DIDASKALIA

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About Didaskalia

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Directed by Henry MacCarthy
The Anderson Theatre
Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota

Reviewed by **Eric Dugdale** and **William Riihiluoma**
Gustavus Adolphus College

"What was it like when the world was so young?" ask the actors of the Muse in the opening invocation of Mary Zimmerman's *Argonautika*. It is a question that has continued to fascinate Zimmerman and her audiences ever since her dramatic retelling of Homer's *Odyssey* first took to the boards at Northwestern University in 1989, where Zimmerman now teaches in the Department of Performance Studies. A 1998 recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship (a.k.a. "genius grant"), Zimmerman has become one of the most prominent interpreters of the classical tradition. Her *Metamorphoses*, premiered by the Lookingglass Theatre in 1998, went on to Broadway and earned Zimmerman the 2002 Tony Award for Best Director. Zimmerman is the original director of all her works, and her work with her company helps shape her plays.1

Figure 12: Jason on the main deck of the Argo. (photo credit throughout article: Terena Wilkens, Gisel Murillo, Bryden Giving)

Figure 1: Hercules, played by Nick Sweetland in the Gustavus production, bests his fellow Argonauts in a rowing competition.

Argonautika, Zimmerman's most recent classical play (premiered in 2007, also at the Lookingglass Theatre), stages the epic voyage of Jason and his Argonauts. It draws much from the homonymous poems of Apollonius Rhodius (3rd c. BC) and Valerius Flaccus (1st c. AD), in the translations of Peter Green and David Slavitt respectively.2 Hers is a close relationship with her sources, as she herself observes: "So I don't set out to change them or quarrel with these texts; I'm more interested in a sort of loving dialogue with them."3 Zimmerman is the consummate storyteller; she finds the imaginative core of an archetypal story and brings it to life. She strips down Apollonius' poem, as Valerius did before her, thereby allowing fewer episodes greater room to breathe. (The show still lasts over two and a half hours.) And yet her play remains true to the spirit and style of Apollonius' poem. At times it exudes epic grandeur and lyrical beauty. Like a number of Zimmerman's other works (especially *The Arabian Nights* and *Metamorphoses*), it has a strong cosmological dimension that invites the imagination to enter into a primeval and elemental world at the dawn of time. The magnitude of this archetypal voyage of discovery is especially conveyed by Athena, who functions as a narrator framing individual episodes, as at the launch of the Argo ("At the Hours' prompting, the Sun / put on his splendid tiara of shining rays and rose in the sky / to bedazzle the waves on the shore where the Argonauts slept. / From the town and down the mountains, everyone came, people / and creatures of all kinds, to see, at last, the launch ")4 and again at the arrival at Samothrace ("The sun rose up and sank in the sky, / and then, for the first time since the world began, / a ship from foreign parts pulled up to foreign shores").5

Like Apollonius and Valerius, Zimmerman writes in a range of registers. We see this variety in the gods,

whose machinations and direct interventions aid Jason and his crew at every turn. At times Hera and Athena stand apart, pacing imperiously on the raised platform that serves as the *theologeion* and doubles as the bridge of the *Argo*; at times they blend in with the human characters, adopting a seemingly infinite variety of mundane disguises, a kind of shape-shifting perhaps inspired by Zimmerman's earlier immersion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The effortlessness of divinity coexists with the frustrations of familial relations, and elevated language rubs shoulders with bathos. Aphrodite, a pampered housewife given to sarcasm, vents to Athena and Hera about her obstreperous son Eros as her cortege combs her hair and fans her. The humor of Apollonius' portrayal of Aphrodite's fraught relationship with her teenage son is preserved by Zimmerman. Aphrodite's opening salvo, "What are you grinning at, you unspeakable little horror?"[6] is an amped-up translation of Apollonius' line (τίπτ᾽ ἐπιμειδιάᾳς, ἄφατον κακόν, 3.129).

Perhaps the greatest range is found in Hercules who, like Apollonius' Heracles, often comes across as a buffoon and a self-absorbed, competitive, irascible windbag. He is a landlubber who gets seasick at the first pitching of the boat. At roll call, when the Argonauts take turns introducing themselves in a spoken-word version of an epic catalogue of heroes, he is unable to keep the beat or follow suit. Not only is composition-in-performance beyond him, but he also disrupts the team-building exercise, breaking into a fatuous refrain of "I'm Hercules! / *Yeah!* / I'm Hercules! / *Yeah!* / Hercules! Hercules! Hercules!"[7] He even turns rowing into a competition to see who can row the fastest (Figure 1), as absurd a proposition for team rowing as it would be for orchestral performance.[8] And yet his relationship with his beloved Hylas is tender, and his grief at losing him poignant and raw.

Apollonius' poem is a masterpiece of Hellenistic erudition, at once closely intertextual and highly original; the same holds true for Valerius' work.[9] Zimmerman's *Argonautika* follows suit, the latest contribution to an iterative process that goes back all the way to Homeric epic. It is a play whose subtleties a classicist can appreciate. For example, in Apollonius' poem the heroine Atalanta, famous for her athletic prowess, is eager to enlist in the expedition, but is prevented by Jason, who "feared bitter rivalries provoked by love" (*Argonautica* 1.773). In other versions she is listed in the catalogue of Argonauts (cf. ps-Apollodorus, *Library* 1.9.17); Zimmerman follows this tradition by including her in the crew, but not without a wink at Apollonius:

Figure 2: Hercules saves Andromeda, played by Serena Schreifels in the Gustavus production.

Figure 3: Medea wearing her blood-stained white dressed, played by EB Skinner in the Gustavus production.

ATALANTA:
My name's Atalanta.
HERCULES [alone, belligerently]:
Yeah?
ATALANTA:
Think I'm out of place?
HERCULES:
Yeah!
ATALANTA:
Then just one question,
HERCULES:
Yeah?
ATALANTA:
Would you like to race?10

Later Zimmerman has Hercules engage in an epic battle with a sea-monster guarding Andromeda (Figure 2), much to the chagrin of Percy Jackson aficionados for whom this is one of Perseus' crowning exploits. Is this a nod to Disney's television series *Hercules* (1998), in which Hercules and Andromeda are students at the Prometheus Academy and the new girl asks the love-struck Herc on a date? Or is Zimmerman engaging in intertextual *aemulatio* with Valerius, whose *Argonautica* describes how Hercules saves the Trojan princess Hesione from a sea-monster sent by Poseidon? Certainly the episode follows Valerius' version in a number of telling details. And Valerius is himself drawing on Ovid's account of Perseus' rescue of Andromeda in his *Metamorphoses* (*Met*. 4.663-752), thereby bringing us full circle.**11** As in Valerius' account, the focus in the modern play is not on the love interest between Hercules and the damsel he rescues, as in Ovid's Perseus-Andromeda episode, but on Hercules' prowess as a victor. In fact, Hercules forgets about the maiden he has saved in his excitement over his feat, and Andromeda must call out repeatedly "Untie me!" Further intertextual humor infuses this and other episodes. In Valerius' version, Hesione promises Hercules her father Laomedon's snow-white horses as reward for her rescue (2.485-8). Laomedon, however, invites Hercules to spend the night, adding that he will give him the horses in the morning (2.565-6); he intends to kill his guest in his sleep. But Hercules decides to press on, thus eluding death, promising to return to pick up the horses on the way back. In Zimmerman's version, Hercules deftly sidesteps the death-trap before it even materializes:

ANDROMEDA:
Sir, my father has declared a great prize for anyone
that saves me and rids us of the monster:
a pair of dazzling snow-white horses!
HERCULES:

Figure 4: Jason, played by Sam Burnham, and Medea, played by EB Skinner, in the Gustavus production.

Figure 5: Athena, played by Laura Herbers, and Hera, played by Hannah Tran, dress Medea, played by EB Skinner, in the Gustavus production.

Horses? I'm with a boat right now.12

It seems this Hercules knows his Valerius and has also compared notes with Homer's Telemachus, who in the *Odyssey* (4.600-8) turns down Menelaus' gift of horses and chariot because they would be useless to him on rocky Ithaca. Zimmerman's combination of erudition and intertextual humor is close in spirit to the Hellenistic aesthetic of Apollonius. Zimmerman's method is an extension of Apollonius' tradition of eclecticism and repurposing.

Zimmerman's play is divided into two acts, mirroring the structure of the poems of Apollonius and Valerius, both of which announce a second movement through a second proem invoking the Muse (Apollonius 4.1-5, Valerius 5.217-9). In this second act the plot of the epic journey intersects with the story of Medea, who is coopted by Hera and Athena, aided by Aphrodite and Eros, to help Jason succeed in his quest. Zimmerman foregrounds the apparatus of divine manipulation, depriving Medea of some of her agency. Her tragic fate is foreshadowed through costuming: her white dress is stained with blood from the arrow with which Eros has pierced her heart, and every time Medea makes an entrance the blot is bigger (Figures 3 and 4). Similarly, echoes of Virgil's Dido and Aeneas carried over from Valerius' poem add to our awareness of impending doom. But the play's arc continues to follow the journey of the Argo as its crew surmounts one challenge after another, now with the aid of Medea's magic arts, and Medea becomes ballast discarded too readily. It is not that Medea's pathos is trivialized. Rather, in the shadow of Euripides' *Medea*, any retelling that does not languish in her pathos seems off kilter. The play ends where it began, with attention fixed on the Argonauts, who introduce themselves for a second time, now immortalized as the constellations of the zodiac.**13** The star show ends with Medea, transformed into Virgo, the virgin goddess. The catasterism, a favorite Hellenistic trope, suits the play's cosmological interests and story-telling register, but the "tidy bow"**14** with which it ties up the play seems too neat in the wake of the devastation and carnage that we have just witnessed in double time.

Endings are always vexed, especially in Greek and Roman epic. Zimmerman has to strike out on her own because Valerius' poem, her main source in the second act, is unfinished. This gives her the liberty to innovate to a greater degree than she has hitherto. She seems to acknowledge her modern contribution to the mythical tradition in an exchange between Hera and Athena in the closing scene, delivered as they replace Medea's bloodied dress with a new one (Figure

Figure 6a: Aphrodite, played by Claire Chwalek, and Eros, played by Kyle Stas.

Figure 6b: Aphrodite and her willful son Eros.

Figure 7: Argonauts with the shipwrecked Dymas and prophet Phineus. Back row, left to right: Atalanta (played by Zainab Ferrer), Castor (Gabe Berg), Idmon (Chase Adelsman), Dymas (Dan Britt), Pollux (Landon Walters), Uncle (Thomas Buan), Tiphys (Aaron Bogen). Bottom row, left to right: Phineus (Jacob Marcott), Jason (Sam Burnham).

5):

> HERA [quietly, a little embarrassed]:
> This dress has a zipper.
> ATHENA:
> I know.
> HERA [again embarrassed]:
> Not very authentic.
> ATHENA:
> No. But then... a sheep that flies? And a dragon who doesn't sleep
> and all the rest? Don't be so literal. You miss a lot.15

The vagaries of transmission mean that Valerius' poem breaks off while still incomplete. Medea intuits Jason's perfidy, importunes him in language heavily redolent of Dido's appeals to Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid* (e.g., *nulla fides?* 8.435; *heu dure siles?* 459), and storms off in a Bacchic frenzy; as Jason vacillates on how to respond, the poem ends abruptly. The lack of closure—occasioned, we presume, by Valerius' untimely death—is perhaps more satisfying to our modern sensibilities than the "happily ever after" (ἀσπασίως, 4.1781) ending of Apollonius.

The final two scenes of Zimmerman's play show a metatheatrical self-awareness that problematizes the neat ending.16 For example, in their closing words the Argonauts offer a moral exemplum drawn from their own story:

> ARGONAUTS:
>
> Oh these glorious missions of men, they start out so well,
>
> so full of hope and noble intent: teach the foreigner a lesson,
>
> destroy the tyrant, become a man, defend the nation,
>
> hip, hip, hoorah, hoorah. Seize that shining Fleece
>
> and the world itself will change, seize that Golden Fleece
>
> and utopia will descend, seize that Fleece and
>
> there will be an end to evil.
>
> Whatever.
>
> They all end up like this in the end.17

Figure 8: Athena, played by Laura Herbers, in one of her many disguises.

Figure 9: Thrust stage of the Anderson Theatre. Scenic design by Miccah Maatman.

Figure 10: Lower and upper deck of the Argo.

This double vision has been present throughout the play. The Golden Fleece inspires poetic hyperbole and bathos alike. After setting Jason the quest of retrieving the Golden Fleece, Pelias delivers a blistering aside: "Who gives a fuck about the Fleece? Are you serious? Some stinking piece of wool that's been rotting in the rain for twenty years?" And when Jason and Medea consecrate their marriage aboard the ship, then consummate it on the Fleece, Athena wryly notes: "Oh yes they did. Right there, on the Fleece itself!" This may be disorienting, and the crude humor may seem out of place in a play whose language is sometimes hauntingly beautiful. But the disjuncture lies at the heart of the subject matter itself; this is at once an archetypal story of heroic adventure and an egregious case of utter depravity. The play's ending lives with this paradox. Jason, now an outcast, stumbles across the carcass of the Argo rotting on a lonely rocky outcrop; he contemplates hanging himself from the mast, but the wreck collapses and crushes him. "Not a glorious end," adds Hera. "No," Athena agrees. "What happened to the rest?" asks Hera? "Look up," replies Athena: "There in the sky, the zodiacal signs that journey forever. All of them are there."[18]

Figure 11: Lighting panels in the deck of the Argo. Lighting design by Terena Wilkens.

Figure 13: Jason washes himself in a forest pool.

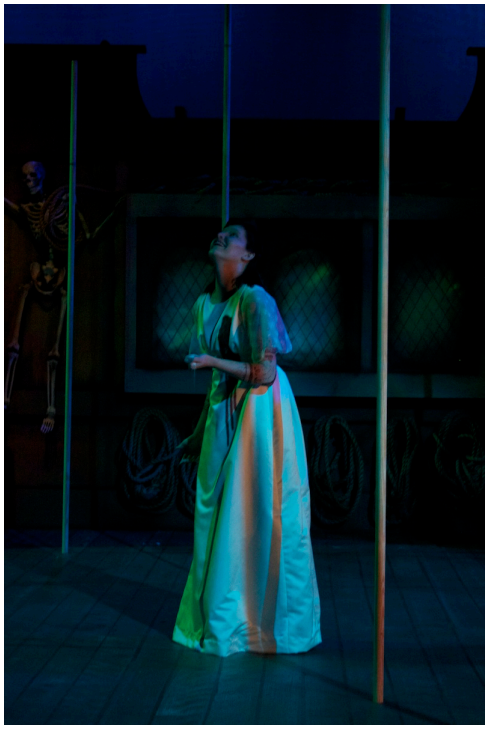


Figure 14: Medea by moonlight in the forest.

Zimmerman's *Argonautika* revels in exploring the mythical world. The production at Gustavus Adolphus College, directed by Henry MacCarthy, makes the most of the fluidity afforded by the play's lack of realism. MacCarthy sets the different worlds that the Argonauts visit in different time periods through stunning use of costuming and props (costume design by Natalicia ZumBerge). His women of Lemnos, for example, are dressed in clothing reminiscent of housewives of the 1940s, awaiting their husbands' return. With their hair done up in victory rolls and their chanting in unison to the accompaniment of a guitar, they also conjure a comparison to the cults of the 1960s, à la Scientology or the Children of God. His Aphrodite is a 1950s housewife sporting a frilly magenta dress and garish costume jewelry, carrying a plate of cupcakes. Her son Eros, his spiked hair radiating an electric pink, wears a ribbed wife-beater vest, a studded leather choke collar and wrist bands (Figures 6a and 6b). Thus MacCarthy exploits the deliberate anachronism foregrounded at key moments in Zimmerman's text. The audience accompanies the Argonauts on a journey of discovery in which they explore new worlds, and the different locations that the Argonauts visit are distinguished by the costumes of their inhabitants, separated in time and space.

Utilizing temporal separation in costuming to communicate the spatial distances involved in the plot not only solidifies the surreal quality of this story of heroes and monsters, but also allows for a certain level of visual storytelling. The Argonauts find Colchis a land subject to the iron rule of Aeetes. Ensconced in stiffly regal accouterments suggestive of imperial Russia, his stern rule is emphasized in his perfectly

manicured appearance, from his spotless black boots to his rich red coat and brass buttons. These costuming choices reinforce the foreignness of these far-flung lands. The Argonauts wear differing shades of off-white and beige outfits, the only real commonality being their simple high-waisted canvas pants, complemented by differing loose-fitting shirts and the occasional tan vest or set of beige suspenders (Figure 7). This relative simplicity in tone and homogeneity in appearance allows them to enter the numerous radically different worlds on their journey without disrupting their individual stylistic palettes.

Figure 15: Hercules, played by Nick Sweetland.

The costuming of the goddesses Hera and Athena is also very intentional on the part of MacCarthy. Wondering what aspects of human experience would seem unusual and exciting for the gods, he decided that splendor and majesty were commonplace for them—the banality of the everyday would be their exotic. These two goddesses thus never wear jewelry, fine dresses, or armor, instead donning the uniforms of tollbooth operators and retail workers, maids and nurses. In this way, they may also be seen as the custodians of the human race (Figures 2 and 8).

Figure 16: Hylas (at center), played by Clay Sletta.

The production at Gustavus Adolphus College utilizes a thrust stage, dominated by the foredeck of the Argo and a raised poop deck (Figures 9 and 10) occupying the furthest reaches upstage (scenic design by Micah Maatman). The ship's bow reaches almost to the audience, so that the Argonauts look out to the audience when scanning the horizon for distant lands. Upon the floor of the foredeck lie four large panels that can be lit from below in different colors (Figure 11). The façade of the pilothouse facing the audience has dual doors flanking three oval portholes (Figures 1 and 12), as well as two ladders granting access to the upper deck. These different components of the stage are used to great effect to separate the different locales, as Zimmerman's play, like Athenian drama and Shakespeare, is a theatre of the imagination, given focus and structure by the characters' actions and words. The portholes, for example, glow red and billow smoke to become the bulls in Aeetes' test of Jason. The two sets of doors lead both to Pelias' throne room and to Aphrodite's abode, and the light panels in the deck serve as both the water beside the ship (Figure 11) and as the pool in which Jason washes himself in the forest where he meets Medea (Figure 13).

Figure 17: Apsyrtos, played by Clay Sletta

The definition of the stage also relies heavily on props, particularly the multivalent rods used most commonly as the oars of the Argo. From the cliff to which Andromeda clings (Figure 2) to the pillars in Aeetes' court to the forests surrounding Colchis (Figure 14), these rods define the space while also loosening the audience's inherent focus on place and highlighting the actions of the characters. The only clear division onstage is between the elevated poop deck of the Argo and the main deck. This separation often implies a great distance between the actions and characters on either deck, both literally and metaphorically. The poop deck often functions like the roof of the Athenian *skene*, serving as a platform

from which gods oversee the action below. This distinction is put to good use in the production, as when Athena narrates the voyage of the Argo between destinations, or when Hera an Athena discuss the happenings in the mortal world below. This separation between gods and men is closed whenever the goddesses go down to interact directly with the mortals, as in the beginning of the play when Hera is carried across the river by Jason and his sandal is lost. The separation is also used to illustrate Aeetes' divine heritage and his mindset: he never once departs from the upper stage, asserting his will from afar like a god detached from the mortal realm.

This play contains a very large number of characters, many of whose roles are quite small. The production at Gustavus thus heavily and intentionally utilized the idea of casting double roles to accentuate similarities between characters and their relationships. The actors playing Hercules and Hylas also played Aeetes and Apsyrtos respectively. Hylas' and Hercules' poignantly linked exits from the story are mirrored in their actors' shared return to the stage as the royalty of Colchis. Hercules, a boastful and proud buffoon earlier in the show (Figure 15), is mirrored both in Aeetes' extreme pride and antithetically in his elegant, flowing lines and cold demeanor. Hylas, at first Hercules' quiet companion and supporter (Figure 16), is mirrored as well in Apsyrtos' quiet, unequivocal devotion to his father and king (Figure 17). This multiple casting also suggests Athenian tragedy, in which the three-actor convention required the deuteragonist and tritagonist to play multiple characters, often leading to rapid costume changes backstage. This same logistical difficulty persists today; three members of the costume team help Medea change dresses, requiring considerable practice and a stopwatch in some cases.

The Gustavus production features original music composed by Aaron Bogen. All music but the tango accompanying the lovemaking on Lemnos is performed live, either on stage or just offstage. Instruments range from the body percussion performed by the Argonauts throughout the Roll Call scene to accompany the rap (choreographed by Kate Dudley) to Japanese taiko drums and the Ugandan amadinda, a sort of xylophone. The numerous pieces played both during scene transitions and within certain scenes—as in the scene at Aphrodite's abode, in which saccharine elevator-type music plays in the background—all maintain a percussive element throughout. This focus on percussion creates a welcome consistency in a play that changes location and costuming so often.

Director Henry MacCarthy staged Zimmerman's *Arabian Nights* in 2010, another play with a huge cast, exotic settings and costumes, a fantastical story, and an episodic structure that takes the audience on an imaginative journey into the past. What he admires about Zimmerman is that she "takes on gigantic epic stories and is completely fearless about it." He too relished the challenge of taking on a play that "is in theory impossible to stage."**19** But MacCarthy and his crew, like Jason and the Argonauts, rose to the occasion.

notes

[1] Zimmerman (personal communication, February 2, 2016) describes her creative process: "I think of myself primarily as a director, not a writer. I write the script during the same time frame as rehearsals, writing every night a day ahead of the actors (not, as some suppose, improvising with the actors and then "writing it down.") The script is very influenced by the set we have designed, by the company I have cast — both those things precede the script."

[2] Zimmerman (personal communication, February 2, 2016) credits Slavitt as a significant creative influence on both her Metamorphoses and her Argonautika: "His profound love of the stories mixed with complete irreverence and creative meta-commentary was very, very influential to me from Metamorphoses on: the rapid shift in tone, the freedom in the telling, the wit... I came to stage Argonautika in large part because he had done a translation (albeit of the Roman version of the story)."

[3] McConnell (2010), footnote 4, citing Mary Zimmerman on "Shakespeare Theatre Company" podcast, recorded February 15, 2007.

[4] Zimmerman (2013) 37–8.

[5] Zimmerman (2013) 48.

[6] Zimmerman (2013) 95.

[7] Zimmerman (2013) 28.

[8] Apollonius' version is less absurd, as the competition is to see who can outlast the rest (Argonautica 1.1153–4). In Valerius' poem the crew members are keeping time but Hercules is competing to make the biggest waves (Argonautica 3.473–5).

[9] See Hershkowitz (1998) 35–104 for a sustained treatment of the latter's intertexts.

[10] Zimmerman (2013) 31.

[11] For Ovidian intertext in Valerius' Hesione episode, see Hershkowitz (1998) 72–8. As Hershkowitz notes, Valerius' imagery also draws from Virgil's Aeneid, Seneca's Phaedra, and the treatment of the Andromeda incident in Manilius' Astronomica.

[12] Zimmerman (2013) 50–1.

[13] The proem (1.4) of Valerius' Argonautika and two further allusions (at 1.1303–4 and 4.691–3) seem to anticipate a catasterism of the Argo towards the end (now lost) of the poem.

[14] The phrase is borrowed from Tony Gomez, whose write-up of the performance for a class assignment offers a different response to the play's ending: "However, the truly touching piece of the play is when all of the crew of the Argo appear onstage and explain their place in the constellations, and state how their journey is still recorded in the night sky for all to see. That last segment truly puts a tidy bow on the performance and teaches the audience about the constellations that most have knowledge of, but no understanding of the story of them."

[15] Zimmerman (2013) 143–4.

[16] Henry MacCarthy, director of the Gustavus production, noted that the end brings the play back to the present, a transitional device from the narrative past also found in Zimmerman's Arabian Nights (oral interview, November 10, 2015).

[17] Zimmerman (2013) 141.

[18] Zimmerman (2013) 146.

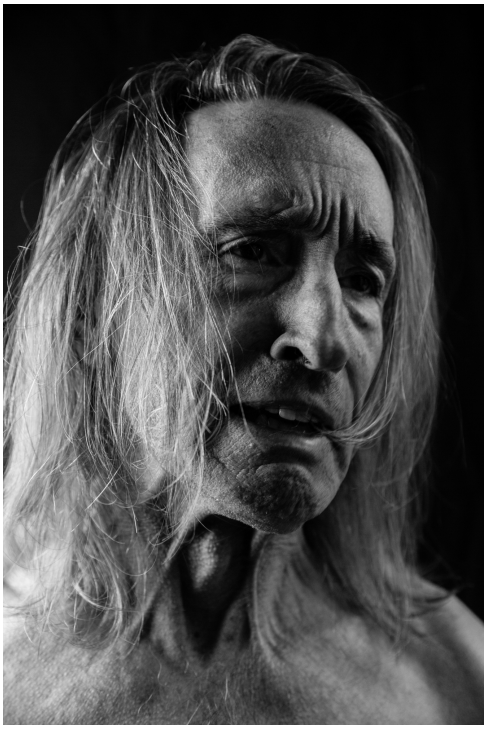
[19] Both quotations from an oral interview with MacCarthy conducted on November 10, 2015.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

translated by Peter Meineck
Directed by Desiree Sanchez
Aquila Theatre
New York University, New York

Reviewed by **Tony Tambasco**

In their production of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the Aquila Theatre features the Warrior Chorus, a national initiative dedicated to training veterans in presenting "innovative public programs based on ancient literature."[1] Guided by this purpose and a Brechtian stage sensibility, the Aquila Theatre creates an uncomfortable production of *Philoctetes* that reminds us that the healing of veterans is an incompletable process, as it has been since ancient times. Like Philoctetes' wound, the traumas of war may flare up at any time.



Richard Chaves as Philoctetes
(photo: Dan Gorman)

In preparing for the production, members of the Warrior Chorus participated in a 10-week program in which veterans explored personal connections to classical literature. The performance script, translated by Peter Meineck and using Warrior Chorus' words in place of Sophocles' choral odes, was developed through this workshop. The resulting performance focuses more on psychological realism than on heightened language or stage spectacle, and relies on minimalist design choices to reinforce this aesthetic and ground the play in the here and now.

Walking into the theatre, the audience is greeted by an almost-bare stage and a mixture of alternative and punk rock. The set consists of a white square painted on the floor, surrounded by a shin-high white wall, and an outer stage area painted black without any adornment, save for a few chairs upstage, where the Warrior Chorus sits for the duration of the play. Inside the white square is a hospital bed and small nightstand: the sole indications that this white, walled space, which we quickly learn is the interior of Philoctetes' cave, should be understood as a specific locus with modern significance.

John Meyer (left) and Richard Chaves (right)
(photo: Dan Gorman)

The costumes in this production are modern and mostly simple. The Warrior Chorus members wear stage blacks, and while Odysseus' (Ed Walsh) costume looks like a modern army uniform, Neoptolemus (Johnny Meyer) and his sailors (Brian Delate, Caleb Wells, and Michael Castelblanco) wear clothing that is not quite military: a reminder that Neoptolemus is not yet a soldier.

Philoctetes (Richard Chaves) is stripped down, wearing nothing but a loin cloth and a foot bandage, beyond which there is little to indicate that he suffers from a physical wound. His limp comes and goes.

Neither Neoptolemus nor his men seem to notice any of the putrid odor implied by the script, and at the play's conclusion, when the bandage comes off, there is no sign of a physical injury.

At the top of the play, the Warrior Chorus enters, each repeating the line "This is the isle of Lemnos" while images of modern battlefields are projected onto the upstage curtain, with Odysseus debriefing Neoptolemus in the black outer-stage area. This scene is lit in a combination of side- and foot-light that is both stark and murky, throwing bold shadows across both men's faces. When Odysseus leaves, Neoptolemus and the chorus of sailors enter the white, inner-stage area, violating Philoctetes' sanctuary. With the stage now brightly lit, Philoctetes has no place to hide, and he emerges from behind his bed with sounds more like defiant curses than cries of pain.

The Warrior Chorus does not directly interact with the characters in the play: they remain upstage of the main playing area, their words heard only by the audience and Philoctetes. Hearing the voices of his fellow soldiers call out across the ages, Philoctetes is curious, frightened, and anguished, never certain if the voices are coming from the cave or from himself. These choral odes are the clearest divergence from Sophocles' text, but a change in lighting, which returns us to a general darkness where only Philoctetes and the Warrior Chorus can be clearly seen, heightens these moments, stressing the primacy of Sophocles' text as a vehicle for the Warrior Chorus' words.

Chaves' Philoctetes is far from a helpless cripple. His intermittent limp is slight, and his initial defiance of Neoptolemus creates the impression that he would be more than a match for the young prince even without Herakles' magical bow. When at the top of the play Philoctetes faces down Neoptolemus and his men with the bow, he doesn't yet hold any arrows: this opening moment is all the more poignant for Philoctetes' being fully armed later in the play, when he draws the bow on Odysseus, an arrow ready to fire. In the opening, we see a Philoctetes fending off intruders who are still strangers to him, without the full use of his famous weapon, but towards the conclusion, he is *unwilling* to kill the man he hates most, even though he is prepared to do it. It's a neat way to show how Philoctetes, who has been reduced almost to savagery, is transformed by Neoptolemus' idealism and Odysseus' patriotism into something close to the man he was.

Walsh as Odysseus and Meyer as Neoptolemus offer measured counterpoints to Chaves' Philoctetes. Walsh's Odysseus is pragmatic, sometimes dehumanizingly so, but the audience is always left with the impression that he is looking to the greater good. Here is a man who may once have dreamed of glory, but now uses heroic rhetoric to convince Neoptolemus to do his part in bringing the war to a swift conclusion. While Sophocles' Odysseus is often contrasted with Homer's, Walsh's performance is clearly grounded in the epic hero who, above all else, wants to return home.

Meyer, for his part, gives us a Neoptolemus who never seems completely convinced that glory is worth its cost. Neoptolemus needs military conquest to rule successfully and to stand out from under the shadow of his famous father, but his disillusionment with Odysseus' trickery only grows when confronting a Philoctetes who is clearly capable of fighting, but chooses not to. By the play's end, Meyer's Neoptolemus is genuinely concerned for Philoctetes' wellbeing, which seems more important than his hunger for reputation in motivating his desire for military glory.

Director Desiree Sanchez (who is also the Aquila's artistic director) explores Philoctetes' wound as psychological in nature; in a particularly clever piece of staging, Philoctetes recovers a bottle of pills from a drawer where the text has him retrieving herbs that soothe his pain, and the bottle is promptly pocketed by one of the sailors at Neoptolemus' instruction. Philoctetes is addicted to self-pity and his own victimhood as much as he may be addicted to pills, and this move nicely prefigures Neoptolemus' command that he leave his exile, which by the end of the play we understand is self-imposed. Philoctetes can only be healed once he is willing to allow it.

But Sanchez's casting has left us to wonder exactly what kind of healing and reconciliation Philoctetes *can* find. Both the merchant/spy and Herakles are played by Odysseus: the minimal costume changes and the program make clear that this is not merely Ed Walsh doubled in the roles, but the character Odysseus in disguise. Herakles' promise that Philoctetes will be healed and given a hero's welcome rings hollow as a result. In this moment, Walsh stands on a chair, down left, and the lighting again becomes steep, stark, and murky, as at the beginning of the play. But here, with arms spread wide, Odysseus casts a shadow over not only the characters on stage, but the Warrior Chorus as well. Just as the 21st-century voices spoke to Philoctetes before, the shadow of Odysseus, willing to say or do whatever it takes to convince Philoctetes to return to war, falls over these 21st-century veterans.

Of course Odysseus is also a soldier, and though he's deceiving Philoctetes in this final moment, he's not necessarily lying: whatever the source of these words, Philoctetes' return to health and dignity at play's conclusion hints that their healing effect is real. As Philoctetes accepts the destiny that Herakles/Odysseus offers him, one of Neoptolemus' men enters with a uniform, helping Philoctetes remove his foot bandage and dress himself as a soldier again. Once more in his military uniform, Philoctetes stands upright for the first time in this play, and even as the Warrior Chorus' final ode makes it clear that his path ahead won't be easy, Chaves' posture gives us the sense that Philoctetes has moved beyond the self-pity on which he has nursed his pain. Odysseus may be deceiving Philoctetes for the sake of his own interests, but the deception benefits Philoctetes too. Philoctetes' tall, proud stance is hard to reconcile with shadow that Odysseus as Herakles casts over the Warrior Chorus, but this dialectic of images demands considerations without neat resolutions—appropriately enough for this kind of performance.

Though deprived of Sophocles' lofty lyrics and lacking the heightened language of a poetical translation, the play still tells its story well, even cut down to a 70-minute running time. There are few moments of soaring passion, but the all-veteran cast's well-grounded performances invite a consideration that more heightened acting would not, especially when coupled with the images of modern war zones at the beginning of the play and the words of the Warrior Chorus as choral odes. The audience engages all of *Philoctetes*' contexts, antique and modern.

When one of the Warrior Chorus members shouts out "Baby killer!" for example, one can't help but think of Neoptolemus' future self: throwing the infant Astyanax from the walls of Troy. We know what the noble and even *kind* young man before us will become. And the mercy that we now applaud will yield to bloodshed of the sort that, as Herakles' speech makes clear, was considered a war crime even in the ancient world. And how can we begin to talk about it—we who have no knowledge of the ways in which mercy, kindness, and love may be coupled to that level of brutality?

Don't expect any easy answers from *Philoctetes*. Sophocles doesn't offer them, and neither does Aquila's production. True to their mission, Aquila re-frames Sophocles' questions for our own state of continuing war, offering a glimpse into the difficulty some service members have in coming home, but also into the bond they share with their fellow veterans. In so doing, the Aquila lets us see Sophocles, himself a veteran, struggling to reconcile himself to his own wars and to his role after the fighting was done. As Chaves said in a post-show talk-back, "We have all experienced war in one way or another." In light of Aquila's performance, the perfunctory "Thank you for your service" seems like a way of shutting down the necessary conversations that we all need to have about what that experience means, and that Sophocles posed with this play.

Philoctetes, by Sophocles, translated by Peter Meineck. Presented by the Aquila Theatre. Directed by Desiree Sanchez. Lighting by Peter Meineck. Technical direction by Robert Rogers. Stage Management by Abigail Strange. Featuring Ed Walsh as Odysseus, Johnny Meyer as Neoptolemus, Brian Delate as Phoenix (a sailor), Caleb Wells as Leukos (a sailor), Michael Castelblanco as Alcimus (a sailor), Richard

Chaves as Philoctetes, and the Warrior Chorus (Dar Lily, John Manley, Philip J. Milio, Dan Murphy, Jenny Pacanowksi, and James P. Stanton). Presented at the GK Arts Center in Brooklyn, NY on April 6th, 7th, 13th, and 20th 2016. For more information please see www.aquilatheatre.com and www.warriorchorus.org.

notes

1 "The Program." Aquila Theatre NYU. Accessed May 10, 2016.

Trachiniae

Directed by Anna Conser
March 31-April 2, 2016
Minor Latham Playhouse
New York, New York

Reviewed by **Claire Catenaccio**
Columbia University

The basic pattern of the choral odes of Greek tragedy is the alternation of strophe and antistrophe – paired stanzas that correspond in meter, music, and (some scholars would argue) choreography. If a strophe is a "turn," then an antistrophe is a "turn back," a "return." This concept of strophe and antistrophe, turning and returning, informs every aspect of the excellent production of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* by the Barnard/Columbia Ancient Drama Group, under the direction of Anna Conser. The play seems to propose a set of binary oppositions: man and woman, old and young, wild and domestic, day and night, speech and song. But instead of settling on any one truth, we wend our way among these different alternatives. As the Chorus declare in their majestic first song,

> Never has Zeus, the king of all things,
> granted to mortals life without pain;
> but grief and happiness come
> to every man in his turn,
> like the circling paths of the Bear.
> The gleaming splendor of the night
> will not remain with men, nor yet
> will grief, nor wealth; all pass away
> at once, and soon another man
> encounters joy and sorrow.

Figure 1: Elizabeth Heintges
(photo: Joseph Henry Ritter)

Figure 2: Elizabeth Heintges as Heracles
(photo: Joseph Henry Ritter)

Figure 3: The Chorus
(photo: Joseph Henry Ritter)

Trachiniae, like the *Odyssey* or Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, is a story of *nostos*: its central action is the return of the hero Heracles to his wife Deaneira and his children in Trachis. Yet for the first three-quarters of the play Heracles does not appear, and Deaneira dominates the stage. The longest speaking role in Sophocles, Deaneira is a woman of remarkable sensitivity. She begins in a state of anxiety and vague hope, wishing for sure news of her husband. When she learns that Heracles is in love with another woman, Iole, for whose sake he has sacked an entire city, she assumes an attitude of wisdom and acceptance: "Whoever stands up to Eros like a boxer is a fool; for he rules even the gods just as he pleases, and he rules me; how should he not rule another woman like me?" In the next scene, however, Deaneira cannot bear the prospect of sharing her bed with Iole, imagining the two women "waiting under a single blanket for him to embrace." In her distress, jealousy, and shame, she settles on a desperate plan. She will prepare

a robe for Heracles, anointed with what she believes to be a love charm, given to her long ago by the Centaur Nessus. But the potion turns out to be a poison, the dying Centaur's last revenge. When Heracles puts on the robe, it clings to his flesh, devours his limbs, tears at his bones, feeds on him like a serpent. In metaphors of the beasts he has conquered, the robe lays low the civilizing hero of man.

The play begins in darkness. The stage design (by Ashley Simone and Ashley Setzler) is minimal, with the studied asymmetry of a Japanese garden: the façade of a palace on one side of the stage, a stand of saplings on the other. Deaneira (Elizabeth Heintges) emerges from the palace, carrying a lantern. She is dressed in white and silver, with a headdress that gleams like the full moon above her pale face. She speaks slowly, as if in a dream. In a monologue she describes her marriage to Heracles and her unease at his long absence. While Deaneira speaks, another actress, identically costumed, enters from the grove of trees. Then a third enters, this time from the palace. What is happening?

Figure 4: Elizabeth McNamara as Deaneira
(photo: Joseph Henry Ritter)

Conser has cast three different actresses in the part of Deaneira. This bold choice has the practical benefit of dividing up a large number of lines, which might be too much for any one performer. On an interpretive level, Conser's tripartite casting emphasizes the different sides of this complex and sympathetic woman. Heintges' Deaneira is inscrutable, speaking to herself more than to the audience. Elizabeth McNamara, who plays Deaneira in the long First Episode, perfectly captures both the regal bearing and the deep compassion of the character. McNamara makes believable Deaneira's rational words about the ineluctable power of Eros; she will not fault Heracles for his affairs. The third Deaneira is Barbara Edith Vinck, who in two successive scenes describes the plot of the robe and its disastrous miscarriage. Vinck is more distraught than her predecessors, more vulnerable, and therefore more dangerous. When she reports the last instructions of Nessus, she stands transfixed, as though possessed by the ghostly presence of the Centaur; his words revealed, she shakes herself out of the trance with an embarrassed giggle. We get the sense that there are layers to this woman's consciousness, or perhaps that her mind is like a set of nesting boxes; some, like the bronze box where she stored the potion for so many years, she cannot, or will not, look into. Vinck's Deaneira seems desperate enough to turn, against her better judgment, to love spells and charms. Does she know, on some level, that the potion given to her by a dying enemy, steeped in the blood of the Hydra, must be evil? Vinck makes us think that she does, and that her silence in the

Figure 5: Talia Varonos-Pavlopoulos as the Messenger and Elizabeth McNamara as Deaneira
(photo: Joseph Henry Ritter)

Figure 6: The Chorus and Elizabeth McNamara as Deaneira
(photo: Joseph Henry Ritter)

face of her son's accusations is a partial acknowledgment of her guilt.

Deaneira's suicide is not enacted before the audience. We hear of the queen's death through a messenger, her Nurse (the breathtaking Rachel Herzog). The Nurse relates how Deaneira bade farewell to her servants, her house, the bed she shared with Heracles, all the details of her domestic life. As she speaks, the Nurse is joined by a dancer (Chloe Hawkey) in a white dress. Slowly, elegiacally, the dancer enacts Deaneira's last moments; but when Deaneira prepares to plunge a sword beneath her heart, the dancer stops, turns, and walks offstage. Deaneira's death remains private, personal, silent, beyond our ability to understand.

In the first three-quarters of the play the speeches of the Deaneira are set against the songs of the Chorus. The Chorus, unmarried maidens of Trachis, express a different perspective on the twists and turns of man's life. They do not share the knowledge that Deaneira has gained through painful experience. What they offer instead is the timeless wisdom of myth and metaphor. The eleven young women of Conser's Chorus, dressed in deep blue dresses spangled with stars, whirl in concentric circles, separate, and come together, like the celestial bodies of their first song. They are serene, and the music underscores their serenity: their voices glide in harmony, for the most part chromatically, over an arrangement of keyboard, cello, oboe, ukulele, and percussion. Composer Melody Loveless, who knows no Greek, worked closely with Conser to set the odes with admirable fidelity to the intricate and varied meters of Greek tragedy. The result belies the carping of scholars who say that we can never know anything about how ancient music sounded. We can, and it's beautiful.

The songs of the Chorus, harmonious in sound as well as content, emphasize the cycles of endless return that govern the natural world; their perspective stands in contrast to the more teleological concept of time articulated by Deaneira, who sees event follow event in a relentless chain of cause and effect. Is she deceived in thinking that her life moves from beginning to end, from joy to sorrow? Or can mortal existence, as the Chorus posit, be somehow strophic?

The entrance of Heracles, long anticipated and long delayed, is the most dramatic return of all, for the role is taken by Elizabeth Heintges, who spoke Deaneira's lines in the Prologue. This doubling is consistent with ancient practice: given the constraints imposed by the Great Dionysia, which allocated three actors to each playwright, Deaneira and Heracles must have been played by the same performer. Of course, in the original production the actor would have been masked, and would have delivered his lines in an outdoor theater seating several thousand spectators; we may only guess at the impact of the double casting on an audience accustomed to this convention. The effect in Conser's production goes far beyond historical accuracy. The doubling is uncanny – not only is Heracles a woman, but he is, in fact, Deaneira.

Heracles' entrance is remarkable also for ushering in a new mode: solo song. Thus far – after nearly a thousand lines of Greek and more than an hour of performance time – all of the music in the play has come from the Chorus. Heracles, collapsed in exhaustion after his struggle with the robe, is carried in on a bier. His first address – to his immortal father Zeus – is suddenly, unexpectedly, in song. Conser and Loveless here take advantage of Heintges' musical ability and the range of her voice. Heracles condemns his fellow Greeks and his perfidious wife in a steady, commanding contralto; but when he begs Hades to lull him to sleep, to death, Heintges strains towards a soprano range. It is as if the masculine and the feminine, the strong and the weak, contending so fiercely within Heracles, can only break free through this hybrid song.

Aristotle dismissed *opsis*, spectacle, as the least important aspect of tragedy. That is certainly not the case in this production: the visual aspects of the play, like casting, choreography, and music, are essential to conveying the central themes of time and change. The striking makeup (by Kerry Joyce) and costumes (by Bo Yeon Jang) pick up the astral imagery of the Chorus' first song in their use of palette: Heracles is a

bright vision in gold, orange, and red, symbolizing both the sun and the burning effect of the robe, while Deaneira gleams in silver and white. The three Deaneiras differ only in their headdresses, which represent different phases of the moon. The moon is a symbol of change; it is tied to a woman's reproductive cycle; and it does not shine by its own light, but reflects that of the sun. Over the course of the play Deaneira wanes and disappears, to be outshone by the glorious Heracles; but when his light has set in death, the moon returns. In the final scene of the play Iole, another frightened and unwilling bride, steps out of the palace, wearing the headdress of the full moon. To return to the first stasimon of the Chorus: soon another man encounters joy and sorrow.

A few words remain to be said about the quality of the Greek in this production. The annual performances by the Columbia/Barnard Ancient Drama Club remain one of the only opportunities in the country to watch the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Plautus, Terrence, and Seneca (as well as other ancient works adapted for the modern stage) in their original languages. It is a magical experience. A spectator with intermediate fluency in Ancient Greek and some knowledge of the play can follow, at speed, the unfolding of Sophocles' verses. Many of the actors in *Trachiniae* are seasoned veterans from previous years: in particular, Talia Varonos-Pavlopoulos as the First Messenger delivers her lines with spirit and humor, while Rachel Herzog as the Nurse modulates gracefully from grief to wonder to acceptance in her report of Deaneira's death. A degree of freedom apparently has been granted the individual performers in their pronunciation of the Greek; given the lack of absolute certainty as to how the ancients mayhave spoken or sung the lines, this deviation from pedantry probably gains as much in spontaneity as it loses in uniformity and precision.

Rhesus

Directed by Katerina Evangelatos
July 24, 2015
Aristotle's Lyceum
Athens, Greece

Reviewed by **Scott Andrew Cally**
City University of New York

In her production of *Rhesus*, Katerina Evangelatos recreates the walks conducted by Aristotle in the 4th century BCE as he taught in his school. Translated and performed in Modern Greek with projected English translation, quotes from Aristotle himself are interjected at various points in the script, serving as an intellectual counterpoint to the violent action. Subtitled "A peripatetic performance at Aristotle's Lyceum," this version of Euripides' controversial dramatization of Book 10 of the *Iliad* takes its audience on an intellectual journey through time on a summer's evening, creating a highlight of 2015's annual Athens and Epidaurus Festival.

Figure 1: The stage: the excavations of Aristotle's Lyceum recently rediscovered in 1996 with the foundations of the buildings clearly visible. Photo by author

Thought by some to be spuriously ascribed to Euripides, this tragedy tells the story of the death of the Thracian King Rhesus and the subsequent prophecy by his mother, the Muse Calliope, that her son would be resurrected, but only to live on in the underworld. Much of the controversy surrounding the disputation of authorship centers on stylistic and structural differences between *Rhesus* and other, indisputably Euripidean tragedies such as Medea and Orestes. It is perhaps this very ambiguity that led Director Katerina Evangelatos to adapt the play as an environmental piece and set it in Aristotle's Lyceum (Figure 1). As *Rhesus* seems to ask more questions than it answers, it is fitting that it be performed in such a hallowed academic setting.

Figure 2: English subtitles projected on the face of a nearby building. Photo by author

I was first impressed by the choice to stage this show in a place known for logic and the acquisition of knowledge. Knowing the more famous version of this story told in book ten of the *Iliad*, subtitled "Marauding through the Night," I entered the production with the question of how these two different conceptions would meld. By the end of the night I was thoroughly convinced by the storytelling of this wonderful production.

Figure 3: Performance of Rhesus. Photo By Author

The audience was divided into three groups before being led into the Lyceum, known as a *peripatetic* school because of Aristotle's reputation for walking while teaching. I was placed in Group 3 with all other English-speaking patrons, who were seated where we

would have the best view of the projected English titles used throughout the evening (Figure 2). As we entered there was a palpable sense of excitement, as through we were being led on a literal journey as well as a dramatic one.

True to the original, the show has a male-only cast of ten, slightly smaller than one would expect of a Euripidean tragedy. With drums heralding the beginning of the show, the cast enters in a sort of semiformal processional that hints subtly at a Noh influence. The entirety of this parados adaptation is danced sans dialogue, with only an occasional quote from Aristotle projected to emphasize the physical storytelling. The men enter dressed in varying styles of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century schoolboy costumes, carrying an assortment of toy weapons, which they use to act out a stylized version of the Trojan war. The juxtaposition of such boyish violence with philosophical reason suggests the duality of human nature, its seemingly innate drive towards barbarism tempered by logic and reason. The combination of drumming by Dimitris Desyllas' percussion class from the Athens Conservatory and Choreography by Patricia Apergi works to create an exciting and effective beginning of the show.

In the spirit of the peripatetic walk, the ushers move each of the three audience groups to a different location after the prologue. This change of viewpoint adds to the excitement, combining the theatrical experience with the exploration of an archaeological site. The "walk" left me anticipating the next move, but the production chose not to shift its audience again for the remainder of the show. At least one additional move would have been helpful in firmly establishing this experience as a "walk."

At varying points during *Rhesus* the action is interrupted by an interlude featuring the voice and text of Aristotle. The first of these occurs shortly after Dolon dresses as a wolf before being attacked and killed by Odysseus and Diomedes. Once again, Evangelatos adeptly punctuates the story with an instructional interlude before the brutality of war that will soon ensue, thus heightening the didactic quality of the experience.

Under the direction of Katerina Evangelatos the ensemble cast creates a consistent performance that tells this story of aggression tempered by the intellect and philosophy of the ancients. The use of the childish costumes designed by Vasiliki Syrma along with the exaggerated toy props creates a playful environment while avoiding outright mockery. The juvenile mood is in stark contrast to the harsh reality of the archaeological site, which visually reinforces the overriding metaphor of duality posited by this production. Giorgos Tellos' lighting is commendable, creating a versatile design in a large space with relatively minimal equipment. His lights seem to fade into the environment, enhancing rather than detracting from the ancient setting. The lighting also subtly and beautifully moves us through a show that begins at dusk and ends in darkness with a blackout that is an astounding spectacle in itself (Figure 3). The superb sound design by Kostas Michopoulos allows an audience spread out over several acres to hear the performers with a clarity that many traditional indoor venues would envy.

Apart from its failure to use the concept of the peripatetic walk to its fullest potential, this production of *Rhesus* was a success, winning several ovations from the audience. Among the dozens of performances at the Athens and Epidaurus Festival, *Rhesus* stands out for its environmental performance venue. These ruins were only recently rediscovered and are a place of reverence for all academics and devotees of learning.

52nd Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Alcestis*

May 13 to June 19, 2016
LII Ciclo di Spettacoli Classici
Teatro Greco di Siracusa
Syracuse, Italy

Reviewed by **Caterina Barone**
University of Padova

In the 52nd season of classical plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse, the stage is once again dedicated to women. The plays this year are Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Alcestis*,[1] directed, respectively, by Gabriele Lavia[2] and Cesare Lievi.[3] One of the many themes of these two tragedies is the *oikos*, in the broader meaning of the Greek word: both family and family property. In both texts, the vicissitudes of the protagonists are not limited to their personal sphere, but involve the entire family universe to which they belong.

Stefano Santospago and Sergio Mancinelli in Alcestis. Photo by G. L. Carnera

Electra's desire for vengeance, while she spasmodically awaits the return of her brother Orestes, goes beyond her wish to avenge the death of Agamemnon at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus: it is also aimed at restoring hereditary right, a purpose that entails gaining possession of her father's assets. Orestes shares this objective, as evidenced by the prayer the young man directs to the gods as he enters the stage: "Send me not dishonoured from the land, but grant that I may rule over my possessions, and restore my house!" (vv. 71-----72).

Galatea Ranzi and Danilo Nigrelli in Alcestis. Photo by G. L. Carnera

In the 2016 theatrical productions, however, these themes remain in the background. The common denominator for both directors seems to be the focus on the emotions of sorrow and bereavement.

Maddalena Crippa in Electra. Photo by Maria Pia Ballarino

In *Electra*, Federica Di Martino plays the protagonist with monotonous exaggeration, running across the stage in a posture bent by hate and despair, the emotions consuming her youth while she waits for Orestes. Constantly screaming out her sorrow, covered in rags and with her hair cut short in mourning (unlike all the other characters, whose flowing tribal hairdos and ahistorical costumes "tell of a world where rules are unhinged," in the words of costume designer Andrea Viotti), Electra is a counterpoint to her mother Clytemnestra (in Maddalena Crippa's authoritative interpretation), who is as regal in her appearance and demeanour as she is merciless towards her daughter, though she too is tormented by the thought of Orestes' possible revenge. Electra finds no more comfort in the meek words

of the Chorus and of her sister Chrysothemis, who attempt to induce her to moderation.

The cast of **Electra.** *Photo by Maria Pia Ballarino*

Although the Sophoclean heroine is monolithic and moved by unshakable determination to achieve vengeance, her attitude is variously adjusted to the people with whom she interacts, and to the unfolding of events. All this is lacking in the 2016 staging, which is suffocated by exaggerated interpretive paroxysms. In Sophocles' work, Electra is not actually driven mad by sorrow: she has her mind lucidly set on her objective. Throughout the tragedy, she repeatedly stresses that her current condition is that of a slave, and that she is forced to live miserably in her own house. She has a strong aspiration to regain the role that is hers by birthright. She lucidly explains her reasons to her sister Chrysothemis, attempting to persuade her to act in their interest, after they receive the news of Orestes's alleged death (947–989).

Maddalena Crippa plays Clytemnestra with more subtlety, despite some imperfections, managing to convey her inner torment, the state of being torn between hate and fear. The queen is violent and aggressive towards Electra, who deprives her of her peace with constant death threats. At the same time, she is also tormented by fear that Orestes may return to Mycenae to kill her. The prayer she directs to Apollo, with the secret hope that her son may die and thus free her from her impending nightmare, is a sensitive exploration of the meanders of a troubled psyche.

After the deception that lets the avengers into the palace, the production rushes hastily towards the *katastrophé*. Orestes's character seems faded and flat because of the systematic cutting of important lines (such as in the prologue and the dialogue with Electra) that butchers Nicola Crocetti's sensitive translation. In its attempt to speed up and simplify the tragedy, Lavia's "theatrical revision and adaptation" ultimately impoverishes the text.

Thus when Clytemnestra is killed behind the scenes, the director cuts Electra's ferocious lines, relying instead on the sombre tones of Giordano Corapi's music. At the very point where the violence of Sophocles' Electra explodes in words of uncontrollable hate ("Smite, if thou canst, once more!" v. 1415), Lavia inexplicably opts for a wordless protagonist.

The last character on the stage is Aegisthus, interpreted by Maurizio Donadoni with flashes of vulgar coarseness. He arrives singing to himself ironically, scornful and violent, and grabs Electra by the throat and spits on her, revealing his nature as a merciless and arrogant despot. His death puts an end to the tyranny of the usurpers. The smallness of the avengers, however, dims the prospect of any rebirth for the city and kingdom: moral decadence (visually rendered by Alessandro Camera's stage settings, with the image of a palace in ruins, iron-like and rusty, besieged by decaying rubbish) is destined to perpetuate itself.

The background setting for *Alcestis* is instead the geometric facade of Admetus's palace, rendered with dark red window frames and black curtains. This set creates a dialectic relationship with the archaeological context of the Greek theatre in Syracuse. When the curtains open, they give the audience glimpses of the white rooms within, so that the actions recounted by characters outside often seem to be enacted simultaneously inside, with a dynamic and immersive effect. All around, 1,400 red poppies evoke the cult of the dead. Refined chromatic effects add meaning to the characters. The black cloak of Thanatos contrasts with the bright yellow of the garments worn by Apollo, the god of light. Alcestis wears a simple white dress, as immaculate as her sacrifice, while Admetus's costume, in shades of bright blue and held together by strings, is an allusion to his inner complexity. The dull red worn by the old king Pheres is a symbol of past power, contrasting with the female servant's bright red, synonymous with

loyalty.

The production opens with a Mediterranean funeral. A band, priests, men and women dressed for mourning in a procession after the coffin: this spectacle introduces the theme of death in its timeless relevance, and should, according to the director, signal the gap between our current concepts of life-death/immanence-transcendence and the very different view that characterised the archaic and faraway world of myth. After the dialogue between Thanatos and Apollo, a dark veil covers the scene. This cloud later disappears, swallowed by the Charonian stairway, to reveal the presence of the Chorus.

The mournful pathos of the mythical events is enhanced by the singing of the female and male Choruses (the text indicates only a male Chorus), and is managed with intelligence and control by the director and actors, all of them excellent. The two characters in the prologue, Thanatos (Pietro Montandon) and Apollo (Massimo Nicolini), face each other in an ironic and mocking duel; the courageous Alcestis (Galatea Ranzi), not unlike a Homeric hero in her valour, is aware of her own *aretè* and does not indulge in querulous lamentations, maintaining instead a sorrowful but composed demeanour. Admetus (Danilo Nigrelli), regretting that he has accepted the sacrifice of his wife, calibrates his contradictory attitude, giving credibility to a character whose shifting thoughts make him difficult to define: his pained awareness of his own cowardice appears authentic. The cynical Pheres (Paolo Graziosi), the elderly father who did not want to die instead of his son, expresses with harsh firmness his contempt for Admetus without hiding his own irreducible selfishness. The female and male servants (Ludovica Modugno and Sergio Mancinelli), by contrast, display sincere affection and sympathy for their masters.

The production also successfully calibrates and resolves the tension between tragedy and comedy that characterizes of the original work, which was staged at the Athenian contests in the fourth spot, traditionally reserved for satyr plays. Stefano Santospago skilfully portrays the complexity of Heracles, a gluttonous and unrestrained demigod who is also the generous restorer of Alcestis to life. He is at once hyperbolic and ironic, in a way consistent with the traditional iconography of the hero. Equal credit must be given to the music (varying with the text and reminiscent of folkloric motifs from southern Italy), and above all to Maria Pia Pattoni's careful translation, which manages to reproduce, philologically but not slavishly, the original's variety of stylistic registers: lyric, dramatic, pathetic, and sophistic, sprinkled throughout the entire tragedy, but reaching their antiphrastic climax in the satyresque tones of the epilogue.

The ending is a parallel to the Christian funeral in the opening: as Heracles leaves for his next labour, he takes with him a club rather than a cross. This choice is a sign of convinced secularity, a worldliness that sees mankind's abilities as a concrete chance of salvation.

notes

[1]This review does not cover Seneca's Phaedra, staged at the end of the 52nd season and directed by Carlo Cerciello.

[2]Characters and cast: Electra: Federica Di Martino, Clytemnestra: Maddalena Crippa, Orestes: Jacopo Venturiero, Aegisthus: Maurizio Donadoni, Paedagogus: Massimo Venturiello, Chrysothemis: Pia Lanciotti, Pylades: Massimiliano Aceti, Coryphaea: Giulia Gallone, First members of the chorus: Simonetta Cartia, Flaminia Cuzzoli, Giovanna Guida, Giulia Modica, Alessandra Salamida, Chorus of Women of Mycenae: girls from the Academy of Ancient Drama, "Giusto Monaco" section, Masters of the Chorus: Francesca Della Monica and Ernani Maletta, set design: Alessandro Camera, costumes: Andrea Viotti, music: Giordano Corapi.

[3]Characters and cast: Alcestis: Galatea Ranzi, Admetus: Danilo Nigrelli, Heracles: Stefano Santospago, Apollo: Massimo Nicolini, Thanatos: Pietro Montandon, Pheres: Paolo Graziosi, Female servant: Ludovica Modugno, Male servant: Sergio Mancinelli, Choryphaei: Mauro Marino and Sergio Basile, Chorus of men: Nicasio Ruggero Catanese, Alessandro Aiello, Massimo Tuccitto, Lorenzo Falletti, Carlo Vitiello, Eumelus: Tancredi Di Marco, Alcestis's daughter: Mirea Bramante, Choruses: boys from the Academy of Ancient Drama, "Giusto Monaco" section. The cast featured also students from the music program at the Corbino-Gargallo high school. Set design and costumes: Luigi Perego, music: Marcello Panni.

A Conversation About *Deus Ex Machina*

Deus Ex Machina
by Liz Fisher and Robert Matney
Directed by Liz Fisher and Robert Matney
Whirligig Productions, Fusebox and Shrewd Productions
The Long Center for Performing Arts
Austin, Texas
January 3–18, 2015

Liz Fisher, Whirligig Productions and Texas State University, **Robert Matney**, Whirligig Productions, **Paul Woodruff**, University of Texas at Austin, and **Lucia Woodruff**

Excerpted and edited by **Sophia Dill**, Randolph College

Deus Ex Machina was born from the scheming of Liz Fisher, Robert Matney, Beth Burns, and Rob Turknett. Each showing's audience was invited to participate in the plot by voting via text message each time a character appealed to the gods for guidance. The following is a conversation that took place with Liz Fisher (LF), Robert Matney (RM), Paul Woodruff (PW), and Lucia Woodruff (LW), recorded on February 7, 2015, at the Woodruff home.

The parts of the conversation excerpted here—edited for brevity and clarity—explore the challenges of making an audience divine while telling a coherent story.

Katherine Catmull as Clytemnestra
(photo: Will Hollis Snider)

Liz Fisher reimagined the the Oresteia as a choose-your-own adventure with the plotline selected by audiences at specific junctures between scenes. While she gave the audience power and enough information to make a choice at those moments, Fisher retained enough control to keep her actors on script instead of running off into improvisation. She held back select information regarding characters and consequences that could then be a surprise to the audience: her interpretation of the freedom ancient playwrights had to introduce unexpected characters. With a plethora of pathways and several possible endings, Deus Ex Machina could hardly be confined to just one genre and Fisher's recognition of this fact allowed the show to push at the expectations and boundaries of modern theatrical convention.

'What if we were able to create a show where audience members got to be gods and tell characters what to do?' (LF)

LF: Because that's what so many of those great Greek myths are about: gods tell humans to go off and do things, and then they have to, otherwise they get smoked. And we kind of laughed about it, like, 'Oh that would be really funny,' and then walked away from it….After reading all of the [Greek] plays I could get my hands on and a couple different translations, I realized there was this really interesting pattern that emerged that I'd already kind of known about: gods telling humans what to do through the oracular intervention. And I thought, 'Well that might be a really interesting way to frame that,' because audience participation in theatre can be a very tricky subject. How do you manage that in an effective way? How do you give the audience power? But not too much power, because if you give them too much power, then God only knows what you're going to end up with.

I started thinking about how could we frame that in a way that does allow for complete control over a

narrative, but doesn't make that narrative into something that is improvisational, where actors would actually have a script that they would have to learn with all of this different branching. After revisiting the *Oresteia*, which was always one of my favorite ones, I realized that of all of the Greek plays that I'd read that that had the highest frequency of, as I like to call it, 'the gods fucking with humans' ratio, because there are so many instances of gods stepping in and saying, 'You must kill your daughter if you want to go to Troy,' or 'You must kill your mom because she killed your dad because he killed your sister.'

There were these different variations of it already with the different playwrights tackling the story, and it seemed like, 'Well this might be a really interesting way to start thinking about it because there's already a natural multi-verse that exists, and, because it's a story that I've always enjoyed, this might be an interesting place to start figuring out how could we do a branched narrative where we let the audience decide what happens to these characters.'

Avoiding the theatre-maker's nightmare: audience control

PW: It's reminded me of *The Night of the Burning Pestle*, where the audience hijacks the play and the actors are at least represented as not prepared for it. But the audience knows just what it wants.

LF: And they make it happen.

PW: And they make it happen. Actors comply and allow this.

LF: I think that's a really great example of a lot of theatre-makers' nightmare when you talk about audience participation. Rob and I both did Shakespeare at Winedale, and a lot of the philosophies around performance there center on the idea that the audience is your scene partner. That's why the direct address is so prevalent out there. They're (the audience) in the scene with you, and you want to share that moment with them.

PW: And in Shakespeare, they would have been on the stage with you.

LF: But audience members can be totally unpredictable, more so than dogs on stage. You never know what they are going to do. And of course audience members have their own wishes and desires, and if you say, 'You get to decide whatever this character wants to do,' they could tell a character to do something that is against any rational or emotional objective that that character might have. So we had to find—and, again, this is why the Greeks are such a great example—a good scenario where an audience member can say, 'I want you to go jump off a cliff. Why? Because I said so.' The Greek gods, unfortunately, have that reputation of asking humans to do absurd things because they said so. It matched very well with this literary device.

RM: And it also allows us to confine with quite a lot of clarity what choices are available within the freedom that we're giving to the audience. To give that sense of agency while structuring it. Of course, in the case of *The Night of the Burning Pestle*, it's all structure. There's no actual agency; it's a theatrical sleight of hand. So where do you drop the needle? Of course we didn't want it to be a theatrical sleight of hand, though indeed we faced accusations or suspicions throughout the whole process, that, in fact, it was all a fabrication. So, how do you give the agency, reveal convincingly that you have done so, make the agency meaningful, but then structure it within enough boundaries that you can prepare and craft something that will be...finished and artful?

Limiting the audience—more like human beings than gods

PW: The Greek gods are represented as always knowing way ahead all the consequences of their

actions... Zeus planned this long ago, you know, relax, this was all planned. At the end of the *Philoctetes*, one of Sophocles' great plays, Zeus' plan for Philoctetes has been known by oracles, but Philoctetes is reluctant to fall in line and his best friend, who is dead, Herackles, comes back to tell him that he really should do it and why he should do it, but one of the main reasons why is that this was Zeus' plan. But the audience in your play makes decisions without knowing where they're going to lead. They are more like human beings than they are like gods in that way. Because we don't know— we know a little bit, because you were completely honest when you gave us a choice, the thing we chose happened, but a whole lot of stuff we didn't choose and didn't know also happened.

LF: That's true. At the beginning of the play, when Zeus invests the audience with their god power, he does make it clear that the power isn't absolute, because it's only about two hours and he does call them demigods. That says, from a playwright perspective I'd argue, Zeus always knows. And when he comes back a couple of times, he delights in the fact that he's not the one picking, but he's enjoying this process and gets to watch over everything. But he's not the one having to make those decisions.

One of the things we struggled with in the development of the show, and we definitely swung back and forth on this, was how much should we make clear when the audience is faced with a decision what's going to come of that. Whether to drop that prophecy line on 'kill him' or 'don't kill him' and make it very explicit what's going to happen. Or, the other side, shroud it in a bit more mystery so it is that double-speak that you see with some types or oracles or dramatizations of oracles. Initially, I'd had it much more vague.

RM: It's way more transparent than it used to be. And interestingly, we have received great honest feedback critiquing it from both sides. One which wanted it to be less clear, that it was too literal. Or one which was of the opinion that, 'No, actually I didn't get any agency because I didn't know what I was picking. And if I don't know what I'm picking, can you say that I have agency?' Both of these are good points.

PW: Right. If I don't know what I'm picking, I'm not really playing the part of a god. But I love being surprised.

'Well if the Greeks did it, then I can do it, too!'—the precedent for unpredictability

LF: When Clytemnestra goes to the oracle, there's a whole cast of characters, no matter which way you go, that then suddenly get introduced after her decision is made. Aegisthus suddenly shows up; Cassandra shows up. But part of that was also a structural issue that I was facing. For example, when you look at the *Oresetia*, Aegisthus—if you've never read the play before—comes out of nowhere. And at the end of *Agamemnon*, if you don't know the story ahead of time, all of a sudden at the end you realize Clytemnestra's got a lover and he only comes in at the last ten pages or so of the play. And then all of these other characters suddenly start popping up, and I felt like, 'Well, if the Greeks did it, I can do it, too!' So that turned out to be quite a bit of the logic: 'If they did it, I don't feel so bad doing the same thing.' And I was trying to keep some of those original relationships and some of the original character decisions that were made by that mythology, bringing that forward into *Deus* so that, you know, Aegisthus at the beginning is never going to get along with Agamemnon. There's too much back history for them to be best friends.

PW: Well, they have a family history as well as a personal one.

LF: Exactly. So they are trying to maintain some of those initial relationships and then of course actions happen that can adjust them, but they are never going to stray—hopefully, at least what I thought was—too far from those original relationships that existed in that source material.

PW: One thing that struck me about the production was, as various and as unexpected as the scene shifts were, they were never improbable.

LF: That's good to hear.

PW: It was not surprising to see Agamemnon kill his children—his other children. He'd done it to Iphigenia with a different kind of reason—and that was just the version I saw, in which he killed his children.

LF: You saw what we nickname 'the darkest timeline' because of course in that timeline he (Agamemnon) kills both of his children, his other children, in a fit of madness. And it wasn't an intentional death like Iphigenia's.

PW: That's right. But you can understand how he gets to that point.

LF: Absolutely.

PW: And, of course, those of us who know Greek plays know about Herakles coming back from the wars and killing all of his children.

LF: You identify one of the things that I tried to do very intentionally with all of the timelines. I tried to keep any story that happened in that world of Greek drama, where you see these tropes, so that you never ended up with a timeline where all of a sudden there's aliens. That doesn't make sense. You can have Furies because Furies existed in that world. You know, it's actually quite an intentional mimic: the killing of Electra by Agamemnon is straight out of *The Bacchae*, but all of the genders have been flipped. So instead of a mother killing her son, it's a father killing his daughter.

PW: In a state of madness.

LF: In a state of madness. And then somebody pointing out, 'Look at what you've done.'

PW: Well, of course, that's also in the *Herakles*: he doesn't realize it's his children he's killed until somebody points it out to him and he recovers from the madness. Aristotle and other ancient and modern critics have said, with some reason, that the *deus ex machina* when it's used in a play is a dramatic flaw, that it shouldn't be used. And Aristotle says the miraculous should be, I would say, off-plot. If there's going to be a miracle, it should happen before the staged part of the action. And so, people praise Sophocles because there's no *deus ex machina*. And Sophocles is very careful to sequester the mythical miracles out of the plot so that they're nothing to do with the action shown on stage. So, for example, Orestes in Sophocles' version has not been told to kill his mother. He has gone to the oracle before the play begins, and he has said to the oracle, 'How can I kill Mom' And the oracle gives him some advice—'Do it by stealth; don't go with an army.'—and that's how Orestes does it, but the god didn't tell him to do it. He was determined to do it already.

RM: Interesting.

PW: And so, Aristotle, and again, these other critics, have admired this style of playwriting that doesn't have a *deus ex machina* because it's more humanistic. Because the scenes all grow out of human interaction and are humanly explained. But the difference between, say, Sophocles and Euripides, who uses the gods a lot, is like the difference between Thucydides, who writes utterly godless history, and Herodotus, who has gods running through it all the time. So the Persian Wars are explained, in Herodotus, by Zeus. Zeus was determined they would happen, and so he sent dreams to the Persian king, and they kept coming. And the king had his counselor sleep in the same room, and he had the dream. Zeus was determined that

the Persians would come to grief in this war. He was going to make sure it happened. But there is nothing like that in Thucydides. He's got it all at a human level. And I think for Aristotle and those critics, the criticism of *deus ex machina* wasn't so much humanistic as it was about plot. Aristotle wanted the plot to be plausible, and he focused on that. It all had to be plausible, which is why he hated the *Iphigenia in Aulis*. He criticizes *Iphigenia in Aulis* because in the first half of the play Iphigenia is opposed to being slaughtered for the sake of the army, and she goes off stage, and she comes back a bit later having totally converted, now she wants to be slaughtered for the sake of the army, but there's no explanation. How did this happen? Well, maybe the gods visited her. Who knows? But she's almost a different character when she comes back on. Aristotle thinks this is very bad playwriting.

LF: It's cheating.

PW: Well, it seems to be cheating, though I imagine Greek audiences accepted it because it was considered one of his (Euripides') better plays, and it's a very interesting play. (You have two Iphigenia plays, one in Aulis and one in Tauris. The one in Tauris Aristotle liked a lot. That's the one where she is reunited with Orestes.) I don't know whether you thought of this as a problem, but you didn't allow the audience 'ex machina'—we were appearing out of technology; we were 'ex machina' with the technology—but you didn't allow the audience 'ex machina' to do anything improbable. You had it designed in such a way that, I think, no matter what choices we made, the resulting play would have had a structure which made dramatic sense. And that's a tour de force of writing. I don't know how you quite managed to do that. It was very impressive.

LF: Thank you for saying that. I think you're right, because personally I prefer Sophocles. I think of all of the playwrights, I prefer his plays, and especially his *Electra* was a huge influence for me on how to think about those characters, and that's always going to be my favorite play.

Genre fluidity and power of the audience

PW: I get the sense that modern audiences and therefore directors, producers, and so on, don't want anything that pushes against the lines of genre. They want to know what kind of play they're going to see. And they certainly want to know what kind of movie they are going to see. You can't play around with their expectations. People will come out of a Terry Malick film absolutely furious because it didn't fit their genre expectations. Had they just watched, they would have seen something beautiful, but they're not willing to do that. They want it to be of a certain kind.

RM: There's even public-funding, grant-winning punishment given for pushing at some of these boundaries. For example, if you were a theatre company that doesn't know who you are and basically does the same thing every time, you were seen as a company that doesn't know who you are and you'll get punished in grant-giving. So the more narrowly you define yourself, the more successful you'll be in terms of funding, which seems to me a bit of a tragedy behind the scenes that we're not nourishing vital, challenging, and elbow-throwing outside of your comfort zone.

LF: But I think about works of art in any genre that do that and people's reaction to that: they tend to be delighted. A movie like *Birdman*, what is that movie? It's cleaned up how many different types of awards?

PW: But it hasn't cleaned up in the box office.

LF: No, but that's going to be the movie that everybody is talking about, and closer to home, we were talking about them earlier, the Rude Mechs [the Rude Mechanicals, an ensemble-based theatre collective from Austin, TX]. How could you possibly categorize the type of theatre they're doing? And they are getting accolades from all over the world and actually traveling around the world doing that kind of art.

And sure, I don't think you could actually replicate that special magic that they have, but there's something in it.

LW: Why do you think that's happening right now?

RM: In terms of Rude Mechanicals and *Birdman*?

LW: Yes.

LF: There was also a special kind of reaction that we were getting at *Deus* as well from audience members. Even people who thought that they knew what they were walking into, I don't think expected what they got. Some people would ask me beforehand, 'Well, is this what you're doing a drama, right?' And I would say, 'Well, it's very funny and there's quite a bit of dance and music and all kinds of other things, but I don't think I would want to categorize it as a drama.'

PW: You know, just to get back to Greek tragedy, Greek tragedy very often has comic scenes. And a number of Greek tragedies have happy endings or endings that the audience would have thought were happy. So in Sophocles, both the *Philoctetes* and *Ajax* essentially have happy endings. Problems are resolved in the way that we want. In the *Antigone*, there's a hilarious scene with a guard making fun of Creon. *The Bacchae*, which is the most grisly of Greek tragedies, has more than one comic scene in it. And I'm sure the audience laughed. They didn't say, 'I came to see a tragedy, this scene is funny, I'm walking out!' But I wonder, in considering the various possibilities for the *Oresteia*, did you think of introducing comic scenes or did you think of one possible outcome that you might regard as happy?

LF: Well, we had a couple of happy endings.

RM: And before you talk more about that I just want to mention that, in fact, so we did a few beta tests to both trot out Liz's writing ... but then also for different approaches to the technology just to see what it could bear, and one of the primary pieces of feedback we got in reading number two out of three was, 'Hey, that flair for the comic you've got in this version, more of that.' And so between that reading and the subsequent versions, Liz really consciously started at intervals within the story, saying, 'This needs a punch of comedy here.' And so it became a structural adjustment that you were making.

LF: That was a very wonderful piece of feedback that I'd forgotten about. There was a very conscious shift towards comedy.

LW: The more comedy you have, the more people can bear to hear.

LF: The really terrible things, yes. But to get back to your question about happy endings, on a closer timeline to where the night you saw ended, Cassandra and Orestes get married. That was one of our happier endings. Electra survives as well.

PW: Did Agamemnon and Clytemnestra reconcile?

LF: Unfortunately, no. That was something that structurally I was never able to get around because of where that choice fell.

PW: Yes, I can see that.

LF: One must fall no matter what happens, but there were some very happy endings, that one being what I thought of as always one of the happiest. In that timeline as well you get to see Pylades. Pylades and Orestes would arrive back in Argos, and we actually spent a lot of time talking with the actor who played Orestes, Chase Brewer, because of course Orestes shows up about two-thirds of the way through the

story and in all of the timelines, his character was very different, sometimes a very, very dark, very moody, very angry young man. But on that side, because of the other events that had to happen, it was one of the happier versions of Orestes because we had set him in a world where he wasn't sent away and alone for a long time or he had been raised with a friend and companion in a happier environment. So then he came back not by himself but with a friend who he had grown up with and thought of as a brother. So then we were able to have some happier endings on that one, including one where he is able to reconcile everything that has happened to his family and to Cassandra's family, and the two of them get married and become king and queen of Argos.

RM: And end holding hands in this almost coronation moment of glory. It's quite a beautiful moment.

Performance, Politics, Pedagogy: a Tribute to Mary-Kay Gamel

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Mary-Kay Gamel

Performance, politics, and pedagogy represent key themes that resonate through the theatrical productions of Mary-Kay Gamel, who retired from teaching at UC Santa Cruz in 2015. These concerns have informed her creative work as director and translator since 1985. Mary-Kay is indefatigable, and her profound collegial support, particularly of younger scholars, has been deeply appreciated by many, myself included. This and the four articles that follow (*Didaskalia* 13.07-11) originated in a panel intended to celebrate her and her body of work, held at the annual meeting of the Society of Classical Studies in San Francisco in January, 2016.

I first learned of Mary-Kay's productions before I met her. Jim Svendsen, Professor of Classics and Theatre at the University of Utah and director of the Classical Greek Theater Festival, told me about her 1990 production of Euripides' *Electra* (part of *The Elektra Project*, in which she staged both Aeschylus' and Euripides' accounts of the story within a few months). The Euripidean play was set in a kind of trailer park, with the trailer of the *autourgos* (a man who works on his own, without slaves) to whom Electra has been married surrounded by the cliff walls of a granite quarry. The trailer—old, rusted, and implicitly as far from the palace of Argos as the modern American West—instantly suggests something of the class differences and economic uncertainty that inform Euripides' mythic innovation. This stunning mental image still resonates with me as emblematic of what Mary-Kay works to accomplish in her productions. In this case, it offered a spectacular re-interpretation of Euripides while also revealing a deep truth within the play. The moment represents the spirit of the text (as she sees it) in a contemporary American idiom.

Mary-Kay has recently provided her own account of her emergence as a theatre artist (Gamel 2017): what she refers to as her "call from Dionysus." Prior to that call, she worked on Roman epic and elegy. In 1972, she completed her PhD dissertation at UC Berkeley in Comparative Literature, "Playfulness and Seriousness in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*", and she established herself as a teacher and a scholar at her beloved UC Santa Cruz. The conversion that began with her first translation for the stage, *Medea* in 1985, created an irresistible theatrical force. She has been involved in more than 40 productions, translating and directing all the extant ancient playwrights.1 These include *Effie and the Barbarians* (1995; her version of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, remounted in 2010), *Eye on Apollo* (1996; her version of Euripides' *Ion*, remounted in 2009), and *The Buzzzz!!!!* (2006; her version of Aristophanes' *Wasps*). Her performances typically involved student actors, providing them with a grounding in and a love for ancient theatre. This substantial body of work was recognized when she won the 2009 Outreach Prize from the (then) American Philological Association for her theatre productions.

In time, as her theories of adaptation developed, Mary-Kay's performances became more independent of their source material. She has also begun to document her changing attitude toward adaptation of classical material in publications (see Gamel 2002, 2010, and 2013). A special issue of the *American Journal*

of Philology in 2002 celebrated *The Julie Thesmo Show*, her adaptation of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* to the context of an American television talk show. Her distinctive approach to ancient theatre has meant that she has been invited to re-mount several of her productions at academic institutions as far away as New Zealand. For many scholars of classical theatre, Mary-Kay Gamel has modeled the integration of performance into teaching and into research.

Additionally, Mary-Kay grounds her productions in a wider academic context, somehow finding money to invite scholars for a mini-academic festival. It is through such occasions that I have been able to see several of her productions. When I was working on my book on Roman Comedy, she invited me to attend her 2003 production of *Eunuchus*. As the male characters left the stage at the play's conclusion, the walls of Thais' house were backlit to reveal silhouettes of the women left behind inside. Later, when I was working on Euripides' *Helen*, I was invited in 2008 to see her production of that play (*Helen of Egypt*), which sticks to the Euripidean text almost line-for-line until the appearance of the final messenger, when the text swerves wildly, with the escaping lovers caught and brought back for a final encounter with Theoclymenus. The jarring effect twisted the mythic variant in an unexpected direction, keeping even the savviest Euripidean scholars guessing at where the play would turn next. Finally, I was able to see her 2011 production of *Orestes Terrorist*, which coincided with a discussion of New Music that Mary-Kay was organizing with Mark Griffith at Berkeley (and was reviewed at Macintosh 2011).

As an actor, I have been privileged to be directed by her twice, first as the Young Housman in a rehearsed reading of Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love*, performed at the meeting of the American Philological Association in Philadelphia in 2002. It was the first such conference performance in what has now become a tradition at the annual meetings. I went on to direct the Canadian premiere of the play in 2009, which wouldn't have happened without that earlier experience. I also played Einstein (Plautus' character Sagaristio) in rehearsed readings of Amy Richlin's version of *Persa*, called *Iran Man* (Richlin 2005), initially staged at the fourth *Feminism and the Classics* conference in 2004, held in Tucson, Arizona, and then again at the 2005 APA in Boston. Mary-Kay's productions can be revelatory, challenging their audiences to re-assess elements and unveiling new ways that actors can make ancient scripts compelling.

In this tribute we have four papers on Mary-Kay's productions and the themes they evoke. In the first essay (Number 8 in this volume), Amy R. Cohen explores Mary-Kay's 2011 production of *Ajax* in the light of the need for student productions, which are often still omitted from published accounts within reception studies.[2] Next in Number 9, Christopher Bungard examines Mary-Kay's production of Terence's *Eunuchus*, which was produced in conjunction with Hrotsvit of Gandersheim's play, *The Conversion of Thais*. In the third contribution (Number 10), Timothy Moore explores a recent political performance of *Antigone* produced in the light of the 2014 Ferguson Riots. Finally, Ruby Blondell offers a response (Number 11) to the previous papers, returning to the nature of "authenticity" within Gamel's work. In different ways, we have all benefitted from the friendship and theatrical vision offered to us by Mary-Kay Gamel.

notes

Thanks are due to the contributors, to Didaskalia, to the anonymous readers, and above all to Mary-Kay, friend and inspiration. Thank you, Mary-Kay.

[1] The Medea translation was published originally in 1995 (with subsequent reprints), but other scripts have yet to be published.

[2] Marshall 2010: 174–75 identifies Mary-Kay's work as an exception in this tendency. The two major studies of modern American productions of ancient drama do not engage with university or amateur productions at all, even though it is these that often engage most fully with the ancient text (see Hartigan

1995, Foley 2012).

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Raising the Stakes: Mary-Kay Gamel and the Academic Stage

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In the spring of my first year at Stanford, I somehow got myself to the University of California Santa Cruz to see *Iphigenia at Aulis.* I remember sitting on a hill, feeling the urgency of the actors' entering and exiting through the audience, and the sense that Euripides was suddenly talking to us all about the Gulf War, even though it was with words from 2,500 years ago. That May day in 1991 solidified my determination to make the realities of Greek drama the center of my work, and on that day graduate school came alive, even though I wasn't at my own institution. Mary-Kay Gamel and her students were showing me what could be done and what *should* be done with ancient drama: stage it.

Video clip 1: youtu.be/o7lC3shMCQ8 from the opening scene of* The Ajax Project *at Christopher Newport University, 2011

Mary-Kay and I like to marvel at the ways we sit in different corners of the ancient theatrical playground while both making claims to lively authenticity. We both came to directing as part of our teaching, and we both have done most of our work on college campuses. I do original-practices, outdoor, masked productions in a large Greek theatre. I tend to hew closely to the original texts, in the best translations I can find or commission, in the belief that following the rules the playwrights followed gets us closer to understanding what they had to say to their audiences and what they have to say to ours. Gamel, on the other hand, plays in a different mode: she finds a modern take on the ideas that an cient plays suggest, adapts the plays to modern staging conventions, and engages her audience with a modern message. Sometimes her productions use elements of ancient conventions, but often they do not.

***Image 1: Flyer for* The Julie Thesmo Show**

In the version of Sophocles' *Ajax* that Mary-Kay Gamel devised and directed with Jana Adamitis at Christopher Newport University in 2011, Ajax was seen (in silhouette) [video clip 1] to slaughter not sheep and cattle but rather human prisoners of war. With that change, and by setting *The Ajax Project* in the twenty-first-century American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Gamel and her collaborators changed the terms of the play and reframed its issues of honor. When asked at a talkback the reason for the different victims, Gamel exclaimed, "Raise the stakes!" Those words expressed the theatrical philosophy she embraces, but also her effect on academic productions of ancient drama.

Image 2: reporters accost Helen in* Helen of Egypt, *UC Santa Cruz, 2008

Her answer irked me at the time, and the reframing of the play's issues of honor was and is a problem for me. Mary-Kay and her company departed from Sophocles' subject. The show was a powerful play, but it

wasn't Sophocles. Even though the production was called "The Ajax *Project,*" the audience went away thinking that they'd seen *Sophocles's* play, not an adaptation. Making Ajax a wanton killer of people instead of cattle turns him into a war criminal and implicates Athena in the crime. The human victims change entirely the terms by which we judge Ajax's suicide and by which his soldiers and the other generals judge him. "Raise the stakes" does not satisfy me as a sufficient rationale for such a change. In a published interview, however, Gamel says that her "main mission is to experiment with t hese plays."1 From that point of view, the experiment was clearly successful: the audience was entranced, the company was entirely invested, and we all left the theatre unable to stop thinking about the play, because it spoke in Sophoclean terms to modern anxieties, if not to Sophoclean ones.

Image 3: the divine look down on the mortal mess in* Orestes Terrorist *at UC Santa Cruz, 2011

Video Clip 2: youtu.be/tD9hgCJ3i0c The concluding scenes of Effie and the Barbarians

The Ajax Project developed ideas seen in Bryan Doerries's Theatre of War series: both projects used Sophocles, and *Ajax* in particular, to address the hardships of the modern warrior.2 *The Ajax Project* also used techniques that appeared later in Aquila Theatre Company's *Herakles*:3 Gamel, Adamitis, and their students used the words of modern veterans to rewrite the choral passages of the play, and Aquila used video interviews of veterans to form the choral parts of their production. Both performances succeeded, with much the same thought and technique, in insisting that we understand the tragedies in terms of our modern world, and both performances also insisted that fifth-century Athenian drama still gives us ways to confront human realities.

Video Clip 3: youtu.be/t7_GZyCE4gA the concluding scene of Alcestisperformed at Feminism and Classics VI, 2012

Although I remain troubled by Gamel's using Sophocles as a jumping-off point rather than staging *his* play, I admire *The Ajax Project* as part of a continuing conversation with , and influence upon, the professional stage. While Gamel has educated generations of students by having them *do* Greek drama (experiential learning at its best), she has also made academic productions of ancient works vital to the continuum of modern thinking—artistic, practical, and philosophical—on theatre. She has raised the stakes—or shown how high the stakes are—in academic drama. In this realm, even if we don't follow her specific path, we should follow her lead.

Academics tend to feel defensive about the stakes of our dramatic endeavors. We work with newly trained or untrained actors and often with inexperienced designers and other young collaborators. We worry that our productions will be amateur not only in the technical sense: that our shows lack professional polish and therefore must be merely pedagogical exercises for our students. We are anxious that their wider importance fades as fast as the cram notes for a chemistry exam. In other productions, we have a different anxiety: we are collaborating with much more experienced artists, and if we have been trained outside of formal drama programs, we feel like imposters with little to contribute. Theater professionals can treat us as hobbyists or raise an eyebrow at our freedom from their commercial

concerns about box-office receipts, salaries, and survival.

Mary-Kay Gamel's extraordinary career as a director, translator, adapter, and dramaturg, however, has proven that the adventurous work being done in colleges and universities cannot be dismissed as mere class projects. Her bold adaptations have always spoken to their times, addressing the social and political issues of their day in clear and direct terms. To name just a few: In *The Julie Thesmo Show* [image 1], she addressed women's issues; in *Helen of Egypt*, she foregrounded the role of the media and celebrity culture [image 2]; in *Orestes Terrorist*, she explored exultation in revenge in a ruined world and the gods' indifference to our troubles [image 3].

She has an instinctive suspicion of masked, ancient-dress productions, detectible in the assumptions behind her *Didaskalia* review of a Getty double feature of *The Woman from Samos* and *Casina* (emphasis mine):

> Such careful attention to archaeological detail might suggest that this production was just an exercise in antiquarianism. But shortly after the show began any doubts about its theatrical effectiveness vanished. The combination of authenticity and theatricality made for dynamic tension, not lifeless formalism, and this fruitful tension ran throughout the shows.4

She insists that a play has more going on than correctness:

> The plays are complex and have hugely important themes— democracy vs. tyranny, gender conflicts, conflict between the generations. I think it's important for all the participants to feel invested, too, in what's going on, and that some issues are being addressed. . . . I'd rather have the audience be annoyed, offended or indignant than simply entertained.5

She provokes, and in doing so strikes us hard with the realization of what theatre, and ancient theatre, can do. My objections to her choices in *The Ajax Project* are a result of that provocation: she annoyed the originalist in me and so provoked me into an indignant articulation of what I think Sophocles was doing that her production did not. The stakes raised for me were different from the stakes for less-initiated members of audience, but Gamel's choices still made me engage with the ancient work at a heightened level.

The Ajax Project is one among many productions demonstrating Gamel's awareness that the ancient playwrights were "famous for offering alternatives to traditional narratives" and that she feels comfortable taking "a step further in interpreting Euripides' script."6 She framed her *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*—renamed *Effie and the Barbarians*—with the events of *Iphigeneia at Aulis*: Agamemnon's daughter begs for her life, and the soldiers begin to take her away. But when, in a freeze-frame moment, we were transported to her other world, her other play, we rooted for her and her brother Orestes to recognize each other and then, when they did, cheered on their escape plan. I forgot all about the dreadful forces that had landed her among the barbarians. When the frame seemed to freeze again, and the escape became suddenly the conclusion of the sacrifice [video clip 2], the shift took my breath away by undermining the happy ending in a way that struck me as quite Euripidean indeed. In her 2012 adaptation of *Alcestis* in collaboration with Mark Damen, Allison Futrell, and John Given, Gamel grabbed the famously troubling end of the play and wouldn't let go: Admetus appeals to Alcestis to return home and be happy, while Death silently invites her to go back with him. [video clip 3].

In the performance at the Feminism in Classics VI conference, the audience was asked to weigh in on what Alcestis should do. The question was, brilliantly, both a clear acknowledgement that Alcestis has no choice and an ironic continuation of that withholding of agency, since Alcestis still had no voice. Until, that is, the moment she broke into song with her decision—left up to the actor, Jenna

Chrol—and chose to "defy the normative" and start a new life on her own. I think any audience would be thrilled by hearing Alcestis's voice at the end of the play, but for that specialized classics audience it was certainly the perfect way to raise and resolve the stakes of Euripides' strange drama.

In these examples, Mary-Kay Gamel trusted that the ancient playwrights' works are strong enough to survive her conversation with and conversion of them for her time. I believe she also knows, trusts, and hopes that other scholar-practicitioners will engage with and enact those works in entirely different ways for their times and with their own performance philosophies. She enables that engagement and the continuing strength of the ancient works, in fact, by making performance opportunities a priority with colleagues as well as with students.

The omission of the *Alcestis* I just mentioned (as well as *The Invention of Love* at the 2002 meeting of the American Philological Association) from the list of Gamel's productions provided to me again bespeaks our anxiety about claiming importance for the plays we produce in academia: we don't include the theatre work we do with each other as part of our dramatic effect on the larger world, because we imagine the stakes are low. We sometimes think of these performances as the comic relief for our too-serious conferences, or as inside jokes made to amuse one another, but they are much more than that. These shows make waves, not just ripples, through us into our classrooms, our students' understanding, and the world. I guarantee that they reach more people and provoke more thinking on the issues they raise than any paper panel does. Mary-Kay brought that understanding to the APA with *The Invention of Love*, which prompted the whole series of CAMP shows.[7] *Alcestis*, in both its 2012 performance and its restaging at SCS in 2013, posed questions that could not be posed otherwise. Yes, our special insider audience allowed us a deep conversation with the play. But that's a conversation that we then share with our students, year after year, giving them a stake in the interpretation of the plays that will inform our next productions and those in the wider world.

What Mary-Kay has done is vital for the ripples and waves it has sent into the world, and she has raised the dramatic stakes of academic work on ancient theatre. By recognizing the critical importance of performance, not just the idea of or study of performance in the ancient world but the *actual performing* of the ancient world, she has helped to foster generations of students and collaborators who have become teachers and directors and actors and translators in their own right, passing on those values to yet more descendants. But not just teachers and directors and actors and translators: her productions have given the power of the plays to students who never again acted in a play or hammered together a flat, but whose understanding of the world is forever changed by the experience of working on a Greek or Roman play.

And then there are the audiences. Modern professional drama certainly produces ancient plays often, and in ways that Mary-Kay has influenced or would celebrate. But her student audiences and ours may never see one of those shows: they are too expensive, too distant, too little a part of their adult lives. Academic production is sometimes the only theatre that Americans will see, and often the only ancient drama Americans will see. Sometimes the effect of those encounters is the result of specific modern issues evoked by our take on a play. A perhaps more frequent or more important message is the very idea that art can speak to life and that life should listen. The ancient playwrights have something to say to us: old words have meaning, and all the more when brought to life.

Gamel's work and the academic theatre she has inspired bring life to American theatre's engagement with the ancients: as much as anyone, we in the academic theatre discover new meanings, new resonances, new life in the plays. The academic theatre makes some of those discoveries perhaps *because* it is free from commercial exigencies. Because we reach audiences no one else can, audiences that may never have the opportunity to see professional theatre, the stakes of academic theatre are very high indeed.

We may never know all the lines of influence from Mary-Kay Gamel's work at UCSC to drama being produced in other colleges and on the professional stage, but I am both witness and evidence that her work—even when I wrangle or disagree with it—has been and will continue to be a foundation and inspiration for the vitality of ancient drama on the American stage. I call on others to celebrate the critical importance of academic performance, to stake their own claims of engagement with the ancient playwrights, and to raise the next generations of scholar-practitioners to inherit Gamel's legacy.

notes

Many thanks to Mike Lippman and Toph Marshall for their advice on this piece. The infelicities and inconsistencies that remain are all mine.

[1] Gamel, quoted in www.sju.edu/int/academics/cas/resources/effieandbarbarians/source/Effie_Article.pdf (accessed January 2016) She goes on to say, "…and show the world how great they are," and I continue to doubt that you're showing how great the play itself is if you feel you much change something central about the play to make it great.

[2] See Didaskalia, 8.17 and the Theater of War website.

[3] See Didaskalia 10.5, Didaskalia 10.6, and the New York Times review.

[4] "Casina and Samia in Malibu, California, U.S.A." Didaskalia 2.1 (1995)

[5] Gamel, quoted in www.sju.edu/int/academics/cas/resources/effieandbarbarians/source/Effie_Article.pdf (accessed January 2016)

[6] Program for Effie and the Barbarians. https://www.sju.edu/int/academics/cas/resources/effieandbarbarians/source/Effie_Program.pdf (accessed January 2016)

[7]Another indication that we devalue these performances is the lack of a public repository for their records. The members of the Committee on Ancient and Modern Performance pass down a list from chair to chair, but neither the committee nor the Society for Classical Studies has established a way to share that information.

Navigating Tricky Topics: The Benefits of Performance Pedagogy

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Performance confronts an audience with a text that demands a response. Students in my classrooms frequently refer to anything that we read that does not look like a math or science textbook as a novel, and I believe this misunderstanding underscores a fundamental problem in the way students read literature, i.e., they read the poems of Catullus, the histories of Tacitus, and the plays of Plautus as simply stuff written by ancient people. By shunting the material to antiquity, students may dismiss the ability of these texts to speak to their modern experiences. I propose that asking students to approach ancient texts through a kind of double-vision facilitates student-driven understanding of how these texts challenge and/or support modern ideas. Since ancient playwrights, as Mary-Kay Gamel notes, "wrote for performance, not for reading,"[1] plays are especially useful in exploring tricky topics where ancient and modern attitudes may collide, such as rape. Through performance, we can present students with a text that insists on discussion, and through a double-visioned approach, we can encourage students to probe ancient attitudes while thinking more critically about their own.

Video Clip 1:* *www.youtube.com/watch?v=zROnUgbPUUg

Video Clip 2:* *www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMFTgtCSrKg

Before delving into the classroom activity that will be the focus of this paper, I need to clarify what I mean by double-visioned approach. Modern students, lacking the cultural background of the ancient audience, might be confused by the reactions of characters when those reactions do not align with modern expectations. In order to examine the intentions of the ancient playwright with his ancient audience in mind, students need a window into that world.[2] To open it, I borrow heavily from Amy Richlin's techniques.[3] She gives students a series of potential spectatorsfrom a wide variety of social statuses (e.g., a magistrate and his wife, a *thermopolium* owner, freed slaves, wet nurses). While each audience member is described only briefly, the whole series of sketches provides the picture of a richly complex audience through which students can explore issues of class, race, and gender.

Since my aim is to get students thinking outside of their 21st-century selves, I assign them roles from Richlin's activity randomly, without trying to match the sex of student and character. For example, it may be helpful for a white male student from the suburbs to have to think about what it would be like to be a freed, working-class woman. Once the roles are assigned and students have had a chance to ask questions about any details in their roles that they may find confusing (e.g. what is a *thermopolium*?), I tell the students to take 10–15 minutes to introduce themselves to each other, with the purpose of giving them a fuller sense of the status and experience of their fellow audience members. This is a crucial step, since it encourages students to see each other not as the modern classmates they have been sitting with for several weeks, but rather as a differently complex collection of people from ancient Rome. They can now react to a play both from their own perspective and that of an ancient audience.

My "Roman Perspectives," a general-education course attracting students from across the university, includes a unit on Roman Comedy in which students view, adapt, and perform scenes from Plautus and Terence. They first read Terence's *Eunuchus* to begin thinking about how to handle tricky aspects of other plays in their own performance.During the play, the *adulescens* Chaerea is smitten when he catches a fleeting glance of Pamphila, currently a slave in the house of the *meretrix* Thais (293–297). Acting on a slave's joking suggestion that he dress up as his brother's eunuch to gain access to the girl (370–390), Chaerea finds himself alone with her. He takes "inspiration" from a painting of Jupiter and Danae, and rapes the unsuspecting Pamphila (584–606).

The theme of rape is not uncommon in the Greek New Comedies that Plautus and Terence adapted, but the fragmentary evidence indicates that no rapes happen during the play, let alone in broad daylight and without the excuse of drunkenness.4 The rape in *Eunuchus* is also noteworthy for being described as violent (e.g., 643–667), whereas others serve merely as background, without circumstantial detail (e.g., *Hec.* 382–384).5 For Sharon James, Terence is interested in showing "the privileged perspective of the citizen male, who is in a position to consider people in terms of their utility for himself."6 This is a perspective that many modern students find rightfully problematic, but given the frequency of Title IX violations on college campuses (1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men are sexually assaulted while in college), not as alien as we might like it to be.7

Before continuing with my discussion of my classroom activity, it is important to emphasize a few points raised by the insightful works of Madeleine Kahn, Sharon James, and Sanjaya Thakur on the issue of talking about rape in the Classics classroom.8 We do a disservice to our students by not acknowledging the presence of rape in the texts we assign, and it falls equally to male and female professors to address these issues in class. As Thakur notes, "although an absence of male voices addressing [issues of rape and sexual violence] might not in any way be a validation of them, some students might interpret silence in such a way."9 If we ask our students to engage with texts involving rape, we all have an obligation to explain our belief in the importance of doing so.

In her recommendations for beginning such a discussion, James emphasizes the importance of students' respectfully engaging in dialogue aimed at better understanding how the ancient text treats rape (e.g., focus on social versus psychological consequences, questions of responsibility).10 Once students have a solid understanding of the range of ancient attitudes, she encourages students to be critical of positions privileged by such attitudes, particularly the view that non-citizens can rightly be exploited by the citizen class.11

Such an approach dovetails with Kahn's reflection on a class discussion of rape in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She recognized that her students were responding to the text in very different ways, from complete rejection to relative indifference. From that understanding, she could push the students to think very concretely about how we approach literature from other times and cultures. As she asked her class,

> "Do we try to read as if we were like the author, and a part of his culture? … Or do we read from our positions as late-twentieth-century women and try to reconcile our worldview with the one being presented in the Metamorphoses?"12

By engaging our students in the double-visioned process of understanding the ancient lens and critiquing it from the modern, we can ultimately help students understand that, as Kahn suggests, "meaning isn't hidden in a text, lying there unchanging and waiting to be discovered. Rather it is created between the reader and the text."13 We can help students understand their role in responding to the thoughts of the ancients, encouraging students to think about why we still find these old texts useful in a very different world.

The rape in *Eunuchus* is particularly troubling for both an ancient and modern audience, but for very different reasons. When students are encouraged to consider this text with a double vision, they are better able to recognize the tensions between ancient and modern thinking. For example, an ancient master might focus on the rape of the slave girl as an issue of property damage. An ancient father might be worried about how the rape would impact the possibility of a good marriage for his daughter.14 Students, thinking from their own perspectives, always find it troubling that the girl is compelled to marry her rapist, focusing on the psychological consequences of rape for the victim.

The rape in *Eunuchus* is so troubling that it also causes problems for anyone wishing to stage the play for a modern audience, forcing students think about how to treat such topics in the plays they will adapt and perform in class. Niall Slater has suggested three ways of presenting Terence's plays for a modern audience.One approach is to accentuate characters who express their disapproval of the aspects of the play that a modern audience might find troubling. For example, as Slater notes, Paul Godfrey's 1996 adaptation of *Hecyra* in London has the *adulescens* Pamphilus express joy in his newly discovered fatherhood at the same time the *meretrix* Bacchis says, "You're a rapist!"15 But, as Slater argues, "the problem with this strategy is that Terence disappears and is replaced by what the adapter thinks of Terence."16 Another option is to have the actors step aside and comment on the action of the play, but this method ultimately serves to denounce the action on stage as foreign to modern sensibilities. Instead, Slater suggests that we write new prologues for Terence's plays in order to condition the audience to embrace the notion that "they *play* a role which may entail the assumption of a persona and even a set of values which are not inherently their own."17 I would suggest another way to play on the tension between ancient and modern attitudes towards the rape, an opportunity offered by the staging of the play.

I begin by showing my class parts of a recording of Mary-Kay Gamel's 2003 production of *Eunuchus*. Watching the recording, students see the characters come to life on stage, and they have an opportunity to think about how the staging can influence audience responses. When the tall and boyish Chaerea emerges from Thais' house, having just raped Pamphila, he dances about the stage singing, "Man, I'm hip," to the tune of Devo's "Whip It" before telling his friend Antipho about his "adventures" inside. [Video 1] Since it is not yet clear what he has done, the music induces the audience to view the world through Chaerea's "joyful" eyes. In response to the recording, one student was surprised at how much she enjoyed Chaerea's discussion of his scheme and how he got the costume. Instead of focusing on what he was saying, the student was drawn in by the actor's commitment to Chaerea's delight in telling his friend what just happened.

This identification with stage characters is particularly powerful in *Eunuchus*, one of whose leading characters is an unabashed rapist. A student from my class asked, "Is [Chaerea's discussion of the rape] disturbing because it is disturbing, or is it disturbing because I in the audience am coming to understand how the character understands their world and the joy of the problem for the character?" While I would certainly not condone Chaerea's actions, there is value in students being able to understand his mindset and the cultural assumptions that inform his joy in the harm he has done to Pamphila.18

When I show students the recording, I ask them to view the scenes both from their own perspectives and from those of the ancient audience members from Richlin's exercise. We split the discussion itself, starting with reactions from the ancient audience, so that students first take the play on its own terms before critiquing it from their modern viewpoint. My aim is to encourage them not to privilege one perspective over the other, but rather to understand the tension between the two.

This approach electrifies the discussion of the end of Gamel's production, where ancient and modern perspectives collide. The men exit for a party, congratulating themselves on the arrangements that they have made about the women, and a male slave looks briefly back to Thais' house. The audience can see

into the house, where on the second floor the women stand in various postures of grief and annoyance. [Video 2] Reflecting on this choice, Gamel notes, "it seemed amply clear to those working on our production that Terence was offering audiences a critical perspective."19 The audience is presented with a choice about whether to focus on the joy of the men or the realization that their joy is not shared by all involved. Discussing this scene from both perspectives, ancient and modern, enables a more nuanced consideration of Terence's parting message.

When students focus on the ancient audience, they tend to view the ending through the lens of the joyous men. A freeborn girl has been discovered by her family, has been saved from being wronged in a life of prostitution, and has found a husband. The young lover Phaedria gets to enjoy his beloved Thais even more thanks to the deal brokered with his father, and the soldier is allowed to think he is being loved while really being used for his money. The happy ending words of the text find their emotional counterpart in the students' understanding of the production.

Viewing the play from a modern perspective, a few of my students suggested that Gamel's conclusion highlighted an internal tension they felt between their sympathy with the men's exuberance and their dissatisfaction with male hegemony. This frustration was aggravated by the fact that some students saw in Thais a symbol of female empowerment, deftly toying with her various lovers in order to advance Pamphila's lot in life – the kind of woman who, if she were in a Plautus play, might determine her own fate.20 For these students, Gamel's ending reinforced James' sense of the Terentian play as a space where free males exert the privilege to use the non-free and non-male for their own ends. One student suggested that Terence's ending says that women can play all the games they want, but the "freedom" to do so is limited by men's power to end those games whenever they choose. At the beginning of *Eunuchus*, Phaedria may have agreed to Thais' request that he lie low so she could cheat the soldier (179–188), but he does so simply out of fondness for Thais. At the end of the play, Phaedria can broker an agreement to share Thais with the soldier without requiring her consent.

This simple exercise of having students watch a recorded performance of an ancient play through double vision puts them in a better position to critique their own culture. The students have to think outside of themselves first, understanding an alien viewpoint on its own terms. Having done so, they can think more critically about their own gut reactions to the ancient material, knowing that different responses are possible. It is precisely through this double-visioned process that we can best encourage our students to challenge attitudes that perpetuate problematic aspects of our own world, such as rape culture.

Discussions in response to a recording tend to be more vibrant than those arising from texts alone. Teachers are often unsure of how many student really read the material assigned, while presentation of a performance guarantees at least some exposure to the play. But this approach still leaves students as somewhat passive partners in responding to an ancient text, whether from their own perspective or from that of an ancient audience member.

In-class performances shift the dynamics, making students active creators of a response to the text. With limited time for the Roman-comedy unit, I had my students develop 15–20-minute condensed versions of three Plautine plays, *Pseudolus, Casina*, and *Truculentus*. Each group had about 6 students, sufficient to cover the major characters with doubling only on minor roles. The students were not asked to memorize the scenes, but they were expected to have practiced them enough to be able bring the appropriate emotional tone to the characters and incorporate some basic movement. One group performed in each class session, leaving approximately 30 minutes for discussion.

As students begin to condense these plays, they must determine their essential message, choosing which moments to cut and to keep. Having viewed and discussed Gamel's production of *Eunuchus* equips them with both verbal and visual choices for tackling tricky issues such as rape or slave torture.

In condensing a play, students must also work as the Roman playwrights did, deciding how to adapt material for a new audience.21 For example, the *Truculentus* group felt that the trickery of the *meretrix* Phronesium was essential in highlighting the emphasis on powerful females. As a result, they cut both of the scenes featuring the eponymous slave (256–321 and 669–698) as distractions from the central point of the play.22 In the class discussions and short reflection assignment following the performances, it became clear that the students had internalized the experience of the Roman playwright. They wrote that this condensation process made them think much more about the deliberate choices of the Roman playwrights in how to entertain their audiences. In silent reading, students may have asked themselves simply whether they found the comedies funny or not, but in rewriting them in shortened form, they were forced to consider how an audience influences authorial choice.23

Acting out the condensed versions pushes students to examine the text even more closely. Bringing the characters to life, students must think about how they would interact, imagining the tones of a master and subordinates in dialogue, in contrast with a slave's tone in asides to the audience (e.g., Artotrogus in the opening of *Miles* [1–78]).

In a Latin-language course, the use of performance, though usually beyond the scope of the syllabus, could also draw students' attention to the precise language of Roman comedy and the challenges of translation.24 Serena Witzke stresses the importance of context in translating such words as *meretrix* and *scortum*, since (*pace* some recent scholars) both terms can be used of free and enslaved women. The key difference is politeness: *scortum* is used pejoratively and *meretrix* more neutrally or affectionately.25 Witzke ultimately argues against simple one-to-one translation (*scortum* = whore) in favor of a more nuanced approach that takes into consideration issues such as the differing experiences of free and enslaved women in sex-work, the perspective of the character using the terms, and the cultural baggage of the English equivalents (e.g., the glamorized image of pimps in such modern-culture genres as hip-hop).26

While Witzke is focused primarily on translations intended for use in courses that will not make use of performance, her observations are equally useful for students trying to embody words on the stage. For example, the *amans* Diniarchus in *Truculentus* opens the play with a monologue punctuated with several references to *scorta* (22–94). When the brothel slave Astaphium steps onto the stage, she delivers an alternative perspective (though there is no indication that she overheard Diniarchus) about the greediness of young men who go down to the *scorta* and take what they can while one of them loads up his *amica* with kisses (98–111). Though it is easy to imagine the appropriate tone for the young lover's angry tirade about the *scorta* he perceives as ruining him, the brothel slave's use of the term requires greater sensitivity from the actor. Presumably, the brothel slave refers to herself and her housemates as *scorta* as a way to channel the young men's mindset, but she herself would presumably not think of herself as simply a piece of flesh. The actor must find a vocal technique for indicating that *scortum* is the lovers' term for her as she shifts the terms of the debate to the atrocities committed by the lovers cheating the woman they should be treating well, their *amica*. Whether the translation uses one or several words to translate *scortum*, students performing the scene must process how best to express the characters' intentions in using the term.

I also remind my students that there is more to the performance than mere speech. For example, body posture asserts dominance or subservience, and shifts in power dynamics can be reinforced by changes in the actor's stance.27 In *Casina*, the husband Lysidamus might seek to assert his triumph over his wife Celostrata in the famous sortition scene (353–423) by making himself as tall as possible so as to loom over his wife. At the end of the play, when he must come out from his "wedding" to Casina and admit that his wife has cheated him by replacing the nubile Casina with the male slave Chalinus (969 ff.), the postures could be reversed to reinforce the change in power. Now Cleostrata stands tall as her husband hunches

slightly in defeat, perhaps hinting at the social shame of having his desire exposed.28

Similarly, body shapes of actors contribute to the dynamics between characters. In *Casina*, having a shorter actor playing Lysidamus can underscore the eventual dominance of a taller Cleostrata. But height need not produce a static effect. In my most recent "Roman Perspectives" class, the group performing *Pseudolus* had their shortest member play the pimp Ballio. As she barked orders to the various slaves and prostitutes (133–239), weathered the torrent of verbal abuse from Pseudolus and his young master, who towered over her (357-–375), and schemed with the young man's father (1065–1102), the other actors reacted in ways that clearly revealed her power. The potentially unnerving power of this pimp was heightened by the subservient postures of bodies we might normally expect to be dominant.29

Reflections on the performances, both on students' own work as well as that of their classmates, have proven the most beneficial part of this process. I start the reflection process with immediate discussion of the in-class performances. I ask the students to view the condensed versions of the plays through the lens of the ancient Roman audience from Richlin's activities. I push them to articulate what they think that audience would find funny and why. We also explore what might trouble the audience. For example, freed people who now owns slaves might watch scenes of slave trickery and find themselves torn between sympathies for a resistant slave and for a slave owner. Interacting with the plays (whether visually or textually) is no longer about whether the student finds an ancient drama rip-roaringly hilarious, but rather about how audience experiences influence the meaning of a performance. This simple exercise develops the empathy that allows people of differing mindsets to engage in productive discussion of such polarizing topics as rape culture.30

In addition to class discussions, I require the students to write a short reflection about their own experience of condensing and performing the plays. Before this exercise, students focused their writing about a play on whether they thought it was funny. Now they engage in a more dynamic consideration of Roman comedies' multiple facets. As one student commented, "Through viewing *Casina* both as myself and as a Roman senator, I was able to see Plautus' true craftsmanship. The Roman senator, *thermopolium* owner, slaves and a twenty-first century girl were all able to find comedy in the same show." She went on to note how each might find humor in the show, whether in a far-fetched scenario of a Greek man being duped by his wife or in the spectacle of a "powerless" female tricking a powerful male.

Through the Roman-audience exercise, even something as seemingly uniform as women tricking men can become more nuanced. Reflecting on the trickery of the *meretrix* Phronesium and her *ancilla* Astaphium in *Truculentus*, one student noted that both the wife of the *thermpolium* owner and their slave might find it funny. The wife might appreciate the power these two women exercise over the men of any background, but the slave might especially appreciate the brothel slave Astaphium's trickery while also admiring the space this slave has for action independent of her master. In imagining different roles for themselves (as undergraduates may not always do), students are encouraged to think more about the social and power dynamics activated in Roman comedy. They become more nuanced viewers and readers when given a concrete way to transcend their limited perspectives.31

Prerecorded or live performance demands consideration of the dynamics between a play and its audience. Viewers engage in the process of untangling how a text makes meaning through its engagement with the cultural values of its recipients. Through the double-visioned approach, they are also able to identify the blind spots of a culture different from their own, forcing themselves to think about why something like a rape victim marrying her rapist "just makes sense" within the context of a play. Through the challenges posed by another culture, they may also come to see the blind spots of their own. If they find a moment funny, they are encouraged to ask whether their reaction is similar to that of someone in the ancient audience. If a joke falls flat, students can gauge how cultural difference spoils a certain kind of joke. Ultimately, this pedagogical approach enables students to engage with ancient plays

in richer and, ideally, more personally meaningful ways.

notes

[1] Gamel (2013), 466.

[2] The arguments we make about Roman comedy are inextricably tied to our assumptions about the audience. Compare Richlin's (2014) approach to the Platine audience with Fontaine's (2010). See Marshall (2006), especially 16–82, for a discussion of the logistics of the performance of Roman comedy. For my own students' sense of the needed general background, I have used Moore (2012), a volume in the Cambridge Greece and Rome: Texts and Contexts series well suited to my class of undergraduates, the vast majority of whom have enrolled to complete a general-education requirement. The insights of Goldberg (1998) concerning the use of temple steps for seating are clearly supported by the interpretations of both of Marshall and Moore.

[3] Richlin (2013).

[4] We can identify rape as a feature of Menander's Epitrepontes, Georgos, Heros, Hiereia, Kitharistes, Perinthia, Phasma, Plokion, and Samia as well as at least three others where we cannot identify the play the rape belongs to. Perhaps more surprising is that Georgos and Heros feature daughters who are the product of rape who are themselves raped. See Webster (1974) and Rosivach (1998) for more discussion on rape in Menander.

[5] In Hecyra Pamphilus, while recounting the discovery that his wife, with whom he had not yet had intercourse, has given birth during his absence, informs the audience about the rape through the pleading words of the mother. The audience does not at this stage know that it is Pamphilus who raped the woman.

[6] James (2013), 192. See Witzke (2015), especially 17–18, for a useful discussion of how scholarship on Roman comedy typically replicates this focus on the male-citizen perspective of the plays.

[7] Krebs et al. (2007).

[8] Kahn (2004), James (2014), and Thakur (2014).

[9] Thakur (2014), 155.

[10] James (2014) presents her class with a carefully worded statement. It reads as follows, "Rape is a very sensitive subject, and we will discuss carefully, with respect for each other, the ways in which our materials depict it ... In class, I expect everybody to treat these materials with great care and to be sensitive to each other. Nobody will ever be forced to talk about rape, either in class or outside of class … we must deal with it in this class, but we'll do so with respect and sensitivity." (178)

[11] James (2014), 179.

[12] Kahn (2004), 438.

[13] Kahn (2004), 448.

[14] The prostitute Thais raises this concern on stage. In discussing the rape with Chaerea, she explicitly frets that she no longer feels she can return the girl to her family (867–871).

[15] Slater (1999), 8.

[16] Slater (1999), 18.

[17] Slater (1999), 19.

[18] See Video Clip 1.

[19] Though we did not watch the clip where Thais' slave confronts Chaerea's slave confidant about the rape, students would be in a better place to understand his dismissal of the charge precisely because it took place in a brothel (Eun. 960–961).

[20] See Video Clip 2

[21] Gamel (2013), 479.

[22] One could easily compare the ending of Eunuchus with Plautus' Truculentus, where the meretrix Phronesium tells the soldier he will have to wait his turn to be with her while she works to get money out of the rival country boy.

[23] I intentionally leave some ambiguity about whether the students are producing a scene for a modern or ancient audience. This ambiguity enriches the discussions that follow the in-class performances, requiring students to think about the performance both from the ancient and modern audience's perspectives.

[24] Scholars of course have also debated the role of Truculentus who seems fairly extraneous to the essential core of the plot. For Grimal (1970), the perceived inconsistency of Truculentus' initial violent opposition to Phronesium's house and his later willingness to scortum ducere (678) can be attributed to Plautus' adaptation of a well-constructed Menandrian original into an unbelievably violent satire (une satire incroyablement violente, 95). For Konstan (1983), the potential inconsistency in his opposition to the house of Phronesium, followed by his eagerness to enter, it is parallel to the changes we see in Diniarchus and Stratophanes as they play moves from a tale of rivals into a triad of lovers drawn in by Phronesium's charm.

[25] In a course on ancient drama with more time for thinking about this process, a teacher could utilize this condensation process in varying ways. Students could be asked to condense the play with a free, adult, slave-owning audience in mind, then for a more mixed audience of women and slaves, and finally for a modern audience (however the students would conceive it). Discussions and/or written reflections about how audience shaped the various condensations would help students remember the importance of audience in the theatrical project.

[26] See Moodie (2015) for a fuller discussion of translating Roman comedy for modern audiences. Moodie draws from the insights of contributors to Hall and Harrop (2010) on performance of Greek drama.

[27] See Adams (1983) for a fuller discussion.

[28] Witzke (2015). Witzke does note the deficiency of only having the text to teach students Roman comedy. "The viewing experience may be very different. Performance, as the NEH Summer Institute for Roman Comedy (http://nehsummer2012romancomedy.web.unc.edu) has demonstrated, can significantly affect how the play is viewed. Performance allows for visual markers of status and experience that are not present in text alone. When we have only text to rely on, we lose action, gesture, tone, and other audio-visual cues that teach us how to respond to what we are seeing. Thus we must seek to approximate through translation with text markers (like enslaved versus free women engaged in sex labor) what may have been clear to viewers without explanation.&rquot;.

[29] See Marshall (2006), especially the discussion of status (170–174). Actors' postures can also serve to focus audience attention.

[30] Marshall (2015) provides a useful overview of attitudes towards masters' lust for their domestic slaves. Marshall notes that master–slave sex was "a transgressive act that both undermined familia and ought to be kept hidden at least from citizen women. Sex with one's slaves, though legally permitted, was not without any consequence, and clearly provoked some sense of shame and desire for secrecy." (126)

[31] For more on staging power in *Pseudolus,* see Bungard (2015).

[32] I appreciate the advice of one of the anonymous reviewers who reminds me of Martha Nussbaum's (2010) arguments for the importance of empathy as part of a democratic education.

[33] Such expansion of perspective is especially important at schools like my own, where the student body is overwhelmingly between the ages of 18 and 22, white, and upper-middle class. I would argue that it becomes even more important when a school is actively seeking to diversify its student body, providing students with greater capacities for thinking inclusively and not rejecting lived experiences that they themselves do not share.

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Sophocles after Ferguson: *Antigone* in St. Louis, 2014

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Image 4: Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus (photo credit throughout article: Peter Wochniak)

print version note: all images for this article appear at the end of the piece

As countless performances have shown, especially in the last fifty years, Greek tragedy in performance can respond to contemporary events in remarkably powerful ways.[1] The intermingling of ancient drama and modern politics, however, often brings controversy. Some argue that productions that stay close to the text of the original and introduce few elements that jar with the allegedly ancient setting are academic and irrelevant. Meanwhile, productions that veer further from the original text and introduce conspicuous anachronisms are sometimes charged with losing track of the play at hand (Rehm 2003, 35–39, Goldhill 2007, 119–52).

Mary-Kay Gamel has recently provided a useful tool for directors and critics in working our way through these controversies, proposing that we evaluate productions in terms of what she calls "inductive authenticity" (Gamel 2010). After noting that attempts to provide alleged "authenticity" by recreating exactly the features of ancient performance are not only quixotic but can lead to productions so alien as to be meaningless to contemporary audiences, Gamel observes that there are aspects of ancient performance that we can recreate, but in our own terms. Among the most important of these is the political impact of the plays. Because ancient Athenian plays carried political messages relevant to the time of the original performances, Gamel argues, modern productions create their own form of authenticity when they engage with current politics.[2] The productions Gamel praises for their "inductive authenticity" all include conspicuous anachronisms and some major modifications of the texts performed. Indeed, a strong case can be made that such productions recreate important elements of the politically engaged experiences of Athenian spectators. It should be remembered, however, that Athenian tragedy, unlike Old Comedy, usually engaged with contemporary politics implicitly rather than explicitly. In what follows I argue that productions can also accomplish Gamel's "inductive authenticity" and engage with contemporary politics in meaningful and constructive ways while introducing minimal changes to their received texts and very few striking anachronisms. I offer as an example a 2014 production of Sophocles' *Antigone* offered by the St. Louis-based Upstream Theater Company during a time of intense controversy and civil unrest in the St. Louis area (Boehm et al. 2014).

Philip Boehm, Artistic Director of Upstream Theater Company, chose for the opening show of his 2014–2015 season David Slavitt's translation of *Antigone* (Slavitt 2007, 1–58). The play was to be performed in October 2014 at the Kranzberg Arts Center in central St. Louis. Perhaps more than any other Greek tragedy, *Antigone* cries out for engagement with contemporary politics, for the conflict between Antigone and Creon involves the proper relationship of the individual and the state, an issue that is always relevant. One thinks, for example, of Anouilh's adaptation of the play, first performed in Nazi-occupied Paris; of Brecht's passionately anti-fascist *Antigone*; and of Athol Fugard's *The Island*, where a "play-within-the play" *Antigone* comments on Apartheid.[3]

As Upstream Theater's production was in its early design stages, the issues raised in *Antigone* suddenly became far more urgent. On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed black man, was shot to death by

police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis less than 10 miles from the theater where *Antigone*was to be performed. The shooting led to many nights of riots in Ferguson, protests and riots elsewhere in the St. Louis area and throughout the United States, and considerable debate and soul-searching within and beyond St. Louis about race, social justice, civil disobedience, and police violence.4

Antigone has much to say to anyone pondering Michael Brown's death and its aftermath. The play's conflict between the individual and the state's need for order became intensely relevant when a representative of the state in charge of maintaining public order killed an unarmed citizen; and that conflict continued to resound emphatically as police clashed with protestors in the days, weeks, and months that followed. Furthermore, the saga of Ferguson, like the plot of *Antigone*, started with an exposed corpse. The turmoil over Michael Brown's death began as his body lay for four hours on the street where he had been killed. Though defended by the police on logistical grounds, the long delay in removing Brown's body was widely considered a willful failure to handle a victim of police action with dignity and an affront to the community observing the body's treatment.5

Boehm was therefore faced with important choices as he prepared his production. He could ignore the events in Ferguson, allowing the resonances between the play and contemporary events in St. Louis to speak for themselves, or he could adjust the production to respond to what was happening in the St. Louis area. If he chose to respond to what was going on outside the theater, he would need to decide what aspects of the Sophoclean play he thought relevant to St. Louisans in late 2014, and how to bring those aspects to the fore.

Boehm chose to respond to the events surrounding him in a way that was unobtrusive yet quite effective. His general approach was in most ways traditional. He made very few changes to Slavitt's text, and though he did not seek any pedantic "authenticity," the production's set, costumes, and props could with only a few exceptions pass for "Greek" to the non-expert. Boehm did, however, make one very conspicuous addition to the plot: he began the performance not with Sophocles' dialogue between Antigone and Ismene, but with Polyneices' body lying on stage. This opening allusion to current events in St. Louis would encourage audience members to keep those events in mind as they responded to the rest of the play. Boehm also decided, while not ignoring the individual struggle between Antigone and Creon, to give particular attention to the community in which that struggle occurs, emphasizing that mythical Thebes, like St. Louis in 2014, was a community in crisis. Finally, Boehm chose to place special focus on Creon as a figure of authority alienated from his community, thus emphasizing important parallels between the Theban ruler and authority figures in the St. Louis region in 2014.

The Corpse

The first thing Boehm's audience saw was the body of Polyneices lying on a half-lit stage.6 The stage remained in semi-darkness as Antigone (Maggie Conroy) entered, sprinkled ashes on the body, and left (image 1).7 Few in the audience would miss the allusion to Michael Brown, as for over two months news sources had been reminding them repeatedly of the long time Brown's body lay in the street on August 9th.8 Audience members would therefore be primed to draw analogies between Thebes and Ferguson as the performance continued.

Boehm's opening scene also reinforced the relevance of the play to what became for many a dangerous "red herring" in debates in St. Louis and elsewhere in the weeks after Michael Brown's death: Brown's character. Rumors swirled in the fall of 2014 about just what kind of a person Michael Brown was and what he was up to when he was apprehended and then shot. In fact, it was revealed, Brown had robbed a convenience store shortly before he encountered Wilson. In the weeks when *Antigone* was performed, St. Louis and the nation waited for the results of a grand jury investigation into the shooting. As they did

so, many noted that the personal guilt or innocence of Brown and of Wilson was less important than what the tragic events of August 9th revealed about the state of St. Louis and America, and the need for St. Louis and all cities to address racial inequalities, violence in law enforcement, and other systematic problems.**9** *Antigone* provides a powerful tool for confronting this issue, as Creon and Antigone debate whether our own moral imperative to do right is affected by the guilt of others:

> CREON: Eteocles was blood-kin, too, remember.
> ANTIGONE: Yes, of the same mother, the same father.
> CREON: How then can you insult his memory?
> ANTIGONE: He will not bear witness or take offense.
> CREON: No? If you honor his enemy—a traitor?
> ANTIGONE: Polyneices was my brother. Not some slave.
> CREON: He attacked the city Eteocles defended!
> ANTIGONE: Even so, there are honors due the dead.
> CREON: For the just and the unjust? The good and the wicked?
> ANTIGONE: In the world below, who knows what was good or evil?
> CREON: Enemies don't change, not even in death.
> ANTIGONE: I was not born to feud but to love and to honor. (512–523, Slavitt 23–24)

Creon sees only Polyneices' wrongdoing. For Antigone, her duty to the dead outweighs any concerns about the morality of the deceased.

The play also reveals that however guilty Polyneices may have been, the treatment of his body brings pollution to the entire city. Tiresias says to Creon:

> Our altars
> are covered with foul bits the dogs and birds
> have brought from Polyneices' rotting corpse.
> The gods, disgusted, no longer hear our prayers.
> And the birds are driven crazy having feasted
> on the clotted blood of the body you left for them. (1016–1022, Slavitt 2007, 44)

He adds later:

> Then hear me, Creon. You shall not see the sun
> make many circuits before you have to pay
> corpse for corpse for those you have dishonored:
> a dead man's body left unburied, defiled
> and therefore defiling…
> You cannot
> keep here what belongs to the gods below,
> a corpse, unburied, obscene. (1064–1071, Slavitt 2007, 46)

Whatever we may decide about Polyneices' guilt or innocence, his unburied corpse showed that something was very wrong in Thebes, just as the body of Michael Brown lying so long in the street revealed that things were not right in St. Louis and America, regardless of what we decide about Brown's character and the murky chain of events that preceded his death on August 9th. By adding the body and the burial to the opening of the play, Boehm provided a powerful reinforcement of this message.

Communities in Crisis

The play-opening corpse was one of several ways in which Upstream Theater's *Antigone* underlined that the crisis of the play engulfed not just Antigone and Creon, but Thebes as a whole, in ways that paralleled the ongoing crisis in the region and nation where the play was performed. In his program notes, Boehm wrote, "While it would be wrong to suggest a direct correspondence, recent tragic events in our city lend unwanted resonance to this ancient tragedy. With *Antigone*, Sophocles reminds us of the psychological devastation that comes in the wake of every social disaster. The question remains: how do we seek collective catharsis?" (Boehm 2014a). In an interview with *American Theatre* shortly before the start of *Antigone*'s run, Boehm said: "We're not after one-to-one correspondence with the events in Ferguson—I think that would be wrong and inappropriate. The underlying issue of the play is a conflict between society's need for law and order and an individual's need to follow her conscience, but we're also interested in exploring the psychological devastation all these social disasters carry with them. The wreckage is enormous and the collective psyche is scarred." (Weinert-Kent 2014).

The backdrop to Upstream Theater's *Antigone* gave visual emphasis to the community's troubles, calling attention to two aspects of crisis shared by mythical Thebes and 2014 St. Louis: violence and a curse that transcends generations.[10] It consisted of three panels (image 2). The large central panel showed two warriors in hand-to-hand combat. The warriors, who could be assumed to be Eteocles and Polyneices, provided a stark and continual reminder of the violence that lay behind the plot, violence that was to be relentlessly continued as the play proceeded. That reminder of recurring violence would be disturbingly familiar to the play's audience. Michael Brown's death led to more violence in the riots that followed (Brown 2015), and by the time of *Antigone*'s run there had been more controversial deaths of black men at the hands of police in St. Louis and elsewhere. Within weeks of the play's close, two police officers in New York City had also died at the hands of a sniper who claimed to be avenging Michael Brown and other victims of the police (Mueller and Baker 2014).[11]

Each of these acts of violence brought its own individual controversies and contexts. Yet all were emblematic of our peculiarly American version of a Greek tragic curse: the country's long sordid history of racism, from which decades of civil rights legislation have been unable to free us. That wider context of the Ferguson and post-Ferguson violence brought special significance to the paintings on the side panels of the play's set: each showed Oedipus and the sphinx. The side panels thus kept always before the audience's eyes the story of Oedipus and the curse that his deeds had brought upon his family and his city, reinforcing the first words of the play:

> ANTIGONE:
> Dear sister, Ismene, what evils that come
> From Oedipus our father has Zeus not sent
> to burden our lives? (1–3, Slavitt 2007, 2)[12]

Oedipus and his curse, presented on the side panels, provided the context for the violence painted on the central panel, just as the curse of American racism provided the context for the violence in 2014 St. Louis.

Boehm's presentation of the chorus further encouraged spectators to think about the play's plot in the context of a community struggling in the midst of violence and strife, and to associate that community with their own. As a group of elders, the chorus members are representatives of the wider community beyond both those in authority, such as Creon, and those opposing authority, such as Antigone. Their position is therefore analogous to most members of the audience, who for this production were residents of the St. Louis region observing the events that unfolded after Michael Brown's death. Sophocles portrays the chorus as closely aligned with the ruling class, advising Creon from a position of prestige. Boehm's chorus (Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler), however, wore costumes reminiscent of pre-industrial people of the lower classes (image 4), costumes similar to those of Tiresias (John Bratkowski, image 5), and the messenger (Nancy Lewis, image 6), but in conspicuous

contrast to the far finer garments of the members of the ruling family (see below).13 The costumes thus granted the chorus more of an "everyman" status than the text suggests, encouraging still further an identification between them and average St. Louisans. Although Boehm made no explicit allusions to race, his casting of the chorus as two black performers and a white performer brought racial diversity to his chorus, in contrast to the all-white cast of leads. In fact this casting reflected the demographics of Ferguson itself in October 2014, where the population of the city was about 70% black and about 30% white, but where the city government was almost entirely white (that situation changed with the election of more black officials in April 2015 [Eligon 2015]).

Boehm has stated that he sees *Antigone*'s chorus as "fickle in its own way," changing its views in response to the arguments of the characters (Boehm 2015). During many scenes, Boehm divided his chorus, placing two actors on one side of the stage—and thus visually aligned with the actor arguing from that side—and a third member nearer the opposing actor on the other side of the stage (e.g., image 7). These divisions visually paralleled the deep divisions within the St. Louis community after Michael Brown's death. When the chorus came together in their *prologos* and *stasima*, their movements were often highly erratic: both Sophocles' words and their movements emphasized the chorus' uncertainties about the crisis they were observing, uncertainties similar to the doubts and anxieties oppressing the people of St. Louis in the troubling times surrounding *Antigone*'s performance.14

Alienated authority

As the events following Michael Brown's death unfolded, it became clear that a large part of the region's and the nation's problems stemmed from the failure of those in authority to connect with the communities they represented. Police and other authority figures, for reasons that were understandable but nevertheless unacceptable, found themselves tragically alienated from those they were supposed to serve. Whatever one decides about the specific circumstances surrounding the death of Michael Brown, few would doubt that his shooting was part of a pattern found throughout the United States in which police, eager to enforce the law, make questionable use of violence against members of minority groups. In the days and weeks following Michael Brown's death, use of force by those in authority repeatedly antagonized citizens. In response to the riots, for example, police shocked many by entering Ferguson with over-the-top militarized equipment; and the arrest of numerous peaceful protesters, as well as reporters and political leaders, brought scandal and bad will (Brown 2015). This aspect of the Ferguson crisis inspired Boehm to call special attention to Creon and his alienation from the community he governed, and to encourage his audience to draw analogies between Creon and the police and other authorities of the St. Louis area.

A few weeks before the opening of his *Antigone*, Boehm presented his take on the play to the Classical Club of St. Louis. He entitled his presentation, "Should Sophocles' *Antigone* Really Be Called *Creon*?" (Boehm 2014a). Boehm objects to the tendency, so comfortable in our age of individualism, for analyses and productions of *Antigone* to focus almost entirely on Antigone as the heroic resister of a completely unsympathetic tyrant. He has noted that during rehearsals he frequently discussed Creon's viewpoint with the actors, asking them, for example, to ponder an *Antigone* set in a demolished town in Europe immediately after World War II, where survival depended upon the maintenance of order (Boehm 2015).15 Creon fails and he is at fault, but his failure and fault are understandable within his milieu. His failure is the failure of authority, made rigid by a crisis, alienated from its community. In discussing his production, Boehm stressed the universality of the dangers to which Creon succumbs, noting: "We are all prone to closing our minds and closing our ears" (Boehm 2015). Acting styles, costuming, blocking, and the use of props all reinforced this presentation of Creon, emphasizing his authority, his anxiety surrounding that authority, and his alienation from the other characters and the community of Thebes as a whole.

Peter Mayer as Creon relayed a mesmerizing combination of self-assurance and bluff throughout, clearly doing everything in his power to cover up his own doubts about the best course of action (image 9). One reviewer noted how the actors playing both Haemon (Andrew Michael Neiman) and the guard (John Bratkowski) showed the difficulty of penetrating Creon's stony expression (Green 2014). Mayer had also played Creon when Upstream Theater performed *Oedipus King* in 2010 (image 10), so those who had seen that play would be struck by the irony of Creon's obstinacy here when he had faced Oedipus' stubbornness in the previous production: crisis and authority have changed him.

Creon's anxiety surrounding his authority became especially clear in his scene with the guard. Bringing news of Polyneices' burial, the guard entered carrying an exceptionally long spear (image 11; cf. Callahan 2014). The spear, in the hands of Creon's minion, helped to demonstrate Creon's overweening concern with his authority. Displaying the visual symbol of power through a subordinate was not enough for Creon, though: midway through his dialogue with the guard he got impatient and took the spear himself, and he held it through much of the rest of the scene (image 12).

In various ways the production underlined how this determination to maintain control alienates Creon from his community. We noted above the generically pre-industrial costuming of the chorus, Tiresias, and the messenger. Most of the other costumes were equally vague in their associations. Looking most "Greek" was the guard, whose costume included a tunic and a cuirass (image 11). Most members of the Theban royal family wore costumes that revealed their upper-class status without placing them in a specific cultural milieu: Eurydice (Wendy Renée Greenwood, image 13) and Haemon (image 14) wore elaborate robes, and Antigone (image 15) and Ismene (Wendy Renée Greenwood, image 16) dressed more simply but elegantly. Amidst these costumes, Creon's outfit—part Maoist uniform and part business suit—stood out as looking peculiarly modern and indicative of a no-nonsense authority figure; and Creon, in contrast to the bare feet or sandals of all the other characters and his own bare feet in the earlier *Oedipus King* (image 10), wore a pair of sturdy black shoes (image 12). Several reviewers of the play noted the jarring disparity between Creon's costume and the others'.**16** The costume drew attention to Creon's position of authority and, because it differed so much from the other costumes, to Creon's alienation from his fellow citizens and his family. In the final scenes, as he returned with the body of Haemon, Creon had lost this symbol of his authority: he was shirtless, shoeless, and wore a pair of baggy brown pants instead of the elegantly cut blue pants that accompanied his jacket in the earlier scenes (image 17).

Actors' movements drew further attention to how Creon's determination to exercise his authority separated him from his community. The plot demands that Creon spend much of his time on stage in opposition to other characters. Boehm's blocking amplified this opposition, as the audience repeatedly saw Creon at a distance from others on the stage (images 18, 19, 20). Alienation and authority joined together visually as first the guard (image 21) and then Haemon (image 22) knelt before Creon from across the stage.

Particularly striking is the way Boehm and his actors employed physical contact. Actress Maggie Conroy's Antigone was nearly obsessive in touching her fellow actors. She caressed Polyneices while she buried him in the opening scene (image 1). It is no surprise that in their dialogue the sisters Antigone and Ismene touched each other often and ardently (e.g., image 23). More remarkable is how Antigone broke down the usual barriers between actors and chorus by touching members of the chorus frequently. She emphasized the contrast between her approach and Creon's most effectively when she reached out to grasp one of the chorus members by the shoulder while accosting Creon (image 24). Later the messenger reporting the deaths of Antigone and Haemon mirrored Antigone's behavior by touching chorus members (image 25).

In contrast to his antagonist and the reporter of his doom, Creon almost never touched another character,

and others failed to reach him when they touched him. A desperate embrace of his father by Haemon (image 26) failed to have any effect: the two characters continued the scene in mutual consternation (image 27). When Tiresias attempted to get through to Creon with a warm hand on the shoulder, he was equally ineffective (image 28). Only late in the play, when he decided too late to heed Tiresias' warning, did Creon touch a member of the chorus as he asked for advice (image 29).

Providing the most powerful messages about the importance of community, and Creon's alienation from those around him, was a set of props that could be considered the signature feature of the production. Far downstage center, and therefore as far from the disturbing backdrop as one could get without leaving the playing area, was a small table containing a number of objects: two slices of pomegranate, ears of grain, and three vessels, one of which contained ashes, another burning incense (image 2). These objects resonated in various ways. Their significance was, on the one hand, cosmic. Boehm has noted that the table included representatives of each of the four Greek primordial elements—air, fire, water, and earth—and that the pomegranate and grain remind one of the myth of Persephone, and hence of death and the transcendence of death (Boehm 2015). The ashes would make the objects' association with death clear even to those unfamiliar with Greek mythology. As much as they represented the cosmic, however, the objects also stood for the communal. It would be clear even to audience members unfamiliar with ancient Greek culture that the objects are of a type associated with ritual. To many spectators the association with ritual would be still more intense, as the connection of the grain and pomegranate with the myth of Persephone would remind them of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Ritual, especially in pre-modern cultures, is widely recognized as a key feature that joins together otherwise disparate groups of people, and the Eleusinian Mysteries were one of the most important unifying rituals of ancient Greece. The most important role of these objects, therefore, was as a symbol of what unites mythical Thebes as a community.

With these objects in the foreground, the entire stage became an area of negotiation between strife and a curse, represented by the images on the backdrop, and the sense of community embodied in the ritual objects downstage. The play was performed in a black-box theater, with audience members surrounding the stage on three sides. The table downstage center was thus the focal point not just of the stage but of the theater as a whole, and the contrast on stage between the objects representing community and the strife shown on the backdrop paralleled visually the audience's own attempt to place community over differences in the strife beyond the theater.

Characters interacted with the objects throughout the play. Antigone performed two actions kneeling before the small table. She handled the pomegranate (image 30), and she painted her forehead with ashes (image 31), echoing her earlier sprinkling of ashes on Polyneices. Haemon also took hold of a slice of pomegranate, echoing Antigone's earlier action (image 32). After pondering it, he squeezed it (image 33). After Eurydice heard the messenger report her son's suicide, she stood in front of the table and removed her jewels (image 34); kneeling, she placed them on the table among the ritual objects (image 35).

Each of these characters was responding to the cosmic significance of the objects: handling pomegranate, painting themselves with ashes, and depositing jewels among the ashes and pomegranate slices, they foreshadowed their own deaths. At the same time, however, their close relationship with these items of communal ritual indicated their connection with the institutions of their community. When others characters engaged with the ritual objects, no implication of death was involved, so the emphasis was more specifically on the connection with the communal. At one point Tiresias bowed down directly before the table of ritual objects (image 36). At two moments in their songs, members of the chorus took hold of vessels from the table (images 37, 38).

Through most of the play, Creon remained aloof from the ritual objects, a conspicuous reminder that

even as he seeks to maintain social cohesion by forbidding the burial of Polyneices, his response to his nephew's death is in opposition to the values of the community he is trying to preserve. At several points Boehm's blocking reinforced Creon's separation from the objects and from his community, as the stage showed other characters near the table and distant from and opposed to Creon. At one point Antigone knelt before the objects, her back to Creon (image 39). At another she stood near the table facing Creon at a distance (image 40). Haemon likewise knelt at the table with his back to Creon (image 41), and Tiresias stood between the ritual objects and Creon (image 42). Only at the end of the play, when he had encountered disaster, did Creon approach the ritual objects. He entered the stage carrying the dead Haemon (image 43). He laid his son down directly in front of the table and grieved over him (image 44). Then, echoing the two earlier uses of ashes by Antigone, he took the vessel filled with ashes and sprinkled them first on Haemon (image 45) and then on himself (image 17). The close association of the ritual objects with this moment of deepest pathos brought home the extent to which Creon's failure to connect with his community had brought about his own ruin.[17]

Upstream Theater's *Antigone*, then, though very traditional in most respects, nevertheless encouraged audience members to connect the play with current controversies outside the theater. By beginning with Polyneices' corpse, the Upstream Theater performances provided reminders of Michael Brown and at the same time reinforced the play's message about how the need to right communal wrongs transcends individual guilt or innocence. The stage set, casting, costuming, and choral movements encouraged audience members to appreciate the relevance of Antigone's and Creon's conflict to the troubled city of Thebes as a whole and, by implication, to the troubled St. Louis region in 2014. Pre-production advertisement, acting styles, blocking, gesture, and the use of props further encouraged audience members to think about the role of authority within troubled communities. The production did not condemn Creon, just as it did not condemn the police and other authorities who were the objects of controversy in the world outside the theater in 2014. But it did drive home the dangers to a community when its authority figures become alienated and rigid, a message that was of great value in late-2014 St. Louis.[18]

Upstream Theater's *Antigone* thus provides a case study of how Gamel's standard of "inductive authenticity" can be met by more traditional productions as well as by those that make explicit allusions to current events. With or without such overt allusions, Greek tragedy in performance can play a vital role in contemporary debates.

notes

The author thanks Philip Boehm for the considerable help he provided in preparation of this article. This piece began life as part of a panel in honor of Mary-Kay Gamel entitled "Performance, Politics, Pedagogy," at the 2016 meeting of the Society for Classical Studies. My thanks to the panelists and audience of that panel for their helpful suggestions, and especially to the panel's organizer, C. W. Marshall. Thanks also to the editor and anonymous readers of *Didaskalia* for their valuable criticisms.

[1] On the explosion of performances of Greek tragedy since the 1960s, many with explicit political messages, see Hartigan 1992, 67–146; McDonald 1992; Garland 2004, 179–85, 232; Hall 2004; Altena 2007; Foley 2012, 96–121, 132–89, 210–28 and *passim*.

[2] Cf. Gamel 1999 27: "productions which openly engage with contemporary issues and values are not anachronistic or inauthentic. In fact, attention to such implications in twentieth-century [or twenty-first-century] performance of ancient scripts is actually *closer* to the conditions of ancient performance than approaches which focus only on the historical, aesthetic, or emotional dimensions of ancient scripts" (emphasis Gamel's).

[3] On performances of *Antigone* in the United States, see Hartigan 1992 112–18, Foley 2012 249–58 and passim. Both Hartigan and Foley note that earlier productions, where contemporary political implications of the play were largely ignored, have been replaced since the mid-twentieth century with productions more explicitly engaged with current politics.

[4] For a timeline of the events from Michael Brown's death through August 10, 2015, see Brown 2015. For an extensive collection of images, videos, and documents related to the events, see Washington University in St. Louis Libraries 2014.

[5] The relevance of *Antigone* to post-Ferguson United States was brought home emphatically two years later, when Bryan Doerries and his Theater of War Productions presented "Antigone in Ferguson," a staged reading of an abridged translation of *Antigone* supplemented by a gospel choir and followed by a long talk-back in which audience members related the play to contemporary events. "Antigone in Ferguson" opened in Ferguson in September 2016 and then travelled around the United States.

[6] The "body" was a very still Andrew Michael Neiman, the actor who would later play Haemon. In the darkness, and because his back was to the audience, his identity was not evident, but his status as a real human body was. Boehm did not seek to recreate the exact position of Michael Brown's body: Brown lay on his stomach, Neiman on his side.

[7] All images of Upstream Theater's production of *Antigone* are copyright ProPhotoSTL.com. The author thanks Peter Wochniak for permission to use these photos.

[8] Cf. these words by one of the play's reviewers (Allen 2014): "Creon makes the decree that, of two brothers recently killed in battle, only one will be honored and the other shall be left unburied on the battlefield to be feasted on by birds and animals. With the news recently that a young man killed in North County was left dead on the streets of Ferguson for a seemingly unnecessary length of time before being removed to the morgue, the irony across the ages cannot be overlooked."

[9] Ensuing events confirmed this perspective. About a month after *Antigone* closed on October 26th (November 24, 2014), a grand jury ruled not to indict Darren Wilson, and on January of the next year lawyers of the Federal Justice Department recommended that no civil rights charges be brought against Wilson (Apuzzo and Schmidt 2015). Less than two months after its lawyers recommended that Wilson not be charged, however (March 4, 2015), the Justice Department argued in a review of the Ferguson Police Department that the department had engaged widely in racially biased law enforcement (United States Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs 2015).

[10] Scenic design by Michael Heil, paintings by James van Well (panels) and Cristie Johnston (stage).

[11] The violence continued well after 2014, and by the time of the final revision of this article (January 2017), well-publicized incidents in several American cities had taken the lives of numerous minority civilians at the hands of police and numerous policemen at the hands of minority civilians.

[12] The sphinx scene's reminder of Oedipus would be especially strong for members of the audience who had seen Upstream Theater's production of *Oedipus Tyrannos*, performed in the same space four years earlier (Boehm et al. 2010). In that production the exact same scene covered the stage itself (image 3).

[13] The costumes were designed by LaLonnie Lehman.

[14] Boehm has pointed out the important difference between *Antigone*'s chorus and us. The elders of Sophocles' Thebes have no real power, and their advice has no effect on Creon until it is too late. Boehm has expressed his hope, which we can all share, that in our representative democracy our voices and our

votes can help change the conditions that lay behind the crisis of 2014 (Weinert-Kent 2014).

[15] Note also the image used on the program cover and in advertisements for the production. It showed the faces of Antigone and Creon juxtaposed, surrounded by the words, "What would you be willing to die for? What would you be willing to kill for?" (image 8). The inclusion of ***both*** questions sent the message that, in contrast to many productions of the play, Creon's dilemma would be put on equal footing with Antigone's.

[16] "LaLonnie Lehman's costumes, with the odd exception of Creon's more modern attire, lend an air of authenticity" (Gibson 2014); "LaLonnie Lehman makes a bizarre costuming choice by depicting Creon in a suit and wearing shoes, while everyone else is barefoot or in sandals of ancient attire. Perhaps her intention is to single out Creon as deviating from the wishes of the populace and therefore looking 'different' than the others, a most jarring appearance" (Bretz 2014); "Costumes by LaLonnie Lehman are rather mixed; the chorus of elders are beautifully evocative of some ancient tribal place (north Africa? Afghanistan?). A guard in a bronze cuirass is straight out of classical Greece. Antigone wears a very modern dark dress and fashionable sandals with an ankle strap and low heels. King Creon appears in what might be a collarless Mao suit but for all the very shiny brass buttons. This all lends an air of confusion—of indecisiveness—which is a bit distracting" (Callahan 2014).

[17] Creon sprinkling himself with ashes was the subject of a brief video, produced by Michael Dorsey and posted on Vimeo (Dorsey 2014: https://vimeo.com/108010549). A link to the video was sent in an email blast and otherwise distributed as one of the major ways of publicizing the production.

[18] In keeping with these themes of community and the dangers of authority, Philip Boehm invited Shelly Welsch, mayor of University City, Missouri, to a talkback after one of *Antigone*'s performances (University City lies directly in between the location of the theater and Ferguson). Mayor Welsch, whose suburban St. Louis community faces some of the same challenges as Ferguson, discussed with members of the cast, Philip Boehm, and translator David Slavitt the need for flexibility on the part of those with power. Upstream Theater later brought its production to a prison near St. Louis. There the play's attention to issues of authority, community, and violence was even more poignant.

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images

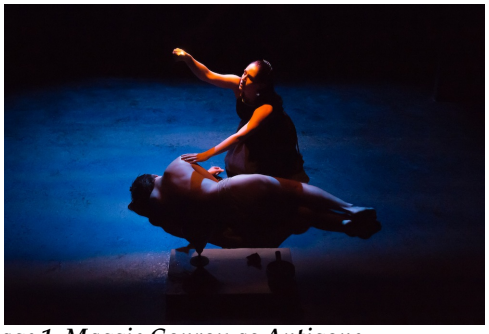

Image 1: Maggie Conroy as Antigone

Image 2: Scenic design by Michael Heil; James van Well and Cristie Johnston, scenic artists

Image 3: Amy Loui as Jocasta and J. Samuel Davis as Oedipus in Upstream's 2010 production of **Oedipus King** *with scenic design by Michael Heil*

Image 4: Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 5: John Bratkowski as Tiresias

Image 6: Nancy Lewis as the Messenger

Image 7: Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus, Peter Mayer as Creon, and Maggie Conroy as Antigone

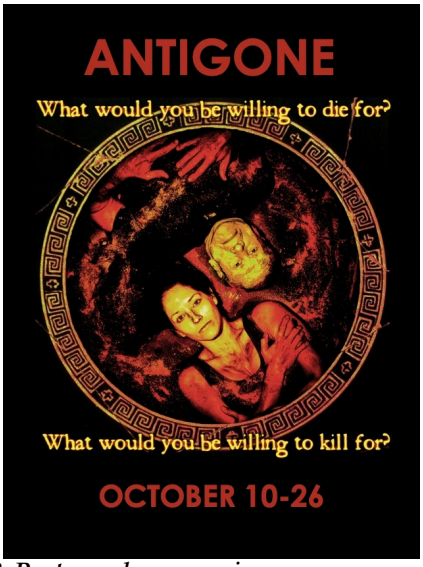

Image 8: Poster and program image

Image 9: Peter Mayer as Creon

Image 10: Peter Mayer as Creon in Upstream's 2010 production of Oedipus King

Image 11: John Bratkowski as the Guard and Peter Mayer as Creon, with Patrick Siler and Norman McGowan as members of the Chorus

Image 12: John Bratkowski as the Guard and Peter Mayer as Creon, with Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 13: Wendy Renée Greenwood as Eurydice

Image 14: Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon

Image 15: Maggie Conroy as Antigone

Image 16: Wendy Renée Greenwood as Ismene

Image 17: Peter Mayer as Creon and Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon

Image 18: Peter Mayer as Creon, John Bratkowski as the Guard, Wendy Renée Greenwood as Ismene, and Maggie Conroy as Antigone, with Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 19: John Bratkowski as the Guard and Peter Mayer as Creon, with Patrick Siler and Norman McGowan as members of the Chorus

Image 20: Wendy Renée Greenwood as Ismene, John Bratkowski as the Guard, and Peter Mayer as Creon, with Patrick Siler and Norman McGowan as members of the Chorus

Image 21: John Bratkowski as the Guard and Peter Mayer as Creon, with Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 22: Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon and Peter Mayer as Creon

Image 23: Maggie Conroy as Antigone and Wendy Renée Greenwood as Ismene

Image 24: Norman McGowan as a member of the Chorus, Maggie Conroy as Antigone, and Peter Mayer as Creon

Image 25: Nancy Lewis as the Messenger and Patrick Siler and Norman McGowan as member of the Chorus

Image 26: Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon and Peter Mayer as Creon

Image 27: Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon and Peter Mayer as Creon

Image 28: John Bratkowski as Tiresias and Peter Mayer as Creon

Image 29: Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus and Peter Mayer as Creon

Image 30: Maggie Conroy as Antigone

Image 31: Maggie Conroy as Antigone

Image 32: Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon

Image 33: Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon

Image 34: Patrick Siler and Norman McGowan as members of the Chorus, Nancy Lewis as the Messenger, and Wendy Renée Greenwood as Eurydice

Image 35: Patrick Siler and Norman McGowan as members of the Chorus, Nancy Lewis as the Messenger, and Wendy Renée Greenwood as Eurydice

Image 36: John Bratkowski as Tiresias

Image 37: Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 38: Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 39: Peter Mayer as Creon and Maggie Conroy as Antigone

Image 40: Maggie Conroy as Antigone and Peter Mayer as Creon, with Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 41: Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon and Peter Mayer as Creon, with Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 42: Peter Mayer as Creon and John Bratkowski as Tiresias, with Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 43: Peter Mayer as Creon and Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon, with Dennis Lebby, Norman McGowan, and Patrick Siler as the Chorus

Image 44: Peter Mayer as Creon and Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon

Image 45: Peter Mayer as Creon and Andrew Michael Neiman as Haemon

The Authenticity of Mary-Kay Gamel

Ruby Blondell

University of Washington

Like so many others, I have benefited deeply for many years and in countless ways not only from Mary-Kay Gamel's academic and theatrical work, but from her collaboration and friendship. In composing my response to these papers, then, I decided to focus on the quality that, in my eyes, unifies her life as a human being and friend with her work as a theater artist, teacher, and scholar: authenticity.

The set for Antigone at the Upstream Theater Company, 2014
(photo: Peter Wochniak)

Whether in a person or in a theatrical production, this quality is notoriously difficult to define; but I believe that very difficulty lies at the heart of its significance for Mary-Kay. She has argued that theatrical authenticity comes in at least six flavors: (i) nominal/historical (reproducing original performance conditions); (ii) expressive (bringing out a work's latent meanings); (iii) processual (expressing the commitment of all the artists involved); (iv) structural (evoking the communal character of ancient theater); (v) inductive (producing an audience impact analogous to that of ancient productions); (vi) critical (taking a holistic scholarly approach).**1** These varieties of authenticity are far from mutually exclusive. It is, rather, the very complexity and multivalence of the term that give it such generative richness for practitioners of ancient drama.

Traditionally, scholarship on ancient performance has equated authenticity with fidelity to the text and to ancient theater practice (nominal/historical authenticity). It is in these terms that Amy R. Cohen locates herself and Mary-Kay "at opposite ends of the ancient theatrical spectrum." At her end of that spectrum, Cohen recreates original practices as closely as possible; at the other end, Mary-Kay is famous for provocative adaptations which insist, in Cohen's words, that we "understand the tragedies in terms of our modern world." Mary-Kay would argue, however, that her productions are no less authentic than Cohen's, since she strives for other forms of authenticity, which complement but also complicate the goal of fidelity to text and *realien*.

Among these modes of authenticity, I would argue that the "inductive" occupies a special place. A director might, for example, choose not to engage in processual or structural authenticity, but the challenge of inductive authenticity is inescapable, since "productions...that do not engage their audiences intellectually and emotionally...fail as theatrical experiences" (Gamel 2013: 189). One of the few things we know for sure about ancient audience response is that it was viscerally emotional. It follows that a modern production will be more authentic in a vital respect if it succeeds in engaging its own audience in a comparable fashion. But this can only be done by relating the drama to contemporary concerns. If, as Christopher Bungard puts it, "a text makes meaning through its engagement with the cultural values of its recipients," then those values, as well as the script, require translation.

Once we realize this we can, like Cohen, let go of the classicist's plaintive knee-jerk reaction "but that's not what it says." After all, no act of translation can convey *every* aspect of "what it says." Indeed, simply by rendering the text in a modern language we have sacrificed one aspect of authenticity—the original words—in favor of a more important one, namely the not-insignificant fact that ancient audiences could understand what the performers were saying. Mary-Kay takes this insight further. On her view, respect for an ancient script may be displayed not only by translating the original words accurately, but

sometimes by actively tampering with them (as ancient actors did themselves2). Departing from the received text may actually serve as translation of a different kind. Mary-Kay's production of Euripides' *Helen*, which Toph Marshall mentions in his introduction, provides an excellent example of this paradox. As Marshall tells us, the ending of her version diverged radically from the original script. As a result, in his words, "The...weirdness of the mythic variant [kept] even the most savvy Euripidean guessing at where the play [would] turn next." Given Euripides' own propensity for surprising his audience with unusual mythic variants, there is an important sense in which nothing could be more Euripidean than such "infidelity" to his script.

Mary-Kay's approach helps to liberate theater practitioners from a misleading and partial notion of what must be done to ensure "authenticity." In an article quoted by Bungard, for example, Niall Slaterobjects to inserting new lines into the script of Terence's *Hecyra*, saying "the problem with this strategy is that Terence disappears and is replaced by what the adapter thinks of Terence" (Slater 1999: 18). But in Mary-Kay's view such concerns evaporate, or must at a minimum be rephrased. In any kind of production, Terence or Euripides or Sophocles *always* disappears, to be replaced by a hybrid resulting from complex interactions between the playwright and his or her interpreters.

There is, then, no such thing as a fully authentic performance. Even time-travel could not provide us with one, since a modern viewer in the Theater of Dionysus would be a cultural alien, incapable of ancient Greek modes of comprehension and emotional response. By the same token, however, *any* modern production, from the most historically informed to the most avant-garde, may stake its own kind of claim to authenticity. In this view, authenticity is not, after all, a point on a spectrum. It is more like a fluid boundary between two territories, or a zigzagging line connecting the dots among multiple points of contact and tension between ourselves and the past—whether these concern script, staging, mode of production, or audience impact. As with any kind of translation, this line is drawn as a result of complex negotiations between what we know of the past and the contemporary perspectives from which we know it. But performance stands apart from textual translation in distinctive ways. Most importantly, it takes the meaning of a script out of the realm of pure imagination and into the physical world, making the choices that inform it starkly visible. In so doing, it forces both performers and audience to take up specific positions in the no-man's-land between us and them, then and now.

As Homer says about the shifting line of battle, this boundary is in a constant state of ebb and flow. But there is no need to construe the field of performance choices as a battlefield, since there is not—nor can there be—any single determinately correct version of where that line should "should" fall. Each production, from the most antiquarian to the most adventurous, is equally engaged in drawing it in a distinctive way. There is, however, some danger of effectively abandoning the field altogether. This can happen, at one extreme, with the kind of pedantic reconstruction that Mary-Kay objects to, which runs the risk of disconnecting the audience from contemporary meanings altogether.

At the other extreme lies the risk of over-familiarization, fueled by the insistence that Greeks and Romans were "just like us." Modern interpreters are, of course, well aware that ancient institutions and cultural practices (such as slavery and the treatment of women) were different from our own. But it can be tempting to bridge this gulf by perceiving the characters' motivations and psychological make-up as "timeless," in other words, as indistinguishable from our own. Medea, for example, may be modernized by presenting her as a heart-broken love-sick woman, or as criminally insane. This approach has the merit of forging a connection with the alien Other, but it does so at a price: we lose the full terrifying force of seeing a "woman" driven by shame, honor, and revenge to commit deeds that fit into no contemporary framework for comprehensible human motivation. By erasing the Otherness of the ancients, such strategies risk abdicating the challenge of what Bungard calls "a double-visioned approach" that "can encourage students to probe ancient attitudes while thinking more critically about their own."

Mary-Kay is of course well aware of this danger, arguing that even inductive authenticity calls for "a mixture of the familiar and the strange" (Gamel 2010: 160). In an interview quoted by Cohen, she declares, "I do not want to change things into concepts that modern audiences can completely understand. There needs to be some unfamiliarity." One of the things that makes her work remarkable is her success in walking this line. Modernizing or experimental productions can, of course, be as unsuccessful in dramatic terms as pedantic literalism. But Mary-Kay's particular genius consists in part in making choices—often risky ones—that keep audiences gripped, even while challenging them to negotiate both similarity and difference. This balance makes her extraordinarily successful in generating what she calls the "dynamic" and "fruitful tension" between antiquarianism and theatrical effectiveness.

How is this fruitful tension to be achieved? In my own experience, members of the general public tend to occupy the same two extremes that bookend the choices of theater practitioners, namely pedantry and over-familiarization (often both at once). It is widely believed that the ancients are "just like us," and that *this* is why their dramas still have meaning for us, since they embody a "timeless" human nature to which we can still "relate." This belief is instinctive, inescapable, and in fact essential, to some degree, if an audience is to engage emotionally with a text or production. But the very necessity of such a response also makes it dangerous, since the complacent acceptance of such commonplaces risks erasing difference altogether, and with it the "fruitful tension" of which Mary-Kay speaks.

I personally prefer the other widespread tendency that pervades reactions from many of the public, namely an almost obsessive desire for a production to "get it right." It is easy to find such reactions in online comments and reviews. A favorite example of mine is the frequent complaint about the 2003 TV miniseries *Helen of Troy*—where Achilles is played (by Joe Montana) as a shaven-headed thug—that Achilles was not "really" bald. This may seem amusingly naive, but as a production choice, the baldness of Achilles is, in fact, a great starting point for a discussion of culture and meaning: Why *would* a twenty-first century TV producer represent one of the "long-haired Achaeans" with a shaved head? What would the alternatives be, and how would they affect the meaning of the production? Whatever answers one offers to such questions, the essential point is that in producing a drama—as opposed to simply reading a text—*some*choice must be made about Achilles' head and its hair, or lack thereof, and that choice will have a whole range of implications. The visibility of performance forces us to confront such questions in a uniquely powerful way.

This is one reason why the kind of pedagogical techniques that Bungard employs are so important. By having his students produce and perform in ancient dramas, he obliges them to make these kinds of choices for themselves, thus prompting reflection on the ways in which—individually and socially—we both are and are not like the ancients. This primes them to become sophisticated viewers and readers outside the classroom, where theater productions and other forms of reception (such as film and television) will continue to challenge them, each in its own way, to interrogate such boundaries.

Upstream Theater's *Antigone*, as analyzed by Timothy Moore, provides a perfect example of such a challenge. Thanks to its location in time and place, the production was inescapably framed by the political unrest in Ferguson. According to Moore, modern productions can "engage with contemporary politics in meaningful and constructive ways while introducing minimal changes to their received texts and very few striking anachronisms." This approach is absolutely "authentic" by the standards of Greek tragedy, which almost never refers directly to contemporary Athenian politics yet engages profoundly with such concerns through verbal, visual, and narrative implication. But the Upstream staging also challenged its audience to construct their own version of the shifting line between ancient and modern meanings. The literal line of Greek key pattern enclosing the stage (visible in this image) seems to provoke the viewer to interrogate its effectiveness as a barrier, not only between audience and players but between the Greeks and us.

The background of oversized vase paintings presents a slightly different kind of challenge. Viewers will respond to it variously, depending on their personal knowledge of Greek antiquity. (Do they realize, for example, that these images are taken from specific vases?) Yet even those who know little of such matters will recognize the images in question as signifiers of European "high" culture. As such these panels invite us to affirm the lasting value of ancient works of art, including drama; by the same token, however, they also elevate the artistic and cultural significance of the events unfolding on stage. In so far as these events allude to the recent political turmoil in Ferguson, then, the production is using an elite cultural form to legitimize the tragic concerns of disadvantaged American blacks—people who, as a group, typically stand well outside the gates of "high" culture. Using ancient drama to think about contemporary concerns is thus a way of democratizing elite cultural products—a way that would have seemed perfectly natural in classical Athens.

Academic theater practitioners can use pedagogy to democratize ancient drama in a related way. As Cohen emphasizes, college productions offer many people their first or even their only exposure to such works of "high" art. As teachers, we have the opportunity to drive home the fact that despite their cultural cachet, ancient dramas were not composed as elite texts for a privileged few, but as performance scripts aimed at a mass audience. If this kind of pedagogy is to succeed, however, the plays must be presented, as they were in antiquity, in ways that make emotional and cultural sense to their audience. This democratizing of an elite cultural practice that was deeply democratic in its origins offers us yet another avenue to theatrical authenticity (in more than one of its varieties).

At this point, one may be wondering whether the concept of authenticity has outlived its usefulness. If every approach has equal potential for authenticity on its own terms, then how are we to locate or evaluate that elusive quality? I think the key lies in a phrase Cohen uses to describe the success of any production: it must have a "lively authenticity." By "lively" I take her to mean "infused with life": infused with our life in a way that makes sense of ancient life as we understand it. To be authentic is to be true to oneself in negotiating the boundaries between past and present and joining the dots to produce our own version of that uncertain line, in full and humble awareness that other approaches may have an authenticity of their own.

I say "humble" because in approaching ancient work of all kinds we must never forget that we are always doing so as ourselves. At the end of the day, we have no choice other than, as Cohen puts it, to "understand the tragedies in terms of our modern world." Different styles of production tell us about different aspects of that world and different aspects of ourselves. But *every* engagement with an ancient script is just that—an engagement, not a presentation of objectively determinable facts. Each classicist involved in the performance of ancient theater must take on the challenge of drawing that uncertain line between ancient and modern, in order to achieve a production that is authentic to oneself personally, both as a scholar of antiquity and as a product of the here and now. We must all aspire, that is, to the authenticity of Mary-Kay Gamel.

notes

[1] This taxonomy is from Gamel 2013. Mary-Kay says more about (iv) in Gamel 2016 and (v) in Gamel 2010. On the difficulty of defining "authenticity" more generally see, most influentially, Trilling 1972.

[2] See e.g. Cicero *Pro Sestio* 121, Plutarch *Moralia* 841F. The degree to which such interpolations may have affected our texts is debated (for a skeptical view see Hamilton 1974), but the fact that they occurred in live performance is not in doubt.

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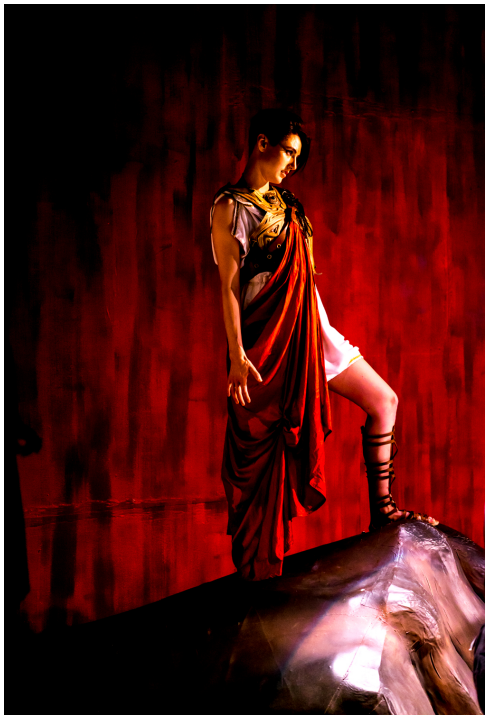
Two Tragic Worlds of Soldiers: Not Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble's *Ajax in Iraq*

Ellen McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq*
Produced by Jason Bruffy, in association with the Greenway Arts Alliance
Directed and choreographed by John Farmanesh-Bocca
July and August 2016
Not Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble
Greenway Court Theatre, Los Angeles

Reviewed by **Yuko Kurahashi**
Kent State University

Founded in 2004 in San Francisco, Not Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble has staged adaptations of Ancient Greek and Roman plays as well as Shakespeare, including *Pericles Redux*, *Titus Redux*, *Hercules Furens*, and *Lysistrata Unbound*. Bringing dance and theatre together, the ensemble has created innovative theatrical events and is one of the leading physical theatre companies in the United States.



Joanna Rose Bateman as Athena
(photo: Sean Deckert)

For their production of *Ajax in Iraq*, produced in 2014, McLaughlin and Farmanesh-Bocca collaboratively tailored the script for the NMA's movement-focused presentation. . The 2016 production of *Ajax in Iraq* was the result of additional revisions done by McLaughlin and NMA to further highlight unique features of the company.

Ajax in War juxtaposes the legendary Greek hero from Sophocles's *Ajax* with a contemporary story about the war in Iraq and the sexual battery of women soldiers fighting there. Ajax (Aaron Hendry) is a Greek warrior who succumbs to his hubris after losing the contest for the armor of the fallen hero Achilles to Odysseus. McLaughlin invents the character of AJ (Courtney Munch) as the counterpart to Ajax. Like her ancient Greek counterpart, AJ is a soldier known for her acts of valor.

Aaron Hendry as Ajax
(photo: Sean Deckert)

McLaughlin's dramaturgy merges these two worlds, universalizing the trauma and tragedy of war by treating Ajax's breakdown as an example of PTSD. In the contemporary story, both AJ (Courtney Much) and Ajax (Aaron Hendry) perform together on the stage in choreographed movement sequences. AJ's breakdown is a response to sexual battery by her superior officer (James Bane). The use of sexual assault in the play reflects increasing concerns about the incidence of sexual harassment and assault in the US military, while PTSD illustrates the condition of soldiers. The interplay between sexual harassment and sexual assault is complex because in the military, "the level of coercion that can be facilitated through the use of rank and authority can be just as serious as the threat or

use of physical force."[1] The routine of AJ's superior's verbal threats escalates into physical assaults. AJ's trauma exemplifies the seriousness of sexual victimization in the military, which still needs to be addressed.

Through the figures of Ajax, AJ, and their fellow soldiers, McLaughlin asks the fundamental question of why we fight. The public would say we fight for freedom and democracy, but in reality soldiers fight for daily survival and, most importantly, from ancient times to the present, for the other soldiers on either side.

Joanna Rose Bateman, who plays the Greek Goddess Athena, serves as narrator of the play. Her sardonic delivery adds an edge, provoking the audience. Hendry's Ajax, with exaggerated makeup and a macho strut, portrays a war hero possessed by demons. Munch's AJ is a strong but vulnerable loner. She expresses her psychological state through dance, movement, and facial expressions. The well-trained ensemble plays multiple roles. The well-trained ensemble plays multiple roles. Their synchronized movement/dance, choreographed by Farmanesh-Bocca and Jones Welsh, to the upbeat music in the first scene, designed by Farmanesh-Bocca and Adam Phalen, sets the tone.

The stage is simple but metaphorical with a red backdrop, abstract sculptures, helmets, and a gigantic right hand pointing at a floor map of the Middle East painted by Courtney Jordan Bindel. Army trunks and cots are used to supplement the stage. Lighting designer Joey Guthman changes tones and intensity of lighting throughout the performance, creating different ambiences for the ancient and contemporary worlds. The ensemble, as soldiers, wears camouflage pants and t-shirts with knee pads. When they become a Greek chorus, they simply wear white masks. Ajax wears a black crossed-leather belt, modified "foustanella" (a skirt-like garment), and greaves. Bateman's Athena is dressed in a stark-white tunic with a bright-red shawl over it. These archetypical costumes and accessories, designed by Stephanie Dunbar (Catherine Baumgardner, wardrobe designer), serve as a visual reminder of the symbioses between Greek tragedies and contemporary war.

McLaughlin has adapted other Greek tragedies, including *The Persians* (National Actors' Theatre, New York), *Helen* (Public Theater, New York), and *Iphigenia and Other Daughters* (Classic Stage, New York). McLaughlin states that when she went into the collaboration process with the class of 2009 at the Art/MXAT Institute for Advanced Theater Training, she did not intend to write another Greek adaptation: "All I knew was that I wanted to write about the Iraq War, which I felt compelled to address as we entered its bloodiest year and there seemed no end in sight."[2] During the creative process, McLaughlin strongly felt that her generation was "essentially sending their generation to fight its battle."[3]

The 2009 collaborative processes were imbued with the younger generation's efforts to know more about war and its effects on people in the past and present. The graduate students conducted research on the mythology and history of war through books, articles, and YouTube videos. Some interviewed their grandparents and relatives, and some talked to homeless Vietnam veterans and returning soldiers. In order to find a strong structure for these diverse devising-theatre materials, McLaughlin turned to the Greeks.

The NMA's interpretation and staging of McLaughlin's *Ajax in War* is an invaluable vehicle for raising awareness of the tragedies in war in the year 2016, 13 years after the US invasion of Iraq.

notes

[1] Valerie A. Sander and Cynthia J. Thomsen, "Sexual Harassment and Assault in the U. S Military: A Review of Policy and Research Trends," *Military Medicine* 181 (2016): 21.

[2] Ellen McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," *PMLA* 129. 4 (2014), 835.

[3] *Ibid.*

Imperial Pantomime and Satoshi Miyagi's *Medea*

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Figure 7: Medea

What was it that made imperial pantomime so wildly, enduringly popular? Pantomime under the empire was not, of course, the silent performance that we think of today, but incorporated what seems to us a strange mix. A notoriously effeminate, silent, masked male player (the "pantomime") was at center stage, in some sense "acting" and "dancing" the part, while other players spoke and sang the libretto and played the music, including a strongly percussive beat. In just the last few years our detailed understanding of pantomime has improved enormously. For most of us, that improved understanding arrived in 2007 and 2008, when no less than four book-length treatments, all good in their different ways, created a millennial flood of publications on the subject.[1] Yet even this welcome light on an erstwhile shadowy topic fails to explain entirely the central paradox posed here: what was it about the art form that made it so sensationally attractive, especially given the availability of tragedy, comedy, and mime? The whole doesn't seem to add up to a sort of theater that could mesmerize Augustus and Trajan no less than Caligula and Nero,[2] that led to repeated riots by its fans,[3] and that swept the eastern Mediterranean by storm as soon as it was allowed to become part of traditional festivals.

Figure 1: Terracotta pantomime mask. Athens. Agora T1818. Roman era.

In this paper I explore possibilities for an answer to that paradox through cross-cultural comparison, taking as *comparanda* certain aspects of traditional Japanese dance drama as refracted through the lens of an extraordinary contemporary play, Satoshi Miyagi's *Medea*. First, though, we need to get a clear impression of imperial pantomime. In the summary that follows we seek fundamentals, to get a grasp of this popular genre *qua* genre, even while freely conceding that such entertainments were unlikely to have fit always within tight parameters, or to have been static over time.

Imperial pantomime was a type of mimetic dance, that is, *dance that tells a story*. Mimetic dance seems to be quintessentially anthropic, arising broadly and independently over time and place. In the northern Mediterranean, pantomime-like performances are attested in early Greece long before the Roman empire,[4] as well as in the Etruscan and early Italic tradition,[5] and the word *pantomimos* appears (in Greek) at least as early as 80 BC.[6] But the *qui primus* story told in the empire isolated the "introducers" (εἰσηγηταί) of pantomime as a pair of Greek entertainers from the east, Bathyllus and Pylades, who were said to have amazed Maecenas and therefore also Augustus at dinner parties, and despite their low rank to have become close associates.[7] This pair went on with the emperor's sanction to formalize their art form, thereby starting

the tradition. Whatever the exact historicity of this founding tale, the critical elements that they "introduced" and which formed the contours for the *idea* of the traditional art[8] were as follows:

1. *Mythic stories* as the object of the "dance that tells a story without words."[9]

2. *Traditional movements, poses, and gestures* that looked back to the Augustan founding figures, Bathyllus and Pylades, and formed the elements of a formalized training in the art. To become a professional required great athleticism and training from an early age to master moves and poses that can be profitably compared to those of today's top gymnasts (for acrobatic moves) and yogis (for contortionist poses). This requirement distinguished pantomimes from other modes of dance that gifted amateurs could produce.[10] Top pantomimes were also often distinguished by association with the "house" of one of the founders or other early stars; we know of five Pyladeses down through the third century who took the founder's name and presumably claimed association with that "house" (*domus*).[11]

3. *A "mimetic" art with a well-defined semiotics* that required some familiarity among the audience with the meanings contrived by tradition.[12]

4. *Multiple, elaborate masks*. Drama and other traditions made use of masks, of course, but pantomime is strongly associated with the combination of dance and the transmutation that masks help produce. (figure 1) A later writer will describe Pylades' dancing with words like "exalted" and "emotive" but also "many-masked" or "many-charactered" (figure 2).[13] The ability of a single dancer to transform himself into multiple characters was essential to how pantomime distinguished itself from other staged dance, such as tragic choruses.[14] This, too, made the pantomime strictly a professional activity — individuals and amateurs would not have access to these elaborate masks.

Figure 2: Pantomime holding masks. Ivory. Trier. c. 4th century.

Figure 3: Noh mask (Shiro-shakumi 白曲見, © TOSHIRO MORITA, the-noh.com)

5. *Silken robes and scarf.* Pantomimes were also famous for their striking ankle-length silk robes and a long flowing scarf used "now to represent a swan's tail, now the locks of Venus, and now a Fury's lash," as Fronto describes it.[15] The distinctive costume was, then, an important additional technique by which the pantomime commanded the stage and was able to represent multiple characters in one person.

6. *All male*.[16] As with tragedy, the maleness seems part and parcel of marking the dance as a professional "high" art, inasmuch as it does not involve "low" females. It also makes the impersonation of the mask and body movements demanding in a particular way and informs the awe-inspiring Protean aspect of the dance:[17] how can one dancer play the Minotaur one moment and a frail young Ariadne the next, Ares but *also* Aphrodite?

7. *Musical and rhythmic accompaniment*. One of the innovations attributed to Pylades was the use of a pipe orchestra and chorus.[18] In later times a fuller ensemble seems usual (see below). This dovetails with the notion of a fully professional art form, since the coordination of musicians with the dancer's performance suggests a troupe of some sort,[19] and thus a resource not readily accessible to amateurs.

Figure 4: Noh Actor (© TOSHIRO MORITA, the-noh.com)

Most scholars, understandably, focus on the visual impact of the solo dancer in trying to account for the popularity of the genre, and without question the dancer was the audience's main focus. Earlier generations were prone to likening the pantomime to classical ballet, and one still finds this anachronism creeping into the literature,[20] but specialists now agree that ballet is far off the mark. In a sensitive study of the ancient evidence for the dancer's movements and methods, Ruth Webb sums up the scene in this way:

Figure 5: Kabuki actor Ebizo Ichikawa XI

Figure 6: Bunraku performance, National Bunraku Theatre, Osaka, Japan. The puppeteers are the black-hooded figures in the background.

> The dancers' combination of controlled, sinuous movements with bursts of rhythmic energy and dramatic stops, together with the erotic or violent stories they conjured up, mesmerized their spectators and sent them wild with excitement, making the pantomimes' audience more akin to sporting fans than to the audience of modern classical ballet (Webb 2008a, 2).[21]

Here, however, I want to focus on the other side of the troupe's performance: not the solo dancer, but the supporting players, who provided the narrative, the song, the music, the rhythm. How did the deployment of these supporting players — with the combination of visual and aural elements— help the whole become a mesmerizing performance? Again, Ruth Webb in her study of ancient audience involvement provides a useful starting point by describing how pantomime contrasts with classical ballet:[22]

> It is true that, like classical ballet, pantomime told a story through the medium of dance and provided a forum for virtuoso dancing. But in contrast to classical ballet, music, rhythm, movement, and meaning worked in unison in the pantomime. The relationships between dance

> movement and musical accompaniment is far looser in ballet, where rhythm is far less marked and the dancer's movements do not closely follow the phrasing of the melody. … I can watch a ballet attentively and still have the mental space for the contemplation of unrelated topics; the same is not true (for me) of a successful performance of flamenco or Egyptian dance, nor was it true, it seems, for the pantomime (Webb 2008a, 90).

(We could also add another important contrast, that ancient pantomime involved use of sudden *static poses*, in combination with traditional gestures, so that the music, libretto and visual tableaux combined to create dramatic tension and to focus audience involvement.)

Figure 8: Speakers (stills from DVD supplied by the director)

We do not know where exactly the supporting players to pantomime were stationed. Notionally the focus was on the pantomime actor himself, but the other players were on stage, in full sight of the audience, and close enough that a player could on occasion interact with the dancer.[23] The music itself was entirely unlike modern symphonic accompaniment to classical dance. The pantomime actor was said to "show forth *the things being sung*"[24] and these things were sung at times by a chorus of "many"[25] and at other times by a soloist singing or euphoniously narrating what the dancer demonstrated with his movements.[26] The chorus, as we expect, sang in unison.[27] The instrumental accompaniment was, as mentioned, a band of multiple pipes, including both panpipes and *auloi*; these carried melody, but the *auloi*, as we know from other contexts, could also provide rhythm or carry a drone note, and both types of pipes can be notably shrill.[28] The strumming of a performance lyre (*kithara*), which can be loud like a harp, could also be part of the ensemble.[29] To all this a strong rhythmic line was provided by cymbals and by the "stampers"—a defining and apparently indispensable aspect of pantomime accompaniment—who kept beat with the *scabella* (κρούπεζαι in Greek), wooden shoes or sandals with a sole or attached plate made of metal or wood; and there might also be percussionists striking a board with a piece of wood.[30] Hostile Christian sources from the third and fourth centuries suggest "an anarchic competition between dancer, narrator, and instrumentalists";[31] and Arnobius complains of "raising the loud din with the clacking of the *scabella*, rousing another crowd of souls in their wantonness to abandon themselves to bizarre motions, to the dance and singing, and, moreover, to the accompaniment of this clacking, to raise their haunches and hips, floating along with a tremulous motion of the loins."[32] We have the sense, then, of a musical background that can be vigorous, loud, gripping, even overwhelming, something in western audience experience in some ways more akin to a rock concert than to a ballet performance, creating a whole that is without obvious parallel.

Figure 9: Movers (dancers) Creon and Medea (photo © Mark Webb/The Herald-Dispatch)

Figure 10: Medea Speaker (stills from DVD supplied by the director)

That pantomime results from a mix that seems to us culturally without register suggests the possibility of improving our understanding through cross-cultural comparison. Several analogues have been suggested. Ruth Webb has with profit explored comparisons with the mimetic Indian dance forms such as Kathak and Kathakali,[33] and makes scattered comparisons to flamenco and to the traditional dances of Egypt (as we saw in the quotation above). Meanwhile, Japanese dance drama, especially Noh theater, has been studied in some depth for the light it may shed on ancient Greek tragedy,[34] but not for its relation to pantomime.

I propose here a brief review of some ways that Japanese dance drama intersects with the sketch of pantomime given above. The argument will not be that pantomime is directly analogous to any one of the Japanese dance forms; rather, that a combination of Japanese traditional features may prove illuminating. We will come to focus not on a traditional staging, but on a contemporary play that combines in striking ways several elements of traditional Japanese theater. That certain elements of Japanese dance drama have fascinating similarities with imperial pantomime is doubly interesting because there is not the slightest chance of trans-cultural influence.

Figure 12: Jason (still from DVD supplied by the director)

Noh, the most ancient Japanese theater, has its own founding figures. The inventor figure was the actor Kan'ami, who in the mid-fourteenth century combined a form of traditional theater known as *sarugaku*, "up to then dominated by mimicry [that is, miming stories], with … a popular form of dance accompaniment to storytelling, to create totally new kinds of music and movement."[35] Kan'ami performed before the Shogun Yoshimitsu (the emperor's supreme commander and military ruler of Japan), who was so taken that he awarded Kan'ami formal status as "Actor to the Shogun," thus granting him patronage, public approval, and prestige. Zeami, son and apprentice to the superstar Kan'ami, took over when his father died, and despite his commoner status was said to have become a close associate with the Shogun and other leading aristocrats (this should sound familiar).[36] The plots of Noh even today are simple and traditional, some of them written by Zeami himself; the Noh actors are part of, or adopted into, families that claim descent from Zeami or other stars from the medieval beginnings of the art's formalization. Traditionally, the dancers are male. They are mostly masked (figure 3). The masks represent about sixty basic types and portray females, elders, demons, gods, and ghosts. The masks, interestingly, are deliberately made too small (figure 4), and are conceived not as a stage prop that disguises, but as a kind of actor's sorcery; for the audience to be so uninvolved that they notice the head of the actor visible around the face of the mesmerizing mask is considered a shameful failure on the part of the actor.[37] The actors themselves train as apprentices for years to command the movements and gestures of the formalized dance, which ranges from static poses to exactly controlled

Video Clip: youtu.be/uAm_0IQPFkw
Medea and Jason from Satoshi Miyagi's **Medea**

movements to set pieces with names. Movements and gestures are famously slow and formal, with well-defined semiotics, some of which need to be learned by the audience. The elements of music, chant, singing, and rhythm are supplied by players visible at the back and along the side of the stage; the instruments are drums and wooden flute. The chorus of players along the side sings in unison, and, though the main actor usually sings for himself, at times the chorus will sing in the main actor's voice. This has the curious effect of blurring, or even intermingling, the personae of the main actor and the other players (principally the chorus).[38] Who "I" am, what "I" feel becomes at times diffuse, embodied in the group rather than in the principal actor at center stage.

Of interest for pantomime in a different way is Kabuki theater. (figure 5) Considerably more comic in plot and feel, Kabuki tends to be loud and boisterous. The music can be vigorous, even noisy, and characteristic features are the use of shrill wooden reed pipes, drums, and a distinctive percussive effect caused by a clapper. A standard part of the performance is the use of acrobatics: players will suddenly perform a standing flip, for example. Like Noh, the actors are apprenticed from an early age, and come from, or are adopted into, various "schools" which are in effect families or houses claiming continual descent from medieval times.[39] Also relevant to pantomime is a third traditional form of Japanese drama, Bunraku, a wondrously effective and sophisticated type of puppet theater (figure 6). Of interest to us will be the way that a half- or two-thirds-life-sized wooden figure (the puppet) is impelled by two kinds of controllers. First are three black-robed puppeteers, who work not with strings but with finely coordinated, choreographed movements to give life to (1) right arm and head, (2) left arm, and (3) legs and feet. It is said that a puppeteer can take years to learn the feet, more to move up to govern the left arm, and yet more to become the lead puppeteer who controls right arm and head.[40] The second kind of controller is the narrator, who is fully visible at the side of the stage, and creates the voices —spoken, chanted, and sung — that drive the play the puppet enacts, able to change his voice seamlessly from one character to the next. The narrating is "extraordinarily virtuosic, drawing on a huge vocal range, dynamics, and power."[41] This role too takes years of intense training; among Bunraki narrators the saying goes that "it takes three years to learn to laugh, and eight years to cry."[42]

There is more that could be said, but for our purposes it will be most useful now to turn our focus to an amazing contemporary play, Satoshi Miyagi's *Medea*.[43] This is avant garde contemporary theater, not traditional Noh or Kabuki or Bunraku, though it uses actors trained in the traditional arts and incorporates many traditional elements. In figure 7, for example, the star is female, and does not use a mask; the player is, however, trained to suggest the use of a mask through her countenance (as is apparent in the play, and perhaps also discernible in the image here). The play also deploys a signature Miyagi feature, one adapted from Bunraku (with influence from Noh): voice and song come *entirely* from figures on the side —Miyagi terms them the *Speakers*— while at center stage the dancers (in Bunraku, the puppets) have no voice—Miyagi calls these the *Movers*.[44] I had the good fortune of coming to know of Miyagi's *Medea*through a riveting lecture given at Duke in 2011 by Mae Smethurst, who has written seminal works on Noh theater and Greek tragedy;[45] at her suggestion, I subsequently contacted the director Miyagi, who was kind enough to supply me with a DVD of the play along with other materials.[46]

Miyagi's piece is structured as a play within a play, in which the members of a 19th-century Japanese men's club receive a translation of Euripides' *Medea* and decide to enact it by reading it aloud performatively—these men then are the Speakers (figure 8)—and by selecting female servants—the Movers (figure 9)— to act out the Euripidean drama through gesture and dance movements. Towards the back of the stage are other servants (the supporting players) who add music and rhythm; the instruments here are flute together with drums and other percussion.[47] Costuming for Speakers is dark and unobtrusive (the robes of a judge or professor); but for the Movers at center stage it is exuberantly colorful, with exotic features (the Medea Mover wears the dress of a Korean foreigner underneath her

kimono). The Speakers (including the voice of Medea) are all males; the Movers (including Jason) are all females forced to act the part, roused to movement by the male voices but powerfully embodying the semiotics of the dance. The subject matter is the traditional Euripidean material, emotional and dramatic but, interestingly, not a surprise to the audience: the play as written assumes knowledge of Medea's story. The complex whole is curiously effective. And I mean *curiously* effective, something quite unlike modern western drama, but, I think, deeply illuminating for the way that the side-players—narrators and musicians—interact with the pantomime(s) at center stage to create a compelling whole.

The scene I have selected as an example picks up at the climax to Medea's first great monologue, right after Creon has decreed Medea's exile, in which she steels herself to murder her husband Jason and his wife (lines 395–445 in the Greek original). The man you will see talking (figure 10) is *Medea*, a gentleman performing the voice of Medea in a bunraku-style chant,[48] and the mute dancer[49] (figure 11) is Medea too—Medea embodied. The gentlemen as a group chant and thereby act as the chorus — this is the chorus of Corinthian *women*, you will recall (there are no Movers/dancers for the chorus). At the very end, another figure will appear, and that will be Jason (figure 12)—again, the voice of one of the club's gentlemen, the body that of a mute woman dressed and dancing as a man.

The sample scene (in this video clip) lasts for about 5 minutes. The emotions are raw, the plot well-known to Classicists, but the script is in Japanese, without subtitles. This has its advantages: as with ancient pantomime, the words are secondary. In the clip you will see, in succession:

> 1. Speaking nominally to the chorus, but in fact addressing herself (listen for the Japanese-inflected *MEDEA*), Medea reveals her plan and steels herself to action.
>
> 2. The Chorus (the "Women of Corinth") laugh and speak of three *adynata*: (a) rivers will flow backwards, (b) faith in the gods will not hold, (c) women will enjoy good repute. The Medea mover dances to the choral lyric.
>
> 3. At the very end of the clip, we see Jason arrive.

At its core, there are several aspects to the Miyagi play analogous to imperial pantomime, and my hope is that you will have had an "aha!" moment of insight simply from the review of ancient evidence and seeing the performance clip.[50] To be clear, let us recap the similarities. (1) A solo dancer (Mover) moves with formal choreography, deliberate bodily phrasing, and controlled hand gestures.[51] The goal of the dance is to tell a story, full of contained emotions and potential actions that are gradually allowed to surface, thus "mimetic." (2) Narrative and music come from the side and rear of the stage (Speakers and musicians) in such a way as to suggest that the sound impels the movements of the dancer. (3) The narrative material is traditional and mythical (in this case, serendipitously, from Greek myth). (4) Though the solo dancer does not change parts, she does enact in the dance the shifts in personae that are basic to the Medea character. (5) Flat expression of face and careful tilt of head is suggestive of a mask (or of a puppet), despite the obvious emotion of the scene. (6) The dancer is center stage, wearing a flowing and elaborate costume,[52] while narrator, chorus, and musicians are visually subdued and marginalized. (7) The rhythm of narrator's voice and the strong percussive line is striking and deeply essential to what is being "sung" or "played." At its most furious, the dance is driven by a terrifically involving din. (8) The performance as a whole is simple in its elements, but the combination of elements is complex, emotional, riveting, intense.

At the heart of the combination seems to be the curious divorce of the visual (the dancer) from the auditory (narrator, chorus, musicians). In this sense, the vigorous, loud supporting players — the narrator and music— are central to the effect of the dance in a way that seems rarely imagined by scholars of pantomime. The whole is of course complex, but it is the critical contribution of the

supporting players to the power of the pantomime dance that I hope this particular *comparandum* can help to illuminate.

That result is perhaps enough. But I want to entertain a further hypothesis: that both here and in ancient pantomime an essential part of the effect derives not only from the fascination and wonder provoked by the controlled dynamism of a central star performer alongside the vigorous auditory impulsion of supporting players, but also from the *ecology of displacement and reversal* inherent in this kind of theater, where sight and sound are deliberately set apart. Cassiodorus speaks insightfully of the "clamorous silence" (*silentium clamosum*) characteristic of pantomime,[53] and the art form seems to prompt or embody conceptual reversals and displacement along several planes. The dancers "speak" through movement; gender roles routinely reverse in both dancer and narrator but have the feeling of displacement, since we are always aware of the male in the female; the whole, as Lada-Richards puts it, seems a "promiscuous mingling of low and high culture," or, to follow the formulation by Panayotakis, a simultaneous embodiment of "low and high repertory."[54] The idea that reversal and displacement are essential to the mimicry of pantomime is reflected in ancient witnesses as well, as we have seen. The comments on pantomime by the late observer Cassiodorus are worth quoting at length:

> The pantomime actor derives his name from his many types of imitations. When first he comes on stage, lured by applause, bands of musicians, skilled in various instruments, support him. Then the hand of meanings/emotions expounds the song to the eyes of melody (*tunc illa sensuum manus oculis canorum carmen exponit*) and, by a code of gestures, as if by letters, it instructs the spectator's sight to understand the essence of the story and without writing performs what writing has set forth. One and the same body portrays Hercules and Venus; it displays a woman in a man; you would thereby imagine that in one there were many, so various are his impersonations.[55]

In these remarks, you can hear not simply Cassiodorus's admiration for talented performers, but his strong fascination with the theatrical set-up, one that not only allows but promotes or even embodies a long list of essential ironies and paradoxes.

> As for Miyagi's play, consider these remarks from theater scholar Mika Eglinton:
>
> [Miyagi's theatrical company] Ku Na'uka's most distinctive feature was the division between "speakers" and "movers," between the aural and the visual, a concept that can be found in traditional Japanese performing arts such as *bunraku* and *nō*. In practice this meant that the logos and pathos inherent in a character in classic texts from both East and West were divided between two or more actors, and on occasion united again. This division, dislocation, restriction, refinement, and reunion in the relationship between words and bodies created a dissimilation dynamic with the potential to expose metacritical and metatheoretical aspects of the play.[56]

Again, we hear in the critic's remarks a deep interest in the intellectual as well as emotional effect of the distinctive separation of body and music/voice, but here the focus is not so much on reversal and paradox as on the curious effects of displacement. When we say that the Speaker impels the Mover/dancer, the impulsion is in fact metaphorical; when we feel the voice and body becoming one, this union is also metaphorical. The division itself seems to engender unease about the fragile unity of personhood, and encourages interrogation of how the displaced elements can or should be together—not, for example, just the relation of the Speaker's voice to the body, but the power and control over body and events that the voice carries with it. This is what prompts Eglinton's developmental sequence "division, dislocation, restriction, refinement, and reunion," which he sums up with the phrase "dissimilation dynamic." The displacement serves to stir the emotions, but also suggests schematics and relationships with potential for deeply thoughtful exploration.

I wish to suggest, then, a provisional response to the question with which we began: that part of what is gripping in this type of theater is the combination of emotive *and intellectual* interest that the ecology of displacement and reversal supports, since it is suggestive of a wide sweep of possibilities. The exact themes will depend on the play, but the genre itself brings with it latent possibilities, generally including gender roles, personhood, and the dynamics of relations, but more specifically the power of voice in its inclusion or absence, and the power of gesture and bodily presence, also in inclusion or absence. In short, the forces suggested by the theatrical divorce of body and voice in imperial pantomime[57] are topics with emotional, philosophical, and even political resonance that could understandably fascinate intellectualized Roman aristocrats and emperors alongside their less educated peers and *hoi polloi*.

notes

[1] Garelli 2007, Lada-Richards 2007, Hall and Wyles 2008, Webb 2008a.

[2] See Molloy 1996, 53–65, for a review of the primary evidence for the relationship between emperors and pantomimes; ibid., 49, for explicit quotes on the fascination pantomimes aroused.

[3] Jory 1984; but cf. Slater 1994.

[4] Xenophon, *Symposium* 9.2–7 (dance of Ariadne and Dionysus), *Anthologia Graeca* 11.195 (Dioscorides, 3rd c. BC: dance of the story of the Temenidae).

[5] Wüst 1949, 844.

[6] Robert 1930.

[7] Athenaeus *Deipn.* 1.20d–e is the earliest direct attestation of the story, though Tac. *Ann.* 1.54 mentions Bathyllus and Maecenas in passing. For review and discussion of the ancient evidence, see Jory 1981. Pylades' student Hylas also is part of the story as told in Macrobius (*Sat.* I.14.12, 2.7.12–19), who, like Dio Cassius 54.17.5, situates Pylades at Augustus' dinner parties.

[8] Not, it must be repeated, the invariable practice of the traditional art. I am well aware that the contours of the traditional art were often stretched and even violated in what we can see of actual performances: imperial pantomime as a concept had both a traditional "ideal" and a wide spectrum of actual instantiations. Nonetheless, the sort of muddle that arises from using the term pantomime too loosely can be seen in e.g. Slater 1994, 131ff., which argues that equestrians could be pantomime dancers on the grounds that they performed movements on stage (these could just as well have been spectacles like *venationes*, but even if dance is meant, this could not have been the sort of professional performance that required years of apprenticeship, nor was that true for the case cited by Slater of the equestrian whom Augustus had dance at a festival [Dio Cassius 53.31.3]).

[9] These made use of the stuff of tragedy, but the stories could also have a lighter tone of pastoral fantasy, very much including matters erotic. Some illustrative examples: Hercules Furens (Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.7.12–16; cf. Lucian, *Salt.* 67), Ares and Aphrodite (Lucian. *Salt.* 63), Daphne and Apollo (Libanius *Or.* 64.67), "Echo, or some Pan or Satyr frolicking with Eros" (Plutarch, *Symp. Quest. Moralia* 711e–f). The possibilities were endless, as the lengthy catalogue at Lucian, *Salt.* 37–61, is meant to demonstrate.

[10] On the selection and early training of pantomimes, the *locus classicus* is Libanius *Or.* 64.103–107. Galen regarded pantomimes as a medical curiosity, so extreme were their acrobatics and consequently so slender, hard, and tough their bodies (*de sanitate tuenda* 2.11, 6.155K). Other ancient evidence for the dancers' athleticism and training is gathered in Molloy 1996, 67–69; for the relation to competitive acrobatic training see Lada-Richards 2007, 31–32.

[11] Seneca, *Quaest. Nat.* 7.32.3: "The House (*domus*) of Pylades and Bathyllus have continued through a long line of successors. For their arts there are many students and many teachers" (trans. after Corcoran). Inscriptional evidence for such "dynasties" of pantomime actors is collected in Bonaria 1959; for Pylades, see pp. 228, 238–242.

[12] Here too the semiotics are highly formalized, suggesting a professional niche for the art form, although this was also surely a semiotics that could be mimicked by amateurs. Interesting tales of the transparency of the meaning of the dance, such as at Lucian, *Salt.* 64 (an aristocrat from Pontos, who wants to bring back a pantomime from Rome to act as interpreter to his barbarian neighbors), are naïve fictions. Webb 2008a, esp. 72–77, offers an excellent discussion of the semiotics.

[13] Athenaeus *Deipn.* 1.20e.

[14] The Trier ivory (Fig. 2) shows a player holding 3 masks, identifiable as pantomime by the distinctive closed mouth (cf. Fig. 1); Lucian *Salt.* 66 refers to a dancer who lays out 5 masks, one for each act; the detailed story lines of the libretti suggest frequent change of character (e.g., the dance described in Lucian *Salt.* 67, where "we are shown" [δείκνυται] the dancer mimic Athamas, Ino, Thyestes, Aegisthus, and Aerope in a single play). For further evidence and discussion of the use of masks in pantomime role playing, including the probability that one mask could sometimes do double duty, or that the mask could perhaps at times be omitted, see Webb 2008b and 2008a, 79–85; and for an illuminating discussion of the differences between tragic and pantomimic masks, Petrides 2013.

[15] Fronto, *de Orationibus* 5; on robe and scarf generally see Wyles 2008. It is not clear that this was a feature claimed to go back to the founders, but the robe and scarf were characteristic costume from at least the second century.

[16] In late antiquity, females could be dancers on occasion, and we know of one example from as early as the first century: Starks 2008.

[17] For the *topos* that pantomime dancers were able to change to opposite characters quickly and on cue, see Lucian, *Salt.* 19 ("imitating Proteus himself"), 63, 67, Libanius 64.117; cf. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.51.9.

[18] *Pylades Cilex pantomimus, cum veteres ipsi canerent atque saltarent, primus Romae chorum et fistulam sibi praecinere fecit,* Jerome, *Chron.,* ad 22 BC, *PL*27.553–4.The pipe orchestra was made up of *auloi* and *syrinxes*: Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.7.18, Lucian, *Salt.* 63, Libanius 64.116. For other instruments, see below.

[19] For inscriptional evidence that puts pantomimes and musicians together in a troupe, see Molloy 1996, 79; sometimes, of course, local musicians would be used for a traveling pantomime.

[20] Lewis and Short define *pantomimus* as "a ballet dancer." For recent examples by prominent scholars in the field, see, e.g., Slater 1994, 120 "[pantomime is] ballet dancing of Greek tragic themes"; Hall 2005, 65, "[in the empire] ballet to choral accompaniment [was called] ancient pantomime"; Hall and Wyles 2008, where the appendix of "Selected Source Texts" repeatedly uses "ballet" for ὄρχησις and its cognates, as happens also in the translations of Lada-Richards 2007 (e.g. p. 50), despite her keen awareness of the differences.

[21] Cf. *Anthologia Latina* 100: "Declining his masculine breast with a feminine inflection and moulding his pliant torso to suit either sex, the dancer enters the stage and greets the people, promising that words will come forth from his expert hands. For when the sweet chorus pours forth its delightful song, what the singer declaims, the dancer himself confirms with his movements. He fights, he plays, he loves, he revels, he turns round, he stands still, he illuminates the truth, and imbues everything with grace. He has as many

tongues as limbs, so wonderful is the art by which he can make his joints speak although his mouth is silent" (trans. Hall and Wyles 2008, 403).

[22] The contrast Webb describes is sometimes called *embodied dance* as opposed to *intellectual dance*.

[23] Such is the implication of the story told at Lucian, *Salt*. 83–84, where the dancer, overcome by playing the part of the mad Ajax, grabs a flute from one of the musicians and strikes the lead "actor" on the head—that is, the soloist singing Odysseus at the time. (There is no need for the textual correction suggested by Harmon 1936 at *Salt.* 84 [παραιστησάμενος for παραστησάμενος], and the interpretation of this passage in Jory 1998 seems to me badly off mark. The punchline to the story is that when asked by supporters to repeat the performance, he stands alongside the Odysseus "actor" and says, with reference to the injury his colleague has just received, "it is enough to have gone mad once." Lucian uses "actor" [ὑποκριτής] for the solo singer also at *Salt*. 68, another passage misinterpreted by Harmon. Some follow Harmon in inferring here a second actor on stage rather than a solo singer, an unnecessary inference, as Jory too saw.) Tatian (quoted below, n. 24) imagines the singers as part of what the audience sees on stage, and that seems generally implicit in our sources.

[24] Lucian, *Salt*. 62.

[25] Explicit in Tatian (2nd c.) "I have no wish to gape eagerly at the many singers (πολλῶν ᾀδόντων, *Or. ad Graecos*, 22)," but implicit in the descriptions in Lucian, Libanius, and elsewhere.

[26] Lucian, *Salt*. 68 (ὑποκριτοῦ εὐφωνίαν); *Anthologia Latina* 100 (*cantor resonat*); *Anthologia Graeca* 9.542 (written in praise of a singer whose singing of the libretto matches the pantomime's gestures in its grace).

[27] Lucian *Salt*. 63 (τῇ τῶν ᾀδόντων εὐφωνίᾳ); cf. 68, 72; *Anthologia Latina* 100 (*chorus dulcis*).

[28] For the use of drone and rhythmic counterpoint in the ancient use of such pipes, see West 1994, 103–104.

[29] Cf., e.g., Lucian *Salt*. 2, 26.

[30] The board is mentioned in two sources from the 4th and 5th centuries: Libanius *Or*. 64.96; Jacob of Sarugh, *Homily* 2 (Hall and Wyles 2008, T41, p. 413). For the *scabellum* /κρούπεζαι, see esp. Lucian *Salt*. 63 and 83 (indicating that there were multiple stampers); Libanius *Or.* 64.95 and 97; and the detailed discussion in Bélis 1988. The passage at *Salt.* 83 speaks of an "iron sandal" which however may be the same as the metal attachment mentioned at Libanius *Or*. 64.97 and Jacob of Sarugh, *Homily 2.* Lada-Richards 2007, 41, points to Arnobius, *adversus nationes* 7.32, for a late mention of yet other percussion (castanets and drums), to which might be added the water organ (*symphonia*) mentioned in the same passage. (Hall 2013, 469–470 [cf. Hall 2008, 27–8], makes much of large theater organs, but aside from the passage in Arnobius, a hostile source enumerating and potentially exaggerating the noise-making devices, the only link to pantomime seems to be the medallion she cites showing a pantomime [identified by the closed-mouth mask] with a portable organ in the background. We agree in any case that the pantomime performance could be "terrifically noisy" [Hall 2008, 27].)

[31] Hall 2013, 469 (= Hall 2008, 27), citing Novatian, *de spectaculis* 4.5.

[32] Arnobius (early 4th c.) *adversus nationes* 2.42 (trans. Hall 2013, 468 [= Hall 2008, 26–27]).

[33] Webb 2008a, 74–5, 78–9, 82, 84, 92–3.

[34] See esp. Smethurst 1989 and Smethurst 2013.

[35] Udaka 2010, 151.

[36] Zeami took the great work of his father and "developed it further, giving Noh the [distinctive] artistic qualities it retains to this day" (Udaka 2010, 151). This is a standard account. As mentioned above (n. 7), Macrobius tells a similar story about Pylades' apprentice Hylas, who came to rival and better him in the art.

[37] Udaka 2010, 153–4.

[38] For discussion of this phenomenon, see Smethurst 2013, 13–15; along similar lines, the main Noh actor will at critical moments speak of himself in the third person (see Smethurst 2013, 63–73).

[39] In March 2016 I had the fortune of witnessing a naming ceremony, in which an actual or adopted son is given one of the ancestral names by acclamation of the guilds and audience. *News from the Kabuki World* (Internet resource) routinely contains notices such as "Nakamura Kankurô VI's two sons, his elder son Namino Naoya and his younger son Namino Noriyuki, will make their debut on stage (*hatsubutai*) in February 2017 at the Kabukiza. They will receive the respective names of Nakamura Kantarô III and Nakamura Chôzaburô II. The first holder of the name Nakamura Chôzaburô was Nakamura Kanzaburô III, who held it between 1673 and 1674."

[40] Cavaye and Griffith 2004, 114: "Traditionally the path to chief puppeteer takes ten years of training as an *ashizukai* [leg handler], followed by another ten years as the *hidarizukai* [left handler]. … On a more practical level, however, the speed at which one moves through the ranks is determined by the skill of the individual puppeteer."

[41] Cavaye and Griffith 2004, 116.

[42] Adachi 1985, 150, quoting the narrator of an Osaka troupe. The full quote is: "In Buraku one is not considered a true performer until one reaches fifty, and not an artist until one reaches sixty. We say it takes three years to learn to laugh, eight years to learn to cry. Well, that's only the beginning." An internet search suggests that this is a common saying.

[43] The clips are from a 2011 production of the play, kindly supplied to me by the Director on a non-commercial DVD. The play was first performed in 1999, with several subsequent revivals. Miyagi's theatrical company was named Ku Na'uka. I here thank Director Miyagi for his generous help.

[44] This is sometimes referred to as the "two actors, one role" method.

[45] Smethurst 1989, Smethurst 2013.

[46] Professor Smethurst is both a Classicist and a Japanologist, fluent in the language and with deep knowledge in this area. Without implying her agreement with my conclusions, I wish here to record my warm thanks to her for help with this project.

[47] The drums are African, and the heavy percussive line is a Miyagi innovation and not a traditional feature (though it does evoke the more frenzied moments in Kabuki); the heavy percussive line does, however, match what we know of imperial pantomime.

[48] Played by Kazunori Abe.

[49] Played by Micari (she has but the one name).

[50] A few further clips, some with titling, can be found on the internet by searching for Medea+Miyagi. As

stated earlier, the whole of the production is unfortunately not publicly available. At the time of this writing, the trailer from the New York performance was still viewable at http://www.japansociety.org/event_detail?eid=770bc34d. Anan 2006 gives a summary and overview of the play as well as analysis.

[51] A 2008 interviewer wrote, "Though there is no particular form that she practises, Micari draws from the Japanese 'Noh' form that focuses on movement within stillness. While on stage, she sees herself as a 'vessel, like a bamboo connecting heaven and earth'" (anon. 2008). Among the elements of the dance we see in the clip is the use of *ningyō-buri*, a Kabuki technique by which humans imitate the Bunraku puppets. On the term and its use in the play, see Anan 2006, 407.

[52] On the costume of the pantomime actor (both functionality and "symbolism"), see Wyles 2008.

[53] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.51.8.

[54] Lada-Richards 2008, 287; Panayotakis 2008, 190.

[55] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.51.9 (translation after S. J. B. Barnish).

[56] Eglinton 2011, from her introductory remarks to an interview with Miyagi in 2006. Some of this seems to come from Miyagi himself. In a 2013 interview, Miyagi said about the separation of Speaker and Mover: "Word and body (Logos and Pathos), which are torn apart on stage, show us to what extent they are vital to each other. One could say that there is a fervent courtship between word and body, and, beyond it, a moment of bliss where these two overcome their alienation and fuse together. Thus, the primitive image of the human being will manifest itself on stage" (Smethurst 2014, 843).

[57] Some will wish to invoke Lacanian desire: on Lacan and Miyagi, with focus on how "the audience perceives the voice of an actor not directly but as 'absence', as a substitute for a 'real' voice in the Lacanian sense," see Hirata 2010.

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Sophocles' *Electra*

Adapted and Directed by Kevin Moriarty
Dallas Theater Center, May 2017

Reviewed by **Thomas E. Jenkins**
Trinity University

Abbey Siegworth as Electra and Tiana Kaye Johnson as Chrysothemis
(photo: Karen Almond)

Three years ago, the Dallas Theater Company mounted an electrifying *Oedipus El Rey*, adapted by Luis Alfaro and directed by Kevin Moriarty. I'd be happy to report a similarly charged *Electra*—if only for the pun—but, alas, lightning did not strike twice. *Oedipus El Rey* worked, at least in part, because of Alfaro's ingenious re-envisioning of Sophoclean 'fate' as SoCal recidivism; for Alfaro, impoverished Latinos struggle to escape the thumping 'doom' of incarceration. (The physical production of *Oedipus* therefore played out within a claustrophobic cellblock.) For all the technical ingenuity of the DTC's *Electra*, however, the evening falters because too little attention is paid to this fundamental act of *translation*: how do text and conceit work *together*? Moriarty's surprisingly old-fashioned version—replete with lofty epithets and couched in a rather stodgy translation-ese—jibes uneasily with the evening's high-tech staging: what was required was a sleeker, more modern, more *urbane*translation that comments implicitly on the political problems emphasized by the production, to wit, the cycle(s) of violence in contemporary American cities.

As physical design, the production was nothing if not ambitious. Eschewing the two indoor stages of his company, Moriarty opted instead for the great outdoors, or rather, four different configurations of the great outdoors: a sort of walking tour of tragedy, plotted with considerable wizardry by Diggle. The evening's most striking feature was the distribution of over-the-ear headsets to each audience member (supplemented by a mandatory sound check: for Americans, a headset malfunction would be a *real* tragedy!). A revealing program note from the director explains the origin of this striking choice in audio design:

> Initially we chose this [the headset system] to allow the Greek Chorus to be experienced as the disembodied voice of the ghost of Agamemnon, crying out from the underworld for revenge. This allowed us to communicate … in a more personal and direct way…. This has resulted in a fascinating experiment: you are watching a very real and immediate live event, literally sharing space with the actors as they perform and following them to various locations; while, at the same time, you are hearing their voices in your ears without access to the sounds of the natural environment around you.[1]

As Moriarty later argues, this technique mixes the natural and the artificial in a way analogous to the ancient use of masks, which—obviously—mask the actors' natural facial expressions while amplifying, or at least permitting, a full vocal range.

For me, the analogy doesn't quite work; as it turns out, watching a play through headphones is a lot like watching a podcast. And I don't mean that to sound particularly negative: I *like* podcasts. As Ira Glass has explained (in the context of producing his phenomenal show, *This American Life*): "Radio is your most visual medium."[2] That is to say, sounds piped in through the ear force the imagination to create a visual scene, which, guided by text and savvy editing, can be highly compelling. For *Elektra*, however, we already *have* the visual scene, so the "added value" of a headset is readily apparent only during, e.g., a

scene with an unseen, supernatural ghost. Otherwise, the headphones are principally helpful in absorbing the eclectic, cinematic score (by Broken Chord) and for general clarity of diction.

For this production, audiences are guided to four different locations in the immediate vicinity of the theater, including the Annette Strauss Square's vast lawn, an enclosed and fabric-strewn "tomb," a makeshift alleyway, and a nearby reflecting pool. (The social engineering was as elaborate as the audio engineering: tour guides helpfully herded the shambling audience members from spot to spot.) By far the longest stretch was spent at the huge expanse of Strauss Square, a scene that featured Electra at her looniest—with tortured animal carcasses swinging from a tree—and included an intense shouting match between Electra and Clytemnestra. Indeed, one of the curiosities of the evening is that even with audio piped directly into the audience's ears, this was one of the shouty-est Greek tragedies I've ever seen—er, heard. (Did the audio engineers make the decision to equalize the voices at a high volume so that they never drop? In any case, it resulted in a certain flatness of dramatic arc.)

The actors' performances were fine, given the considerable challenges of both the audio and physical design. (The sprints across the Square, in particular, were a grueling exercise in calisthenics: Electra could use a pair of non-classical Nikes.) Abbey Siegworth made for a particularly unhinged and batshit Electra, which Sally Nystuen Vahle used as a foil for her unyielding, coldly logical Clytemnestra. (There was solid support from Yusef D. Seevers and Tiana Kaye Johnson as Electra's siblings.) The evening's star turn came from David Coffee's Paedagogus, with a terrific (and terrifically duplicitous) messenger speech. This was one of the few times in the evening when the technical elements were underplayed and the audience could concentrate on what really matters: good acting and interpretation. The murder scene of Clytemnestra and Aigisthus (Tyrees Allen) was staged quickly and claustrophobically as an alleyway murder at knifepoint: a nifty, politically-charged idea but difficult to pull off. (Other reviews complain of awkward sight-lines,[3] but I had Orestes practically at my elbow. Should I have stopped the murder? I've suffered sleepless nights ever since.)

At a nearby reflecting pool, a final, sentimental scene was staged as a *toro nagashi*, a Japanese sending-off ceremony for souls, as audience members lit floating candles in remembrance of, well, I'm not exactly sure: Clytemnestra and Aigisthus, I suppose, though why the audience was enlisted on *their* behalf was unclear. Over the headphones, the chorus interpolated the Euripidean version of the myth in which Iphigenia is replaced by a deer, and later discovered by her brother Orestes in Tauris; this variation upends the moral implications of the version we just saw, in which Clytemnestra's slaying of Agamemnon is at least partially exculpated by her husband's filicide, and which thus provides a more complicated and nuanced view of the politics of revenge. I couldn't get over the feeling that this concluding tableau was "tacked on," in part to take advantage of a beautiful, downtown pool of water, in part to send the audience off with a feeling of calm and quiet after the agitation of Greek tragedy.

But *should* an audience for a Greek tragedy—*any* Greek tragedy—be sent off serenely into that good night? Jerome Weeks perceptively argues that Moriarty is trying to "Say Something Profound About the State of Dallas in a Tragic, Ceremonial Form."[4] (I'm not a Dallas native, so Weeks' analysis of *Elektra*-as-Local-Metaphor is certainly better than anything I could come up with.) But having staged a politically- and socially-charged *Electra*—one whose final gangland murder would seem to touch on matters of Texan and even national import—Moriarty seems, at the end, to lose his nerve: the conclusion is elegant, not electric, and certainly not disturbing. Hampered by an overly literal text and an under-commitment to nuance, this *Electra* will be mostly remembered, alas, for its electronics.

notes

[1] Program for *Electra*, 14–15.

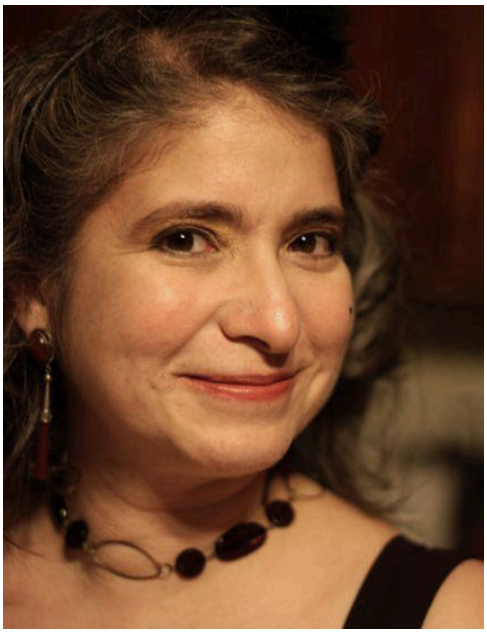
[2] Ira Glass, "Tips from Ira Glass on making better radio," *Current*, February 16, 2016.

[3] For example, Kyle Christopher West's review in *Broadway World – Dallas*.

[4] The review by Jerome Weeks is in *Art&Seek*.

Valedictory from the Editor

Amy R. Cohen



Amy R. Cohen

The time has come for me to hand *Didaskalia* to new leadership.

Many thanks to Randolph College for their farsightedness in taking up the journal when it needed a new home, and especially to Chris Cohen and the Information Technology staff, for their years of patience and creative expertise. Thanks, too, to the members of the Advisory and Editorial Boards who have contributed time and insight to the enterprise. The wisdom of associate editor C.W. Marshall and the swift correctness of assistant editor Jay Kardan have regularly elevated the quality of the journal. Gage Stuntz, Grace Gardiner, Kiaorea Wright, Gabriel Kuhl, and Sophia Dill were the interns who trudged through code and transcriptions and video editing to make the publication possible, and became wonderful colleagues at the same time.

The last seven years have given me the opportunity to make connections with a remarkable variety of scholars and practitioners of ancient drama. I am encouraged over and over again by the strength of the work being done in our field, on paper and on stage. I am so proud to be a member of this company and to have been able to showcase that work.

Beginning with Volume 14, the journal will be published from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. I'm pleased to announce that Mike Lippman will be the new Editor-in-Chief. I look forward to seeing the new directions he takes *Didaskalia*.