

DIDASKALIA 

The Journal for Ancient Performance



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

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About Didaskalia

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

Didaskalia is an English-language, online publication about the performance of Greek and Roman drama, dance, and music. We publish peer-reviewed scholarship on performance and reviews of the professional activity of artists and scholars who work on ancient drama.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of the field. If you would like your work to be reviewed, please write to editor@didaskalia.net at least three weeks in advance of the performance date. We also seek interviews with practitioners and opinion pieces. For submission guidelines, go to didaskalia.net.

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Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 9 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

Up Close and Personal: Encountering Ancient Drama through Performance

Eric Dugdale

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Abstract

The evidence suggests that ancient actors felt a strong emotional response to the plays they performed and drew close connections between the characters they played and their own lives. And yet today's students can often find these plays inaccessible. This paper presents a case for integrating performance into the classics curriculum, highlighting the benefits this brings to students. It features two student-directed performances from the 2010 biennial Festival of Dionysus at Gustavus Adolphus College (in Minnesota, U.S.A.) and describes the conceptual and creative thinking that went into staging these adaptations of Greek tragedy and comedy.



Video 1: House of Atreus. Allie Buchnis as Electra, Alex Legeros as Agamemnon, Sarah Graver as Clytemnestra, Bryan Pelach as Orestes.

video: Gustavus Adolphus College
youtube.com/watch?v=Hs8M-vaQ0Hc

Introduction

Drama is a genre made for performance. And yet when classicists teach ancient drama, we often ask our students to go home and read the play, then come to class ready to discuss it. Why is this? Certainly there are often logistical difficulties that discourage a performance-based approach to teaching drama: the assigned classroom does not lend itself to movement; the class size is too large to involve everyone in acting. Then there are factors such as time and effort, as well as concerns about training: as classicists we are all well qualified to analyze texts, but many of us may feel less able to teach using performance. We may also be skeptical of our students' willingness—and ability—to act.

I shared many of these concerns when I first started teaching drama through performance in a course on Greek and Roman theatre at Gustavus Adolphus College, a liberal arts college on the banks of the Minnesota River. I had to look hard to find a suitable classroom. Then there was the problem of Midwestern reserve: how would I get shy Minnesotans to take to the idea of performing in public? After all, this is a general-education course in which most of the students have no background in classics or prior acting experience.



Video 2: Partly Cloudy. Nick Prince as Stella (aka Strepsiades), Kait Peterson as Phyllis (aka Pheidippides), Shannon Holland as Gertrude (aka Socrates' pupil), Dan Rohlf as Professor William K. Freiert (aka Socrates).

video: Gustavus Adolphus College
youtube.com/watch?v=Y07EaFyysl4



Figure 1: Allie Buchnis as Electra and Bryan Pelach as Orestes

In practice, these misgivings have proved less valid than I anticipated. It is true that teaching through

performance takes more time, organizational effort, and nervous energy than a straight literature course or a lecture course in which exposure to performance comes only from watching it on film. But the rewards richly repay the additional investment of time and effort. By and large, students end up engaging with the course material on a far deeper level than if they were simply reading the plays in their rooms. The process of arriving at a shared vision for a performance, with all the incumbent directorial decisions, not only hones verbal-reasoning and consensus-building skills that will be valuable in their professional lives, but also ensures that students end up spending many hours outside class actually talking about what they are studying. Through the process of rehearsal, students develop a strong connection to the play that they perform—a connection not only on the cognitive level but also on the affective level. Assessment of student learning (through oral examinations at the end of semester as well as students' own evaluations of this course component—see Appendix) suggests that two concomitant learning outcomes are achieved: not only do students come to understand their chosen play far better through performance, but in some cases at least, they also learn to feel the play. As I have argued elsewhere,¹ the evidence suggests that performance can develop the capacity for empathy—as I believe it did in ancient Athens.



Figure 2: Shannon Holland as Gertrude and Nick Prince as Stella

The Theatre of Greece and Rome course is taught in the spring semester every other year. For the first two thirds of the course (while snow blankets the prairie) the course is primarily classroom based. We study a dozen or so plays, investigate Greek and Roman theatre and its stagecraft, and workshop different aspects of performance. Then, in the last month or so, we switch gears and begin rehearsing in earnest for the grand finale, the Festival of Dionysus, usually held on Honors Day when many family members come to campus. Weather permitting, it is held outdoors, as was the springtime festival of the Great Dionysia at Athens. The class splits into six or seven groups, each group of three or four students choosing a different play to perform. Performances last 12–15 minutes, so groups adapt one scene or more to create a self-standing piece. Students make all the interpretative decisions; they serve as director, producer, and actor rolled into one; they select costumes; they help publicize the event (social-networking media are used to great effect); they also critique other groups in rehearsal. As instructor I play a supporting role, providing feedback at various stages of the process.² A panel of faculty judges adjudicates at the performance and later provides written feedback. The festival has gained considerable local recognition and thus serves as an outreach event, introducing the campus and broader community to classics.

Responses to a questionnaire administered in the first week indicate that many of the students come into the class with a high degree of apprehension about the public performance. The course is designed to mitigate their anxiety. Over the semester, it incorporates the skill building and contextual understanding necessary to equip students to make informed choices as directors and actors and allow them to understand an art form that can seem very alien. We study what we can learn from ancient literary and visual sources about ancient performance contexts; we explore the afterlife of ancient drama in modern performance and study modern adaptations of these plays. We workshop a variety of aspects of ancient drama, from masked acting to choral song.³ In-class performances built into the weekly class schedule allow students to develop skills and confidence in front of a supportive audience.

This paper discusses two of the seven performances at the fifth biennial Festival of Dionysus held on Saturday, May 8, 2010. Video of the performances posted on YouTube (with the actors' permission, of

course!) offers readers the opportunity to see what is being described, even if a filmed record cannot capture the immediacy and context of a live performance. The paper highlights some of the ways in which *House of Atreus* and *Partly Cloudy* engaged with important elements of Athenian tragedy and Old Comedy respectively, and suggests that performance can not only enhance our appreciation but also inform our understanding of ancient drama.⁴

House of Atreus

House of Atreus is a 15-minute performance (Video 1) that combines scenes from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Sophocles' *Electra*. This approach allowed its student-directors to explore new possibilities. Among the key elements of their conceptualization was a focus on structural and visual parallels between scenes: Agamemnon's return is mirrored by that of Orestes; Clytemnestra's trickery precedes and justifies Orestes' use of the same; Electra's exclusion from the house and marginal position in the opening scene (where she is hanging laundry) continues in the second scene (where she is tending her father's tomb). Meaning is conveyed through difference, too: Agamemnon approaches his ancestral house in triumphant procession down the central aisle through the throng of spectators; his disguised and exiled son makes his way home across the fields. The decision to perform scenes from Sophocles' *Electra* rather than from Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* gave its modern audience a more powerful female protagonist whose heart-wrenching grief at the false news of Orestes' death could more readily convey the emotional force of Greek tragedy.

The group set its play in the period of the American Civil War. This choice of context would be likely to resonate with audience members, since it evokes an iconic and often mythologized chapter of their shared history. Period costuming reinforced the Civil War setting. So did the mandolin, whose plaintive refrain opened and closed the performance and served as a bridge between the two scenes.⁵ But perhaps the most arresting dramaturgical element was the settler's cabin that the group chose as the backdrop for its performance. Selecting a performance space that serves the interpretive designs of the production is one of the most crucial decisions that each group makes. The Linnaeus Arboretum, with its 125 acres of varied landscape, offers endless possibilities. The more obvious choice for a palace backdrop is the Interpretive Center, an imposing building with a columnar porch and paved courtyard; this is where many previous performances have played out. Of the more than thirty performances in the Festival of Dionysus to date, no other has used the Borgeson Cabin as its setting.

The Borgeson Cabin is a pioneer home that dates back to 1866; it was moved to its present site in 1986, and now serves as a strong visual reminder of Gustavus Adolphus College's Swedish heritage and immigrant roots. It miraculously survived the 1998 tornado that leveled most of the surrounding trees. Within our campus it stands as a *monumentum* through which the viewer can enter into dialogue with the mythical past.⁶ On a raw and overcast spring day, it lent a powerful presence to the performance. The lineaments of its simple wooden facade, a central door framed by a pair of double-hung windows, offered a stripped-down vocabulary that readily articulated the symbolism of the house and the significance of entrances and exits.⁷ The perimeter fence of rough-hewn logs effectively demarcated the viewing space (*theatron*) from the mythical space (*orchestra*) in which the story unfolds.

Thus the physical setting served as a narrative vehicle. Blocking added further layers of meaning. The group chose to draw primarily on the formal and symbolic register of acting characteristic of Greek tragedy rather than on modern naturalistic modes. Movement and posture were largely stylized and used to convey patterns of meaning. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra maintain their distance from each other throughout, the gulf separating the estranged spouses all the more apparent after the tender embrace between father and daughter with which the play opens. The decision to have Clytemnestra read her

longer speeches as if from her diary adds to the distancing effect.⁸ Here, for example, is a portion of the first entry that we hear Clytemnestra reading aloud:

I feel no shame in telling you of my love for the man, shyness dies when one gets older. When a woman sits at home, parted from her husband, the loneliness is terrible. . . . These rumors ate away at me, to the point that I had to be released from the noose of suicide more than once. I once cried rivers of tears, but I can't anymore—I have no more tears . . .

Translation by Peter Meineck (adapted)⁹

Modern audiences often find the long set speeches of tragedy alienating, and this speech of Clytemnestra (Ag. 855-913) can seem particularly foreign. Why is it addressed to the chorus of Argive elders (855) when her long-absent husband now stands before her? The journal offers a genre whose expectations are understood by a modern audience. It is at once a literary genre that fits the formal register of tragic set speeches while also serving as a repository for personal thoughts and feelings. Reading aloud as if from a journal entry serves as an effective link between the unfolding present and the distant past that captures the retrospective interests of this speech. And yet it also retains the speech's latent ambiguities. A scene in which a character reads from her diary can be construed as a moment of extreme privacy or as a public performance. For the audience it can be a deeply intimate experience or have a distancing effect. Did Clytemnestra really experience the emotions that she describes, or is she reading from a script?

Physical objects frequently carry symbolic meaning in Greek tragedy, serving as “miniature repositories of huge associations.”¹⁰ In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, such significant stage props include the purple tapestries on which Agamemnon walks as he enters the palace. Colored by the expensive dye extracted from murex sea snails, the tapestries are a precious and finely woven fabric. In trampling on them, Agamemnon commits an act with implications of extravagance and impiety as well as injury to the laborious handiwork of the women of his household. In Sophocles' *Electra*, it is the urn that the disguised Orestes brings with him that serves as an important plot element and powerful visual focalizer. The urn purportedly contains the ashes of Orestes after he dies in a chariot race; both Electra and Clytemnestra take it as proof that the news of Orestes' death is in fact true. Clasp the urn in her hands, Electra utters a poignant funeral lament for her supposedly dead brother. Thus the empty urn functions as a false recognition token. Instead of bringing about recognition of a loved one, as recognition tokens usually do in tragedy, the urn prevents Electra from recognizing the “stranger” standing before her as her long-lost brother.

The emotional power of physical tokens such as the urn is not easily accessible nowadays. Largely unacquainted with formalistic theatrical traditions, we tend to view symbolism as cerebral—even emotionally detached—while naturalistic acting is seen as the accepted medium through which to convey authentic emotion. Getting students in the theatre class to the point where they can convey the emotive power of Greek tragedy in performance requires careful preparation. For example, in order to help students appreciate the emotional significance of theatrical tokens such as the urn, I have asked them to bring to class a physical object to which they have an emotional attachment: a family photo, perhaps, or something they were given by a parent when they went off to college. This object then becomes their urn when they workshop Electra's lament.

House of Atreus succeeded, in my estimation, in conveying the symbolism and emotional charge of both the tapestry and the urn. For the tapestry, the group substituted a patchwork quilt, a choice that helps convey the contours of this adaptation. The humble log cabin of a Civil War soldier has replaced the palace of a Mycenaean king. Purple-dyed fineries whose desecration offends the gods have no place in

this context nor resonance with a modern audience. A patchwork quilt does, however, communicate important aspects of the Aeschylean original. The fruit of loving labor, it is a cherished heirloom passed down from mother to daughter. Its trampling is a potent symbol of the violent discord within the house of Atreus. Similarly, in the scene from *Electra*, the urn is replaced by a flag, neatly folded and solemnly delivered to the surviving relative of the fallen soldier (figure 1). This substitution activates a modern context in which symbolism and ritual have a strong emotional charge. In such circumstances, the muted grief and stately movement of Electra are all the more poignant. The flag also retains a striking element of the symbolism of the urn: as a token of Orestes' death, it is specious:¹¹ it relies on emotion and rhetoric, not proof, to make its case.

Unlike most modern drama, with its elaborate stage scenery, props, and technological enhancement, Greek drama is a theatre of the imagination. Holding the Festival of Dionysus at Gustavus Adolphus College outdoors forces the players to keep the staging simple. With no lighting, sound effects, or scene changes with which to distract the viewer, students must rely on a well-thought-out conceptual framework and a strong delivery. It was interesting to note the audience response to the final scene of the play. In this most literal sequence of the performance, Orestes picks up the woodsman's axe lying by the door before entering the cabin; when he emerges to announce their mother's killing to Electra, he leaves a bloody handprint on the white door. One of the few "special effects" of the performance, this threatens to destabilize the play at its dénouement. Although it is always hard to read laughter at moments like this, we can perhaps appreciate why Greek tragedy generally avoided presenting acts of death on stage. Discomfort at the spectacle of death can easily manifest itself as awkward laughter.

Partly Cloudy

As its name suggests, *Partly Cloudy* (Video 2) is a reworking of Aristophanes' *Clouds*. An ambitious mother, Stella, drags her reluctant daughter, Phyllis, on a guided tour of the college; she is looking for "one of those liberal-arts educations that everybody is talking about" for her daughter. Gertrude, their student guide, brings them into the presence of the great Professor William K. Freiert who, like Socrates, is preoccupied with conceiving great thoughts. As in Aristophanes' play, the "great scheme" backfires, in this case leading not to the burning of the Thinkery but the sudden retirement of its guru. This surprise ending heightens the topicality of the play, performed on the occasion of Will Freiert's retirement after 38 years of teaching in the classics department.

Students in this performance group cited an in-class lecture by Professor Mary-Kay Gamel (University of California, Santa Cruz) as a strong formative influence. Her ideas on different ways of conceiving "authenticity" in performance allowed the group to think more expansively about the possibilities of adapting Greek drama. In particular, her positioning of what she terms "inductive authenticity," with its strong interest in audience response, offered the group a useful way of thinking about contingency as it applies to Old Comedy. As Gamel put it in a recently published paper,¹² "Modern productions and adaptations which may seem radically innovative, unfaithful, subversive, even parodic or satiric, but which provoke critical and emotional responses in their audiences, more closely resemble ancient performances in their effect."

Partly Cloudy is laced with the topical humor that is characteristic of Old Comedy. This new type of liberal-arts education is all the rage as a result of "having a liberal in the White House—and a community activist at that." Indeed, the play, performed in the contentious lead-up to President Obama's "shellacking" in the 2010 midterm elections, employs the tension between conservative and progressive views as a contemporary analogy for the dispute between old-style education and newfangled ideas

playing out in Athens in the 420s, an ideological clash that in both contexts was cast in moral terms. However, most of the topical references in *Partly Cloudy* are more localized, centered on the campus community rather than on the nation state. This points to a fundamental difference between the Athenian *polis* and modern society. We have no direct equivalent of the *polis*, a community that is at once local and at the same time can wage war and conduct diplomacy. Thus mapping Athenian topicality frequently involves selecting between a zoom and a wide-angle lens. Politics in the narrower sense of the term usually finds its frame of reference in the national arena. But the majority of the topical references in *Partly Cloudy*—and most of its funniest jokes—are more parochial. Indeed, much of their appeal lies in the fact that they depend on insider knowledge peculiar to a specific place and time.

In *Clouds*, Aristophanes uses the language of mystery cult to describe the divide between outsider and initiate. Strepsiades and his son Pheidippides are the clueless outsiders seeking access to the Thinkery and its mystifying pursuits, while at first Socrates' pupils keep them at arm's length. When in the opening scene of *Partly Cloudy* Stella, the eager mother of the prospective student, glimpses headlines in the college newspaper that read "President Ohle unveils plan for Gustie waterslide" and "Gustavus prepares for annual Case Day festivities," the threat of these secrets getting out requires the swift intervention of a well-timed rugby tackle, leaving Gertrude dazed and the college audience in stitches.

If the anecdote recorded in Aelian (*Varia Historia* 2.13) is to be credited, the topicality of Aristophanes' *Clouds* was all the more immediate because it involved a rare double act: the character of Socrates on stage was playing to an audience in which the real Socrates was present:

When Socrates was moving around on the stage and referred to frequently (and I should not be surprised if he was also recognisable among the figures on stage, for it is clear that the makers of the masks had portrayed him with an excellent likeness) the foreigners, who did not know the person being satirised, began to murmur and ask who this man Socrates was. When he heard that—he was in fact present, not as a result of luck or chance, but because he knew that he was the subject of the play, and he sat in a prominent position in the theatre—at any rate, in order to put an end to the foreigners' ignorance, he stood up and remained standing in full view throughout the play as the actors performed it. So great was Socrates' contempt for comedy and the Athenians.

Translation by Nigel Wilson¹³

That Socrates was in the audience at the original performance of *Clouds* at the 423 BC City Dionysia festival is not improbable—that day he also featured in Ameipsias' *Connus*, which beat Aristophanes' play to second place in the competition of comedies. The scant information that we have about *Connus* suggests that it followed broadly the same lines as Aristophanes' play in making the new breed of thinkers (*phrontistai*) the target of its humor. Aristophanes' *Clouds* does not insist on the physical presence of Socrates in the audience. (How could anyone plan on the barefoot philosopher making a scheduled appearance?) However, it does implicitly invite the viewer to compare the character of Socrates on stage with the well-known figure that is being parodied.¹⁴ Is the caricature of the head-in-the-clouds and prickly academic anything like Socrates the Athenian?

Partly Cloudy offers a study in the range of dramatic possibilities that such comparison opens up. There is the metatheatrical mileage to be made from having Will Freiert in the audience. Her curiosity piqued by Gertrude's constant references to the great Professor Freiert, Stella exclaims "I am just so curious to know what this man looks like!" "Well, actually," Gertrude replies, "He looks kinda like *that* man over there." (Figure 2)

Stella is smitten by the man she espies in the audience (“He looks so distinguished!”); but before she can finish chatting him up, she is led over to the onstage incarnation of Will Freiert. His reaction could not be more abrupt: “Go to hell! Damn it, you have just made a newly found idea miscarry!” Will Freiert the character in the play comes across by turns as cranky, arrogant, explosive, and impatient; he describes himself as “classics guru and *deus ex machina*.” The play invites the obvious question: is the real Professor Freiert like this? Wherein does the humor lie?—in a caricature that, while hyperbolic, captures the essence of Will Freiert’s personality, setting off harmonic resonances in the minds of the viewers? Or does the humor lie in a portrayal of Will Freiert that is so at odds with the gentle and self-effacing man loved by all that the onstage representation becomes preposterously hilarious? Other possibilities present themselves too. Is the parody leveled not at Will Freiert as an individual but at a group with which he is associated, namely members of an intelligentsia who turn their back on reality (the kind of education that Phyllis is hoping for is “something more practical—like business”) and who pursue learning for its own sake (“the last great relevant irrelevant major”)? Or does the performance derive its thrill from the boldness with which its creators exercise free speaking (*parrhesia*), mocking authority figures—from faculty members to the college president—at a public event in which, like the City Dionysia, outsiders (alumni, parents, and friends of the college) are present and the community is trying to put on its best face?

Responses to the performance within the audience will have varied. Outsiders coming to the Festival of Dionysus at Gustavus may have been asking themselves the question that Aelian ascribes to *xenoi* in the 423 BC audience at Athens; not knowing the person being satirized, they may have been wondering: who is this man Freiert? Can it be that Gustavus faculty are really as self-absorbed and inaccessible as all that? Members of the community will have had varying degrees of privileged knowledge and perhaps varying assessments of the degree to which art is imitating life. Classics majors and alumni will have enjoyed jokes (e.g. “I was born on the day Odysseus sailed for Troy . . . I introduced Freud to Oedipus”) not only for their pithy humor but also for their homage to Will Freiert’s interests and idiosyncrasies (e.g., his pronunciation of Odysseus). The reality in this case is that the caricature of Will Freiert at once does and does not correspond to this great Mensch.

More than two dozen centuries late for the original performance of the *Clouds*, we must resign ourselves to the fact that we will necessarily remain outsiders, unable to gain direct access to Socrates the man. Our understanding of Socrates is mediated by the interests and agendas of our ancient sources. We still occupy ourselves with the stubborn question of who Socrates was, so persistent that it has been capitalized and dubbed “the Socratic Question.” Several concomitant questions remain open. To what degree is Aristophanes’ caricature of Socrates in the *Clouds* dependent on similarity or on difference as the source of its humor? Did Socrates investigate natural philosophy (“the things beneath the earth and in the heavens”), or are we to believe Plato’s account (*Apology* 19c-d), in which Socrates explicitly denies involvement and expertise in these matters and repudiates Aristophanes’ caricature? Is the Aristophanic Socrates a stand-in for pre-Socratic philosophers and sophists in general, with little or no connection to Socrates as an individual?

These questions may also have been present in the minds of at least some of the theatre-goers in 423 BC, only a few of whom will have had direct experience of Socrates. The Aelian passage points to an inherent tension in Socrates’ position. He is it at once targeted for parody and the recipient of attention. His prominence in the play surpasses even that of Cleon in Aristophanes’ *Knights*, performed the year before. Given his interests as an apologist, it is hardly surprising that Aelian presents Socrates’ decision to stand through the remainder of the performance as an act of resistance that showed his “contempt for comedy and the Athenians.” But if Socrates was “severe in his contempt for men who dealt in insults and abuse and had nothing sensible to say,” why was he present at the performance? Aelian’s account portrays

Clouds as a stratagem designed by Anytus and his fellow conspirators. They felt that Socrates enjoyed support among the Athenians, and so co-opted Aristophanes to produce a play that would turn public opinion against him and allow them to prosecute him with impunity. Despite the implausibility of this conspiracy theory, it points to the fact that Socrates is likely to have enjoyed a degree of recognition among his fellow Athenians. It is interesting to note Aelian's remark: that the playwright chose to lampoon Socrates over other potential targets such as Cleon, the Spartans, the Thebans, and Pericles. Socrates' star may indeed have been shining brightly enough to attract Aristophanes' attention: he had just acquitted himself with exemplary bravery at the Battle of Delium the year before, and his association with prominent aristocrats such as Alcibiades had not yet become a liability. Socrates' reported presence in the audience (not to mention the act of rising to his feet so that others could identify him) can be parsed instead as a sign of cooperation, a willingness to subject himself to the scrutiny of his fellow-Athenians.

Partly Cloudy offers a provocative comparison. It introduces Prof. William K. Friert and the liberal arts education he champions as the "great idea" typically found in Aristophanic plots, only to lampoon and deconstruct it: the play ends with the character Will Friert so frustrated by the imbecility of the prospective student that he stomps off into retirement. Placed, as Aelian writes of Socrates, "in a prominent seat in the theatre," the real Will Friert is enjoying the show even as fellow audience-members are glancing at him to see how he is reacting. Certainly the circumstances here are different: it is clear to all that the players aim to roast their favorite professor rather than to lambast him. Nevertheless, the play raises interesting questions about how the parody of Socrates in *Clouds* might have been received by members of the original audience.

I hope I have made a case for the claim that including a performance component in courses on ancient drama carries real benefit, for the students, instructor, and the broader community. The process of investigating what lies at the core of a play, of identifying what Michael Walton refers to as its "spine,"¹⁵ calls on students to exercise critical thinking skills; the challenge of communicating a play's Gestalt to a modern audience puts them in the role of teachers and deepens their understanding of the plays (*homines dum docent discunt*, Seneca *Epist. Mor.* 1.7.8). They gain self-confidence as they rise to the challenge of performing in public, and develop skills in verbal and nonverbal communication. The instructor too invariably gains new insights into the plays, and the public at large is introduced to the rich heritage of ancient drama.

Appendix. Student Evaluations of the Festival of Dionysus

Students were asked the following question. "How would you characterize the experience of participating in the Festival of Dionysus? Please comment especially on what (if anything) you learned from the process." Feedback was universally and overwhelmingly positive. Here are a few of the written responses:

*The Festival was one of my favorite experiences this semester. Reading ancient drama is one thing, but trying to bring it to life for a modern audience gets you thinking about the play and its relevance from an entirely different perspective.

*I enjoyed being hands-on with the material. I feel it added to my level of understanding of the characters and the emotions of the play.

*It was a unique, fun experience and totally worthwhile. I am happy that I was able to participate in this because it put me outside of my comfort zone. I learned that it is a team event and the success of a play is based on the actors'/actresses' chemistry and ability to work/interact well

with each other. Also, I learned that memorizing lines isn't as challenging as I would have expected.

*Very rewarding, it was nerve-racking and unenjoyable at the time, but it forced me to step outside the box . . . Looking back it was a lot of fun and definitely something I will remember for a long time.

*I thought it was a valuable experience—any time you overcome fear and do something you'd rather not is valuable. I learned, to a greater extent, what it is like to be an audience member, and how to play to them and their feelings/emotions/humor.

*The festival was a great way to bring everything we've learned into a fun and creative environment. It was a blast, and a great way to build class community.

*The Festival of Dionysus was a remarkable experience, and I know that the course would have not been the same without it.

*The festival was a fantastic way for students to get a hands-on experience with ancient theatre. I really felt the process was continually brought to life by student efforts each time we rehearsed.

*I had fun and really learned a lot about the theatre process and how to stage a scene from a play—very memorable.

*It was definitely a great experience! It was a great way to focus in on one play and really dive into all aspects of theatre.

*Staging and performing ancient drama is a great way to really understand what we've been learning. Between setting the play and thoroughly examining the text and performing it for an audience, the Festival was just as if not more instrumental to my understanding than anything else.

notes

¹ Eric Dugdale, "Good Grief: Learning Empathy through Ancient Drama," in *Meeting the Challenge: Bringing Classical Texts to Life in the Classroom*, *Institutio* 4.1–3, eds. Licia Landi and Luigi Scarpa (Lecce: Pensa Editore, 2011), 227–36.

² In applauding the arrangement by which I entrust these responsibilities to the students, one of the referees cogently expressed the bleak alternative: "Otherwise, if the professor ends up directing, trying, at the same time, to let the students make key choices, it is like trying to write a term paper for a set of undergraduates without actually writing it for them—totally exhausting and nerve-racking."

³ For details of some of the components and workshop exercises that I incorporate into the class, see Dugdale *op. cit.* 229–36.

⁴ There are many whom I would like to thank for making the Festival of Dionysus a success: my colleagues in classics and in other departments (esp. theatre and dance), collaborators in the Interpretative Center, Physical Plant, Costume Shop, and Office of Marketing and Communication, the judges, and most importantly the wonderful students who perform in it. I would also like to thank the two anonymous referees for their helpful feedback on this article. Finally, I thank those who participated in and led the CIC / Center for Hellenic Studies' seminar on Song Culture in Athenian Drama (July 2012) for a lively exchange

of ideas on ancient drama in performance.

⁵ In this case, the musician was not enrolled in the class. I encourage recruitment of friends as supernumeraries; they have served as mute characters, as stooges in the audience, or as choruses performing interludes (e.g., the *embolima* of New Comedy). Incorporating music into a performance often adds greatly to its emotional expressivity and impact. In the 2012 Festival, the group performing Sophocles' *Ajax* recruited a trombonist to punctuate key moments. All students who take the course must perform on stage; this requirement, as well as the date of the Festival, is written into the course description.

⁶ Mary Jaeger, *Livy's Written Rome* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), *passim*.

⁷ Oliver Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 31–36.

⁸ This was a creative response to a practical consideration arising from the Asperger's Syndrome of the actor playing Clytemnestra, Sarah Graver, which makes direct eye contact and close physical interaction difficult. That Sarah chose to take on the challenge of public performance is testimony to her gumption. In fact, Sarah is the only student in the history of the Festival who has acted in two iterations, participating again in 2012 in the winning production, *How I Met Your Uncle*, an adaptation of Plautus' *Menaechmi*. Her openness about living with Asperger's and her courage in embracing challenges are qualities that, I hope, will inspire others to take risks, whether in the form of instructors' going out on a limb by integrating performances into their class or students' going out of their comfort zone by performing in them. This article is dedicated to Sarah.

⁹ Peter Meineck, *Oresteia* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 33–34.

¹⁰ Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, 77.

¹¹ Mark Ringer, *Electra and the Empty Urn: Metatheater and Role Playing in Sophocles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 185–89.

¹² Mary-Kay Gamel, "Revising 'Authenticity' in Staging Ancient Mediterranean Drama," in *Theorising Performance*, ed. Edith Hall and Stephen Harrop (London: Duckworth, 2010), 153–170.

¹³ Nigel Wilson, trans., Aelian, *Historical Miscellany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 83–85.

¹⁴ Indeed, in Plato's *Apology* (17d–18d) Socrates at his trial blames Aristophanes' play for an inaccurate and slanderous representation of him; his wording draws attention to this very issue of the disjuncture between caricature and person being represented (my italics): "You saw it yourselves in a comedy of Aristophanes, where *a certain Socrates* was carried around and claimed that he walked on air and spouted lots of other nonsense concerning things *I don't know the slightest thing about*. I don't speak out of disrespect for this sort of knowledge, if there is *someone* knowledgeable about such things." Translation by David Johnson, *Socrates and Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 34.

¹⁵ Michael Walton, "Where is the Spine?" in *Looking at Lysistrata*, ed. David Stuttard (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010), 11–19.

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