Odyssey*, experimenting with modes of in-performance creation which highlight the epic's status as unfixed, flexible and emergent, and embracing the potential of epic performance for accident, surprise, interaction and transformation. Both highlight a developing engagement with some of the key practices, processes and techniques of epic performance, and in making these a visible component of the emerging theatre event, suggesting that contemporary creative artists (across a range of disciplines and genres) are increasingly concerned with showcasing the mechanics and dynamics of epic performance, as well as re-telling the much-loved (and much-contested) tale of Odysseus's homecoming. Perhaps most importantly, both provide an exhilarating, unpredictable and (at times) unexpectedly moving evening's entertainment, re-inventing the ancient, oral-poetic *Odyssey* as a site of contemporary theatrical experiment, exploration and innovation.

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notes

[1] Oliver Taplin, "Homer's Wave Machine," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2006. Accessed February 17, 2013. http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/may/20/poetry.classics.

[2] See Edith Hall, The Return of Ulysses: *A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey* (London: Tauris, 2008), 42.

[3] Lena Corner, "Paper Cinema Interview," *The Knowledge*, September 30, 2010. Accessed February 19, 2013. http://www.ideastap.com/IdeasMag/The-Knowledge/paper-cinema-interview.

[4] Rawling comments that 'we riff off the music and they riff of [sic] us'. Corner, "Paper Cinema Interview."

[5] A fragmentary version of this sequence can be viewed via The Paper Cinema's website. See "Trailer for The Odyssey," 2012. Accessed February 17, 2013. http://thepapercinema.com/gallery/videos/.

[6] On 'the often cited but still poorly understood comparison between Homeric and South Slavic epic' see John Miles Foley, "Homer and South Slavic Epic," Didaskalia 3/3 (Winter 1996). Accessed February 19, 2013. http://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol3no3/foley.html.

[7] Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. 2nd edition.), 150.

[8] Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 141-157. For an overview of Parry and Lord's 'Oral-Formulaic Theory' see Richard Janko, "Thunder But No Clouds: The Genesis of Homeric Text," *Didaskalia* 3/3 (Winter 1996). Accessed February 19, 2013. http://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol3no3/janko.html. On the theory's genesis, and its limitations, see John Miles Foley, How to Read an Oral Poem (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 109-13.

[9] As Finnegan notes, the oral poet 'can base his composition on these known patterns of phrases, lines and themes, without necessarily restricting himself to them'. Ruth Finnegan*, Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 65.

[10] The Paper Cinema, *Wine Dark Sea: Music from The Paper Cinema's Odyssey*, 2012. Accessed February 16, 2013. http://thepapercinema.bandcamp.com.

[11] The use of some of these "words" can be observed in a short interview with the company. BAC London, "The Paper Cinema Interview," 2012. Accessed February 19, 2013. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgjDAIqu6-8.

[12] Foley, How to Read, 17, 110, 114. Foley uses this term to translate the Serbo-Croatian term reči (singular: reč): Foley, How to Read, 11-20. See also John Miles Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1999).

[13] For a more detailed application of Oral-Formulaic Theory to cinematic works see Caroline Eades and Françoise Létoublon, "From Film Analysis to Oral-Formulaic Theory: The Case of the Yellow Oilskins." In *Contextualizing Classics: Ideology, Performance, Dialogue*, ed. Thomas M. Falkner et. al. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), 301-16. On the impact of antiquity on the development of early cinema see Pantelis Michelakis et.al. (eds.), *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[14] Robert Fitzgerald (trans.), *The Odyssey* (London: Vintage, 2007), 4.

[15] See The Factory, "The Factory," 2012. Accessed February 25, 2013. http://www.factorytheatre.co.uk/.

[16] Tim Carroll. "The Odyssey," 2010. Accessed February 25, 2013. http://thefactory.wetpaint.com/page/The+Odyssey>.

[17] Creation Theatre, "Assistant Director, Reuben Grove," 2012. Accessed February 24, 2013. http://www.creationtheatre.co.uk/shows/The%20Odyssey%202012.

[18] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Performance as Event - Reception as Transformation." *In Theorising Performance: Greek Drama, Cultural History and Critical Practice*, ed. Edith Hall et. al. (London: Duckworth, 2010), 29-30.

[19] Minna Skafte Jensen, "Performance." In *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 46-7.

[20] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008), 155.

[21] Carroll, "The Odyssey." On the selective incorporation of narrative elements as a characteristic of oral epic in performance see John Miles Foley, "Analogues: Modern Oral Epics in Performance." In *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 204.

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Why Didaskalia?: The Language of Production in (and its Many Meanings for) Greek Drama

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Scholars and performers have long been familiar with a curious feature in the language of Greek drama: the technical term for the classical Greek dramatic poet-director was διδάσκαλος.[1] The evidence for this phenomenon is widespread. In Aristophanic comedy, the chorus explicitly calls the poet-director διδάσκαλος.[2] Various forms of epigraphic evidence (e.g., production lists, victor lists, and other choregic[3] monuments) refer to the poet-director as διδάκαλος or indicates that he "produced" (ἐδίδασκε / ἐδίδαξε) a given drama or dramas.[4] Similar in diction but later in date, several surviving hypotheses inform us that a given drama '"was produced'" (ἐδιδάχθη) or that a poet '"produced'" (ἐδίδαξε) or even '"reproduced'" (ἀνεδίδαξε) his tragedies or comedies.[5] In turn, the poet's collective output could be referred to as his διδασκαλία ("production"), hence of course the name of the present journal.[6] We moderns refer to the official victor lists and inscriptions that record the names of the dramas produced as διδασκαλίαι; this nomenclature dates back at least as far as Aristotle, who composed a book of *Διδασκαλίαι*,[7] although Arthur Pickard-Cambridge argued that Aristotle's *Διδασκαλίαι* derived its title from the official language of the Dionysia,[8] and other scattered references may corroborate the point.[9]

None of this is curious in itself; rather, the oddity arises when we examine *didaskein* language from a diachronic perspective, comparing the diction for dramatic production to other occurrences of the verb *didaskein* and its cognates that either antedate or are contemporaneous with the development of Greek drama. In most surviving archaic and classical Greek texts, *didaskein* does not mean "to produce" or "to direct," but "to teach" or "to instruct."[10] Similarly, the nominal form *didaskalos* means not "director" or "dramatic poet" but "teacher," both in the unmarked sense of "one who teaches" – as in Heraclitus' complaint that "Hesiod is the *didaskalos* of most people" (διδάσκαλος δὲ πλείστων Ἡσίοδος, B57 D-K)[11] – and in the familiar marked sense of "one who teaches a particular *tekhnê*," sometimes for money, sometimes not. Even the term *didaskalia*, in its earliest attestations, does not mean "production" but rather either "education,"[12] or, less commonly, "facility in learning," as we find in a fragment of Evenus: "A clever speaker could quickly persuade those who understand, those who have a facility for learning" (τοὺς ξυνετοὺς δ᾽ ἄν τις πείσειε τάχιστα λέγων εὖ, / οἵπερ καὶ ῥῄστης εἰσι διδασκαλίης, fr. 1.6 West).[13] A particularly compelling example comes from Pindar *Pythian* 4, wherein the hero Jason declares "φαμὶ διδασκαλίαν Χεί-/ρωνος οἴσειν" ("I claim that I shall manifest the teachings of Cheiron," 102–3).[14] Here *didaskalia* seems to denote "education" in the sense of "an entire educational regimen," as if Jason were claiming (as it were) to have a degree from the Cheiron Technical Institute of Heroes. In other words, when we look at *didaskein* language from a diachronic perspective, it was by no means historically inevitable that Greek dramatists in the fifth century BCE would come to speak of their art as *didaskalia*, nor that *didaskalia* would be used to denote such a restricted meaning as "dramatic production."

Consequently scholars have spilled no little ink attempting to delineate the precise meaning and scope of *didaskein* language so that we may better understand how and why the broader notion of "teaching" came to be used to talk about the more restricted notion of "producing drama." Perhaps the simplest explanation has been that *didaskein* refers to "teaching" in a restricted, technical sense,[15] referring to the dramatist's specialized work "instructing" or "training" the actors in their roles. Such work could also include the composition of the poetry (music and lyrics), the choreography of the performance, and the basic social education or socialization of the chorus.[16] As John Herington noted, this diction is not exclusive to drama, but also applies to “training” in other performance genres, including dithyramb, epinician, and other choral poetry.[17] This explanation further makes good historical sense if we accept Aristotle’s argument that drama developed out of dithyrambic performance (*Poetics* 1449a). According to this argument, we would thus take the hypothetical statement *ὁ δὲ Εὐϱιπίδης ἐδίδαξε τὰς Βαγχάς (“Euripides taught the *Bacchae*”) to have the marked meaning “Euripides produced the drama *The Bacchae*” or, to unpack it further, “Euripides trained the actors and chorus of *The Bacchae*.” Other scholars have attempted, however, to move beyond this basic “technical” interpretation, suggesting instead that the convention of referring to the poet as *didaskalos* alluded to a classical Greek, if not distinctly Athenian, idea that drama was “culturally formative,” that is, that the dramatist not only “taught” the performers, but offered a moral education to the people or the city at large.[18] According to this argument (and to borrow from Pindar), we might say that dramatic performers “made manifest” to the polis the *didaskalia* of an Agathon or Sophocles. One further extension of this argument has been to assert that the dramatic festivals were civic institutions directly aimed at giving Athenian citizens an education in civic ideology, rooting the tragic performance deeply in its civic and religious festival context,[19] although such a view has not been without its detractors.[20]

The basic idea that drama somehow “teaches” individual citizens or the polis at large, of course, is nothing new, but can be traced back to late-fifth and early fourth-century sources. In books 2–3 and 10 of the *Republic*, Plato’s Socrates famously scrutinizes the educational value of *mousikê*, although he argues that most drama and poetry must be heavily redacted, if not completely censored, in order to educate citizens of the *kallipolis* properly. Moreover, the relationship between drama and education is an explicit, recurring topic in Old Comedy; as Emmanuela Bakola and Zachary Biles have recently shown, comic poets at times even adopted the persona of the *didaskalos* as a form of self-representation.[21] Perhaps most famous is the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes’s *Frogs* (1052–1058):

> **Εὐ**: πότερον δ᾽ οὐκ ὄντα λόγον τοῦτον περὶ τῆς Φαίδρας ξυνέθηκα;
> **Αἰ**: μὰ Δί᾽ ἀλλ᾽ ὄντ᾽· ἀλλ᾽ ἀποκρύπτειν χρὴ τὸ πονηρὸν τόν γε ποιητήν,
> καὶ μὴ παράγειν μηδὲ διδάσκειν. τοῖς μὲν γὰρ παιδαρίοισιν
> ἔστι διδάσκαλος ὅστις φράζει, τοῖσιν δ᾽ ἡβῶσι ποιηταί.
> πάνυ δὴ δεῖ χρηστὰ λέγειν ἡμᾶς.
> **Εὐ**: ἢν οὖν σὺ λέγῃς Λυκαβηττοὺς
> καὶ Παρνασσῶν ἡμῖν μεγέθη, τοῦτ᾽ ἐστὶ τὸ χρηστὰ διδάσκειν,
> ὃν χρῆν φράζειν ἀνθρωπείως;
>
> **Eu**: Did I compose an account about Phaedra that did not already exist?
> **Ae**: Oh yes, it exists. But the poet must conceal that which is wicked, and not
> bring it forth or [teach/produce] (didaskein) it. For children it is the
> [teacher/director] (didaskalos) who explains things,[22] but for the post-
> pubescent there are poets. We are obliged to speak useful things.
> **Eu**: So if you speak to us of Lykabêttoses and mighty Parnassus, this is
> “[teaching/producing] (to didaskein) useful things”, when we ought to be
> speaking on a human scale?

Euripides’s skepticism aside, the *Frogs* passage offers two basic, but, for our purposes, significant points. First, in Aristophanes’s view, dramatists like Aeschylus and Euripides would have self-identified as “poets” (ποιηταί: 1053, 1055); indeed, as Kenneth Dover observes, “Aeschylus locates himself within a continuous tradition of teaching,”[22] including Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, and “the divine Homer” (1030–1036) who “taught useful things” (ὁ δὲ θεῖος Ὅμηϱος… χϱήστ’ ἐδίδαξεν, 1034–5).[24] Second, Aeschylus argues for a distinction between “teachers” (*didaskaloi*) and “poets” (*poiêtai*): “there is a *didaskalos* for children, but for the post-pubescent there are poets” (1054–5).

Such a positivist reading of this passage, however, oversimplifies. First, Aeschylus's statement implies that both *didaskaloi* and poets "teach," that both are, in one sense or another, *didaskaloi*. The only distinction Aeschylus offers between these two categories is the age group to which each "teaches."[25] We might, of course, make other assumptions to distinguish *didaskaloi* from poets – for example, that the distinction has to do with professional status (*didaskaloi* are paid, poets are granted a chorus). However, Aeschylus does not explicitly authorize this distinction here. Second, even if we think Aeschylus is distinguishing *didaskaloi* who are glorified babysitters from *poiêtai* who are grant-winning artistes, there is a meta-theatrical joke that cannot be easily dismissed. For if the language of theatrical *didaskalia* does indeed date to the fifth century, how can Aeschylus not be ironically suggesting that he and Euripides, themselves *didaskaloi*, are glorified babysitters, how can he not be implying that the audience of Athenians are anything other than "little children" (παιδαρίοισιν)? We not only have here a meta-theatrical joke to which Aeschylus seems delightfully oblivious, but also a serious question that Aeschylus ignores about the meaningful difference, if any, between kinds of *didaskaloi*.

The scene from *Frogs* ultimately gestures towards two important points for our present consideration of *didaskalia*. First, even though the *didaskein*-based language of theatrical production is internally consistent, it can be difficult to pin down the precise valence of a given use of a *didaskein* term, especially in the context of dramatic performance, where many different meanings may be operating at any given moment. Second – and this is perhaps my bolder claim here – much of Greek drama appears to be a contest for the very meaning and aims of *didaskalia*. That is, far from taking for granted the "instructive" value of drama, the dramatic *didaskaloi* seem to have been attuned to deeper, troubling questions about "teaching" the city: What does it really mean to "teach"? Is there good "teaching" and bad "teaching"?[26] What are the dangers of "teaching"? In other words, there is a second way in which the language of *didaskalia* is curious: despite the fact that the dramatic poet was, by definition, a *didaskalos*, the language of "teaching" in Greek drama suggests that the definition of *didaskalia* was up for grabs, and, as the conclusion of Aristophanes's *Clouds* suggests, that education was not always good for the polis.

These contests for the meaning of *didaskalia* were not exclusive to Old Comedy either, but also appear with some frequency in Attic tragedy. In many instances in Aeschylus, for example, "teaching" is not the language of moral instruction, but rather of tyrannical violence and political capitulation. At the end of *Agamemnon*, Aegisthus threatens that the Argives elders will be "taught" (διδάσκεσθαι, 1619) to submit to him, characterizing prison bonds and hunger pangs as "exceptional at teaching" (διδάσκειν ἐξοχώταται, 1622):

> **Αἰγ**: σὺ ταῦτα φωνεῖς, νερτέρᾳ προσήμενος
> κώπῃ, κρατούντων τῶν ἐπὶ ζυγῷ δορός;
> γνώσῃ γέρων ὢν διδάσκεσθαι βαρὺ
> τῷ τηλικούτῳ, σωφρονεῖν εἰρημένον.
> δεσμὸς δὲ καὶ τὸ γῆρας αἵ τε νήστιδες
> δύαι διδάσκειν ἐξοχώταται φρενῶν
> ἰατρομάντεις. οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὁρῶν τάδε;
> πρὸς κέντρα μὴ λάκτιζε, μὴ παίσας μογῇς.
>
> **Aeg**: You dare say these things to me? You, who are seated at the oar below, while those at the helm rule the ship? You, old man, will learn how hard it is to be taught at such an age, when you should be speaking prudently. Prison-bonds and the pangs of hunger are the best healer-prophets for the mind, even for the instruction of old age. Do you, although seeing, not see this? Do not kick against the goad, lest you suffer pain as you strike it.

Similarly, in the opening lines of *Prometheus Bound*, Kratos threatens that Prometheus will "be taught" (διδαχθῇ, 10) to love the rule of Zeus (7–10):

> **Κρ**: τὸ σὸν γάρ ἄνθος, παντέχνου πυρὸς σέλας,
> θνητοῖσι κλέψας ὤπασεν. τοιᾶσδέ τοι
> ἁμαρτίας σφε δεῖ θεοῖς δοῦναι δίκην,
> ὡς ἂν διδαχθῇ τὴν Διὸς τυραννίδα
> στέργειν, φιλανθρώπου δὲ παύεσθαι τρόπου.
>
> **Kr**: Your choicest bloom, the blaze of fire that assists all crafts, he stole and gave to mortals. Such is the wrong for which he must pay the penalty to the gods, so that he may be taught to love the rule of Zeus and to cease from his mortal-loving ways.

Such threats from Aegisthus and Kratos, however, do not go without response. Whereas Kratos uses the notion of "being taught" as an expression of tyrannical compulsion, Prometheus refuses to partake in such a view of "teaching." Not much later in *Prometheus Bound*, when Ocean visits the bound Titan, Prometheus rejects the idea that Ocean has any use for him as a *didaskalos*, claiming "You are not inexperienced, nor do you need me as a teacher" (σὺ δ᾽ οὐκ ἄπειρος, οὐδ᾽ ἐμοῦ διδασκάλου / χρῄζεις, 373–4). Even though Prometheus famously enumerates the many *technai* he has conferred upon humankind (436–506) and offers extensive instruction to the visiting, cow-headed Io (700–741, 786–818) – during which instruction he repeatedly refers to Io's need to "learn" (701, 817) – never once does he explicitly describe himself as a *didaskalos.*

Elsewhere in Attic tragedy, "teaching" is the language of ritual and mantic instruction, although it can still imply forcefulness. Fed up with Creon's paranoia in *Antigone*, the prophet Teiresias pointedly declares "I shall instruct, and you obey the seer" (ἐγὼ διδάξω, καὶ σὺ τῷ μάντει πιθοῦ, 992). In *Eumenides*, Orestes explains how he came to Athena, transforming his experience of a violent education, "being taught among evils" (διδαχθεὶς ἐν κακοῖς, 276), into a willing submission to his *didaskalos,* the god Apollo (φωνεῖν ἐτάχθην πρὸς σοφοῦ διδασκάλου, 279).[27] Indeed, the *Oresteia* offers one final transformation of the notion of "teaching," transferring it from the language of tyrannical violence to the language of the law court, as if to suggest, as Yun Lee Too has argued, that the court has become a new locus of education in Athenian society.[28]

My objective in this article is not to offer a complete catalogue or extended analysis of instances of "teaching" in Athenian drama,[29] nor do I intend to attribute any singular or unified meaning to *didaskalia* or the *didaskalos* in the context of ancient drama. Rather, my aim has been: first, to raise several complications about the language of *didaskalia* otherwise taken for granted by both scholars and theater practitioners; and second, to argue for a much more dynamic understanding of *didaskalia* with regard to both the content and performance of Greek drama. Since the language of *didaskalia* is so central to the performance of Greek drama, as I established at the beginning of this discussion, we cannot help but ask in what way(s) the dramatic poet "teaches" or "instructs," but we must also be aware that invocations of *didaskalia* in dramatic performance are far from transparent in meaning and require us to examine each instance of "teaching" in Athenian drama through multiple lenses simultaneously. Do characters speak in terms of literal education or use "teaching" as a linguistic frame for a speech act that expresses violence or submission to ritual or participation in the lawcourts, etc.? Is dramatic *didaskalia* somehow similar to or different from the *didaskalia* of Cheiron or Hesiod? And, to put these questions into terms more pertinent to modern directors and performers of ancient drama, do utterances of "teaching" or "instruction" take on new meaning when we consider our (student-)actors and our own claims to be *didaskaloi*, whether moral, professional, or civic? To conclude, then, my goal is not to answer definitively the question posed in the title – "Why *Didaskalia*?" – but to demonstrate that Greek dramatic *didaskaloi* repeatedly and resolutely struggled with and competed over the very idea of *didaskalia* and its various meanings for Greek drama, and to point forward to the (re-)assessment of *didaskalia* in the Greek dramas themselves that awaits future scholars and practitioners alike.

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notes

[1] By the third century BCE, Alexandrian scholars were comfortable with this use of *didaskalos*, as can be seen in the title of Callimachus' lost work on Greek drama, πίναξ καὶ ἀναγραφὴ τῶν κατὰ χρόνους καὶ απ' ἀρχῆς γενονμένων διδασκάλων (frr. 454–6 Pfeiffer); cf. Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 70.

[2] Ar. Acharnians 628, Peace 737–738: both occurrences take place in the *parabasis*. Cf. Antiphon 6.11. In a similar vein, the Poet in Ar. *Birds* calls himself διδάσκαλος (912) but explicitly aligns himself with Homer (κατὰ τὸν Ὅμηρον, 910, 914). Perdicoyianni (1994: 178) takes the reference to τῷ διδασκάλῳ at *Wealth* 797 (where the god Ploutos accepts food from the Wife) to be a reference to the comic poet.

[3] I do not intend here to examine the related figure of the *chorêgos,* the citizen who funds (as a liturgy) and produces classical Athenian dramas. For more on the *chorêgos*, see the seminal study of Wilson 2000.

[4] It is not uncommon to find phrases such as (e.g.,) ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΗΣ ΕΔΙΔΑΣΚΕ ("Euripides produced," on the Socrates Monument, SEG XXIII.102). On the *didaskein* language in the Athenian production inscriptions (the so-called Didaskaliai), victor lists, and other choregic monuments, see Csapo and Slater 1995: 39–44, 121–138, 227–229.

[5] *Didaskein* terms are used to describe dramatic productions in the following hypotheses: Aes. *Agamemnon* (ἐδιδάχθη, 21); Soph. *Philoctetes* (ἐδιδάχθη, 17), *Oedipus at Colonus* (ἐδίδαξεν); Eur. *Alcestis* (ἐδιδάχθη, 16), *Medea* (ἐδιδάχθη, 40), *Hippolytus* (ἐδιδάχθη, 25), *Andromachê* (∑mny ad 445 οὐ δεδίδακται, proposed by Cobet); Ar. *Acharnians* (ἐδιδάχθη, 32), *Knights* (ἀνεδίδαξε, 2.11–12; ἐδιδάχθη, 25), *Clouds* (ἐδιδαχθήσαν, 5.1; ἀναδιδάξαι, 5.5, 7), *Wasps* (ἐδιδάχθη, 30), *Peace* (δεδιδαχὼς, 3.1, but see app. crit.), *Birds* (ἐδιδάχθη, 1.7, ἐδίδαξε, 2.25), *Lysistrata* (29), *Frogs* (ἐδιδάχθη 1.29, 3.24; ἀνεδιδάχθη,1.33, 3.27), *Wealth* (ἐδιδάχθη, 4.1; διδάξας, 4.3). No *didaskein* terms appear in the following hypotheses: Aes. *Persians*, *Seven Ag. Thebes*, *Suppliant Women*, *Eumenides*, *Prometheus Bound*; Soph. *Electra*; Eur. *Cyclops*, *Children of Heracles*, *Hecabê*, *Suppliant Women*, *Electra* (fragmentary), *Heracles*, *Trojan Women*, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*, *Ion*, *Helen*, *Phoenissae*, *Orestes*, *Rhesus*. In the Euripidean manuscript tradition, where multiple hypotheses sometimes survive, *didaskein* language and the accompanying information on performance context appear in the hypotheses attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium (with the exception of the reference to the *didaskaliai* in the hypothesis for *Rhesus*, see n. 9 below).

[6] Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 71.

[7] Diogenes Laertius (5.26) records the name of three Aristotelian texts about drama: *Νῖκαι Διονυσιακαὶ* (in one book), *Περὶ τραγῳδιῶν* (in one book), and *Διδασκαλίαι* (in one book). For other attestations of the title Διδασκαλίαι, cf. Harpocr. s.v. διδάσκαλος, ∑ Ar. *Birds* 1379. Pickard-Cambridge (71) notes in addition that διδασκαλίαι included not just records of tragic and comic performances, but also dithyrambic performances. See also Csapo and Slater 1995: 41–2.

[8] Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 71.

[9] There are explicit references to the *Διδασκαλίαι* in the hypotheses for Eur. *Rhesus* (24–5) and Ar. *Peace* (3.1), as well as in a scholion on *Frogs* about *Bacchae* (∑ Ar. *Frogs* 67: οὕτω γὰρ καὶ αἵ Διδασκαλίαι φέρουσι, τελευτήσαντος Εὐριπίδου τὸι υἱὸν αὐτοῦ δεδιδαχέναι ὁμώνυμον ἐν ἄστει Ἰφιγένειαν τὴν ἐν Αὐλίδι, Ἀλκμαίωνα, βάγχας [= DID C22 Snell]), although these were likely composed later than Aristotle.

[10] Perdicoyianni 1994 provides a detailed and comprehensive study of the verb *didaskein* and related terms from the archaic period to 400 BCE.

[11] 57 D-K = XIX Kahn = Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.10.2. The full quotation runs: "Hesiod is

the teacher of most people. They think that he knows the most things, he who did not recognize day and night, for they are one" (διδάσκαλος δὲ πλείστων Ἡσίοδος· τοῦτον ἐπίστανται πλεῖστα εἰδέναι, ὅστις ἡμέρην καὶ εὐφρόνην οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν· ἔστι γὰρ ἕν.). See also Kirk 1962: 155–161, Conche 1986: 102–3, Robinson 1987: 38, 120–1.

[12] E.g., Protag. fr 3 D–K. Cf. Perdicoyianni 1994: 172–3.

[13] Perdicoyianni 1994 notes that ῥήστης διδασκαλίης "designe la faculté d'apprendre" (65). Cf. the alternate, albeit unlikely, reading of διδασκαλίην at h. Hermes 556.

[14] Translation: Race 1997: i.273.

[15] Perdicoyianni 1994: 172 observes a distinction in the Hippocratic corpus between *didaskalia* "au sens d' 'enseignement' d'un savoir-faire précis" and *paideia/paideusis* "au sens de 'culture'."

[16] Note in particular the theory of Winkler 1990, who suggests that tragic choruses may have been composed of ephebes, thus making performance in the dramatic chorus a kind of education and *rite de passage* for future adult male citizens; cf. Calame 2001 on the idea of a chorus as a *rite de passage*, but see Csapo and Slater 1995: 352 and Griffin 1998: 43–4 for criticisms of Winkler's theory. Even if ephebes did not participate in tragic choruses, nevertheless they were members of the audience, educated along with other citizens; see Goldhill 1997: 59.

[17] Herington 1985: 24–5, 183–184. Herington's Appendix IV.D (183–4) lists select examples of occurrences of the verb διδάσκω or noun διδάσκαλος in various poetic contexts. Herington is careful to note that there are no classical attestations of διδάσκαλος with respect to choral lyric, but he infers continuity in Spartan choral training from the time of Alcman onward on the basis of the reference to Alcman as a διδάσκαλος in the "Commentarius ad Melicos" (Alc. 10 fr. 1 iii PMG = P.Oxy 2506).

[18] E.g., Jaeger 1945, Marrou 1956, Beck 1975, Forrest 1986, Woodbury 1986. I take the definition of poetry as "culturally formative" from Woodbury 1986: 248.

[19] Examples include, but are by no means not limited to: Winkler and Zeitlin 1990 (*passim*), Euben 1990, Gregory 1991, Rose 1992, Meier 1993, Croally 1994, Seaford 1994, Griffith 1995, Goff 1995, Gellrich 1995, Cartledge 1997, Pelling 1997, Goldhill and Osborne 1999, Seaford 2000, Goldhill 2000. Hall (2006: 1–15) offers a useful, short sketch of the contours of this debate, although she is specifically interested in the larger question of the interrelationship between Athenian drama and social reality.

[20] E.g., Heath 1987, Griffin 1998, Rhodes 2003.

[21] Bakola 2008, Biles 2011: 98, 247–8.

[22] Here I follow the translation of Dover 1997: 193.

[23] *Ibid.* 11.

[24] *Ibid.* 193 advises that we translate ἡβῶσι as "adults" rather than "young" (i.e., adolescents).

[25] Cf. Biles 2011, who amusingly observes that Aeschylus's claim here is "a pithy pronouncement about the poet's role as *didaskalos* of the adult population" (247).

[26] And does the audience come to the theater with the explicit intention of being "taught"? Dover 1997 reminds us that "It may well be that many, perhaps most, Athenians would have assented to the general proposition that a tragic poet has a responsibility to 'make his fellow-citizens better people', but that is not to say that they actually went to the theatre in the hope of moral improvement" (12).

[27] It is tempting to speculate that here lurks a potential moment of meta-theatricality, since *didaskalos* Apollo doubles as both ritual "instructor" of, and onstage "director" for, Orestes' actions.

[28] Too 2001.

[29] I provide a lengthy catalogue and extended discussion of the notion of "teaching" in Attic drama in my forthcoming monograph entitled *Troubling Teachers in Archaic Greece and Athenian Drama*. The present study here is merely intended as a snapshot of, and gesture towards, the larger, much more complicated picture of "teaching" not only in classical Greek drama, but in archaic and classical Greek poetry and culture at large.

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Men In Drag Are Funny: Metatheatricality and Gendered Humor in Aristophanes

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Modern drag shows, plays, and movies such as *Tootsie*, *The Birdcage*, *White Chicks*, and *To Wong Foo* exploit to great effect the fact that men in drag—by which I mean men who cross-dress in a way that makes their gender-switching "transparent" and does not seek "to convince the audience of their authenticity"[1]—are funny. Such works play on the incongruity of the male body in female costume in order both to transgress and to confirm gender norms while making the audience laugh.[2] Modern media are undeniably different from ancient Greek theater; nevertheless, the potential for a similar brand of gender-related humor is present in Aristophanes's works, for it is generally agreed that men played all of the female roles.[3] Yet this potential is rarely fulfilled; indeed, the productions of Aristophanic plays that I have seen followed *modern* convention by casting female actresses as female characters. There is no reason to suggest that such adaptations are somehow lacking because they follow modern convention (for surely, men in drag must have at least a slightly different connotation for us than they had for the ancient audience). It is fair to say, however, that our conventions diminish the "many possible experiences and meanings" generated by the ancient convention of male actors in female roles,[4] and that modern scholarship, which has devoted so much study to issues of gender in Aristophanic comedy, would benefit from more discussion of the issue of "drag" in these works.[5] In this paper, therefore, I will explore a few moments from *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Acharnians* in which the incongruity of a male actor in female costume, the "gap between biology (male actor) and culture (female character)," might have been "opened up" onstage—to humorous effect.[6]

An objection might be raised that the ancient audience would not have been sensitive to such incongruity, since the concept of male actors playing women was conventional. As Lauren Taaffe puts it, "the convention of male actors is usually dismissed as a practice accepted without further thought by audiences, actors, and playwrights alike."[7] On the other hand, she reminds us, "performance theorists...argue that any actor playing any role is recognized, remembered, and assessed by an audience; in addition, they claim that theatrical conventions are significantly recalled and manipulated in performance."[8] For Rabinowitz, this may have been especially the case with regard to gender, since "gender is especially prominent as an overt issue in the plays' plots."[9] So the viewer of Euripides's *Medea*, for example, may have sensed "the man in the woman," on both the narrative and authorial levels, when Medea speaks and behaves in a surprisingly masculine fashion, so that both the masculine words spoken by the "female" character and the male actor's body in the female costume in fact underline the fact that this is "no ordinary woman."[10]

Though Rabinowitz's discussion focuses on tragedy and the ramifications of transvestitism on the interpretation of gender issues,[11] it is surely fair to extend these points to comedy and the ramifications of drag on the interpretation of humor as well, especially given ancient comedy's interest in exposing the unreality of theatrical conventions.

As Taaffe points out in her article on the *Ecclesiazusae*, for example, much of the extant artwork depicting theatrical performances suggests that comic costumes were distorted and exaggerated versions of their tragic counterparts, and that men in female costume still retained markers of their masculinity.[12] She concludes that "true-to-life representation seems not to have been the central aim of comic costumes and masks... A female mask worn by a padded actor in woman's clothes emphasizes, in fact, the theatrical nature of the imitation."[13] The Apulian bell krater illustrating *Thesmophoriazusae* 750–755 (c. 370 BCE) provides just one example of this phenomenon: the krater depicts Euripides's Kinsman, disguised as a woman, threatening the "child" (i.e., a bag full of wine) of one of the "real" women (Figure 1). The facial features on the mask of the "real" woman are distorted and remarkably similar to the facial features on the masks that we see in depictions of male characters in comedy, and the body padding that "she" wears exaggerates her shape. The iconographic tradition thus suggests that ancient comedy exposed and manipulated the theatrical conventions of costume. The extant texts support this argument, as they contain many convention-shattering references not only to costume but also to machinery, props, and theatrical personages.[14]

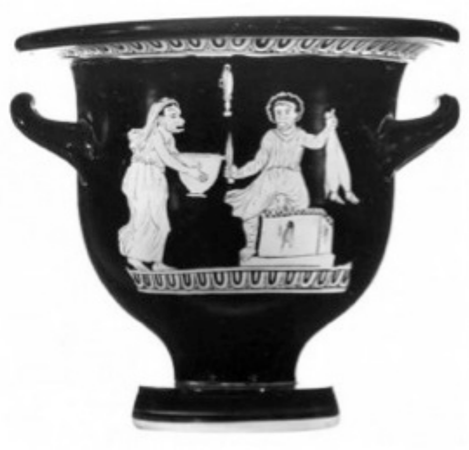

Figure 1: Apulian bell krater (c. 370 BC) illustrating THESMOPHORIAZUSAE 750–755. Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg, Antiken-sammlung,

While this interest in exploiting convention is true of most—if not all—of Aristophanes's plays, I have chosen to investigate the *Acharnians* and*Thesmophoriazusae*, not the least because both contain *explicit* metatheatrical references to costume (*Ecclesiazusae* does, too, but Taaffe's work has already covered much of what I would say about cross-dressing in that work).[15] When Dikaiopolis dresses as a beggar at *Acharnians* lines 410–480, he draws attention to the act of costuming while parodying a tragic performance (Euripides's *Telephos*):

> δεῖ γάρ με δόξαι πτωχὸν εἶναι τήμερον, εἶναι μὲν ὅσπερ εἰμί, φαίνεσθαι δὲ μή.
> (Ach. 440–441)

"It is necessary for me to seem like a beggar today," he says, "to be who I am, but not to appear to be (who I am)." Dikaiopolis' beggar's guise only fools the internal audience until lines 593–595, and even before that, the illusion does not extend to the external audience, who know all along that he is not really a beggar. When the audience sees through the costume of Dikaiopolis-as-beggar, they are reminded of how transparent costuming can be. Scenes such as this one open the door for costume-related readings that take into account the actor's body in addition to the "character's body."[16]

As a specifically gender-related example of such transparency, in *Thesmophoriazusae* the character Agathon, the playwright, arrives on stage dressed in feminine garb and composing verses for a "female" chorus. He states (at lines 154–156) that "if someone composes masculine poems, this is present in the body by nature; but the things which we have not gotten (by nature), mimesis helps hunt these things down."[17] In other words, dressing like a woman helps him compose verses that apply to a female character. These lines emphasize the contrast between what his body is by nature and what about him—his feminine costume—is *mimesis*. After the Kinsman's initial confusion has passed, nobody thinks that Agathon is actually a woman; the male body—which belongs to both the character and to the actor—supersedes the costume. When his "female" chorus gives voice to a "masculine shout" (ἄρσενι βοᾷ, line 125),[18] the tension between body and costume is highlighted. Even while composing for female characters, Agathon cannot avoid the reality of his own voice (or the voices of the actors who will eventually sing his script). For Rabinowitz, this is an important factor in determining whether Greek actors tried to "pass" as women: while the heavily padded costume and mask may have been enough to conceal the physical markers of gender, "the voice was irreducible, undisguisable, and keyed to gender."[19] Thus Agathon's chorus is a pointed joke: "male actors as women always remain male actors as women."[20]

This joke is continued through the disguise and exposure of Euripides's Kinsman. The scene in which the Kinsman is dressed up as a woman not only provides a great deal of immediate comic relief but also sets up his later exposure by the "women" at the Thesmophoria. Since the Kinsman's disguise is fashioned by two tragic playwrights, Agathon and Euripides, its lack of success has been interpreted as criticism of tragedy's failure to make male actors believable as female characters, while turning "a blind eye to comedy's own involvement in the same charade."[21] But a comic playwright might relish the opportunity to exploit comedy's faults for humor. If a male *character* being unconvincingly costumed as a woman was funny, a male *actor* being unconvincingly costumed might be funny, as well.[22]

Of course, it is easiest to make this point when the character is disguised *on stage*. In Gold's article on Plautus' *Casina*, for example, she argues that Chalinus' onstage transformation from man to "Casina" and the constant reminder through "self-conscious gestures, props, costumes, and language that this 'she' (Casina) is a he" means that the character Casina "did not exist, even for a dramatic moment."[23] Because this character was *never* a woman to the audience, it is easier to see—and laugh at—the man in the woman's costume. Still, Plautus' play points to a central dramatic issue in Roman drama (and Greek drama before it): men trying to "pass" as women are funny, especially when their attempts are unsuccessful. The fact that plays such as Aristophanes's *Thesmophoriazusae* and, later, Plautus' *Casina* are able to draw so much humor from an explicit exposure of the man-beneath-the-woman suggests that the seeds of this humor were present even when the "women" were costumed offstage.[24]

Let me now turn to an analysis of scenes that make use of this humor. The first scene has already been touched upon by Taaffe,[25] but it serves as a jumping-off point for subsequent discussion.

In *Thesmophoriazusae*, both the women of the Thesmophoria and Kleisthenes, who is *himself* confused for a woman upon his first entrance—Καὶ γὰρ γυνή τις ἡμῖν ἐσπουδακυῖα προστρέχει—"For indeed some woman is hurrying toward us" (*Thesm.* 571–572)—ultimately confirm that the Kinsman is a man by pointing out his phallus, which quickly becomes involved in a game of hide-and-seek and is described in various ways by Kleisthenes.[26] The attention drawn to this undeniable physical marker of masculinity humorously taps into the audience's knowledge that even the "real" women of the Thesmophoria, being male actors, would have such a marker as well, though perhaps somewhat more skillfully hidden than the Kinsman's. The commentary by Austin and Olson, while thorough, has nothing to say on this matter; moreover, it seems to miss one possible interpretation of the joke in line 656, when the women say that they are going to hike up their chitons "in a good manly fashion"(εὖ κἀνδρείως).[27] Here the "female" chorus alludes to its own hidden masculinity after "exposing" a man who was dressed as a woman and before searching for other such "impostors." Like the ἄρσενι βοᾷ of Agathon, who is *admittedly* a man in female clothing, the adverb ἀνδρείως provides an intentional (on Aristophanes's part) gap in the façade of femininity, an admission of the reality of the male body. Thus Austin and Olson's explanation of the adverbial phrase εὖ κἀνδρείως as being "humorously applied to women" feels somewhat insufficient, since in truth it is also an adverbial phrase that is humorously applied to men *dressed* as women. To top it all off, the "women" of the Thesmophoria, having just exposed the Kinsman's male identity and slyly admitted their own, proceed to look – as Taaffe puts it – "everywhere except at themselves"[28] for other men who are posing as women.

Another example of gender-incongruous humor occurs at *Thesmophoriazusae* lines 298–379 when the chorus leader, initiating the women's assembly, speaks a parody of the curse against traitors used to open meetings in Athens. Her curse begins with traditional imprecations against those who support tyranny. Shortly thereafter, however, the masculine formula gives way to a feminine parody, in which crimes related to women are privileged beside those related to men. The parodic element is emphasized by the constant repetition that the "people," the "harm," and, later, the "council" belong to women rather than men:

> εἴ τις ἐπιβουλεύει τι τῷ δήμῳ κακὸν
> τῷ τῶν γυναικῶν ἢ 'πικηρυκεύεται

Εὐριπίδῃ Μήδοις τ᾽ ἐπὶ βλάβῃ τινὶ
τῇ τῶν γυναικῶν…
ἀλλ᾽ ὦ παγκρατὲς
Ζεῦ ταῦτα κυρώσειας, ὥσθ᾽
ἡμῖν θεοὺς παραστατεῖν
καίπερ γυναιξὶν οὔσαις.
ἄκουε πᾶς. ἔδοξε τῇ βουλῇ τάδε
τῇ τῶν γυναικῶν… (*Thesm.* 331–373)

"If anyone plots any evil against the people,
the people of the women, or communicates
with Euripides and the Medes with an eye
toward some injury, an injury against the women…
but, all-powerful Zeus,
may you decree that the gods protect us,
even though we are women.
Listen, everyone. This is the decree approved by the council,
the one of the women…"

Keep in mind that the Kinsman has *just* been disguised as a woman, so that the male-in-female-costume theme is still fresh in the audience's minds. Though the Chorus establishes itself as being composed of well-born women (εὐγενεῖς γυναῖκες, line 330), the characters are using language that is usually reserved for male speakers and thus—perhaps unwittingly—hinting at the male body beneath their costumes. The frequent repetition of "the one of the women" and, in line 370, "even though we are women," overcompensates for what is lacking physically. The humor of the scene derives not only from the idea of women appropriating masculine language for a feminine issue, but also from the idea of men dressed as women who use masculine language while insisting on their femininity.[29]

In another example, when Kleisthenes runs onstage to inform the women of the presence of an impostor, the Chorus Leader—having initially mistaken Kleisthenes for a woman (see p. 6 above)—asks, "and how did he escape our notice being a man among women? (καὶ πῶς λέληθεν ἐν γυναιξὶν ὢν ἀνήρ;)" - *Thesm.* 589. The very people expressing disbelief about a man's ability to be disguised convincingly as a woman are also, we might realize, men disguised as women.

My final example from *Thesmophoriazusae* occurs when the Chorus, having stripped off the Kinsman's clothes to reveal that he is a man, exclaims, "By Zeus! He does not have tits like we do (καὶ νὴ Δία τιτθούς γ'ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἔχει)" - *Thesm* 640. Of course, the "tits" that they say they have are not real body parts, and their falseness could easily be emphasized, by (for example) physical manipulation by the actors (though Beare argues against such obvious interpretation).[30]

This sort of physical humor may also occur in scenes where characters appear nude. It is not necessarily a given that men would have played the roles of nude women: according to Zweig, "older scholars" tend to support the interpretation that *hetairai* would have played these roles, while more modern scholars support the claim that these roles, too, were given to men in women's clothing.[31] Whatever the case, the purpose of this paper is not to argue that ancient practice preferred definitively one over the other. Rather, my goal is to explore passages in which the phenomenon of a male actor in female clothing could *potentially* add another layer of humor. Let us look at these scenes, then, keeping in mind the lack of realism in the exaggerated padding that—according to Henderson and others—might have constituted the "naked woman" costume.[32] Thus when the naked dancing girl seduces the Scythian bowman in *Thesmophoriazusae*, she would not have been as sexy—and not as female—as the bowman insists. The falseness of the "female" body is emphasized in line 1185, when the bowman uses the adjective στέριπο to describe the dancing girl's breasts. This adjective, the "Scythian" version of στέριφος, denotes "firm" (and perhaps therefore small) breasts, and thus may not be an unusual adjective with which to describe that particular region of a woman's anatomy. However, it is notable that this adjective is used one other time in *Thesmophoriazusae*: at line 641, the Kinsman, a male disguised as a female, exclaims στερίφη γάρ εἰμι κοὐκ ἐκύησα πώποτε ("For I am barren and I have never been pregnant"). Here the context of the adjective suggests a translation of "barren," but we must keep in mind that he is using this adjective to try to explain why his (ostensibly) feminine breast is so "firm" (i.e., small). The very fact that the Kinsman uses this adjective to describe his *male* chest, which clearly has *no* breasts, has repercussions, I believe, for the later scene, for we might see a potential joke in the way that the same adjective is used to describe the Kinsman's admittedly-masculine chest and the chest of the dancing "girl."

The potential humor of men dressed as naked women occurs in many Aristophanic plays, including the other play that I am investigating, *Acharnians*.[33] But I will focus on a more nuanced gender-related joke in *Acharnians*: the infamous piglet scene (lines 729–817). Here a starving Megarian comes to Dikaiopolis' marketplace to sell his daughters as sacrificial pigs. Some interpretations of this scene focus on the humor in Aristophanes's punning use of a word (χοῖρος) that can mean both "piglet" and "pussy,"[34] while others express indignation at the sexual objectification and degradation of girls who are pimped out by their father for food.[35] But the scene takes on another shade of meaning if we remember that the "girls" were really men.[36] The "girls" have just been costumed (and not very successfully) as pigs, so that the audience has been reminded of the transparency of costume. Moreover, the scene already relies on ambiguities for its humor: as Olson explains, "the girl's identity is confused on two counts: she is both a piglet and the Meg.'s daughter, and she is both a 'piglet' and a 'pussy.'"[37] The ambiguity of gender adds a third layer to the joke. This gender ambiguity is reinforced by the different genders of the word χοῖρος when it means 'piglet' vs. 'pussy' (which are feminine and masculine, respectively). Though distinctions of word gender may not seem important, given the mechanisms of the Greek language,[38] Aristophanes seems to play with both meaning and gender at lines 781-782:

Με. αὔτα 'στὶ χοῖρος;
Δι. νῦν γε χοῖρος φαίνεται·
ἀτὰρ ἐκτραφείς γε κύσθος ἔσται.

Megarian: Isn't she a piglet?
Dikaiopolis: Now at least she seems like a piglet;
but once grown she will be a cunt.

Since αὔτα refers to his daughter, who happens to be disguised as a pig, the Megarian seems to be using the feminine meaning of χοῖρος, "piglet." Dikaiopolis' first line gives no indication that the gender should be changed, and so the feminine meaning must still be inferred. Thus the masculine participle ἐκτραφείς in the next line comes as a surprise. The character who just one line before was female—both as a girl and as a χοῖρος—is suddenly referred to with a masculine participle. The gender confusion is fixed two words later with κύσθος, which makes clear that the χοῖρος Dikaiopolis mentioned was meant in the masculine and obscene sense, but for a moment the masculine participle stands without any referent except the subject of φαίνεται: the Megarian's daughter. This play with the genders of words and their referents—easily emphasized in the oral and aural context of performance—may also hint at the masculine body beneath the female costume beneath the piggy costume.

Such an interpretation imbues *Acharnians* lines 785–787 with a similar gender ambiguity:

Δι. κέρκον οὐκ ἔχει.
Με. νέα γάρ ἐστιν. ἀλλὰ δελφακουμένα
ἑξεῖ μεγάλαν τε καὶ παχεῖαν κἠρυθράν.

Dikaiopolis: But she doesn't have a tail/penis.
Megarian: For she is young. But once she grows up she will have a big, thick, red one.

In these lines, Dikaiopolis complains that the "little piggy" doesn't have a tail, κέρκον, which is a word that has the additional meaning of "penis." The Megarian explains it is because she is young, but when she grows up she will "have a big, thick, red one." Olson explains this line by using "hold, accommodate" as a meaning for ἑξεῖ; i.e., when the young girl grows up, she will be able to accommodate a penis inside of her.[39] But the use of ἑξεῖ as "to have continuously" (as part of one's anatomy) would work, as well. Saying that this girl will grow up to have a large penis may be a nod towards the body of the actor. He may look like a girl now in his costume, but eventually he will return to a more masculine state.[40]

It is likely that there are situations in which the female costume is meant to be convincing, where Aristophanes provides a more realistic depiction of women.[41] How else can we explain, for example, the evenhanded characterization of Lysistrata and *Ecclesiazusae*'s Praxagora? Taaffe, in fact, denies that characters such as Lysistrata and Praxagora are meant to be realistic women: "As twentieth-century readers, we should interpret *Ecclesiazusae* as a play which represents a comic stereotype of woman that reaffirmed the male power base of Athenian society." She therefore claims that these roles must be played by men, and men who do not attempt to "pass" as women, at that.[42] But as John Gibert suggests in his review of Taaffe's book (1995), there are certainly situations in which "Aristophanes's comic purposes are…sometimes better achieved if the illusion of 'men playing women' remains intact." We might, then, concede that "a distinction must be made between non-illusionary and illusionary cross-dressers, those who call attention to their performance as women and those who do not."[43] Plays with plots that explicitly bring issues of gender and costume to the fore—such as *Ecclesiazusae*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and, to a lesser extent, *Acharnians*—might be seen as particularly appropriate venues for "non-illusionary" cross-dressing. Nevertheless, the potential for "men in drag" humor is everywhere, and a good director could easily utilize costume, gesture, voice, and blocking to emphasize this humor in performance.[44]

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notes

[1] Gold (1998) p. 19 n. 1.

[2] See Garber (1992) on the movie *Tootsie* for a discussion of the different ways in which we can interpret drag (pp. 6–9), and Robson on the role of incongruity in Aristophanic humor (2009: pp. 50–54).

[3] There does seem to be some controversy regarding the role of mute, nude female characters, who may have been played by *hetairai* (Zweig 1992). I will return to this point in more detail later.

[4] Rabinowitz (1998) p. 17.

[5] For examples of scholarship that discuss gender in Aristophanic plays without reference to "drag," see, for example, McClure 1999 and, specifically in reference to *Thesmophoriazusae*, Zeitlin 1996.

[6] Rabinowitz (1998) p. 17.

[7] Taaffe (1991) p. 91.

[8] Taaffe (1991) p. 91.

[9] Rabinowitz (1998) p. 4: "We could, of course, hold that, since in the theater every actor is pretending to be someone s/he is not, the phenomenon of cross-gendered performance was not significant, that the convention was invisible and without effect. That seems at least worthy of question since the ancient Greeks took gender differences as a framing dichotomy through which to interpret the world, and gender is especially prominent as an overt issue in the plays' plots."

[10] Rabinowitz (1998) p. 14.

[11] Rabinowitz is certainly not alone in being interested in the effect of transvestitism on gender issues. Bassi, for example, notes that “In general then, and again in contrast to male nudity, female clothing is traditionally a marker of the contradictory relationship between a woman’s inner being and her outer appearance” (1995: 6). For Rabinowitz and others, cross-dressing was (and still is) a way for men to maintain control over femininity by replacing women (1998: 9) and representing them by means of a masculine stereotype (Taaffe 1991: 107). See also Dolan (1992), Zeitlin (1996), and Bassi (1998).

[12] Taaffe (1991) pp. 94–97.

[13] Taaffe (1991) p. 98; Beare (1954) represents an opposing viewpoint: he claims that none of the evidence regarding ancient costume is quite compelling enough to *prove* that the actors did not wear anything but “the dress of ordinary life” (74). However, this seems to be the minority viewpoint.

[14] As at *Peace* lines 173–176, where “the actor playing Trygaeus addresses the crane operator not in character, but *in propria persona* as an actor in a play” (Robson 39) by complaining about the jerkiness of the *mêchanê*, or *Acharnians* 408 and *Thesmo* 96 and 265, where reference is made to the*ekkyklêma*. Or when there is reference to playwrights (such as Euripides in *Thesmophoriazusae* and Aristophanes himself at *Acharnians* lines 377–382 and 628), judges (as at the end of the *Acharnians*), and choregoi (as at *Acharnians* lines 1154–1155). Taaffe notes, too, that in *Ecclesiazusae* the women “rehearse” their roles in the assembly using theatrical language, thus drawing attention to the idea of the play *as* a play (1991: 100).

[15] Indeed, Rabinowitz cites both of these plays as evidence that tragic playwrights were thought to “get in character” (1998: 6).

[16] As Compton-Engle terms the padding that actors wore (2003: 507–508).

[17] ἀνδρεῖα δ’ἢν ποῆι τις, ἐν τῶι σώματι/ἔνεσθ’ὑπάρχον τοῦθ’. ἃ δ’οὐ κεκτήμεθα,/μίμησις ἤδη ταῦτα συνθηρέθεται (*Thesm.* 154–156).

[18] σέβομαι Λατώ τ’ἄνασσαν/κίθαρίν τε ματέρ’ὕμνων/ἄρσενι βοᾶ δοκίμων (*Thesm.* 123–125): “I honor both mistress Leto and the cithara, mother of esteemed songs, with a masculine shout.”

[19] Rabinowitz (1998) p. 7.

[20] Taaffe (1993) p. 100.

[21] Compton-Engle (2003) p. 523.

[22] As Taaffe (1993) puts it, each of the intentional impersonations of women is unsuccessful, so that “we are reminded of the play as play and the representation of ‘real’ women is undermined” (94), so that neither “male characters who borrow the female figure or female language” nor “the ‘real’ women of the Thesmophoria” are successful (100).

[23] Gold (1998) 21–24.

[24] We might take as another Plautine example the figure of Alcmena in the *Amphitryo*. Her appearance onstage as a heavily pregnant woman is (as far as we know) unique in both Greek and Roman comedy. Interpretation of this unique situation has suffered from critics’ sentimentality, as a result of which she is often read as a highly serious and sympathetic character. Yet knowing that she was being played by a man in a mask and exaggerated body padding, and imagining “the male actor embracing this unusual role with gusto,” as the continual jokes about her condition suggest may have happened, makes her appear laughable (Christenson 2000: 37–39). The fact that such a joke is present in a play that identifies itself as tragicomedy (Christenson 2000: 24) may seem to support the interpretation of men-in-drag jokes as being somehow reliant on issues of genre. However, the explicit men-in-drag humor in *Casina* shows that transvestitism is not merely an issue present in paratragedy. At the very least, Alcmena in the *Amphitryo* shows that more implicit men-in-drag humor (so implicit that many modern scholars miss it entirely!) can potentially be emphasized through the actors’ performances.

[25] If I seem to draw rather heavily on Taaffe, it is because she is one of the few scholars who have conducted a systematic study of these issues.

[26] As Taaffe somewhat humorously puts it, “his phallus has been the center of attention from the moment when it was hidden to the moment when it was revealed” (1993: 93). Whether the “phallus” is a stage prop that is manipulated before the audience’s eyes or a hidden marker that is simply alluded to (as Bear 1954 contests) matters little to this interpretation; in fact, a hidden phallus would be quite effective as well, since it would make it impossible to distinguish the actor-playing-a-man who is disguised as a woman from the actors-playing-women who are disguised as women.

[27] Even Taaffe only calls this phrase “somewhat ironic,” which is a dramatic understatement, in my opinion.

[28] Taaffe p. 94. They also, she points out, do not look at the (probably all-male) audience.

[29] We might compare Taaffe's interpretation of the play on gender disguise that appears throughout the Ecclesiazusae (1991), which notes that the play ironically refers to the "women's" *chitons* in its sustained metatheatrical sporting (104).

[30] Beare 1954.

[31] Nor does simply arguing that a man in woman's clothing would have been more *humorous* help us solve the issue. As Zweig suggests: "If the purpose of Old Comedy is to hold up for ridicule the topics it treats, we might prefer to opt for the padded male actor. But surely every subject and character of Old Comedy is not presented as being equal in kind or degree, and the role of these mute female characters differs significantly from that of most other characters. The characters that represent desirable abstractions, such as Treaties, Peace, or Reconciliation, would hardly be subject to the ridicule that a costumed male actor would naturally evoke" (79).

[32] Henderson (1987: 195) describes the false-looking quality of female body padding. He continues: "false breasts and genitalia were as much a part of the fun as false phalloi."

[33] At *Acharnians* line 1198, for example, Dikaiopolis enters with a couple of naked prostitutes "most likely played by elaborately costumed men" (Olson 2002: 359), and possibly fondles their (false) breasts. We might also compare the Lampito scene in *Lysistrata*, in which the women ooh and aah while they feel Lampito's various firm and attractive body parts. If we imagine the scene being played by men dressed as women, we might see it as intended to rouse laughter rather than sexual desire.

[34] As Olson's commentary does.

[35] As Fisher p. 39: "[Dikaiopolis'] trade with the Megarian is grossly exploitative (though I cannot myself find much sympathy in the scene for the suffering Megarian forced to sell his daughters into slavery and sexual abuse for a bit of salt and garlic, rather than the idea that it is fun to laugh at those even worse off than yourselves)."

[36] Strangely, Taaffe ignores this aspect of the scene, despite her insistence (at the beginning of the chapter containing the discussion of *Acharnians*) that she's going to consider "any evidence in the text that points to the male actor playing the role of a female figure" (23).

[37] Olson p. 267.

[38] Nonetheless, O'Higgins suggests that the genders of words were often explicitly sexualized (thus the different biological functions of differently gendered abstract nouns in Hesiod), especially in comedy (2003: 119).

[39] Olson (2002) p. 271.

[40] A joke that may have additional meaning depending on the age of the actor playing the role of the piglet/girl.

[41] Yet "It is perfectly possible for the audience of an 'illusionist' play to be at the same time emotionally involved in the action and in possession of its critical faculties" (Bain 1997, p. 6). In addition, as John Gibert suggests in his review of Taaffe's book (1995), there are certainly situations in which "Aristophanes's comic purposes are…sometimes better achieved if the illusion of 'men playing women' remains intact."

[42] Taaffe (1991) p. 107.

[43] Gold (1998) p. 20. Although Gold is speaking about Roman comedy rather than Greek comedy, the same conventions are present, and—as Gold shows convincingly in her article—the same interest in exploiting these conventions for humor.

[44] It is fascinating—and indeed, somewhat puzzling—that this sort of humor translates so well into the sensibilities of our own time, especially since the root of such humor has been attributed not just to simple incongruity but to a kind of social aggression, an attempt of sorts to put women "in their place." The most famous proponent of this view is Henri Bergson, in *Le rire* (1899), but similar explanations are given by Mulkay (*On Humor*, 1988). For Halliwell (*Greek Laughter*, 2008), Aristophanic comedy converts shame into laughter, "institutionalising and in a sense ritualising this conversion of a potentially negative force into the celebrations of communal enjoyment" (247-248), and this phenomenon is especially salient with regard to issues of sex (253). It would be interesting and perhaps revealing to explore what the similarity between modern and ancient responses to this type of humor means for our modern sense of gender-related shame.

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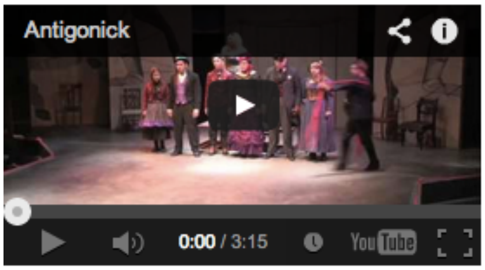
Antigonick: A new version of Sophocles's *Antigone*

Written by Anne Carson
Directed by Martha Johnson
January 31–February 9, 2014
Tjornhom-Nelson Theater, Augsburg College
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Reviewed by **Eric Dugdale**
Gustavus Adolphus College

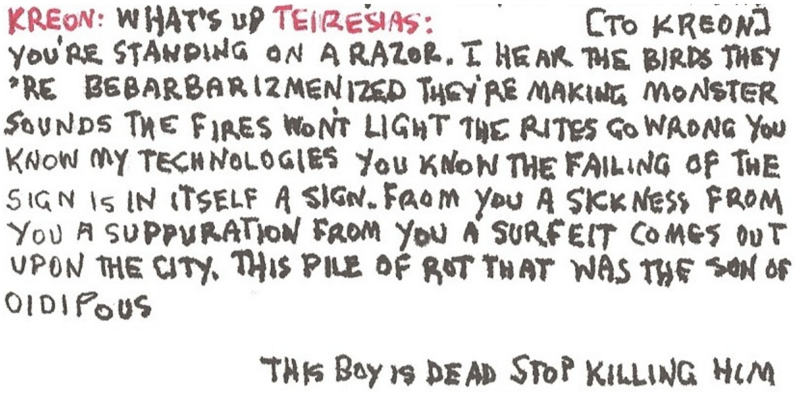
Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (New York: New Directions, 2012) is like no other version of Sophocles's masterpiece. In her inimitable style, Carson defies boundaries of genre with another pioneering work. My attempt to characterize it in the following paragraphs will underscore, I hope, the enormity of the challenge that Martha Johnson undertook in putting it on stage. Whatever *Antigonick* is, it is not a conventional dramatic script.



Video 1: Clips from ANTIGONICK. Brid Henry as Antigone, Michael Wesely as Kreon, Jason Hanson as Nick, Jamil Toney and Joe Rachwal as Guards. Chorus: Quinci Bachman, Ben Fiorendino, Andrew James, Victoria Linstrom, Jack Morton, Alia Thorpe.
video: David Ishida
youtube.com/watch?v=OP8D0b2pDbs

In his interview with Anne Carson, Will Aitken characterized her as both a visual and a verbal artist.[1] Discussing with him her deeply personal book of poetry *Nox* (New York: New Directions, 2010), Carson replied "that even when the thing I'm doing is just writing I try to make it into an object. Try to make it something to look at or experience as well as read, so I worry about the topography and spacing, and just the presentation of it." *Antigonick* is also an *objet d'art*. It is accompanied by thirty-three illustrations by Bianca Stone; printed on transparent vellum, these overlay the text, written in block capitals in the hand of Carson herself. The idiosyncratic layout of words on the page, their interplay with the artwork, the virtual absence of punctuation, and the bold use of space allow the imagination to run riot while keeping the reader off kilter.

This experience is also continued in the language. Carson is a wordsmith. Her language is terse, immediate, arresting:



KREON: WHAT'S UP TEIRESIAS: [TO KREON]
YOU'RE STANDING ON A RAZOR. I HEAR THE BIRDS THEY
'RE BEBARBARIZMENIZED THEY'RE MAKING MONSTER
SOUNDS THE FIRES WON'T LIGHT THE RITES GO WRONG YOU
KNOW MY TECHNOLOGIES YOU KNOW THE FAILING OF THE
SIGN IS IN ITSELF A SIGN. FROM YOU A SICKNESS FROM
YOU A SUPPURATION FROM YOU A SURFEIT COMES OUT
UPON THE CITY. THIS PILE OF ROT THAT WAS THE SON OF
OIDIPOUS

THIS BOY IS DEAD STOP KILLING HIM

Page from *Antigonick* by Anne Carson.
New Directions Books: © 2012, illustrated by Bianca Stone, designed by Robert Currie.
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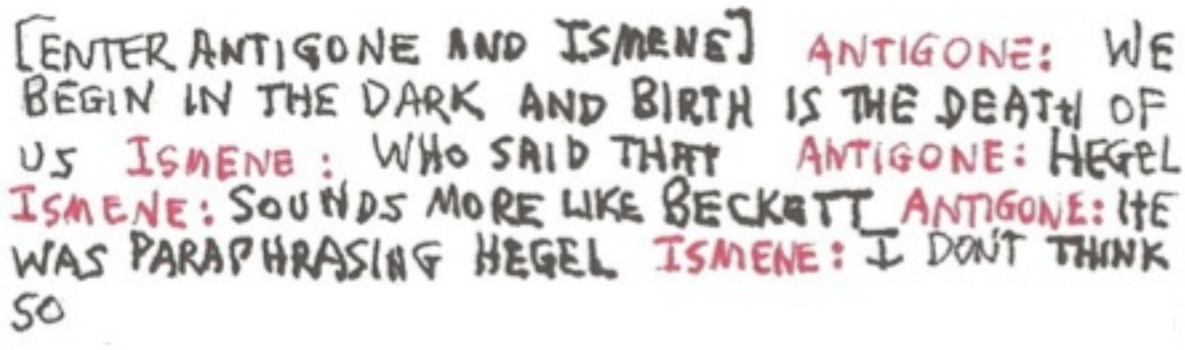
Image 1: Parodos: The Glare. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

There is much here that originates with Sophocles. Like Sophocles, Carson enjoys neologisms, bold metaphors, and paradox. The horror and consequences of Creon's act are vividly conveyed by both Sophocles and Carson in Tiresias' description of the omens that fail to signify (*Ant.* 1013). What is different from Sophoclean tragedy is the high degree of referentiality that pervades *Antigonick*. If in Sophocles the birds are screeching with an incoherent frenzy (οἴστρῳ… βεβαρβαρωμένῳ, 1002), Carson's "bebarbarizmenized" is now a quotation at one remove. Carson's version engages not only with Sophocles but with theory (e.g., Saussure, Freud) and subsequent versions of *Antigone*, as is signaled in the opening lines of the play:



[ENTER ANTIGONE AND ISMENE] ANTIGONE: WE
BEGIN IN THE DARK AND BIRTH IS THE DEATH OF
US ISMENE: WHO SAID THAT ANTIGONE: HEGEL
ISMENE: SOUNDS MORE LIKE BECKETT ANTIGONE: HE
WAS PARAPHRASING HEGEL ISMENE: I DONT THINK
SO

Opening lines of *Antigonick* by Anne Carson.
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This clever self-awareness offers much to delight the erudite reader, but poses a considerable challenge for a theatrical director staging the play. Martha Johnson's production at Augsburg College was perhaps only the second staging of *Antigonick.*[2]

Johnson's interpretation tapped into the referentiality of *Antigonick*, which she described as follows: "Carson has stated that her translations are filled with her own 'glare,' her fierce way of looking at the original Greek from her contemporary standpoint. I wanted to explore theatrical techniques of somehow staging this vision, this glare, including the self-referential aspects of the play."

This intention was conveyed already in the opening sequence. The whole cast filed in like a Greek tragic chorus. This ordered and harmonious entrance was rapidly thrown off beat as the actors twisted with increased agitation, casting cautious glances over their shoulders, watching and being watched, a motif heightened by the goggles worn by the guards (Image 1). Johnson writes about this opening movement, choreographed by Pam Gleason: "In this...dance, I felt the audience was introduced to Carson's ironic, contemporary vision of Antigone, and that one could sense both her glare, and the glare of the centuries and of all cultures over the millennia, looking at this play. And one could feel the characters, in turn, looking back at the audience, and we could feel that the characters themselves had been affected by the reception and analysis of the play since it was first written and produced."

An hour later, the play closed with the same sequence, now heightened by the tableau of Antigone's body cradled in the lap of her grieving sister Ismene. It was as if time had stood still, as if the play's denouement was contained in its beginning; or, as Antigone says in the opening line of the play, "We begin in the dark and birth is the death of us."

Time is a key interest of *Antigonick*, which introduces a mute character called Nick. His name gives the play its title, and he remains on stage throughout the play; "he measures things," Carson explains in the dramatis personae. Nick is reminiscent of Kairos, the Greek personification of the opportune moment as a young man. But Nick is a devastatingly ironic incarnation of him in this play. His name is invoked at key moments: when Kreon enters, moments after the bound Antigone is dragged on by the guard, the chorus exclaims: "Oh perfect here's Kreon," to which Kreon replies "Here's Kreon, Nick of Time." When the chorus persuade Kreon to free Antigone, they urge him to hurry: "Quick quick quick," they cry out. As Kreon rushes to Antigone, the chorus marks the interval with a choral ode that ends with the refrain "Here we are we're all fine we're standing in the Nick of Time." When Kreon recognizes his culpability, the chorus remarks: "You're late to learn what's what, aren't you?" "Late to learn, o yes. I am late, too late," replies Kreon.

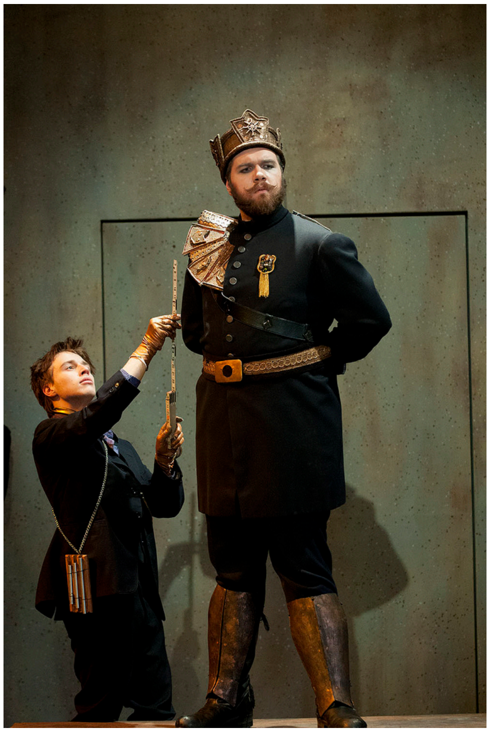

Image 2: Nick, played by Jason Hanson, measures Kreon, played by Michael Wesely. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

Johnson's Nick (played by Jason Hanson) patrolled the stage, unnoticed by the characters, but quietly observing everything. As one audience member said after seeing the production, "Nick was one of the most eloquent characters in the play, in spite of—but maybe because of—the fact that he has no words." He measured the stage, the set, the characters. He measured with a surveyor's measuring wheel, with a tailor's tape, with a carpenter's folding ruler. Most disconcertingly, he occasionally appeared behind characters, measuring their dimensions as if for burial (Kreon was the first person to receive this attention)(Image 2). He also measured time, pointedly looking at his wristwatch or striking a small chime strung over his shoulder at key moments (entrances, deaths) in the play (Image 3). During the second choral ode, Nick began unraveling a scarlet thread ("rope" may more accurately convey its scale), which he wound around the perimeter of the stage. The symbolism of the thread (drawing on the motif of the thread of life spun by the Fates and picking up on a recurring image in Bianca Stone's illustrations) helped to develop the motif of the fragility of human life explored in Carson's version, in which both Antigone ("I died long ago") and Kreon ("A corpse is more alive!") are the living dead. The timing of this stage action, performed during the "Ode to Man" in which the chorus sings

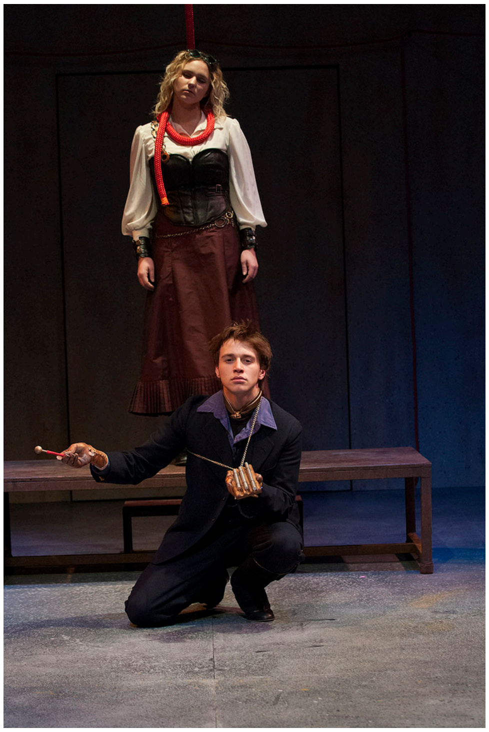

Image 3: Nick, played by Jason Hanson, with chime, and Antigone, played by Brid Henry. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

of man’s attempts to control his environment (the sea, the land, animals), heightened the punch-line: death man cannot control. Nick finished binding the performance area with his thread during the "Hymn to Eros." Here too the action supported the meaning: like Death, Eros binds us. Or, as the chorus say, “Aphrodite, you play with us! You Play Deeply.”

The costuming (designed by Sandra Nei Schulte) suited the disjunctive mood of *Antigonick*. The costumes were inspired by steampunk, a genre that combines the past, especially the Victorian era, and a post-apocalyptic future (Image 4). Like *Antigonick*, it is intrinsically a mélange that defies classification and the constraints of time; as Johnson noted in her post-show talkback, it is both ancient and contemporary, epic and hip. It is thus perfectly suited to Carson’s approach, which is to deconstruct *Antigone* rather than to present a dramatically coherent play. Carson’s Kreon is almost the parody of a tyrant (Kreon: “Here are Kreon’s verbs for today: legislate adjudicate scandalize capitalize…”) until he experiences a sudden reversal. Carson’s language ranges vertiginously from archaisms (Ismene: “Your heart is hot, thou sister,” Antigone: “O one and only head of my sister…”) to contemporary slang (when Kreon asks her whether she was the one who buried the body of Polyneikes, Antigone replies “Bingo”). Brid Henry (as Antigone) and Mawrgyn Roper (Ismene) took these sudden shifts in their stride, switching from earnestness to irony as needed (Image 5). Johnson embraced Carson’s idiosyncratic humor. For me, however, Carson’s penchant for bathos at moments of pathos was distracting. So, for example, Antigone breaks into her *agon* with Kreon with “Can we just get this over with?” “No, let’s split hairs a while longer,” he replies. Or when Haimon pleads with his father for Antigone’s life: “This girl. Here I posit a lacuna. This girl does not deserve to die.”

The actors spoke of the challenge of finding the emotional center of their characters. To their credit, they rose to this challenge. Kreon (Michael Wesely) and Antigone both had commanding presences, the former’s explosive passion complementing rather than eclipsing the latter’s simmering intensity. Ismene’s tender and Haimon’s (Walter Criswell) earnest entreaties helped highlight the intransigence of Antigone and Kreon respectively.

Martha Johnson did a lot with the play’s minor characters, fleshing them out and mining moments for humor, caution and irony. The palpable relief of the sentry (Joe Rachwal) at having been let off the hook by the capture of Antigone was exploited for a moment of light relief and even humor, an

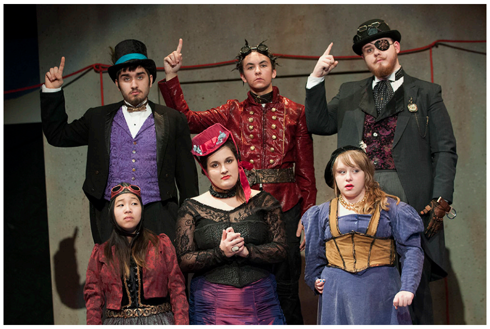

Image 4: Chorus in Steampunk costumes. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

Image 5: Antigone, played by Brid Henry. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

Image 6: The Messenger, played by Jamil Toney, and Eurydike, played by Rebecca Cho. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

Image 7: Teiresias, played by Jorge Rodriguez. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

interlude such as is provided by the gravediggers in *Hamlet*. The messenger (Jamil Toney), by contrast, reported the deaths of Haimon and later Eurydike with a somber poignancy that underscored the frailty of human fortune (Image 6). His message speech is interrupted by the startling entry of Eurydike. Carson takes this minor character and thrusts her into the limelight for a brief but highly charged scene that seems to disrupt the plotline of the play. The messenger announces "They're dead," but has only been able to describe one death when Eurydike bursts in, delivers a monologue, then announces "Exit Eurydike, bleeding from all orifices." But she does not exit. The messenger resumes his message. Only then does she exit. Like Cassandra in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Eurydike in this play is a character who takes the play hostage, refusing to exit on its terms. Martha Johnson's Eurydike (Rebecca Cho) effectively caught the audience off guard with her fierce tragic self-awareness.

Another character who channels Carson's interests in metatheater is the prophet Teiresias. His entry is announced by the chorus with the words "Here comes Teiresias! Episode Five." His pronouncements are very self-referential ("You know the failing of the sign is in *itself* a sign… You've made a structural mistake with Life and Death, my dear! You've put the Living underground, and kept the Dead up here!")(Image 7). Johnson's Teiresias (Jorge Rodriguez) entered the theater through the audience, led in by Nick. Treading with a confidence that belied his blindness, he swept past Kreon and eclipsed him with a presence worthy of the Godfather, his prophetic utterances punctuated by the shaking of the sistrum by Nick, producing a sound evocative of a belligerent rattlesnake. The startling and powerful effect of Teiresias' entry provided motivation for the sudden change of heart of Kreon who, like the audience, was shaken by this encounter.

Tragic choruses are often shortchanged in modern performances. In this production, the choreography of the six-person chorus (by Pam Gleason) contributed significantly to the success of the performance. Each choral ode was strikingly different in movement and tone. The triumph of the first ode, accompanied by the modern equivalent of a Pyrrhic dance, full of rapid and excited gesture, was followed by the buildup of the second ode, Carson's eccentric rendition of Sophocles's famous ode to man ("Many terribly quiet customers exist, but none more terribly quiet than man.") Here the dancing effectively communicated the vanity of human self-confidence. In the third ode, that confidence had vanished, replaced by a sense of human frailty. "Zeus you win you

Image 8: Chorus with red thread. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

Image 9: Kreon, played by Michael Wesely, on Pedastal. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

Image 10: Antigone, played by Brid Henry, and Ismene, played by Mawrgyn Roper, watch duel from battlements. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

Image 11: Antigone, played by Brid Henry, and Ismene, played by Mawrgyn Roper. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

always win," cried out the chorus in despair as they sank to their knees. The fourth ode surprised me with its sheer beauty. This is the hymn to Eros (*Ant.* 781–800), and the choreography captured the grace and longing, the joy and despair, of the madness he inflicts. The contrast with the ensuing ode could not have been more striking. Carson rejects the Sophoclean chorus' attempt to offer Antigone comfort through mythological exempla, replacing it with a metatheatrical moment ("How is a Greek chorus like a lawyer? They're both in the business of searching for a precedent, finding an analogy locating a prior example so as to be able to say this terrible thing we're witnessing now is not unique you know it happened before or something like it.") This ode was performed in a prosaic, even detached manner, as if the chorus had lost its reason to dance. The sixth choral ode follows on from Kreon's rapid exit as he now frantically seeks to rescue Antigone. The chorus, holding the scarlet thread, spun in a strophic dance, as if forming the wheel of a clock; Nick stood ominously at the center, controlling the plot as the human characters vainly sought to achieve *eukairia* (timeliness) (Image 8).

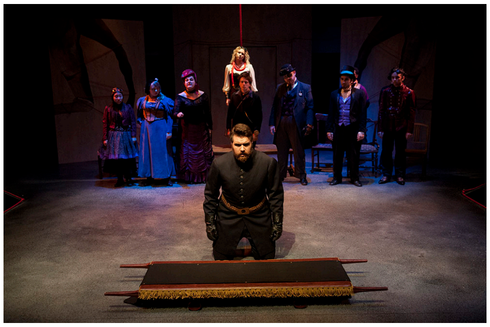

Image 12: Kreon, played by Michael Wesely, and bier. Photo by Stephen Geffre.

In between these choral odes, the chorus assumed a variety of positions on stage that signaled the dynamics of a given scene. When Kreon first entered, they cowered on the ground. Later, when Antigone confronted Kreon, they became passive onlookers, seated at the back of the playing area on high-backed chairs (another motif inspired by Stone's illustrations). Antigone tried to enlist their support, raising them to their feet, but a glare from Kreon sent them scurrying back into their seated position. At moments of tension they rose to their feet; after Kreon's *peripeteia* they brought the chairs downstage in a poetic dance and became an onstage audience.

The set design (by Mina Kinukawa) was sparse, in keeping with ancient drama's visual economy. A prominent rotating central door was flanked by four flats in muted tones, depicting horses' legs bound by red thread, a design inspired by one of three equine illustrations by Stone. A long trestle table positioned upstage center on this thrust stage gave Kreon an elevated platform from which to issue his virulent verbal assaults (Image 9). Johnson used it as the focal point for a number of pantomimes not present in Carson's script. In the opening scene of the play, Johnson portrayed the duel between Eteokles and Polyneikes in mime as their sisters Antigone and Ismene watched in horror from this platform, which represented the battlements of Thebes (Image 10). It also served as Antigone's living tomb, and later the locus of her suicide, a variation on the tragic *ekkyklema*. In the closing scene, Ismene returned to discover her sister hanging in this same spot; she took down the body, cradling it in her lap in a tableau reminiscent of Michelangelo's *Pietà* (Image 11). Indeed, in her use of visual tableaux and slow and deliberate stage action, Martha Johnson remained very close to the aesthetic of Greek tragedy. Perhaps the most arresting stage property was the empty bier that Kreon's attendants brought on stage in the closing scene (this replaced the body of Haimon, which in Carson's script is brought on stage) (Image 12). The bier became the focal point for Kreon's pathos, a multivalent symbol of the lives he destroyed and the suffering he experienced. Kreon pleads for death, but the chorus responds "That's the future this is the present." Exit Kreon and bier, a haunted ending if ever there was one.

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notes

[1] Carson, Anne. "The Art of Poetry No. 88: Anne Carson." Interview by Will Aitken. *Paris Review* 171 (2004): 190–226.

[2] The only earlier performance of which I am aware was put on by the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club at the Loeb Drama Center in October 2013, directed by Ianthe Demos.