

DIDASKALIA 

The Journal for Ancient Performance



photo: P. Winters/Theater of War

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

DIDASKALIA

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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.

2011 Staff

Editor-in-Chief:	Amy R. Cohen	editor@didaskalia.net +1 434 947-8117
		Post: <i>Didaskalia</i> Randolph College 2500 Rivermont Avenue Lynchburg, VA 24503 USA
Associate Editor:	C.W. (Toph) Marshall	
Assistant Editor:	Jay Kardan	assistant-editor@didaskalia.net
Intern:	Gage Stuntz	intern@didaskalia.net

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DIDASKALIA
VOLUME 8 (2011)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

8.01	Introducing Volume 8 and Remembering Douglass Parker Amy R. Cohen	1
8.02	Review: 45th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse Caterina Barone	4
8.03	Review: <i>The Brothers Menaechmus</i> at East Carolina University Amy R. Cohen	6
8.04	Review: <i>A Man Who Hates People</i> at Trent University and the University of Toronto Donald Sells	10
8.05	Review: <i>Hecuba</i> at Randolph College Jaclyn Dudek	13
8.06	Interview: Satyrs in L.A. Mary Hart	16
8.07	KOSKY - <i>The Women of Troy</i>: Barrie Kosky, The Sydney Theatre Company, and Classical Theatre in Australia Elizabeth Hale, guest editor	26
8.08	KOSKY - Delivering the Message in Kosky's <i>The Women of Troy</i> Helen Slaney	33
8.09	KOSKY - <i>The Women of Troy</i>: Barrie Kosky's "operatic" version of Euripides Michael Halliwell	48
8.10	KOSKY - <i>The Women of Troy</i>—New and Old Michael Ewans	58
8.11	KOSKY - "Toothless intellectuals," "the misery of the poor," "poetry after Auschwitz," and the White, Middle-class Audience: the Moral Perils of Kosky and Wright's <i>The Women of Troy</i> (or, how do we regard the pain of others?) Marguerite Johnson	65
8.12	Masks in the Oxford Greek Play 2008: Theory and Practice Claire Catenaccio	75
8.13	The Masked Chorus in Action—Staging Euripides' <i>Bacchae</i> Chris Vervain	85
8.14	Review: <i>Orestes Terrorist</i> at the University of California, Santa Cruz Fiona Macintosh	98
8.15	Review: 47th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse Caterina Barone	101
8.16	Review: <i>Medea</i> at the Long Beach Opera Yoko Kurahashi	104
8.17	Interview: <i>Theater of War</i> Amy R. Cohen and Brett M. Rogers	109

8.18	Storm in a Teacup: an Exercise in Performance Reception in Twenty-First-Century Israel Lisa Maurice	112
8.19	Review: Seneca's <i>Oedipus</i> at the Stanford Summer Theater David J. Jacobson	129
8.20	Review: <i>Sophocles: Seven Sicknesses</i> at the Chopin Theater Teresa M. Danze Lemieux	133
8.21	ADIP I - Ancient Drama in Performance: Theory and Practice Amy R. Cohen	140
8.22	ADIP I - Play in the Sunshine Jennifer S. Starkey	142
8.23	ADIP I - Adapting <i>Hecuba</i>: Where Do Problems Begin? Nancy Nanney ¹	157
8.24	ADIP I - The Twice Born and One More: Portraying Dionysus in the <i>Bacchae</i> Jaclyn Dudek	170
8.25	ADIP I - A Gestural Phallacy David J. Jacobson	173
8.26	ADIP I - Double the Message Diane J. Rayor	177
8.27	ADIP I - Performing the "Unperformable" Extispicy Scene in Seneca's <i>Oedipus Rex</i> Eric Dodson-Robinson	179
8.28	ADIP I - Compassion in Chorus and Audience Paul Woodruff	185
8.29	ADIP I - Staging the Reconciliation Scene of Aristophanes' <i>Lysistrata</i> John Given	189
8.30	ADIP I - The Delayed Feast: the Festival Context of Plautus' <i>Pseudolus</i> Laura Banducci	198
8.31	ADIP I - Euripides' <i>Hecuba</i>: the Text and the Event Kenneth Reckford	207
8.32	ADIP I - <i>Hecuba</i> in a New Translation Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street	208
8.33	ADIP I - Talkback: <i>Hecuba</i> Mary-Kay Gamel	299

Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 8 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

Introduction to Volume 8 and Remembering Douglass Parker, 1927–2011

Amy R. Cohen
Randolph College

Welcome to the new *Didaskalia*. With Volume 8 we embark on a new era that will reflect the revolution in online capabilities in the nearly two decades since *Didaskalia* began. What has not changed is our mission: we are an academic journal dedicated to the study of ancient theatre and its legacy in performance.

The new look of the site is the most obvious of our many projected changes. We intend it to be aesthetically pleasing as well as easy to navigate. You will also notice that the journal will no longer be organized by issues: each year will be a volume, and we will publish pieces as soon as they are ready. We may sometimes publish a group of pieces together (conference proceedings, perhaps), but the new numbering will be by volume, with sequential numbers for each item within a volume.



Douglass Parker, 1927-2011

Randolph College is now our hosting and publishing institution. We are grateful to Hugh Denard and his colleagues at King's College, London, for their many years of promoting *Didaskalia* with excellent technical services. Randolph College is the home of a Greek theatre with a long and active Greek Play tradition, and the institution welcomes the opportunity to support the study of ancient performance.

The new editorial staff will have a difficult time living up to the standards of our founding editor, Sallie Goetsch, and her successors, Hugh Denard and Jane Montgomery Griffiths. Toph Marshall has been devoted to *Didaskalia* since he first wrote for it in 1994, and he will continue to serve as associate editor. Jay Kardan brings years of experience as an editor and translator and a remarkable expertise in classics to his new position as assistant editor. My own qualifications as the new editor-in-chief come from my deep belief in the critical importance of performance for understanding ancient plays and the ancient world. I learn every day from my fellow scholars and practitioners, and at the helm of *Didaskalia* I hope to continue to foster that interaction for others.

Our new advisory and editorial boards will help us to keep raising the standards of the journal, and we are grateful to the APA's Committee on Ancient and Modern Performance, who have affiliated with us by agreeing to have their chair join our editorial board.

We are starting slowly: expect to see the site change and evolve as we discover what is possible and find the best way to implement changes. This is not the place for an exhaustive list of our plans, but embedded video and pdfs of articles will appear as soon our technical capabilities will permit. We are still making sure that all of the material from the first seven volumes is available and free of errors, and that process will continue as we adapt their text, images, and video to the new site.

We dedicate our new endeavors to the late and much-lamented Douglass Parker, who embodied the interplay between scholarship and practice, between an acute understanding of the ancient world and a keen sense of modern audience. Remembrances of him by friends and colleagues follow.

Kenneth Reckford

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

In our Hellenic Center year of blessed memory, 1961-62, Doug Parker quickly became our unofficial leader. He was older than the rest of us, emotionally more mature, vastly well read, with broad literary interests, but wise also in the ways of the world. He was terribly funny—at least once, he had me literally rolling on the floor with helpless, painful laughter—as well, of course, as terribly serious. I learned so much from him amid the almost continual flow of food and drink: from morning coffee, through lunch, through afternoon tea. But for three wintry weeks Doug fell silent. He was translating *Lysistrata* (for the Michigan series, edited by Bill Arrowsmith, his fellow komast). Maybe he nodded and spoke a few words, but his mind was elsewhere, struggling with recalcitrant lines of a choral ode. He translated from sheer obsession, then and always.

If I am still working on Aristophanes today, it is Doug's fault, for showing me how our poet could be terribly funny and terribly serious at the same time.

Mary-Kay Gamel

University of California, Santa Cruz

Predictably, I first found Doug as a translator—absolutely the best translator of ancient comedy into English in the twentieth century. As an undergraduate I was so excited by what was going on in classics at Texas that I almost went there for graduate studies, and I wonder what my career would have been like if I had. I loved his translations long before I started working in the theater myself, and once I heard the call of Dionysos I realized even more clearly what an amazing man of the theater he was, as I produced his *Lysistrata* in 1993, then directed his *Eunuch* in 2003, then used his *Wasps* as the basis for my own version in 2006.

Over the years he sent me unpublished translations, including the best version of *Metamorphoses 1* I have ever read (I pleaded with him for years to do the rest of the poem), and *Money* (Aristophanes' *Ploutos*). I hope these can somehow make it into print; the world needs them.

Doug's brilliance was not only intellectual and creative—it was a warm brilliance, sparkling with humanity, compassion, and kindness. My longest association with him (not nearly long enough) was in 2002 when I directed him as the elder Housman in Stoppard's *The Invention of Love*, the first of the now-annual staged readings at APA meetings. On that occasion, as always, he was a delight—creative, flexible, generous, funny. The only problem was that he wasn't nearly nasty enough to embody the character.

Ave atque vale, dear Doug.

John Given

East Carolina University

I didn't know Doug Parker well, having met him only once. But my recent production of his *Menaechmi* translation was likely the last staging of his work during his lifetime. It is an honor I bear with deep regret. I met Doug in January 2002 when I was cast with him in a production of his *Heavensgate Deposition*,

an adaptation of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*. I was a young, anonymous face, just out of graduate school. Yet I vividly remember how, after I delivered a single, inconsequential line, Doug pulled me aside to say how well that line came off. His kindness and generosity to someone he need not have noticed were remarkable. It gave me the courage, years later, to seek his permission to use the *Menaechmi* translation. He remembered me and granted permission immediately. When I offered royalties, he adamantly refused. He was pleased, he said, to have his work performed and to have Plautus introduced to new audiences. His linguistic playfulness and intricate understanding of the stage made our production very successful. My students and I express our gratitude and sincere sympathies to his family and friends.

Peter Meineck

New York University and Aquila Theatre Company

Doug was so kind to me in Aquila's very early days and when I was in Austin working at UT. He was an inspired, brilliant translator who had a keen sense of the stage. The works he did with Arrowsmith set the bar for all others, and they still hold up today. His recent translations with Hackett of Roman comedy were equally inspired. He will be missed.

Tim Moore

University of Texas at Austin

Doug was a regular visitor to my classes, where we often read his translations of Aristophanes and Plautus. Whether it was a class of 18 students in "Comedy, Ancient and Modern" or 320 in "Introduction to Ancient Rome," Doug always enchanted.

45th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Euripides's *Medea*, Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*

Reviewed by **Caterina Barone**
University of Padova

Medea

The ship Argo, which brought Jason to Colchis in his quest for the Golden Fleece, its sails a harbinger of death; or a temple to *sophia*, the “wisdom” which characterises Medea as a dangerous woman, different from others—these are only two of the possible impressions evoked in this staging of *Medea* by the stately and beautiful set designed by Massimiliano and Doriana Fuksas for the 45th season of classical plays at the Greek Theatre in Sicilian Syracuse. A sort of cast-iron truncated cone, built with inter-bolted geometrical panels, reflects the white space of the orchestra and, for Euripides's tragedy, bears letters of the Greek alphabet and forms of the ancient Mycenaean linear script, among which a red M stands out. The set is a strong technological sign in its proportions, sealing the boundaries of the area in which, by antiphrastic contrast, passions explode. On the left of the stage stands a withered, leafless tree being climbed by an imperfectly erect ape-man: an effigy of mankind in its primordial and savage stage, not yet supported by the *logos* and unable to tame the feral instincts of its nature—foreshadowing the fierce heart of the Colchidean sorceress herself.

Medea is shown from the very beginning as a barbarous and violent woman, indomitable even in her suffering and in her difficult condition as a repudiated wife and rejected foreigner. With shrill and strangled modulations of her voice (which do not always seem calculated), actress Elisabetta Pozzi expresses the offence that burns in the heart of the protagonist and which exposes her to the laughter of her enemies. In this production, Medea's relationship with Jason is carnal, scorching and maddened, reminiscent of the lacerating relationships of Strindberg's bourgeois dramas in the bodily contact of the two actors, consisting of wild embraces and wild blows, and in verbal aggressions driven to the extreme.

Beneath this violence glow the smothered embers of a passion that has degenerated into hatred towards the hero of the Golden Fleece. Jason is played vigorously by Maurizio Donadoni, but perhaps with too-frequent reliance on uncontrollable screams to convey the strongest emotions, even in the final cry, when Jason, by now a living corpse devoid of a future after the death of his children, is swallowed by the trapdoor of the Charonian staircase.

In this context, the perfidy of Medea and her malicious cunning, resting more on her extraordinary



Medea

Euripides's *Medea*, Greek Theatre, Syracuse, 2009: Elisabetta Pozzi as Medea; Simonetta Cartia, Chiara Catera, Carmelinda Gentile, Manuela Giangrasso, Doriana La Fauci, Valeria Lombardo, Nirysis Pouscoulous, Katia Principato, Gabriella Riva in the Chorus; set design by Massimiliano and Doriana Fuksas.



Elisabetta Pozzi as Medea; Simonetta Cartia, Chiara Catera, Carmelinda Gentile, Manuela Giangrasso, Doriana La Fauci, Valeria Lombardo, Nirysis Pouscoulous, Katia Principato, Gabriella Riva in the Chorus

intellect than on magical powers, is obscured by the sanguinary traits of her character. Moreover, her relationship with the chorus of Corinthian women fails to convey her status as an outsider, a *xene* within a Greek society highly suspicious of the barbarian. The chorus is too hieratic and detached in its movements around the protagonist; it does not participate in her sufferings or recoil in horror when she decides to kill her children, a decision she executes without concern for the support of other women. "I shall reveal my plans to you, even though you will not like them," states Medea, and in this she is very different from another betrayed heroine, Deianira, who in the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles asks the chorus for counsel regarding the enactment of her plan to regain the love of her husband Heracles.



Giorgio Albertazzi as Oedipus and Maurizio Donadoni as Creon

The overall staging of the play lacks strong direction: Krzysztof Zanussi does not fully explore the theme of the foreigner, shared by this season's plays at Syracuse, nor does he search the depths of Medea's soul or exploit the full potential of the set. The large reflecting surface, on which the protagonist casts a mirror image at times deformed and enlarged into a menacing, dark shape, could have been employed to emphasize the theme of the double, stressing Medea's intellectual duplicity in deceiving Creon and Jason as well as her emotional conflict during her lacerating inner struggle before killing her children. By the same token, the finale, which gratifies the audience's lust for spectacle when Medea appears above the palace among clouds of smoke, riding a chariot / golden disc of light, could have been avoided in favor of an equally effective but less trite solution: simply projecting a light on that glossy surface to represent the shining chariot of the Sun.

The costumes, inspired by the iconography of ancient Greek vases, were expressive and marked by refined elegance, ranging in color from the pastel tones of the chorus to the brown and golden of the royal mantles: garments designed to define the role rather than the *physis* of characters. Medea's clothes are an exception. A broad, austere, black mantle, covered by a halo-headpiece, hides and progressively reveals the true nature of the sorceress, employing the strong colours of her homeland, the east: petroleum green, blue, gold, and burnished silver.

Intense and notable music accompanied the key moments of the play in a crescendo: a fusion of the echoes of Mediterranean musical traditions, North African monophonic music, and the modalities of Gregorian chant and plainsong, blending with chilling metallic background sounds from the stage.

Oedipus at Colonus

In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, the stage set designed by the Fuksases is rather more livid and disquieting, deprived of the black letters and faced by a low barren little hill: a place consecrated to the Eumenides, a final destination after the long and painful exile of the Theban king, the involuntary assassin of his father and husband of his mother, now an outcast suppliant, but still charismatic in his proud endurance of undeserved sufferings.

The whiteness of the scene, rendered dazzling by the play of reflections on mirror surfaces, is broken by the colours of the costumes: mainly black or various hues of grey, as seen in the humble rags of Oedipus and his daughters, Antigone and Ismene, the clothes worn by the chorus of elderly inhabitants of Colonus who advance leaning on staffs with their faces covered by masks, and the mantle and armour of King Theseus. A significant chromatic variation is provided by the Erinyes—slender maidens with long black hair, wearing skin-coloured body suits—and by Creon and his red-and-black-cloaked thugs.

Oedipus's old age is characterised by the weakness of a body maimed by blindness and enfeebled by deprivations, but still capable of expressing the energy necessary to carry out the final act of his existence, to face Creon's violence and to answer Polynices' request for help. Both Creon and Polynices wish to obtain Oedipus's body as a defence against their enemies: not from any feelings of compassion, love or respect for the old king, but only from a desire to exploit the power of his lacerated *soma*. It is King Theseus who, with calm magnanimity, offers rightful hospitality to the foreign suppliant, remembering his own past as an exile and his human condition. "I am a man, and my power over the days to come is no greater than yours," he says to Oedipus.

Daniele Salvo's direction is analytical and well aimed, managing to give dynamism and interest to a tragic play rather poor in events and based on the philosophical interpretation of Oedipus's destiny, on the ultimate meaning of his suffering and of the atrocious twists of his fate. The motionless centrality of the old king is relieved by the revolving chorus, which in this tragedy is a deuteragonist of sorts, in slow but constant motion through well-planned choreographic trajectories and graceful tableaux reflected to great effect by the set.

This search for dynamism runs through the whole play, producing results which are at times necessary and plausible but at others purely showy. In the scenes of Creon's arrival and of the abduction of Antigone and Ismene, the brutality of the aggressors is set against the violent but impotent reaction of the old king, who furiously and desperately swings his staff in a crescendo of dramatic tension before falling to the ground, exhausted and defeated. On the other hand, scenes such as the arrival of Theseus on horseback or the irruption of the soldiers bearing torches to light the braziers on the sides of the orchestra, seem to pander to the crudest expectations of the audience, who greeted them with enthusiastic applause. The final scene, the death of Oedipus, narrated in the text by means of the *rhesis anghelikè* of the messenger, was staged with particular vividness of colors and iconography. In the supreme moment of his passing, the hero stands in a whirl of reddish reflections before the trapdoor of the Charonian staircase, which is lit from below among plumes of smoke. He goes to die on the low hill, supported and eventually engulfed by the redeeming embrace of the Eumenides: a closing image so orderly and intense as to render the previous visual effects superfluous.

With his stately old age and his perfect control over voice and gesture, always measured but powerful, Giorgio Albertazzi incarnates Oedipus rather than simply playing him. The director's choice regarding the expressiveness of Antigone, on the other hand, is not fully convincing. While surpassing the emotional impact of traditional performances by stressing the young woman's suffering and her feeling of being lost (rather than her heroic courage), the gestures adopted to render her distress and that of her sister Ismene are excessively reminiscent of mental alienation, and sometimes almost of daemonic possession. The same can be said of the chorus: its members, their masked faces creating an atmosphere of death in apparent allusion to the work Tadeus Kantor, are sometimes shown in a state of trance to signify the ritual and sacred aura surrounding the events.

The Fuksases' stage setting is used to its full potential; Daniele Salvo compares it, for its density of meaning, to the monolith in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It is a radioactive place where the individual goes astray, similar to an ancient sacred *temenos*. It reflects the movements of the characters and of the Chorus, and is deliberately designed to create mysterious and disturbing images. Thanks to a skilful play of light, the "monolith" shifts in appearance and in meaning, becoming livid and gelid as it represents the cold northern landscapes in the touching third stasimon, where the hopeless reference to old age and the ideal of never being born culminate in the image of the old man beaten by the waves and storms of life like a sunless northern cliff.

The music ranges from ritual rhythms to "romantic" melodies sometimes reminiscent of Hollywood soundtracks.

The Brothers Menaechmus

Translated by Douglass Parker
 Directed by John Given
 January 28–30, 2011
 East Carolina University

Review by **Amy R. Cohen**
Randolph College

John Given's production of *The Brothers Menaechmus* began with a subtle nod to the great legacy of Plautus's play: the overture from *The Boys from Syracuse*, the Rodgers and Hart musical based on *The Comedy of Errors*, which in turn was based, of course, on *Menaechmi*. It was a fitting way into a production that took full advantage of both modern and ancient comedic potential.

The second play to be produced by the East Carolina University classics program, this bare-bones student *Menaechmi* was staged in a recital hall at the Fletcher Music Center on the ECU campus.

The set consisted of painted banners on the sound baffles at extreme stage left and stage right. Although there were times when I wished for side-by-side doors upstage of all the action (for Dovey's perfectly-timed, through-the-door bird-flipping, for instance), the cross-stage traffic necessitated by the side exits

made for appropriately frenetic action.

Director Given introduced the show and spoke the prologue, successfully subordinating his own persona as confident lecturer to that of the "Great Digressor" of Douglass Parker's translation, a script he used with very few changes. Given quickly established the permeability of the fourth wall by telling us most of the backstory of the twins from in front of the stage, at audience level. Meanwhile the cast acted out the story behind him, a technique I usually dislike because it shows disrespect for the talents of the speechmaker. In this case it was an effective way to set the terms of the show for an audience mostly unfamiliar with Plautus or any conventions of the Roman stage.

We saw at once that we were being invited to use our imaginations and to delight in the absurd. The cast appeared in modified modern dress: jeans and t-shirts, some adorned with bright, toga-like garments, others with tunics topped off with modern white navy hats. The look assured the audience that it



Darrell Purcell as Menaechmus Two



Kelly Hunnings as Menaechmus One and Darrell Purcell as Menaechmus Two

would have an easy trip to its foreign destination. The prologue action also featured an extremely successful bit of special effects: as characters crossed the sea in a cardboard boat, members of the cast mimed the actions of the sea with long, floppy, blue mittens that rolled or raged as appropriate, a device that displayed the inventiveness of the company and signaled to the audience how much we would be asked to include silliness in our notions of reality.

The twins were played in the prologue by the child Max Jones, who was swept off to different sides of the stage as his identity changed from one twin to the other, his white t-shirt clearly reading "Menaechmus" or "Sosicles" at the appropriate moments. The choice of a young actor who appeared to be of mixed race foreshadowed the production's most unexpected but also most successful casting decision: Menaechmus One was played by a Caucasian woman and Menaechmus Two by an African American man. At first, the extreme unidenticalness of the twins suggested only a visual joke or perhaps a short supply of suitable actors. As the play went on, however, this casting invited the audience to abandon any expectations of realism and join in the imaginative project of making the play. The overt lack of verisimilitude eliminated the question of which Menaechmus was which, allowing the audience to devote our attention to the situations and the words instead. With such emphatically dissimilar twins, the play is less about confusion than about the relationships among the characters and their social and familial expectations of each other.

The prologue also presaged the musical variety of the production. In Tarentum at festival time, everyone danced a rollicking version of "Good King Wenceslas": great shorthand for what festival time might mean, as well as a familiarizing invitation to feel comfortable in a foreign setting. Menaechmus One (Kelly Hunnings) gave a tuneful, clear, and hilarious rendition of "Incompatible" (to the tune of "Unforgettable") that promised an evening full of fun parodies. Smug (Audrianna Frederick) fulfilled that promise with the slave's lament "I Did It His Way," to the tune, of course, of "My Way." Both songs got big laughs of recognition, and both actors delivered them strongly and clearly enough to communicate the plot elements in the parodies.

One of my few complaints about the show was that it didn't follow through on that musical promise at other times. Perhaps because of the short rehearsal period and last-minute cast changes, several songs in the script—not ones with such obvious melodies—got the spoken or rhythmic treatment, despite the availability of talented music director Will Banks. Such spoken lyrics had the effect of slowing the show rather than enlivening it, as the sung songs did.

Some of the performances were top notch, even for a briefly rehearsed student show. Kelly Hunnings' Menaechmus One was a delightfully dry combination of the comic personae of Tina Fey and Woody Allen. Her swagger was just right for the character and called delightful attention to the fact that she was a woman playing a man. Audrianna Frederick as Smug was strong and clear. Obviously more comfortable on stage than some of her fellow actors, she might have seemed too talented for the rest of the cast if her character weren't intended to be cleverer than those around him. Her most crowd-pleasing moments were her song and the great fight scene, in which she took on all comers and convincingly laid them all out.

Colleen Kilcoyne played Dovey (Menaechmus One's wife) in a perfect, permanent state of annoyance reminiscent of Fiona Shaw's Petunia Dursley in the Harry Potter films. But her frustration remained sympathetic, and we all enjoyed the moments when she got the better of either Menaechmus.

Darrell Purcell was charming and clear as Menaechmus Two, though almost too polite in his dealings with those around him, particularly with Dovey, failing to justify the other characters' plot-necessitated annoyance with him. But everything about his performance was big and bright. I particularly liked his almost cartoonish reaction to discovering his twin brother.

As the parasite Diddly, the energetic Brandy Inez was excellent at physical comedy—unafraid to fling herself across the stage or mop the floor with her fat suit—but her muddy delivery obscured what seemed to be a wry take on the character. A standout among the minor roles was Danielle Bryan's Antiquides, sputtering through the fibers of a particularly bad fake beard and making them fly at just the right times. Her comic timing was on display from the moment she entered from the audience with a cane and an attitude.

The whole cast's supreme gameness was exemplified by the unselfconscious kiss between Hunnings's Menaechmus One and White's Loveykins, by Inez's willingness to "apply your nose here" at Hunnings's behind and *sniff*, and by Purcell's tour-de-force mad scene as Menaechmus Two, in which he fearlessly threw himself around and even off the stage. The student actors clearly believed in the project and put their best energy into every choice, testifying to the quality of Given's leadership and direction.

His staging choices were usually strong, and the cast almost always spoke to and engaged the audience directly. This close relationship with the audience, along with superb comic timing—I'm thinking of the moment when Menaechmus One picked out cheating husbands in the crowd—served to erase any distance or reserve that might be expected from a 21st-century student audience faced with millennia-old Roman comedy.

The audience, consisting mostly of students and faculty with perhaps a few community members, responded to the show with uproarious laughter and warm applause. One audience member was overheard to say, with happy surprise, "I didn't know it was going to be a real production!" Real it was, and proof that John Given is building a body of work and a following at ECU that represent both great outreach for classics and an opportunity to show, as he puts it, "the continuing vitality and relevance of classical works of literature."

Double Bind, trans. Douglass Parker, in *Five Comedies*, trans. with introductions by Deena Berg and Douglass Parker (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 108. Given used Parker's English names for all the characters except the twins themselves.

A Man Who Hates People

Translated and Adapted from Menander's *Dyskolos*

by George Kovacs

January 27-February 5, 2011

Performed by the Trent Drama Group

First People's Performance Space, Nozhem Theatre, Trent University

Ignatieff Theatre, Trinity College, University of Toronto

Review by **Donald Sells**

University of Toronto

Under the steady guidance of George Kovacs, the Trent Drama Group has added another feather to its cap with its 2011 production of *The Man Who Hates People*, an adaptation of Menander's *Dyskolos*. Last year's production of Aristophanes' *Wasps* was a riotous success which showcased both the TDG's unique talent and Kovacs's bold choices in humor and choreography. But Old Comedy and New Comedy are very different animals. While the former's no-holds-barred slapstick and raunchiness tend to recommend it to the tastes of modern audiences, the New Comedy of Menander presents a special set of challenges for the director who must entertain the same audience with its comparatively restrained, subtle brand of humor.

From the play's opening moments one could sense a degree of continuity between *Man* and last year's production. The dainty and aristocratic Sostratus, played as an ascot-wearing fop by Nick Zawadzski, recalled the deliciously pompous Bdelucleon of Jordan Kripp (who plays Gorgias in *Man*). Knemon, 'the man who hates people,' was superbly played by Gilbert Enejajor, whose greying sideburns and beard, combined with farmer's suspenders and boots, endowed the crusty old misanthrope with just a whiff of Southern nobility. Indeed, most of Kovacs and Barb Smith's costuming choices seemed to use the timeless clothing conventions of the rural South to emphasize the social hierarchies of Menander's people. *Man's* primary class collision between the modest farmer Knemon and the wealthy family of Sostratos seemed conceived as a meeting between the New England prep school and poor Southern farmers: Sostratos' aristocratic pedigree was reflected by a tweed jacket and scarf (or 'shawl' according to the script), while Knemon and Gorgias looked the part of agricultural laborers. Kore (Christine Gilbert-Harrison), the farmer's daughter, was virginal and demure in a dress and straw hat.

The arrangement of the set followed the traditional staging of *Dyskolos*: two houses on each side of a shrine to Pan and the nymphs. The shrine was located at the back-center behind curtains, while another set of curtains, perpendicular to the first, represented the direction of the countryside on the right. The left wing of the stage was the *eisodos* from Athens. The farmers' houses were two ramshackle structures,



*Nick Zawadzski as Sostratus and
Christine Gilbert-Harrison as Kore*
photo: G. Kovacs



Julianna Will as Sikon
photo: G. Kovacs

whose prominence on the Ignatieff stage had the effect of repeatedly signalling the dominant trait – aggression – of the play’s most dominant character, Knemon. Although sturdy, Knemon’s simple house had an especially rickety front door which crashed around its frame with each passage, vividly underscoring the fearsomeness of its occupant. *Man*, like *Dyskolos*, has multiple comic door-knocking scenes, and the sounds of entrances and exits were shrewdly exploited to measure Knemon’s growing rage.

Props were few but effectively deployed. Sostratos’ struggle with the Ace Hardware-grade shovel (Act III) was amusing, but Sikon’s entrance with the sheep to be slaughtered for the sacrifice to Pan was arguably the most original piece of physical comedy in the entire play. In Act II, Julianna Will emerged from the left as the cook, dragging a raggedy stuffed animal with a piece of twine to the front-center of the stage. What really made this gag work was Will’s red-faced straining, vividly suggestive of a hernia suffered at some point in rehearsals.



Julianna Will as Sikon, Gilbert Eneajor as Knemon, and Steve Donovan as Getas
photo: G. Kovacs

This leads me to a great strength of *Man Who Hates People*, the distribution of roles. Kovacs has an eye for spreading his talent around in order to capitalize on his actors’ particular strengths. This practice enlivened at least one of the less-exciting roles, that of Getas, which will be described below. Although most of the actors did a fine job, I have space here to comment only on a few.

I have already mentioned Eneajor in the role of Knemon. Eneajor’s ability to fill space very quickly and commandingly is notable. An actor playing a part as aggressive as this must be careful not to run out of room or run over the other actors. Eneajor’s Knemon might be described as an interesting combination of Redd Foxx and a Shakespearean monarch, and convincingly radiated the concentrated rage of the figure of the text. Kovacs’s decision to cast his only other actor of comparable height in the part of Sostratos (Zawadzski) actually communicated a central theme of the play. The greater size of these two actors not only sharpened the social and ethical contrast between the embittered farmer and the dapper youth; it also gave the overarching social concerns of Menander’s play a certain physical dimension, visually reinforcing the two positions between which the maiden would be exchanged in order for Athenian social barriers to be sufficiently overcome.

Jordan Kripp’s earnestness as a Quakeresque Gorgias was amusing and at times reminiscent of his performance as Bdelucleon in *Wasps*. Will’s Sikon was also very funny: in a modern chef’s outfit the cook became almost cartoonish and even cross-generic, the fat-pads which expanded Will’s stomach and rear – realistically jiggling as she waddled around onstage – adding a nice Aristophanic touch to the excellent physical comedy of her interactions with Knemon.

Menander’s Getas is amusing but perhaps not hilarious. Kovacs skilfully enlivened this part, not a big one in the text, by giving it to his most comically talented actor, Steve Donovan. If readers remember last year’s *Wasps*, they will definitely recall Donovan’s hysterically funny portrayal of Philocleon. Donovan has the rare ability to entertain with both speech and gesture, and his Jim Careyesque movements are attention-grabbing enough to make any comic role more interesting. I cannot imagine a better rendition of the cathartic final mockery of Knemon than that provided by him and Wills, who were given complete freedom to taunt and harass the old boy in tag-team fashion. Their jubilant exit – with Donovan leaping and clicking his heels – punctuated an excellent production with an explosive and frenetic closure worthy of even Aristophanes.

One particular directorial decision in *Man* deserves to be singled out: Kovacs's treatment of the choral interludes, which were not choreographed dances but brief vignettes of metatheatrical joke-telling by the 'chorus of revellers' worshipping Pan. Jokes were adapted from sections of Philogelos' 'Laughter-Lover,' an ancient joke-book dated by some to the fourth century CE. I imagine that the decision to stage joke-telling in a style very similar to stand-up comedy charmed some audience members while turning others off. Either way, Kovacs's choice is to be commended as a highly original solution to a difficult problem of fourth-century comedy, the absence of choral song. The choreutai jovially strutted in and out along a short path lined with rocks and torches through the curtains representing the shrine. The metatheatricality of the four interludes openly acknowledged the audience and sharply contrasted with the preservation of dramatic illusion which generally (but not exclusively) characterizes the action of New Comedy. In the *parodos*, the worshippers openly pondered the reason for their presence in a style of comedy which has no use for them: is their part being written as they speak – the leader asks – or is the chorus speaking as the director writes? Almost like Aristophanic *parabaseis*, but without the agonistic element, Kovacs's interludes openly identified him as a voice behind the chorus. But they were not all sophistication and cleverness: moments after the choreutai identify themselves as revellers, choreut number three drunkenly fell on his face. The audience laughed; the fall was effective.

The chorus' full purpose in the play is only discovered after the leader produces the Joke Book (a nice concretization of the play's aim). In each interlude each choreut had a turn to tell a joke, and a drum brought onstage punctuated the delivery of the punch lines. Audience members might disagree about the effectiveness of the metatheatrical comedy, but it succeeded overall: jokes which were actually funny ('That slave you sold me has died,' a man complained to another. 'Well, I swear by all the gods, he never did anything like that when I had him!') got laughs, and jokes which were not funny ('An egghead went for a dip and almost drowned. As a result, he swore never to go near the water again before first learning how to swim.') were bad enough that they also got laughs. Kovacs thus demonstrated what many see as a fundamental truth about comedy: bad jokes, if correctly delivered, are always funny. Part of the amusement of these vignettes was observing the efforts of individual choreuts to remain in character when telling some of their appallingly bad jokes.

Rumor has it that next year the Trent Drama Group may return to tragedy – the special field of Desmond Conacher, in whose honor the TDG performs – since Attic comedy has been staged for the past two years. It seemed clear that the audience of students, faculty, and members of the Toronto community who assembled at the George Ignatieff Theater would be only too happy to see the Group continue its successful run of comedy, especially under the guidance of the current director.

Hecuba

by Euripides

Translated by Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street

Directed by Amy R. Cohen

October 8-10, 2010

The Randolph College Greek Play

Review by **Jaclyn Dudek**

Wayne State University

The 2010 Randolph College Greek Play, a production of Euripides' *Hecuba*, fulfilled many objectives, both academic and artistic. The "Greek Play" is a Randolph College tradition going back to 1909, and this production coincided with Randolph's first conference on ancient drama in performance, serving as an excellent finale for a day devoted to practical and artistic questions about ancient theater.

Director Amy Cohen's purpose was to follow ancient stage conventions as closely as possible: fully integrated music, three actors for all the principal speaking parts, gender-blind casting, and masks. Although most of the actors were women, the few male choristers did an excellent job, blending well with the others in their choral garb. The cast and crew consisted of undergraduates from all disciplines. The performance took place outdoors, in a Greek-style theater, under perfect weather (a good omen sent by the gods). The translation by Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street was crisp and contemporary without sacrificing the grandeur of the original. The production also included original music composed by Chris Cohen and Randall Speer, a mix of violin, melodica, and drums.

The highlight of the entire production was the exquisite masks, director Cohen's specialty. These were not grotesque caricatures but slightly oversized, naturalistic human faces, with a variety of features and hairstyles (kudos to the wig team). The effect was magical; static expressions seemed to change with the mood, while large unblinking eyes held the audience in a kind of tension. I heard one audience member say she was able to focus more on the words because she wasn't distracted by individual faces. Acting in masks is no small feat, especially when they obstruct peripheral vision, but all the actors were naturalistic and unified in their movements.

Often, when there is little to commend a play, the safe comment is, "I could hear everyone." In this instance, however, the audibility of the performers was a truly impressive aspect of the production. As a veteran of outdoor performing, I was impressed with the



Anneka Freeman as Odysseus
photo: J. Shupe



Video 1: Laura Shearer as Polyxena, with Sasha Budd as Hecuba and Anneka Freeman as Odysseus
video: Randolph College
youtube.com/watch?v=8Wsr0UPiHkY



Video 2: Laura Shearer as Talthybius, with Sasha Budd as Hecuba
video: Randolph College
youtube.com/watch?v=HFV68yaAYDI

excellent articulation and diction of all the actors. Each sustained a level of volume that filled the large outdoor space, whose hazards included planes, trains, and a family of raucous crows (I thought of them as the carrion birds outside of Troy). In addition to the difficulties of open-air theater, the integration of masks and sung choral odes would have made the production tricky even for seasoned thespians, yet Cohen's well-taught actors skillfully maneuvered through these potential snags to great effect.

The incorporation of sung choral music is a difficult task and had mixed results, but it raised several interesting questions. The original score by composers Cohen and Speer had complex harmonies and a non-Western touch, with a very striking chord in the third chorus. At other times the musicians and singers seemed disconnected from each other and the action of the play, an effect mostly attributable to the large space and reduced sightlines of the masks. The music raised several questions concerning the placement and integration of the musicians and provided insights into acoustical logistics. The theater itself was more oblong than circular, presumably making it more difficult for the musicians and singers to hear each other. I came away with a deeper respect for both.

Three actors shared eight roles between them, following ancient convention. College senior Sasha Budd (Hecuba) was a competent actor, but she exhibited her real strength as a performer during the lyric solos. Her voice was excellent and had a raw quality that was very moving. Polyxena, Talthybius, the Therapaina, and Polymester were all played by junior Laura Shearer. While Shearer's singing was not as strong as Budd's, it lent itself well to the vulnerability of the characters she portrayed, an excellent foil to the strength of Hecuba. Shearer's versatility was highlighted during Talthybius' messenger speech, in which she switched to her Polyxena voice when quoting the dead girl. (*See videos 1 and 2 to see her in the two roles.*) This was an excellent directorial choice, at once both eerie and self-consciously theatrical. Euripides would have approved. He would have also approved of the broken and panicked way that Shearer, as the blinded Polymester, sang the lament. The emotional climax of the play came as members of the chorus crept up to him, touching him only to run away. Polymester, disoriented, spun around, grabbing at nothing. After the blinding scene, the sympathetic chorus became cruel and taunting. Their transformation from victims to child murderers was quite chilling and I truly felt sorry for Polymester, in the weirdly guilty way that is Euripides' trademark effect.

Senior Anneka Freeman (Polydorus, Odysseus, Agamemnon) had the task of playing not one but two Greek generals. Equally unlikable and unctuous, both characters deny any real responsibility for the war. The doubling convention raised some practical questions and insights. Freeman's petite form and voice were easily recognized in her various roles, while Shearer's were less so. The disparity helps explain the stilts, large padding, or robes that the ancients may have used in order to disguise the individual actor underneath. On the other hand, casting the same actor as both the politician (Odysseus) and the general (Agamemnon) had the effect—intended or unintended—of joining the two character "types" as reflections of the same empty political machine. This observation, coupled with the voice switching in mid-speech, made me wonder how an ancient audience would have reacted to the intertextual ironies that might arise from the three-actor rule. Would an ancient audience find it ironic



The musicians and part of the Chorus
photo: J. Shupe

that the actor playing *Polyxena* is also playing *Polymester*? Or was it just a matter of course? How thoroughly would the ancients disguise their actors? Would a playwright such as Euripides knowingly use such metatheatricality to his advantage?

Randolph's *Hecuba* was not just a performance, but also a research laboratory. Director Cohen's work in the creation and study of masks was made clear in the first ten minutes of the play. The real success of the production lay in the number of questions that it posed, which led to a deeper understanding of the complexities of staging, music, light, and acoustics. In accordance with the civic implications of Greek tragedy, there was a sense that the entire college and community were somehow involved in the production. The motto of the conference was "The Practice Matters to the Understanding." If we translate "catharsis" as a type of understanding, then even by Aristotle's standards, *Hecuba* easily achieved its goal.

Satyrs in L.A.

The Trackers by Sophocles: The Making of a Satyr Play
directed by Michael Hackett, Chair of the [Department of Theater at UCLA](#)

Satyr Atlas
a work in progress by [Poor Dog Group](#)

Cyclops: A Rock Opera from Euripides
Percy Bysshe Shelley translation
by [Psittacus Productions](#)

Interviews by **Mary Hart**
Getty Museum

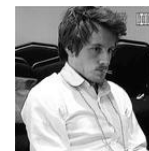
In the fall of 2010 I curated "[The Art of Ancient Greek Theater](#)" at the Getty Villa in Malibu, California, a major international loan exhibition that assembled most of the finest extant objects depicting and reflecting theater from ancient Greece. A major theme of the exhibition was to explore the many ways Greek plays and stagecraft inspired classical artists, whose works are often the only surviving evidence of the birth and early development of this potent art form. In turn, the displayed depictions of actors, chorus men, satyrs, gods and plays—as well as a rare papyrus of Sophocles' *Ichneutai* from the British Library—themselves became the catalyst for performance, inspiring three contemporary versions of satyr plays. Taken together, these productions represent an exceptionally concentrated approach to the performance of that nearly lost art form.

During the run of the exhibition, an international symposium entitled "[Artists and Actors: Iconography and Performance in Ancient Greece](#)" investigated the relationship between art and performance in ancient Greece. The idea of producing a satyr play for our own Villa Theater Lab series inspired a "Satyr" lunch, held during the Symposium to provide an opportunity for speakers and invited guests—directors and actors—to share their experiences and observations. We noted with some surprise that while fragments of satyr plays and Euripides' *Cyclops* had been sporadically produced in academic settings, no one present had first-hand experience with a professional production. Tony Harrison's *Trackers of Oxyrhyncus*, presented by the poet at Delphi in 1988 and at the National Theater, London, in 1990, was naturally evoked as the contemporary masterwork of the genre.

At the lunch **John Kerns**, a member of Poor Dog Group, answered the call for a working definition of a satyr. As he



Mary Hart



John Kerns



Michael Hackett



Jesse Bonnell



Chas Libretto



Louis Butelli



Poor Dog Group Satyr Chorus



Cyclops: A Rock Opera Trailer
(youtube.com/watch?v=2IwVmMyySUK)

recalls:

Satyr territory is ‘the eternal’ and yet they are not immortal. They are also not human. They are part of a primitive inhumanity; leftover from the time before man—a time of gods—they exist as a residue produced in providence by those most comprehensive beings. Their faculties are godlike, born of Dionysian gratuity. They possess a total vision: every particularity of the world and the sum total of time are the ineradicable inhabitants of their memory. As a result, they are incapable of general, platonic ideas so they appear to us as disinterested, remote and godforsaken. The Satyrs are the face and knowledge of the gods cast in outrageous, semi-human representation. Herein lies their humor: they perceive with the capacity of gods as they stumble about in horse/human soma. Their dance is an irreconcilable confrontation with chaos, one that maintains the same *raison d’être* as was practiced in *The Rites*. If Dionysus is the alpha of that pre-performance era (Dionysus Mysteries through *The Bacchae*) then they are surely its omega.

These ideas informed the work of all three productions during the fall, when members from each project spent hours in the exhibition with me and on their own, attended each other’s performances, and intersected at the Villa.

For *Didaskalia* I asked the artistic producers, actors, musicians, and directors of these productions to describe their inspirations and attitudes toward performing ancient Greek theater and specifically toward staging the nearly completely lost art form of satyr play and satyr chorus. The following artist’s remarks are taken from their responses in their own voices, with as little editing as possible.

Michael Hackett, Chair of the Department of Theater in the UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television, directed a three-part performance in the Auditorium of the Getty Villa. *The Trackers by Sophocles: The Making of a Satyr Play* included my own presentation with comments from Michael; a presentation of dances inspired by the vase paintings in the exhibition *The Art of Ancient Theater*; and a performance of *The Trackers* by Sophocles. Michael reflects on the production:

The presentation of dances and the performance of *The Trackers* were the most recent events in an ongoing series at the UCLA Department of Theater called the “Chorus Project.” Since Fall Quarter 2001, the Theater Department has sponsored workshops, residencies, and performances focusing on ensemble music-drama and dance theater. The nature of the chorus as an ensemble form serves as an antithesis to the Romantic tradition in acting that stresses the development of highly individualized projections of character and personality traits. Participation in a dramatic chorus requires the cultivation of group skills that are closely associated with instrumental and choral performance groups as well as athletic teams. In fact, the modern emphasis on character in acting training has shifted the focus away from the teaching of certain fundamental skills common to all performance forms: group concentration and communication, choral breathing, an awareness of the kinetic relationship of a performer’s body in space, the relationship of emotion to movement, the relationship of emotion to voice, and a perception of the musical and poetic structure of a performance text.

Through a series of movement improvisations based on the vase paintings in the exhibition, the students and I explored a series of performance “problems”:

What exactly do these images represent in relation to the actor?

What “essential” attributes or characteristics of being a satyr or maenad do these images suggest?

Can these images be interpreted as “attitudes” revealing psychological traits?

When embodying these images, what psychological condition or emotional state is induced?

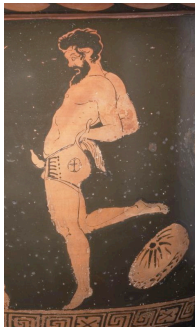
How are these images to be interpreted in movement, in time and in space?

When the vase depicts a series of performers in a sequence performing different movements, can these movements be read as points in a continuum of movement?

Are the movements performed in unison or in nonunison?

With these questions driving our rehearsal process, we arrived at a series of dances and movement sequences that attempted to convey our response to the images on the vases.

Three vases especially served as the inspiration for this part of the presentation.



“Three Chorusmen in the Moments before or after the Performance of a Satyr Play,” Red-figured bell krater, 430–380 B.C. Attributed to the Tarporley Painter, Sydney University Museums (detail at left, photo: Getty Museum).

Here the members of the men’s chorus explored a prototypical satyr pose: head held forward, chin on chest, an extreme arch of the back, arms bent backwards with hands poised in the small of the back, hips thrust forward, belly extended, one leg extended, the other leg bent backwards in an extreme position, and feet and toes pointed.

As the vase quite possibly represents a transition from actor to satyr or satyr to actor, one of the student performers “transformed” into a satyr by incorporating the physical aspects of the painting described above.

Members of the men’s chorus, also incorporating the physical aspects of the painting and dancing in a circle, then joined him. They were accompanied in Greek by a choral exchange between satyrs and the Cyclops from Euripides’ play. Professor Mario Telo from the UCLA Department of Classics advised the students on the preparation of the Greek.

“Gods and Pandora; Actors as Pans with an Aulete,” Red-figured calyx krater, 475–450 B.C. Attributed to the Niobid Painter, The British Museum.

This vase initiated a suite of dances that were in turn inspired by the images on the vase and by the questions articulated above. What became clear is that the maenad presence is essential to an understanding of the satyrs. The maenads seem to have the power to both imbalance and balance, to provoke and soothe. The objects in the exhibition made such a powerful case for the presence of the satyrs that it was especially revealing to witness the authority of the women’s chorus in their guise as maenads and in juxtaposition to the satyrs.

“Satyr Chorus Dancing before an Aulete,” Red-figured kalpis, 480–460 B.C., Attributed to the Leningrad Painter, Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

What was most revealing was the sheer physical strength it took to embody the movements on this vase—they required a sort of virtuosic stamina. The manipulation of the legs of the symposium couch while in movement required significant power in the abdominal area and concentration of power in the extension of the arms and legs. I had the distinct sense that we were watching something related to martial display. It made complete sense that young Athenian

men who would have been trained in both dance and military exercises would have played these satyrs.

In approaching the staging of *The Trackers*, the performers cannot be demure about the scatological aspects of the satyrs' nature nor can they be shy about phallic exaltation and display. As followers of Dionysus, the satyrs participate in an infinite cycle of drinking, feeding, excreting and discharging—they are, indeed, denizens of the earth occupied in a ritual of fertility, death, and rebirth.

For this reason, I was surprised by the impact of the lyrical passages with the Nymph Cylene and satyrs. The dramatic power and elegance of the poetry was unexpected and its presence is a shock to the standard understanding of the satyrs as gross, unrefined creatures.

The Nymph performs an important function as a moderating force between the wildness of the satyr world and the harmonic balance that is anticipated in the advent of the lyre. Presumably, this is the function assigned to Papposilenos, who is traditionally interpreted as a mediator among the animal, human, and divine realms. But in this fragment of *The Trackers*, he abdicates his role by fleeing the sounds of the lyre emanating from the cave.

To accommodate the shifting facets of the satyrs (and to make the juxtaposition of the vulgar and the graceful clear to the audience), we employed multiple approaches to the text that enforced clarity of narrative as well as dramatic action and lyricism.

The concept of the satyr framed by John Kern at the exhibition symposium eventually became the foundation for the satyr chorus in “Satyr Atlas,” performed in the Getty Villa’s Theater Lab series February 4-5, 2011. Like the UCLA company, Poor Dog was partly inspired by the image of a chorus man dancing in satyr costume on the Sydney Vase. But their approach to the form took a very different direction.

PDG is composed of about thirty artists, recent graduates of California Institute of the Arts, who collectively adapted and wrote the performance. As writers they launched their work from a vast pile of references and influences including the exhibition catalog, *The Art of Ancient Greek Theater*, Richard Seaford’s *Dionysos*, the plays of Euripides (using various translations, including Arrowsmith and Grene) and Seneca’s *Thyestes*, as well as *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos* by Tadeusz Kantor, an essay on *Dionysos in '69* by Richard Schechner, and Michael Crichton’s film *Jurassic Park*.

These references and many more found their way into the performance and were added to personal input from members of the company (Serbian surtitles, for example). Their intersection as a performance was unified by expert technological vision pinned on sophisticated videography, itself playing a functional and self-referential role.

Director **Jesse Bonnell** says the company

enters the creative process as a collective committed to contemporary performance in America. Our work stems from an ongoing investigation into the massive matter of our collected history as an access point for physical and physiological exploration. In our latest work, *Satyr Atlas*, we attempt to channel the biological power of our past, the barbaric to the beautiful, the visible and invisible, as an incantation of the world that exists before death, a vortex into a time where law and natural order can reverse—the world of Dionysos.

In development, we started with lost and fragmented satyr plays found at Oxyrynchus, predominantly written by Euripides. During a three-week workshop at UCLA, the ensemble crafted

sections built on singular lines of text and meaning. We attempted to draw together the common relationship between what was represented by the plays and the type of ritualistic performance that occurred between 7th and 5th Century BC as represented on several pots displayed at the Getty Villa. Our study focused on the behavior of the demigods and followers of Dionysus, the satyrs. In an effort to remove the common conception of altered states of consciousness due to intoxication or physical lust, we spent time working on physical and mental ecstasy generated by simple proximity to the omnipotent power of Dionysos.

Crafting a contemporary satyr play that follows the structure that would have been used by its original poets was a challenge for a company that in many ways rejects traditional forms of dramatic literature as the singular language of theater. *Satyr Atlas* retells the myth of Thyestes and Atreus and subverts not only the action of the narrative but also the fundamental structure of theater itself by dismantling Aristotle's notion of theatrical drama. As Artistic Director of PDG, I felt that the myth of Thyestes and Atreus provided us with the proper platform to discuss the political, social, and sexual politics of the late fifth century while supporting the physical transformation among the bestial qualities inherent in our contemporary world.

The Getty Villa's exhibition on ancient Greek theater informed our process almost more than the fragmented texts. As a direct visual representation of ancient theater during this expansive period of time, the group latched on to several pots that seem to pulse with the unknown power of our past. The fusion between what is represented, the real, and the unknown all collide in these masterful works of art. One could say that *Satyr Atlas* is, in many ways, performance by ancient appropriation and at the same time scholarly speculation.

In the third production inspired by the exhibit, Psittacus Productions' *Cyclops: A Rock Opera*, **Louis Butelli**, co-director, played the role of Silenus. He has appeared in stage adaptations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and productions of *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus* (both *Tyrannus* and *At Colonus*), *The Birds*, and *Medea*, but never once felt he was in a production "that approached something divine, something Dionysian, in the way that I've always believed a piece of Greek theater could be."

Butelli reflects,

As an academic myself—or, at the very least, a bibliophile and huge nerd—I have deep respect for the wealth of information that dramatic scholarship has made available to theater practitioners. As a long-time Shakespearean and lover of classics, it would be idiotic not to consider how Greek scholarship is hardwired into every piece of Western literature we read. Still, gratitude aside, it's possible that, in order to actually put on one of these plays, one might benefit from putting the brakes on scholarship at a certain moment, selecting one's favorite and best-targeted scholarly "analogy," and just getting on with it. In my experience, when questions in the rehearsal hall can only be answered with maps and dates, the show itself is bound to suffer.

Growing up in the 1980s, I fell in love simultaneously with books, with the theater, and with music. For sheer theatricality and other-worldliness, favorites included everything from David Bowie and Lou Reed, to the Ramones and the Sex Pistols, to Alice Cooper and Kiss. It's hard to say what exactly it is about a favorite band that can electrify. Certainly it begins with the music—the sounds that, if experienced right at the most agonized moment of one's coming of age, can remain the soundtrack to the rest of one's life. But it is more than that. Rock and roll is also about image and fantasy. Rock and roll is, essentially, theater.

In considering the mutable nature of Dionysus himself, not to mention his great dedication to drinking, music, and sex, the parallels between the ecstatic nature of a bacchanalian revel and a

rock show by sexy, androgynous performers began to intrigue us. Further, given the presence of “The Satyrs” in *Cyclops*, and our conception of them as a Rock Band, desperately attempting to reunite with their patron, the notion of satyr play as rock concert began to seem more than just a dramaturgical analogy—it began to feel inevitable.

When it came time to conceive of our show *Cyclops*, both in terms of the adaptation and the stage direction, I found that I could look to my own experience and find the solution: a steamy tableau vivant, illuminating a stage full of sexy, scantily clad goat-men and their women. It is a simplistic solution—the staging requires no more than a sound system, costumes, and a scrim—but, then, perhaps it was too many extraneous levels of complexity that interfered with my enjoyment of the Greeks prior to this point.

Finally, as regards our use of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s 1819 translation of *Cyclops*, one need look no further than David Bowie’s Ziggy Stardust persona, or to Led Zeppelin’s appropriation of Tolkien’s *Lord Of The Rings*, to see where archness of tone and the patina of ‘the classical’ marry incredibly well with rock and roll. Much as in Greek drama, the emotions in rock are so outsized that, we believe, heightened and stylized language can connect the dots much more effectively than the most ‘down and dirty’ of colloquial translations.

Chas Libretto, co-founder of Psittacus and adaptor of Shelley’s translation, played the role of Odysseus:

Louis and I were invited to join Son of Semele’s winter Company Creation Festival around the same time we’d taken a tour of the Getty Villa’s “Art of Greek Theater” exhibit, which got us thinking about all things Greek. Then the exhibition symposium put us on the Satyr play track. As a lifelong fan of *The Odyssey*, I was excited to learn that one fully extant satyr play riffed on the Polyphemus episode, and that it was, in spirit, about as different from our last show (an adaptation of *Macbeth*) as one could get, while still allowing us the ability to explode a classic outward.

Satyrs are anarchic, horny, hairy, and loud—and not unlike my musician friends. So, Satyr Play/Rock Band was our hook, but reading several contemporary translations left me cold, until a chance discovery of a rare 1819 translation of *Cyclops* by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

As a long-time admirer of the Romantics, their grandfather Goethe (and even their grandchildren the ‘New Apocalyptics’ of the ‘30s and ‘40s: Dylan Thomas, Mervyn Peake, Henry Treece), I was excited to learn this existed, and even more so after I’d read it. So often I find modern translations of ancient drama to be lacking: they attempt to sound contemporary, when in fact, they ought to embrace the heightened, mythic language. These are gods, heroes, and monsters, not Neil LaBute characters, and Shelley understood this. Not to mention that much of the translation is in verse already, which made adapting it to music less challenging.

Shelley, too, seemed to take to rock and roll quite naturally. This was not a surprise, since the greatest of the decadent rock gods are often the most Byronic (Lord Byron being quite a good friend of Shelley’s): ‘mad, bad, and dangerous to know,’ as Byron’s lover put it. And Glam-Rock was the height of this sort of attitude, with androgynous artists like David Bowie and Marc Bowlan embracing Weimar Cabaret, Victorian literature, Science Fiction, occultism, and mythology, while wearing platform boots, outlandish costumes, makeup and hair. It seemed natural enough to us!

Of the seventeen songs nearly half of the lyrics came directly from Shelly’s translation; lyrics to the others were co-written with members of the company and the band, led by **Jayson Landon Marcus**, who also composed most of the music and played the *Cyclops*: “The genres of music in the *Cyclops* include Celtic

dirges, Irish drinking songs, 50's rockabilly, calypso, funk, soul, folk-rock, swaggering blues, sea shanties, arena rock, baroque rock, waltzes, bar-room ballads, opera. . . The sea was a big inspiration for the music of *Cyclops*. . . the rhythm of the waves, the swelling and shifting moods and atmospheres.”

Jayson had just been reading the *Odyssey* when he was approached by Chas Libretto to compose a score:

- ▶ "For Your Gaping Gulf"
Marcus/Shelley
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "An End to the Sea"
Marcus/Libretto
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "Bloodier Than the Cherry"
Marcus
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "More for the Whore"
Marcus/Shelley
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "Strophe/Epode"
Marcus/Shelley
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "Soon a Crab"
Marcus/Shelley
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "Put Your Elbow Right"
Marcus/Shelley
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "Sodomy"
Marcus
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "I'm a Cyclops"
Marcus
Psittacus Productions
- ▶ "Here Comes the Cyclops"
Marcus
Psittacus Productions

sound files available at SoundCloud

He [Chas] gave me a small passage from Shelley's translation of Euripides' *Cyclops* and told me to just think about it. That night I repeatedly read the passage which describes the brutal consuming of Odysseus' men by the Cyclops in great detail, but also with great beauty and metaphor. Upon waking the next morning I immediately sat down and put it to music, without much thought or consideration. It became our first song now titled "For Your Gaping Gulf." This became a commonality for me in the process of writing the *Cyclops*. Often times I would read and re-read a passage or meditate on an idea or theme we wanted to express, like sodomy or the blinding of the Cyclops, and I would wake up with the melody or the entire song. The music always seemed to come from a very natural source. "An End to the Sea" was a nice collaboration with Chas, who wrote the lyrics. I'm a big fan of island music in general. I also like to make references within genres. Chas' lyrics reflected to me the mystic forlorn and doomed despair of Bali Ha'i from South Pacific. The beauty of desperate moments, the pieces of beauty we cling to in the darkest moments, the visions and pictures of familiarity that help us across those divides. Some songs make their own ways into the show. "Bloodier than the Cherry" was taken from a Handel piece from his opera *Acis and Galatea*. Originally titled "Ruddier than the Cherry" it was sung by the Cyclops Polyphemus as a love song to woo the sea-nymph Galatea. I changed the lyrics to portray an initial showdown between the Cyclops and Odysseus and also an ode to the Cyclops' love of feasting on human flesh. The music is still the same but re-arranged for a rock power trio. I thought it would be fun to have Irish style drinking songs in the show—somehow the time signature is a universally drunken denomination. And again the rolling of the sea. The drunken briny sloshing of it all. The rotting fish and decaying kelp baking in the sun being picked at by gulls. It's awful and glorious.

"More For the Whore" was written fairly quickly: there was a passage in the Shelley translation that was suggestive of a gang rape of Helen but certainly not explicit. We looked at a few of other translations and realized the gravity of the situation and where Shelley had relied very heavily on suggestion. We decided in the original spirit of the show we would take the song back to its roots. The opening song of the show is straight Shelley put to music. He was really such an exquisite poet that his verse, while not always obviously rhyming, does contain a very substantial rhythmic origin. The waves washed in bringing a dark carnival ghost ship, wrecked and bleached, moaning a muted SOS. "For Your Gaping Gulf" and "Strophe/Epode" are also straight Shelley. The mood of the verse very much

dictated the musical style in these instances. "Strophe/Epode" undergoes several musical transformations beginning bright and cheery, with the imagery "here the grass is soft and sweet and the river eddies meet." An upbeat folk country rock song with a calypso guitar lick becomes a dark Latin groove lamenting the loss of Dionysus and the enslavement of the Satyrs "in these wretched goat skins clad, far from the delights and thee." Songs like "Soon a Crab" or "Put Your Elbow Right" combine the Shelley verse with my own. I've been a lyrical excavator for a very long time, blending and twisting borrowed phrases from various sources. I find the truest beauty in chaos. Building off Shelley's verse was a very good time for me: to be able to use that language, break it up and fill it out—like making plaster casts of missing dinosaur bones to fill out the skeleton. "Soon a Crab" begins as straight Shelley verse, and it's quite beautiful and romantic: "Soon a crab the throat will seize of him who feeds upon his guest, fire will burn his lamp-like eye in revenge of such a feast! A great oak stump now lying, in the ashes yet undying. Come Maron! Come Maron! Come Maron come! Raging let him fix the doom!"—Odysseus is trying to rally the Satyrs to help him gouge the Cyclops' eye. The satyr response was built off Shelley's passage but is comic exaggeration. Musically it carries on the same melody previously sung by Odysseus of a dark Celtic dirge; juxtaposed with the Satyrs response, it becomes very funny.

I wrote "Sodomy" one morning after Chas said the night before, "We need a song about sodomy." I woke up and there it was straight off, no breakfast, only sodomy. I fantasized about how funny it was going to be for whoever was going to play the Cyclops to have to sing this song. Little did I know at the time that I was going to be the one singing the song as the Cyclops. There's a reference Shelley makes to Cyclops raping Silenus after getting drunk, and I tried to kick the door down on a lot of his subtlety. It is a rock opera, after all. Louis pointed out the first night I met him that I was in fact the Cyclops. After grappling with the realization that I had been the Cyclops the entire time of writing the majority of the show and not knowing it, I accepted the part and just started going for it. The song "I'm a Cyclops" really delivered me to the character. It started to dawn on me that the Cyclops might not be so wicked after all, he's really the victim in this story. And hey!. . . Odysseus is kind of a jerk! "Here Comes the Cyclops" was my way of leveling the playing field a little bit. Knocking him off his high horse. Shining a light on his hubris, his defiance of nature.

I've never done much theater or had much experience dealing with actors in a professional environment. I'd been in bands for a long time but this was very different. Working with actors takes some getting used to, let alone becoming one. I do learn a lot more about the Cyclops with every show. For our upcoming run at Pasadena Playhouse we're adding a few more songs, developing the story and characters a bit more. After playing the show for a few months we have a much better sense of what it actually is and what it can be. Playing it for people and hearing the reactions and feedback has been a big part of gaining perspective. I've always considered the Cyclops such a great opportunity. To resurrect the ancient Gods, to let them express themselves through us. They are very much among us and have been the entire incubation time. There is someone we did forget to include, although she didn't reveal her presence until very recently. The grey-eyed goddess Athena has had only an invisible hand in Cyclops: A Rock Opera...until now.

Chas Libretto has further notes on each song in an [appendix](#) to this interview. There you will also find the full playlist of all the songs in the show.

These projects continue to grow, evolve, and explore the ideas first developed at the Getty Villa last fall. Poor Dog Group will develop *Satyr Atlas* further at [EMPAC at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute](#) in Troy, NY in the fall of 2011. And *Cyclops: A Rock Opera* has been selected as a participant in the 2011 [New York Musical Theatre Festival](#).

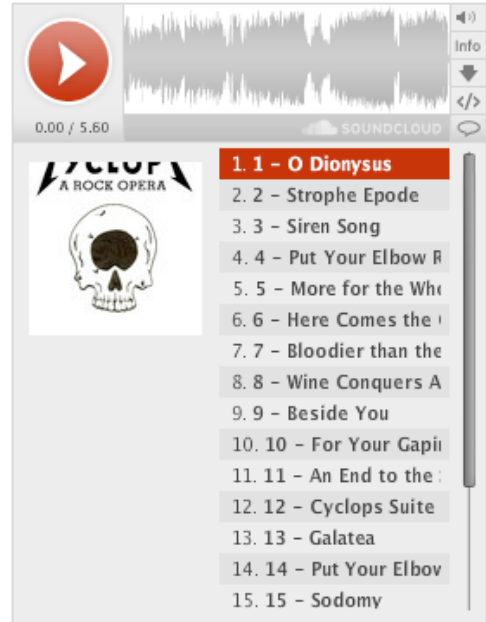
Appendix: Synopsis of songs in *Cyclops: A Rock Opera*

Notes by **Chas Libretto**
Psittacus Productions

Some further notes on each of the songs in our developing show.

The band is Jayson Marcus, Paul Corning, Stephen Edelstein, and Benjamin Sherman. The maenads are Nicole Flanigan, Madeleine Hamer, and Liz Saydah.

1. "O Dionysus" -- Louis sings this opening number. It's entirely Shelley's verse translation.
2. "Strophe/Epode/Iacchic Melody" -- More Shelley, with many of the passages about shepherding edited. Jay and Ben had been listening to a lot of mid-70s soft rock acts, notably "Cecilio and Kapono," but in the end I think the song ended up sounding a bit like Canadian prog-rock band Rush.
3. "Siren Song" -- this is one that Ben and I wrote. As I began working with Ben and Jay, I wanted to stress that they needn't feel limited by the Euripides/Shelley script, and if that there was a song they wanted to write, they ought to go for it. So, Ben handed me a "Siren Song" that didn't quite reflect the story in the *Odyssey*, and I added a couple verses that summed up what actually happened to Odysseus and his crew. Never mind that the Siren episode actually happens a great deal later than the Cyclops episode in Homer, but what we have is a pretty great alt-folk song, I think!
4. "Put Your Elbow Right" -- This one's a mix of Shelley and Jay. Basically, we figured the introduction of wine was a huge enough event to the plot that it deserved it's own song, and what we ended up with was vaguely Irish-sounding drinking song!
5. "More for the Whore" -- the first "original" tune written for the show: the joking about gang-raping Helen is such a bizarre and uncomfortable moment in so many of the translations, that I was puzzled by it basically not existing in the Shelley (until I remembered it was written in 1819). Anyway, I gave Jay about three different versions of the scene, and he wrote this song based on those.
6. "Here Comes the Cyclops" -- This one came fairly late in the process. I was reading up on how The Who's Tommy came to be, and realized that we didn't quite have our Pinball Wizard yet, and that the demos of so many of the songs were rather down-tempo. I left Jay with the challenge of a) writing a song he really wanted to sing, b) giving the Cyclops an entrance (this was well before we knew Jay would play the Cyclops, and well more than a month before "Bloodier than the Cherry"), and c) writing an up-tempo rock song!
7. "Bloodier than the Cherry" (the aria) is a rock adaptation of "Ruddier than the Cherry," a Polyphemus song from Handel's "Acis and Galatea" opera (where it's a song about love, not cannibalism). This came quite late in the process, probably only 3 weeks or so before we opened.
8. "For Your Gaping Gulf" -- literally the first song we did, back in early October. Lou and I both wanted a version of Cyclops that was our own, but I wasn't feeling confident I could adapt any of



Cyclops: A Rock Opera - Live 5/8/11 by
 Psittacusco
<http://soundcloud.com/psittacusco/sets/cyclops-a-rock-opera-live-5>

the translations into my own language, nor was I comfortable with it being a "punk band" on-stage... nor did I think the genre had enough versatility for a whole evening. So, late at night, I pulled this passage from the Shelley script (the Satyrs talking about what the Cyclops does to strangers) and gave it to Jay, who'd just moved here, and I said, "want to do this project we're working on?" A day later there was a song, and we were off and running.

9. "An End to the Sea" (the Polynesian number) -- I felt like Odysseus was fairly bland and didn't have enough to do in this show, so I wrote the lyrics to this (fairly early on, too) and Jay decided to go in a kind of South Pacific direction with those lyrics. The ukulele entered into it quite late actually: I only had about three weeks to learn how to play it!
10. "Cyclops Suite" ("Who is First/Cyclops Blues/One with Eye the Fairest") -- This one's weird: the first part returns to a kind of 70s prog-rock sound, the second part is straight up blues (it was written early on, when we still thought we'd find a large actor to play the Cyclops). The final part was a return to the 'prog' sound, and was what eventually inspired us to include Dionysus in our production (since the lyrics are so bizarre and un-Satyr-y).
11. "Put Your Elbow Right reprise" -- the last song added, a week before we opened. We felt like there was too much dialogue leading up to the concert part of the show. Again, Jay wrote it, but it's pretty closely adapted from the Shelley.
12. "Sodomy" -- written around the same time as "Here Comes the Cyclops," this one came with my "more up-tempo" songs challenge. This one, like "More for the Whore" came out of wanting to include the fairly explicit rape scene between Polyphemus and Silenus that's only hinted at in Shelley, but we made it more consensual.
13. "Soon a Crab" -- more Shelley. This one has an Ozzy Osbourne feel to it. We were inspired by his '80s album Killer of Giants. The second half, with the Satyrs, was a late addition, as the dialogue wasn't playing, and we thought parodying the intense Ozzy song right after it had finished might work. It's one of my favorite moments in the show.
14. "Hasten and Thrust" -- Ben wrote the music to this one, with Shelley providing the lyrics. We wanted a kind of "thrash-metal" sound for the blinding.
15. "Nobody, Nowhere" -- We wanted to have a bigger payoff to Odysseus calling himself "Nobody." Honestly, it didn't become the kind of trance/disco/methamphetamine song it's become until the drummer got excited about what the lighting designer was doing.
16. "I'm a Cyclops" -- Kind of a "Hey Jude" number.
17. "There Goes the Cyclops" -- basically a reprise of "Here Comes the Cyclops." More "rockabilly," and an adaptation, for the most part, of Shelley.

[Return to main interview.](#)

Barrie Kosky's *The Women of Troy*

Didaskalia is pleased to present a collection of pieces (8.07–8.11), organized by former Didaskalia editor Jane Montgomery Griffiths, on the Sydney Theatre Company's 2008 production of *The Women of Troy*, adapted by Tom Wright and Barrie Kosky and directed by Kosky. Elizabeth Hale, guest editor for the collection, introduces here the production and the articles, which include essays from [Helen Slaney](#), [Michael Halliwell](#), [Michael Ewans](#), and [Marguerite Johnson](#).

In earlier volumes of Didaskalia, these articles would have constituted an individual, themed issue. In our new practice of publishing a continuous annual volume, such collections will be numbered in sequence but will bear an indication of their related theme in the table of contents. These *Women of Troy* pieces will all have "Kosky" as part of their references on the site, but they may be cited simply by their volume and number.

The Women of Troy: Barrie Kosky, The Sydney Theatre Company, and Classical Theatre in Australia

Elizabeth Hale

University of New England

Euripides' *Trojan Women* was first performed in 415 at the Athens Dionysia. It deals with the plight of several Trojan women following the fall of Troy: the queen, Hecuba, her daughter, Cassandra, Andromache, the wife of Hector, and Helen. It is the third and in recent times the best known of three important works engaging with the Trojan War. In the 21st century, the play has been performed most notably in 2007 and 2008 at the National Theatre in London: *The Women of Troy* directed by Katie Mitchell; in Canada in 2008 at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario: *The Trojan Women* directed by Marti Maraden; and in Australia, in Sydney and Melbourne in 2008: *The Women of Troy* directed by Barrie Kosky. It is with this last production that this suite of essays engages.



The Chorus (Queenie van de Zandt, Jennifer Vuletic, Natalie Gamsu) and Hecuba (Robyn Nevin)

photo: Tracey Schramm

The Women of Troy was adapted by Tom Wright and Barrie Kosky, and directed by Kosky. It was performed in Sydney, at the Sydney Theatre Company (STC), and in Melbourne, at the Malthouse Theatre. Barrie Kosky and Tom Wright are both Melbourne-born and educated. Kosky has been based since 2001 in Berlin, where he is currently the Director of the Berlin Komische Oper. Wright has been based in Sydney at the STC since 2003, and he is currently Associate Director. The production reflects their long interest in classical and canonical theatre. Kosky in particular is known, in Australia and overseas, for his edgy opera productions, and for using classical vocal music in his theatre productions.

The STC's Artistic Director Robyn Nevin commissioned *The Women of Troy*, after Kosky and Wright's 2006 collaboration with the STC, *The Lost Echo*, an eight-hour staging of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that incorporated Euripides' *Bacchae*. In contrast to the epic theatrical experience of *The Lost Echo*, *The Women of Troy* was significantly pared back; it ran at under 90 minutes, and using only a small cast and chorus.

The small cast included Robyn Nevin as Hecuba, Melita Jurisic in the triple role of Cassandra, Andromache, and Helen, and Arthur Dignam as Menelaus. A small chorus (Queenie van de Zandt, Natalie Gamsu, and Jennifer Vuletic) played a musical role, commenting on the action through song rather than through speech (a deliberate move, Kosky points out in his program notes, as Euripides' choruses most often communicated in song). As in much of Kosky's work, the production made significant use of vocal music through the chorus; it also used violence, shock, and horror to offer the audience an experience that was unmediated and confronting, as is attested by most critical reviews of the play, as well as the essays written for this collection.

In their adaptation to the play, Kosky and Wright entirely removed the role of Talthybius the messenger, a move which further contributed to the unmediated impact of the action on the audience (as Helen Slaney suggests in her essay); the story, however, remains the same: the Trojan women, grieving the fall of Troy, await their fate at the mercy of their Athenian captors. Each is allotted to a captor. Hecuba is allotted to Odysseus, and she witnesses the fates of three women: her daughter Cassandra, is allotted to Agamemnon and foretells her death at the hands of his wife; Andromache, widow of Hector, whose young son Astyanax is put to death by the Greeks, is allotted to Neoptolemus; and Helen, the ostensible cause of the war, who returns to her Greek husband Menelaus, despite Hecuba's attempts to influence the reunion. As Troy burns and each woman is sent to Greece and into slavery, her commodification was symbolized in this adaptation by her being stuffed into a cardboard box and taped up ready for shipping. Horrific events, such as the death of Astyanax, were represented graphically onstage (we do not see the actual death, but we see the bloodied corpse), rather than reported. Again, we were involved in bearing witness to the horrors of war. As the women related their stories, anonymous workers (torturers, perhaps) pass across the stage, bearing frightening and unexplained implements (including a large, ominous looking corkscrew); in the background, random and unsettling gunshots go off, suggesting horrors unseen off stage.

Alice Babidge's set and costume design contributed to that unmediated effect, as did Damien Cooper's lighting. The minimalist set design used stained industrial carpeting to cover the stage; the backdrop was a towering jigsaw of army lockers: we saw the action unfold in a dingy backroom or corridor in part of the military-industrial complex. Responding to the flat tackiness of the set design, but perhaps also to the oddly impassive and anonymous qualities of the set, James Waites (reviewing the play for *The Sydney Morning Herald*) described the set as 'very locker room. A kind of male jock porn setting—which is totally right for this sickening fable.'¹ Because of these qualities, the action on stage, of such moment to individual characters, appeared both to be personally tragic, and also dwarfed by the scale of events (implied by background noises, such as intermittent and irregular gunshots) and by the businesslike aspects of this corridor—in other words, that these tragic queens and princesses are simply part of a large-scale processing of the spoils of war. Such a move flattened but also heightened the sense of tragedy, and it underscored the depths to which they have fallen.

A similarly paradoxical attitude towards the theatricality of the production was seen in the set design, which, through the visual language of anonymous contemporary bureaucracy rather than a historically accurate setting, brought the action forward to the contemporary moment, but also isolated it—out of real space and time, and into the space and time of the theatrical moment. This had the potential effect of underscoring the universality of the action, in which the women of Troy become representative types of women (virgin, mother, whore, crone), rather than individualised tragic characters. Another production choice also had the effect of underscoring the role of the audience in witnessing a production, and particularly a tragedy: each seat in the theatre was draped with calico. Jason Catlett, reviewing the production for *Time Out Sydney*, saw this as a move to draw the audience into the action, obliging us 'to sit in a hilly graveyard, our chairs shrouded in white body bags; our seat numbers become our serial numbers.'² My own impression was that the pale seats heightened the visibility of members of the

audience, who were outlined against them instead of being able to sink anonymously into the normal obscurity of a darkened auditorium. Whether we were drawn into the action, as Catlett suggests, or exposed as a visible audience, the effect was to foreground the role of the audience in witnessing the unfolding action.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this accumulation of story and performance, the production was curiously static; rather than seeing action played out on stage, we watched Hecuba responding to the stories of the three women, and reflecting on the aftermath of this brutal war. The play is, as Kosky points out in the program notes, “one of the most searing and moving anti-war plays ever written,” but it is not through event, but rather through reflection that the anti-war elements are conveyed, both in the original and in the adaptation. Wright describes it as the play’s “‘stand and deliver’ quality; the action is over, now for the shouting.”³ Indeed, this production seemed full of declaimed speeches, which contributed to a feeling of stasis. Each woman, in essence, stood and delivered her story, only some parts of which played out on stage.

As a symbol of the stasis, the opening scene of the play resonated most strongly, in which Hecuba, shaking and terrified, was led on stage, stripped down to her underslip, her head covered in a black hood, and stood on a battered cardboard box, from which she uttered her first speeches. This scene, clearly designed to remind us forcibly of the hooded prisoners of the Abu Ghraib detention facility in Iraq, elicited reflection on contemporary, and likely ongoing, horrors of war. But as well as this visual reminder of contemporary abuses, the use of the cardboard box (which linked tragically to the later packaging and dispatch of the women) as a kind tatty and degraded pedestal from which Hecuba was forced to speak was a metaphor for the role of contemporary classical theatre.

To my mind, props such as the cardboard box, and set design such as the towering wall of lockers, reflected the productive contradictions that run through contemporary performances of plays like *The Women of Troy*—namely, the efforts made by those involved in the production to bring a play up to date, but also to respect its original power and resonances. In their program notes, Wright and Kosky comment both on the original political impact of the play, and on the contemporary resonances they seek in *The Women of Troy*. Wright’s program notes point out some of the historical resonances—such as the recent defeat by Athens of the city of Melos, and its slaughtering of the male Melians: “the audience would have been littered with good citizens who had Melian women and children as slaves in their homes and businesses. None of this can have been far from the mind of anyone listening to Hecuba’s descriptions of war and its aftermath.” Such a specifically historical contextual note reminds us of the immediate political purpose of such a play and seems designed to disinter ancient theatre from the potential stagnancy of canonical appreciation. At the same time, Wright and Kosky point to the timeless quality of the work, referring to the ‘eternal figure’ of Hecuba, and the ‘tripartite feminine’ represented by Cassandra (virgin), Andromache (mother), and Helen (whore). What we found, then, in this production, was an attempt to connect with the immediate political and cultural context—through the visual references to Abu Ghraib and the Western military-industrial complex—and also to connect with the timeless and universal qualities of the play, through the characters and speeches of the women of Troy and through the horror of the death of the boy Astyanax.

The chorus’s beautiful songs offered a further way to connect to the universal. They also pointed to the juxtaposition of horror and beauty that pervades the play. Often, as Michael Halliwell observes in his essay for this collection, songs offer implicit commentary on and contrast to the action. The play emphasized the horror of war’s aftermath, of what Kosky refers to as taking place as ‘after a catastrophe’, a world in which everything that the women “assume to be certain about the world is liable to be brought crashing down around their ears” (Wright, program notes). Aftermath, in this production, mapped onto a post-traumatic space, which had much in common with the flatness of affect that is a cliché of post-

modern culture—the grubby corridor, the flat-toned tannoy through which a disembodied voice orders the women around, the anonymous workers passing through the action, en route to carry out routine tasks of torture, which all served to undercut any possible tragic grandeur in Hecuba’s situation. The only place in which sublimity was allowed in this play was in the exquisite songs of the chorus, which served to highlight the grubbiness and degradation onstage, and which were ultimately silenced unceremoniously when the chorus is shot. This was all the more poignant when we consider Kosky’s program notes claiming that music allows the women to ‘Hang on to their sanity . . . [Music] is their last stop before madness, exile or death’. Or, as John McCallum observes, in his review for *The Australian*, the three women of the chorus ‘were singing sublimely in the face of all this savagery, and then [Kosky] had them shot.’

In refusing sublimity in this production, Kosky and Wright pointed out the original context of the play and also questioned the role of classical theatre in the context of global and post-modern culture.

The Critical Reception

Audiences familiar with Kosky’s work would be somewhat prepared for an experience that deliberately sets beauty and horror against one another; *The Women of Troy*, however, appears to have been a particularly confronting experience for many, perhaps because of the play’s refusal to lift away from horror, or to allow rest or reflection or sublimity or even pathos. For the most part reviewers embraced the confronting aspects of the production. Jason Catlett, reviewing for Sydney’s *Time Out* magazine, found the production ‘shattering’; ‘we felt like insects being tortured by some cruel and childish god.’⁴ Rebecca Whitton (*Australian Stage Online*) praised Kosky’s rigour and intellect: ‘everything that is original, astute and poetic about Kosky shines through.’ To her mind, Kosky ‘transforms *The Women of Troy* into a play for our times without diluting Euripides’ anti-war message . . . masterfully delivers a powerful lesson for today from our distant past.’⁵ James Waites described the play as a ‘sobering’ but also ‘extremist’ theatre event: ‘in this instance, short, pungent, gruelling, attenuated by great moments of aural beauty (the music/singing). Ultimately we are served an uncompromising physicalisation of the play’s anti-war theme.’⁶ Such responses indicate a general willingness to go along with Kosky and Wright’s vision for the performance, including an acceptance of both the meta-theatrical and horrific elements of the production as contributing to, rather than distracting from, the emotional impact of the play.

Most evenings, however, several audience members walked out, unable, perhaps, to continue witnessing the horror on stage. For Waites, this seems to have been more of an affront than anything that happened on stage.

What is amazing that so many weeks into the season, you still have people walking out of this show. The night I was there, about thirty left. . . . Just in dribs and drabs throughout the entire event: at some point they’ve had enough. Where do these people live? I mean mentally. Is it not enough to know that if this is a Barrie Kosky production then you are up for something that is not going to be tame? This is without getting into the far more complex question of why such people feel the need to flee such a work. A work that is, like *Guernica*, ultimately very beautiful. What is it about their lives that they feel so compelled to cling to? To the extent that a show like this threatens them? What are they refusing to let go of? What is it about sitting in front of this production that poses such a threat? And yes, how can they not see the sorrowful beauty in it?⁷

Without being able to see inside the minds of audience members, I’d like to suggest that several factors come into play here: first, the unmediated qualities of the play—such as the removal of the messenger, and the ordinary unstaginess of the set design—do much to unsettle an audience, already unsettled by being so visible to one another in their seats, and clearly able (perhaps even encouraged) to see others leaving. Second, Kosky’s reputation for not being ‘tame’ carries its own unnerving expectations. Third, it

is possible that the death of a child onstage is particularly confronting, and it is understandable that the impulse to leave might be overwhelming. Indeed, it is possible that the audience member who leaves is less 'threatened' than overwhelmed by the trauma presented on stage.

It is possible that audiences found the meta-theatrical aspects of the play unconvincing and uninteresting, and that they found it threatening not to their lives, but to their sense of what canonical theatre aims to do: that they did not find a sorrowful beauty in the production, but that in fact they found it disrespectful. Michael Connor, writing for *Quadrant*, articulates these possible responses in his review of the play, suggesting that its confronting aspects were a cynical ploy to sell tickets through the publicity obtained by outrage: 'Productions by director Barrie Kosky have been deliberately crafted to trigger this . . . response. He offends knowing that any protest will stimulate elite support and affirmative ticket sales. For maximum effect Kosky applies schlock and shock to classic works like an R-rated games maker.'⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, Connor disliked the play intensely, seeing in it a tired revamping of Kosky's trademark use of shock and horror: 'It was a relief when [the chorus] were badly treated, stuffed into cardboard boxes and wheeled away.' Indeed, for him, 'Kosky is a commodity, a commercial product used to castrate classical or much-loved works to achieve maximum offensiveness in order to draw attention to himself. By offending those who love theatre, and dead playwrights, Kosky gains elitist approval which translates into more work.' Those who appreciate Kosky's works, in Connor's view, are 'educated philistines who, with babbling and erudite appreciation, applaud the maiming of beauty.'⁹

This is the sole negative review I have been able to find (though commenters responding some of the reviews online have not been uniformly positive about the production). That it is written for *Quadrant*, a conservative magazine, deeply suspicious of leftist or progressive agendas, suggests this reviewer may have gone to the play with preconceived notions. In contrast to Waites's response to the set design, Connor saw theatre seats 'covered with dust clothes' and the carpet on stage with 'many depressing looking stains,' a response that implies that the production failed to overcome his preconceptions, or that the parts (challenging and metatheatrical production combined with shocking elements) failed to coalesce satisfyingly or convincingly into a whole.

Politics aside, to my mind, Connor's response is important because it reveals what a production like *The Women of Troy* is up against. If shock and horror start to feel contrived, if unconventional and metatheatrical elements work against the emotional impact of a story, then we need to think critically about the relationship between the representation of trauma on stage, and methods of updating, or perhaps jazzing up, classical theatre.

John McCallum's response to *The Women of Troy* offers a full-throated defense of Kosky's approach:

It still astonishes me when people say things like, "Oh, Barrie Kosky is just an egotistical bad boy out to shock." To anyone who is paying attention to what he is doing—with his mixture of pop—culture playfulness, visceral theatrical effects and serious classical learning—Kosky is one of the greatest directors of our times.¹⁰

For McCallum, *The Women of Troy* was 'one of the most harrowing nights I have spent in the theatre', but he found it so moving, so powerful, that he 'went to see it again. I took my daughter and her partner. I wanted to put people I loved through this terrible and cathartic experience, and they felt it.' To those who, like Connor, failed to be moved by this production, McCallum says, "We need to say to them, 'If you don't get it, and don't want to try, then stay home!'

What these responses reveal about the difficulties of presenting canonical or classical theatre are a range of conflicting desires—on the one hand, we might have a conservative audience, unwilling to see a production that alters any aspects of an original text; on the other, we might have an outrageous theatre

maker determined to use any means necessary to ensure an audience reaction by imposing gratuitous sex, violence, and horror. I have still not made up my own mind about *The Women of Troy*—I did not experience the catharsis that McCallum writes of, but neither was I put off by the shocking or violent aspects of the performance. And the play has lingered in my mind—partly because I had set myself the task of writing about it, but partly because I felt that much of what it presented went beyond what one could digest in one evening. Whether one liked or disliked the production (and I have compared notes with a number of friends and colleagues who saw it), it was memorable theatre that provoked an engagement with the meaning and role of classical theatre in contemporary Australia. To my mind, if *The Women of Troy* proved nothing else, it proved that classical theatre can contain and sustain the kind of strong adaptation performed in Sydney and Melbourne: it can sustain the shock and horror, and it can sustain the broken fourth wall and deliberate downgrading that are offensive to conservative critics.

The Essays in this Collection

The idea for this collection came in late 2008 when I was putting together a small symposium on *The Lost Echo*, Kosky and Wright's previous production for the STC, a production which had a very positive popular and critical response. In inviting contributions, I suggested that consideration might also be given to *The Women of Troy*, which was about to be staged. The result, in early 2009, was a symposium titled 'Classical Tradition and the Epic Impulse in Australian Theatre: *The Lost Echo* and *The Women of Troy*.' Papers in this symposium gave equal consideration to both plays, and the talks on *The Lost Echo* became the basis of a special issue of *Australasian Drama Studies*.¹¹ The articles in this collection focus on *The Women of Troy*, and represent a range of disciplinary approaches and expertise.

Helen Slaney, in "Delivering the message in Kosky's *The Women of Troy*," draws together the points of view of classical reception studies and performance studies. Her article argues that the removal of the messenger, Talthybius, from the original play, makes for an unusually stark and confronting adaptation of the play. Michael Halliwell is a musicologist. His article, "*The Women of Troy*: Barrie Kosky's 'operatic' version of Euripides," examines the impact of the musical elements of the play, considering the effect both musically and in terms of the commentary that song offers to the action. Michael Ewans writes from a classical studies point of view, and in "*The Women of Troy*—New and Old" examines the adaptation of the production, paying particular attention to the script. Finally, Marguerite Johnson, in "'Toothless intellectuals,' 'the misery of the poor,' 'poetry after Auschwitz' and the White, Middle-class Audience: the Moral Perils of Kosky and Wright's *The Women of Troy* (or, how do we regard the pain of others?)" writes from the perspective of gender and cultural studies, examining the ethics of shock in Kosky and Wright's presentation of material drawn from war photography and film.

These different approaches to *The Women of Troy* demonstrate, among other things, the potential of classical theatre production to initiate debate, to be relevant in a range of disciplines, settings, and audiences. They also demonstrate that Australian theatre, critics, and scholars are actively engaged in considerations of classical drama, and that Australian classical reception studies is a vibrant and continuing field of investigation. I hope these articles will stimulate further reflection on the role of classical texts in the theatre, be it from Australia or elsewhere, and reflection too on the role of the theatre in transmitting, adapting, performing, and even challenging the classics.

notes

¹James Waites, 'Aftermath of War: One' in James Waites, 27 October 2008, <http://jameswaites.ilatech.org/?p=1166>

²Jason Catlett, "The Women of Troy," Time Out Sydney, 24 September 2008, <http://www.au.timeout.com/sydney/theatre/features/3417/the-women-of-troy>.

³Tom Wright, *The Women of Troy*, Program Notes.

⁴Catlett, op. cit.

⁵Rebecca Whitton, 'The Women of Troy: Sydney Theatre Company,' Australian Stage Online, September 23, 2008, <http://www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/sydney/the-women-of-troy--sydney-theatre-company-1900.html>

⁶Waites, op. cit.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Michael Connor, 'On the Importance of Being Kosky,' Quadrant LIII/12 (2008), 67-69.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰John McCallum, 'Theatre that Messes with your Mind,' The Australian Online, November 29, 2010, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/theatre-that-messes-with-your-mind/story-e6frg8n6-1225962329385>.

¹¹"The Lost Echo," Australasian Drama Studies 56 (April, 2010): 103-153.

Delivering the Message in Kosky's *The Women of Troy*

Helen Slaney
Monash University

On the brink of leading away Andromache's infant son to execution, Euripides' Greek messenger pauses. 'This kind of delivery work should be done by someone pitiless,' he chokes, 'someone more enamoured of cruelty than me' (786-89). Whether Talthybius is to be interpreted as spineless or sympathetic, an apologist for torture or a man doing his best to alleviate an intolerable situation, the character has a crucial role in the drama as conceived by Euripides. How this figure is represented onstage therefore provides a telling insight into the strategies of any given production. Talthybius becomes a barometer both for its treatment of the ancient source-text and its treatment of the target environment.¹ It is the combination—or collision, or collusion—of these two factors (ancient text and current events) which creates theatrical reception.² There is still a conservative tendency to regard any production of a classical play as a site of struggle between the "original" text and the modern director's interpretation, as though it were possible to collapse the polysemy which proliferates in performance—translation, bodies, voices, costume, set, the theatre building and its social scripts, the ideological diversity of the audience—into a singularity. As a performance, Euripides' *Troïades* expired in 413 BC. As the source of future performances, however, much like the Troy it represents, *Troïades* converts its own desecration into something much more far-reaching. In order to speak to the cynical, image-saturated condition of postmodern Australia, Wright and Kosky violate tragic form, because—as Cassandra, Hecuba and Euripides are well aware—only through such violation can the vitality of ancient drama be sustained. Starting from the representation of Euripides' conflicted messenger, therefore, I hope to outline how the Wright/Kosky *The Women of Troy* transmits its material.

Anyone who saw the production will have noticed the apparent flaw in this proposition: there is no Talthybius in the play as conceived by Wright and Kosky. A few of his lines from the sinister loudspeaker that dominates stage left, but the unfortunate individual whom Hecuba calls "friend," who gets a tongue-lashing from Cassandra (text disputed), who fumbles his lines in the face of Andromache's impending grief and who finally prepares her son's body for burial, has been eliminated, subsumed into the institutionalised horror of Kosky's concentration camp. Aside from becoming collateral damage as the women of Troy are stripped back to bare raw bones, joining the gods and the glory that was Greece on the cutting-room floor, Talthybius the character and Talthybius the structural device are eloquent in their absence. This paper identifies three functions of the messenger in Euripides' *Troïades*. First, I examine Talthybius as witness and mediator; second, Talthybius as perversely sympathetic; and finally, Talthybius as simultaneous destroyer and preserver, returning the body of the murdered child and ordering Ilium to burn. The absence of a mimetically represented Talthybius in the Wright/Kosky *The Women of Troy* does not mean these functions go unrealised. Rather, they are displaced, confronting the audience directly with the unbearable responsibility of witnessing.

1. Witnesses The messenger-speech (*angelia*), like the choral ode in praise of moderation or the show-stopping debate, is an indispensable element of Attic tragedy. Introducing extended verbal narrative into the *dramata*, the staged action, it enables events otherwise too distant or too shocking for display to be incorporated into the theatrical experience. As James Barrett has shown, the messenger-speech also performs a metatheatrical role: variations on its formal conventions serve as explorations of the play's broader themes, particularly in relation to vision and spectatorship, epistemology and perception, truth and the integrity of language.³ Barrett also points to the paradox whereby a messenger's reliability depends simultaneously on his disinterest and his involvement, his privileged status as on-the-spot eyewitness conflicting with his privileged status as 'extradiagetic' commentator. Typically, then, the messenger is anonymous and marginal, occupying a position that permits plausible presence on the scene

without demanding extreme investment: Slave, Shepherd, Herald. Beyond the formal confines of that single dramatic entrance and that single knockout monologue, he has no identity and no autonomous existence. The message is his medium.

Talthybius is different. For a start, he is the only named messenger in extant Greek tragedy. Instead of a faceless mouthpiece rushing on to report disaster, Euripides creates a fully-developed character who eventually comes to participate in the action he has observed and directed. *Troïades'* other deviation from standard practice is that Talthybius delivers no *angelia* whatsoever. It may be objected that he cannot be properly be counted as a messenger at all, if such a defining feature is missing. Euripides' Talthybius identifies himself, however, in terms that leave no room for doubt:

Hecuba, you know me as one who has often taken the road to Troy
as a herald [κήρυκ'] from the Achaian army:
someone you should recognise, lady:
Talthybius, playing the messenger [ἄγγελῶν], I've come now with news (235–38).

As Barrett points out, the key terms κήρυξ (herald) and ἄγγελος (messenger) are interchangeable in Homeric discourse,⁴ and it is a blighted post-Homeric landscape that *Troïades* must negotiate. In identifying himself as κήρυξ, Talthybius assumes the almost sacred connotations of his former epic role. However tattered this mantle will become, it nevertheless provides his initial entrance with recognisable, resonant definition. Talthybius plays on his familiarity. Not only is he well-known to Hecuba, but also to the audience; and not only from the *Iliad*, but from the *Troïades'* grimmer companion in postwar survival, Euripides' *Hecuba* (first staged in 424 BCE). In this play, although delivering a classic *angelia*, Talthybius is already beginning to show signs of losing his balance and slipping into an excess of sympathy.

The *Hecuba* resurrects Homer's θεῖον κήρυκα, 'godlike herald' (*Il.* 4.192) as a faltering and sentimental old man. ὦ Ζεῦ, τί λέξω? Talthybius asks as he enters. 'What shall I say?' (*Hec.* 488). Crucially, speech also fails him in the *Troïades* at the point of enunciating crisis: πῶς εἶπω λόγον?—'How do I deliver this account?' (713). Pity saturates his account of Polyxena's sacrifice, which he precedes with an unusually personal statement:

Lady, you're asking me to pay double the tears [διπλᾶ δάκρυα]
in pity for your child; for now I will wet my face again
while relating these evils, just like by her tomb when she was killed (*Hec.* 518–20).

Recollecting the scene and speaking the words that make it a theatrical presence provokes in the messenger an identical emotional response—διπλᾶ δάκρυα—to that provoked by witnessing the act itself. Unusually among Euripidean and indeed among any Greek tragic messengers, *Hecuba's* Talthybius lingers self-reflexively on his personal reaction to witnessing pain. As in the *Troïades*, it is particularly jarring that the empathy is not that of a dutiful servant or faithful companion but that of an enemy. ὦ φίλτατε, Hecuba addresses him, her irony a bitter antidote to his syrupy pathos. 'O best beloved, have you come to kill me, too?' (*Hec.* 505).⁵ When Talthybius first enters the *Troïades'* camp, then, he already bears a considerable burden of identity and anticipation, and seals himself firmly into the messenger's role by describing himself as ἄγγελῶν, cognate of ἄγγελος and obvious cue as to what to expect from his appearance. That Euripides repeatedly confounds these expectations makes *Troïades* as radical a comment on the relationship between war and artistic form as Kosky's *The Women of Troy* itself.

Euripides adapts the role of the otherwise impersonal messenger to suit his material. In the aftermath of war, no identity remains unaffected. The messenger is supposed to be sufficiently detached from the events he must witness offstage to report them coherently.⁶ In *Troïades*, however, Talthybius becomes inextricably involved in the consequences of his reporting, and the audience witness him witnessing in

mounting distress as ‘pain is piled on pain’ (596). Although some scholars have condemned him as ‘little more than a conveyor of information’ or even ‘a harsh, sinister figure... used to represent the impersonal cruelty of the Achaeans,’⁷ more considered assessments of the herald’s role have correctly emphasised his sympathetic characterisation and crucial dramaturgical function. Kristine Gilmartin, in particular, shows how his presence mitigates the play’s nihilism by establishing ‘a means of communication between the victors and the vanquished.’⁸ Euripides’ Talthybius is a bridging device, however meager the hope he offers. In this capacity, he also represents a surrogate audience: an outsider, a Greek, a reporter, an internal spectator demonstrating to Athenians as to how they might respond. As internal observer, he watches scenes such as Cassandra’s wedding-song and Andromache’s farewell to her son, scenes to which he responds with increasing intensity. Neutrality is just not an option when even the messenger is getting his hands dirty playing the gravedigger.

In *The Women of Troy*, however, the human interface vanishes. Contact is replaced by surveillance. Orders to the women are delivered by an oversized loudspeaker that hangs overhead like a mechanical hybrid of mouth and eye, compared by one reviewer to ‘a Big Brother from some cartoon dystopia.’⁹ Euripides offers the consolation to witnesses of trauma that seeing can potentially inspire sympathy, and sympathy lead to intervention; Wright, on the other hand, cuts off this channel to practical action. We are offered no position from which it is possible to intercede. Instead, we are reminded of our status as invisible observers by the loudspeaker’s malevolent presence, and the consequent implication that we are not alone in watching the scene in this camp. Like the unseen “Greek” authorities, we occupy a privileged vantage point from which we can see everything that transpires below without risking our own bodies or security; unlike these authorities, we cannot remain unmoved by the pain on show. *The Women of Troy* forces its audience into the suddenly uncomfortable role of passive spectator.

Kosky’s uncompromising onstage representation of war-crime evokes the medium through which such acts are regularly relayed as spectacle to the affluent West: news-media, whether televised or online, guarantee to keep a ceaseless supply of traumas and conflict streaming into otherwise unaffected personal space.¹⁰ In the interests of staying informed, the television viewer assimilates tragedy in accessible capsules, expected neither to suffer unduly nor necessarily to intervene.¹¹ We are offered a choice of roles, cast by the broadcast either as potential victims—*there but for the grace of God*—or informed citizens whose duty has been discharged in the act of observation. The one role not made sympathetically available is that of perpetrator. We are therefore effectively stripped of agency and constructed as powerless to change what has been (is being) shown on the screen.¹² As long ago as 1981, Peter Dahlgren argued that ‘viewer consciousness is situated in a relationship of subordination and dependence... [and] socialised to be essentially inefficacious.’¹³ Witnessing the violence enacted in *The Women of Troy* constructs the viewer as similarly inefficacious. Rather than counteracting this by incorporating an intermediary figure from behind the camera, as it were, Kosky reinforces it by introducing a regime of remote surveillance and mechanized, systemic brutality.

Kosky and Wright do not dispense altogether with the announcements which Euripides assigns to an increasingly distraught κῆρυξ. A voice remains, but it is disembodied. Orders come from a faceless, unidentified authority to which there can be no appeal, a deaf imperative void that can neither be corrupted nor resisted. Technological mediation allows the voice to remain dispassionate and detached—even, on occasion, coolly amused. We never see who is speaking, and they never have to meet our eyes. According to the program, it could have been the actor who later plays Menelaus (Arthur Dignam); in the script, the lines are assigned to an anonymous ‘Male Voice’. The presence of a reporter, like that of an eyewitness messenger, fulfils an implicit contract between network and viewer: first, that footage is impartially relayed, and second that the viewer is entitled to assume an analogously grave but impassive demeanor. Patricia Mellencamp identifies the reassuring presence of the anchorman, the authoritative commentator delivering rational patter amid the chaos, as a significant factor in maintaining the viewers’

sense of security.¹⁴ News footage, like systemic violence, is a *fait accompli*. Reporters are not supposed to get involved. The newscaster who loses discursive control before human disaster is no longer a conduit for information, but has become part of the spectacle. Reporter and messenger exist in a state of privileged neutrality. Euripides upsets this conventional equilibrium by dragging his messenger out of reportage and into the drama. Kosky upsets it by doing entirely the opposite: his ἄγγελος / κήρυξ / messenger / witness / reporter has no presence on the scene whatsoever. The surveillance is total, the voiceover implacable. By not only recreating spectatorial disengagement from atrocity but also by taking it to an extreme, *The Women of Troy* foregrounds the scandalous fact which the transparency of the media lens tends to occlude: that other woman, the one on last night's news, caught on camera keening over the corpse of her grandson, occupies a reality contiguous to my own, even as she is framed as safely elsewhere. Kosky brings home to me my own impotence, rubbing salt into my Anglo middle-class guilt.

Wright and Kosky eliminate human contact between the Trojan women and those who observe and (re)possess them: the Greeks, and ourselves. The mode of viewing fostered by the removal of a mediating personality results in a kind of glazed apathy. Instead of the optimistic reassurance that every little gesture helps, we receive the bleak message that there is no alternative to complicity. Whereas the Euripidean Talthybius makes manifest the potential for positive action,¹⁵ Kosky makes you acutely conscious of your position as viewer and draws conspicuous attention to its disadvantages. Responding to the spectacle of pain, an audience can choose (or vacillate) between masochistic identification with the victim or self-protective voyeurism, but neither position is ultimately empowering.¹⁶ Some members of Kosky's audience took refuge in the aesthetic high ground, protesting that the simulation of torture in this context was excessive, or—even graver—offensive to those who cannot wash the scars off afterwards. Others declined to confront it altogether, and simply left the theatre. Continuing to watch, however, indicates your consent to act as witness to a representation of such acts; and while this particular representation—despite its realistic violence—is staged, analogous televised representations are not. In this way, Kosky challenges his audience to interrogate their own responsibilities as viewers. Richard Schechner, comparing the vitality of live performance to the stupefying effects of television, once argued that

as observers, they [the TV audience] are stripped of all possibility of intervention—that is, they are turned into an audience in the formal sense—the reaction of anger quickly dissolves into paralysis and despair, or indifference.¹⁷

It is not altogether inimical to Schechner's argument to observe that this kind of paralysis need not be restricted to electronic media. Indeed, the duplicity of the live performance medium itself sets up a cycle of frustrated desire, eliciting the desperate wish to somehow alleviate the suffering on display while inherently inhibiting the possibility. This performance is present, but fictive. Last night's news was remote, but real. Both representations induce an identical state of frozen, systematically short-circuited compassion. *The Women of Troy* isolates this response and brings it to the surface, demanding a self-consciousness in its spectators that goes beyond discomfort. It does not permit indulgence in the altruistic, soft-left gratification of assuming that your personal condemnation of the military-industrial complex might somehow be making a difference. As witness to *The Women of Troy*, you can play the disengaged spectator or the suffering martyr, but in the absence of any figure capable of crossing the borders of experience—Greek to Trojan, victor to victim, stage space to fictional space—you remain sealed off from the action, insulated in your own private hell of helplessness.

2. Sympathies Complicity, compromise, collaboration. To what extent should a captive or subordinate be prepared to transfer her loyalties or compromise her integrity in the interests of survival? This is another of Euripides' more troubling themes in his treatment of what Ruth Scodel has called 'the survivors' dilemma.'¹⁸ Essentially, Scodel argues that the women must negotiate new patterns of allegiance in a

post-Trojan world, superficially accommodating themselves to the interests of their captors in order to guarantee a future. This is primarily articulated through the only bargaining power available to the Trojan women: their sexual desirability and acquiescence. Cassandra rejoices that she has been selected as Agamemnon's concubine, representing her enslavement as a marriage not only legitimate but victorious (308-41, 353). She tenders her body willingly, but at the same time, she gloats that she will prove 'a bride more hostile than Helen' (357). As catalyst for Agamemnon's murder, Cassandra can claim to be his killer, conflating capitulation with vengeance and sexual sacrifice with sacrificial slaughter. Cassandra's solution to a post-traumatic existence is to embrace both her own degradation and the retribution it appears to hold out. If she can only 'annihilate those she hates' (404-05), no alliance is too abhorrent. Wright's translation appears to give Cassandra even more opportunity to revel in her role as *alastor*. 'This fucking will destroy Agamemnon,' she babbles. 'We'll be creating more pain than Helen ever could / We'll choking out his thing demise man / Stripping striprip hard king he has no things he has no me he hasn't / Till he's paiding for my bed dead DEADBROTHER / My DEADFATHER...' In performance, however, Cassandra's words surge out in a torrent that is less vituperative than incomprehensible. In addition, Kosky's graphic treatment of her rape (which immediately precedes this scene) smothers the cry of revenge with images so abject that it is difficult to regard her as anything other than a traumatised victim.

Initially shocked by Cassandra's strategy of accommodation, Hecuba later proposes it to the upright Andromache as a means of saving her son. When Andromache declares her intention to mourn for Hector in perpetuity, Hecuba attempts to dissuade her, advising that she should dry her tears and honour her new master, 'offering all her charms to the man as bait' (700), with the devious intention of raising Astyanax as a secret weapon of future retaliation. For all the moral bankruptcy of infanticide, the Greeks' precautions are not altogether malicious. Wright retains Hecuba's advice regarding co-operation ('Your new master—/ obey him, do everything he wants / no matter how disgusting. / Snare him. / It's survival'), but omits the reference to Astyanax's potential, depriving the Greeks of even a dubious *Realpolitik* rationale. Further emphasising the arbitrary exercise of violence that dominates his camp, Kosky's heavily pregnant Andromache is kicked in the stomach by one of guards. Later, when Helen – the ultimate sexual double-agent – demonstrates her sophistic chameleon's ability to switch sides with a change of wind, Hecuba is not averse to deploying the slipperiest of rhetoric if it will get her adversary stoned to death. Many of Helen's defenses, according to Croally's analysis, in fact go undisputed in Hecuba's rebuttal, most seriously perhaps the power of the gods and the responsibility of Paris.¹⁹ Opportunistic co-operation with Menelaus is less repugnant to Euripides' Hecuba, it seems, than releasing the catalyst of the Trojan War unharmed. Helen bargains with her body for her life while Hecuba argues with spite and specious logic for her death. War brutalises. There are casualties of conscience on both sides.

Euripides' Trojans are not altogether spotless, and his Greeks are not altogether monsters. Talthybius, described like the women themselves as a *λάτρις*, a slave or hired drudge (422, 424, 450, 707), comes across as a kind-hearted, even sentimental man required to not only co-operate in war crimes but (unlike his superiors) to endure continual face-to-face contact with the victims. Refusing to divulge the full extent of Polyxena's abuse, he takes refuge in cryptic remarks: she is to serve at the tomb of Achilles; she is blessed, she has been released from toil. There can be no motive for such circumspection other than tact, or at worst a reluctance to bear witness to the anguish full revelation would bring. Later, when Cassandra curses the Greeks and vows to become the scourge of Agamemnon's house, he responds not with outrage but with tolerance, recognising her diminished responsibility: as a madwoman (*μαϊνάς*), driven out of her mind by Apollo, she is to be pitied rather than punished. Using his discretion, Talthybius permits her to 'reproach the Argives and praise the Trojans' (418) without retribution.

Talthybius' voice becomes progressively less representative of the Achaians. 'I do not announce this

willingly,' he states (οὐχ ἐκὼν γὰρ ἀγγελάω, 710), entering for the second time, and then begins to stumble over the words. 'The child must... How can I say it?' (713). Andromache prompts him, but the violence of articulation still sticks in his throat. This is irreversible. 'I don't know how I can say this to you easily' (717). Unlike Polyxena's sacrifice, he can find no appropriate euphemism with which to veil this particular atrocity. Talthibius' silences, and in particular that awful beat that breaks up line 713, the faultlines in his official persona, betray flaws in the representation of other people's injury. When a newsreader falters, according to cultural critic Meaghan Morris, the sudden crack in composure can affect an audience more profoundly than sensational footage or tear-jerking on-the-spot testimony. 'The announcer's stammer was devastating,' she recalls,²⁰ it signaled a breakdown in the network's ability to control the disaster in its sights, to convert the cataclysmic into the readily communicable. If the anchor's professional defenses can be breached, the viewers' complacency is similarly disturbed. Like the newsreader who stammers, the messenger whose speech has failed him reveals a scandal, a breakdown in the medium more provocative than any war-crime flawlessly depicted. The fabric of the form itself, when Talthibius hesitates, momentarily comes unstuck. Penetrated by emotional identification, he cannot maintain the façade of detachment necessary to impart his observations unaffected. Instead of remaining a transparent communications device, he comes into focus as a human actor, just as vulnerable as both viewers and victims of crisis. Such a recognition undermines impartiality and gives his audience permission to experience a corresponding moment of involvement.

Talthibius' involvement with the women increases in proportion to the harshness of the commands he delivers. Andromache's departure brings him to tears again (πολλῶν ἐμοὶ δακρύων ἀγωγός, 1130-31), affecting him in fact so deeply that he performs an extraordinary act of atonement in carrying out Andromache's plea that her son's remains receive a proper burial. Although Andromache addresses the request to her new master Neoptolemus, it is Talthibius, overhearing, who assumes personal responsibility for conducting the funeral rites. He makes it clear that these rites are to be a shared endeavour. The women are to lay out the body, but he has already cleansed the blood from Astyanax's wounds—his τραύματα—and will meanwhile be the one to dig the grave (1151-55). The implications of Talthibius' contribution are discussed in more detail below, but for the moment it is sufficient to realise the extent to which he has abandoned the messenger's objective façade, transformed by ongoing contact with the victims into a participant rather than an observer.

In contrast, much of Euripides' moral ambiguity has been excised from the Kosky/Wright production. Rather than taking refuge in euphemism—'Polyxena's troubles are over' (*Troïades* 270)—the intercom announces laconically, 'We slit her throat.' Later, it advises Andromache that 'Whatever you do will make the boy's death / Worse. Much worse. / He won't die easily. / Put it that way. / ...If you behave / You'll earn his body for burial.' The speaker's sadistic coercion is haunted by Talthibius' milder, more personal appeal to Andromache's 'nobility' [εὐγενῶς]: 'I don't want you lusting for violence,' he tells her, 'and being disgraced or demeaned' (732-33). He warns her not to anger the army in case they withhold the body, and offers burial as a concession to pity and guilt. There is a convincing argument to be made that this offer is extended on his personal initiative.²¹ The boy is quietly removed as the messenger adds his own tormented voice to the women's chorus: 'This kind of delivery work should be done by someone pitiless...' (786-87). *The Women of Troy* will not permit Astyanax's exit to retain such classical restraint. Instead, the women attempt to shield the child from the guards in a desperate scramble that strips the scene of false dignity, exposing the raw humiliation underneath.²²

Kosky further dehumanises his "Greeks" by having Astyanax removed not by an identifiable character, but by a squad of anonymous torturers. Masked and unspeaking, these figures reflect the loudspeaker's lack of identity, appearing at intervals throughout the play to exercise power with arbitrary beatings and bullets. They are not individuals; they are drones, incapable of compassion. Euripides' intricate mesh of survival narratives has been torn apart, and split into villains and victims. All your sympathy has to rest

with the women, all your horror directed towards their violators. As a protest against the treatment of civilians in a defeated state, the political statement could not be more urgently delivered. *Troiades*, according to D.M. Carter, deals above all with a 'sense of crisis over the treatment of the vanquished.'²³ In order to make the analogy more explicit, Kosky makes repeated visual references to the Abu Ghraib photographs which were made public in 2004: his "Trojans" are bruised, hooded, trailing wires, forced to stand on upturned boxes, photographed with a guard's phone. Kosky's production thus tapped into a deep vein of anxiety and outrage running through the Australian community, a reaction to our government's continued support for a controversial war. However, although speaking bluntly to our condition, depriving the torturers of all humanity nevertheless constitutes an evasion of responsibility as well as an act of protest. It is all too easy to empathise with the oppressed, less palatable to recognise oneself among the damned.

3. Afterlives Kosky's *The Women of Troy* takes aim at an altogether different target from Euripides' *Troiades*. The adaptation is designed to achieve maximum impact a culture where the democracy is representative, the theatre is entertainment, and war is indistinguishable from crime. I would argue that some of the production's more radical measures—scenes hacked off, odes ripped out, prologues slashed, whole characters silenced—deliberately mutilate the pre-existing idealised text in order to thrash it into effective stageable material.²⁴ Francis Dunn suggests that Euripides was in fact inflicting a similar violation on conventional tragic form. Aristotle's after-the-fact prescriptions for dramatic composition require a clear protagonist, a case of *hamartia*, an ironic gap between intent and result, a plot run by strict logical causality, and a gripping climax (*Poetics* 6-16). They do not include cumulative laments, a spiral of despair, the deepening twilight, a threnody for the inevitable. According to Dunn, the structural dislocations that 'give [*Troiades*] its remarkable emotional intensity... also leave the drama itself violently dismembered.'²⁵ *The Women of Troy* continues the process, smashing the classical canon into shards that will resonate here and now.

Both in *Troiades* and in *The Women of Troy* it is Astyanax who represents the destruction of form.²⁶ The boy's broken body signals that Troy is no longer incarnate in the bodies of its citizens. The child whose survival could have prevented this from being utter genocide (703-05) is displayed as a bloody corpse. Hecuba explicitly compares his vanished beauty, like that of Troy the physical city, to its current abject condition (1175-79).²⁷ And Talthybius was responsible. However reluctant, however drenched in crocodile tears, it was still Talthybius who led him up the tower. Someone else might have pushed him off, but Talthybius is the face and the voice of the Greeks in this play, and wears the mask of the murderer. Moreover, although Kosky's production finishes with Hecuba's lament for the child, Euripides goes further. The messenger enters yet again, this time to order that the citadel itself be burned down. All trace of walls and towers is to be erased from the landscape. After its physical obliteration, as N.T. Croally argues, 'the space of what was formerly Troy can only be defined as stage space, for there is nothing else.'²⁸

Yet Troy survives. The structural function of Talthybius in relation to Trojan destiny is as both annihilator and guarantor. As Euripides' Hecuba points out, 'If some god hadn't overturned us, hurling what was above the earth underground, we would be obscure and unremembered, not providing songs to inspire future generations' (1242-45). Fame, which may be defined as future survival in textual form, is predicated in appropriately Homeric fashion on present suffering.²⁹ Talthybius' announcements systematically drive the daughters of Dardanus deeper into despair, but simultaneously stimulate the lament that comprises the play. Tragedy, as Susan Letzler-Cole has argued, is a genre of mourning and lament. The grieving process is sometimes structurally encoded, but sometimes—as in Greek tragedy—actually comprises the action itself.³⁰ The formal activity of mourning is performed throughout Euripides' *Troiades*, beginning with Hecuba's δακρῶων ἐλέγους, the 'elegies of tears' (119) which she also refers to as 'threnody' (111);³¹ to cry aloud what cannot be danced (κελαδεῖν ἀχορεύτους, 121) provides a form of

release. The lyric duet sung by Andromache and Helen (577-607) is identified by the chorus as fulfilling a similar function, transforming otherwise overwhelming trauma into the communal vocalizations which allow it to be uttered aloud and given shape. Tears, the chorus cry, are a pleasure (ἡδὺ), and the wailing of threnody (θρήνων ὄδυρμοί), and the art or song—μουσα—which contains grief (608-609). The therapeutic properties of lament are as important as its commemorative capacity.

The play involves two further major ceremonies of mourning: Astyanax's funeral and the final keening over Troy itself that rises as the city falls (significantly eliminated from the Wright/Kosky production, which cuts off Hecuba in the midst of her funeral oration). To focus for a moment on Euripides' final scene, it becomes apparent here that it constructs an intimately reciprocal relationship between the absence of physical Troy and its re-embodied, secondary presence in the vocal and imaginal space of tragedy. There is a self-conscious irony in the insistence of Hecuba and the chorus that Troy will lose its name (1278, 1319, 1323) even as they etch its repetition deeper into the literary and performative record. Troy's extinction is protracted, even incomplete; twice the chorus proclaim that 'Troy no longer exists' (οὐδ' ἔτ' ἔστι Τροία, 1292 and 1324). In a substantial sense, the city's obliteration is final, but the women return over and over to the panoramic extent of its death-throes, giving vocal and thus sensory form to the flares, the flames, the shuddering crash of towers coming down, the dust-cloud drifting into the wind. Ilium is arrested in a perpetual state of dissolution, dropping into the hands and throats and imaginative resources of global performance practice. To mourn is to memorialize, to reclaim the dead and identify temporarily with their nonexistence. Tragedy, as Letzler-Cole argues, allows unique, funereal embodiments of absence to occur.³² Loss is manifest. Troy falls, and the voices rise.

This interdependence of suffering and survival is wound tighter and tighter with each of the messenger's entrances. His first appearance reports the allocation of captives to masters, facilitating diaspora; his second removes Astyanax; his third brings back the shattered remains for interment; and finally he gives the order to torch the now-vacant citadel. Each time, fresh lament breaks out to underscore the progressively more concentrated remnants of the women and their voices.³³ Even as he eradicates Troy the physical place, Talthylus is releasing it into post-traumatic circulation. "Troy" is now common property, a cipher for Hiroshima, Vietnam, Iraq.³⁴ Euripides' Trojan women are a study in projected reception, self-consciously aware that their future in dramatic form will match their future enslavement to Greece. What's Hecuba to us, if not a famous example of *Greek* tragic nobility?

Wright's translation picks up this theme, while giving it a bitter twist that implies Homeric glory is probably not worth the sweat. Hecuba demands to know why she has to be trampled over and over again: 'To make us history? / To tell a fine story / For actors to groan / For a thousand years?' The Homeric response would be a sonorous affirmative, enabling the name of Troy—like Lucan's *exustae nomen memorabile Troiae* (*Bellum Civile* 9.964)—to outlast its substance. Like Andromache's remarriage, however, Euripidean self-sacrifice has now become just another act of collaboration. In order to survive, the characters in this text must accommodate themselves to the needs or desires of their current masters, benevolent or otherwise. The act of dramatic reanimation is also inescapably an act of repossession, partially enjoying the *kleos* attached to owning (playing, directing) Hecuba for a time, but largely bleeding her for whatever contemporary significance she and the other Trojan ciphers can be brought to bear. Enslaved to their own representation, these characters cannot afford to cling too closely to some predetermined essence. The question of ownership is raised explicitly in the text of Wright's own translation as the women of Troy are passed from hand to hand. Wright's Hecuba introduces herself as 'a museum piece... / a relic. / Who will own me now? / In whose hand will I squirm?' In the immediate dramatic context, Odysseus will claim her; but in the ongoing travail of her reception, "Hecuba" is also a relic of the classical canon, reanimated over and over again to be repossessed by successive productions. What happens to the characters in *Troïades* and *The Women of Troy* is inseparable from what happens to the text. Both sustain mortal injury on Kosky's stage even as their survival is ensured.³⁵

Modern adaptation, like Talthybius, functions as the conduit of transmission. Hecuba and the chorus make it clear that violence is at the source of their presence onstage. As translators, adaptors (and scholars), we are culpable and must accept responsibility. This raises the crucial question common to *Troïades* and performance reception: *How should we deal with the dead?* Proper treatment of corpses is a prevalent theme in ancient Greek literature, implicating everyone from Achilles to Antigone,³⁶ and it is in this context that Astyanax's funeral should be regarded. The reading of this scene by Dyson & Lee stresses its representative function as a memorial for the whole Trojan community,³⁷ but omits two further significant aspects: firstly, the implications of staging funeral rites within a tragic performance, and the relationship of tragedy to mourning; secondly, the part played by Talthybius in the realisation of these rites. It is generally agreed that the structure of Astyanax's funeral corresponds to fifth-century Athenian tradition: the corpse is washed (1152), its wounds are dressed (1232-33), it is laid out and adorned by grieving female relatives (1207-37), the deceased receives an encomium (1156-1206) and antiphonal lamentation (1209-37), and is borne offstage in a procession to the grave-site (1246).³⁸ The detail of Hector's shield may add an anachronistically epic note, but essentially what is enacted here is a complete—if necessarily condensed—Attic funeral.

Talthybius' re-entry with the child's corpse and his contribution to Astyanax's funeral rites constitute a profound statement, making his elimination from the Kosky/Wright production equally powerful. The messenger crosses every conceivable line to ensure Andromache's last instructions are respected. Having washed away the worst of the blood from the wounds—the *ταύματα*—he prepares to dig a grave 'so that what you and I perform together will bring us swiftly home' (1154-55). Bathing the body is usually an activity performed by the female mourners as part of the purification process necessary to socialise death.³⁹ As Rehm has noted, this effectively feminises Talthybius;⁴⁰ more importantly, it further dissolves the distinctions that are rapidly losing their meaning now the walls of Troy have been breached. "Trojan" identity, no longer jealously contained, seeps out to permeate global sympathies as the women of Troy disperse into Greek mythology, ultimately providing an aesthetic vehicle for Australian social commentary.

Conducting an appropriate ceremony of mourning performs a dual function: it memorialises the dead, preventing their otherwise uncontrollable return; and it enables the living to reach a communal point of reconciliation to loss.⁴¹ The performance of such closural practices *as tragedy* represents a further extension or release of private grieving into the public domain. Holst-Warhaft calls Attic tragedy 'a force that subsumes traditional lament within elaborately *staged* lament.'⁴² While she understands this as part of democratic Athens' systematic suppression of chthonic female power,⁴³ it is perhaps more useful for the present discussion to retain a concept of tragedy as refigured—not necessarily *disfigured*—lament. Effectively, the (repeated) performance of a funeral for Astyanax and for Troy assumes the broader social paradoxes of both ritualised mourning and of tragic theatre: embodying an absence, articulating a loss, lending form to the unspeakable. A funeral enables the women to transform raw grief, raw trauma, into a communal sequence of vocal and physical actions that give it a surface, a tangible and separate presence. Just as the fall of Troy elicits epic tragedy, so Astyanax's death elicits tragic threnody. In both cases, the Greek Talthybius has functioned as agent of memorial as well as catalyst for destruction.

There is nothing recognisable as a funeral of any kind in Kosky's realisation. Hecuba is alone onstage with the child's battered, even dismembered body: Astyanax is visible only as two pale legs, running scarlet with blood, dangling out of a cardboard box. Hecuba's grief remains private bitterness, unresolved. Unlike its Greek counterpart, Kosky's *The Women of Troy* offers no opportunity to reconfigure trauma into any kind of socially manageable discourse. This is no therapeutic process, but rather an infliction of original injury. The play breaks off with Hecuba repeating an unanswerable question, all that poetry reduced to an almost inarticulate monosyllable swollen to breaking point with pain: 'Why? / Why? / Why?' As a coda, Wright offers a solution which resolves nothing but instead interrogates our

respective motives for staging and observing this wounding, wounded material: what does it mean that this woman should have provided ‘a fine story / for actors to groan / for a thousand years?’

How do we deal with the dead? And what do we need to inflict on their captive remnants, these relics, in order to transmit them? Returning to the unresolved issues of performance reception, it remains to consider how Talhybius’ role within the play might correspond to the external roles of translator and director. Like photographing a ghost, accommodating autonomous text to a particular performance moment forces the script’s infinite potential into producing a visible manifestation.⁴⁴ Director Jonathan Miller once observed, “I don’t believe one has any duty or obligation to an author once he’s dead. The play becomes a public object”. (Or, as Andrei Serban put it: “I prefer dead playwrights”.)⁴⁵ It is not the playwrights, however, who must endure perpetual passage through the violence of dramatisation. The Wright/Kosky *The Women of Troy* confronts the fundamental questions of how we relate to classical texts themselves, and what form they must assume to convey meaning on a modern stage. Euripides’ Troy is progressively dismantled by Talhybius, until all that remains is smoke on the beach and a name to be passed from hand to mouth. Ironically, Talhybius himself is absent from the Wright/Kosky production, leaving a jagged hole in the canonical material through which a very different play can be viewed. This adaptation is not a service undertaken in reverence for some vanished ideal, but a ruthless cannibalisation of whatever components will serve a current vision. Again, Troy makes the compromise, integrity sacrificed and survival temporarily guaranteed. Like Euripides’ Talhybius, adaptation transforms into performance the substance it must destroy.

Hecuba herself is fully aware of whose interests tragedy is designed to serve. After sealing Astyanax—and Troy—into dramatic ritual, she comments cynically, ‘I don’t think it matters much to the dead / if anyone performs elaborate funeral rites. They’re just an empty conceit of the living’ (1249-50). If a classical play can be exploited to serve a current cause, it should be. Wright and Kosky have taken Euripides’ fatalistic dirge and re-mastered it into caustic political condemnation. Eradicating the messenger, Euripides’ intermediary, creates a dynamic of spectatorship that challenges the audience aesthetically, politically and emotionally. Although I cannot altogether count myself in accord with the kind of despair that results in paralysis and, by default, quiescence, *The Women of Troy* nevertheless forces a confrontation with the principles of bearing witness and the limits of its efficacy. Even in his absence, or perhaps especially in his absence, Talhybius endures, in the radical revisions that plunder classical form and enable ancient pain to keep on speaking.

Notes

¹ Terminology from P. Pavis, ‘Problems of translation for the stage: interculturalism and post-modern theatre’ (trans. L. Kruger) in H. Scolnicov & P. Holland (eds.), *The play out of context: transferring plays from culture to culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 25–42.

² A. Green, *The revisionist stage: American directors reinvent the classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4–15 supplies the basic methodology used in this paper. For more recent discussions of authenticity and the text/performance debate, see M. K. Gamel, ‘Revising “authenticity” in staging ancient Mediterranean drama’ in E. Hall & S. Harrop(eds.), *Theorising performance: Greek drama, cultural history and performance practice* (London: Duckworth, 2010), 153–70 and S. Perris ‘Performance reception and the “textual twist”: towards a theory of literary reception’, 181–91 in the same volume. Perspectives on the performance reception of Troiades can be found in K. V. Hartigan, *Greek tragedy on the American stage: ancient drama in the commercial theatre 1882–1994* (Westport: Greenwood, 1995), 39–45 and I. Carruthers & T. Yasunari, *The theatre of Suzuki Tadashi* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 124–47. For related issues of textual transmission, see M. Walton, *Found in translation: Greek drama in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 25 & 51; and W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the authority of performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 2–16, 51–52, 189–90.

³ J. Barrett, *Staged narrative: poetics and the messenger in Greek tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), esp. 61–62.

⁴ Barrett (2002), 57–58.

⁵ She also addresses Talthybius as φίλος at Troiades 267.

⁶ S. A. Barlow, 'Introduction', *Euripides' Trojan Women* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986), 14, comments the tragic messenger's objectivity. See also I. de Jong, *Narrative in drama: the art of the Euripidean messenger speech* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 30–62, on messengers' inescapable focalisation of their narrative, and Barrett (2002), esp. 43–35, on the paradox of omniscience in conflict with autopsy.

⁷ Respectively M. J. Anderson, *The fall of Troy in early Greek poetry and art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 157; and D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean drama: myth, theme and structure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 144.

⁸ K. Gilmartin, 'Talthybius in the Trojan Women', *American Journal of Philology* 91.2, 1970, 213–22 at 221. Another nuanced reading of Talthybius' role may be found in M. Dyson & K.H. Lee, 'Talthybius in Euripides' Troades', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 41, 2000, 141–73.

⁹ P. Craven, 'A nightmare by glaring torturer's light', *The Australian literary review*, Nov 5, 2008, 27. The same comparison occurs to C. Woodhead, 2008. 'A Trojan horse for modern ills', *The Age*, Nov 15 2008, 23.

¹⁰ J.R. Compton, *The integrated news spectacle: a political economy of cultural performance* (New York: P. Lang, 2004), 170, comments that 'the experience of warfare is, for a majority of Western citizens, limited to spectacle.' See also S. Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003), 21, on war spectacularised and domesticated.

¹¹ Coverage of natural disasters often includes appeals for aid, but in general the studied objectivity of news reports remains aloof from its material.

¹² This is not to perpetuate the myth of media consumers as mindless dupes of the system, just to point out that the packaging and delivery of distressing information via news–media encourages consumption rather than intervention. Compton (2004), esp. 167–91 provides a balanced discussion of consumer behaviour towards news–media imagery.

¹³ P. Dahlgren, 'TV news and the suppression of reflexivity' in E. Katz & T Szecsku (eds.), *Mass media and social change* (London: Sage, 1981), 105.

¹⁴ According to P. Mellencamp, 'TV time and catastrophe, or beyond the pleasure principle of television' in P. Mellencamp(ed.), *Logics of television: essays in cultural criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 262, as witnesses to such crises 'we exist as vicarious participants... yet we are never in danger of being touched... [and] neither do we need to act.'

¹⁵ On this point, see in particular Gilmartin (1970), 213–21.

¹⁶ M. Leigh, *Lucan: spectacle and engagement* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), esp. 4–5; 157; 241–76, makes a similar point about Roman arena culture. G. Debord, *The society of the spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 1–72 esp. 12–13 & 27, regards mass spectacle—including that of violence—as a form of political domination.

¹⁷ R. Schechner, *Performance theory*, (Routledge: New York, 1988), 172–73.

¹⁸ R. Scodel, 'The captive's dilemma: sexual acquiescence in Euripides' *Hecuba and Troades*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98, 1998, 137–54. See also Hall (2004), 45 on the concept of survival as 'one of the hallmarks of our age.'

¹⁹ On Hecuba's rhetoric, see N.T. Croally, *Euripidean polemic: the Trojan Women and the function of tragedy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 135–59. Anderson (1997), 166, also points out that Hecuba is just as vengeful and vindictive as the Greeks, perfectly prepared to see Helen suffer and die.

²⁰ M. Morris, 'Banality in cultural studies' in P. Mellencamp (ed.), *Logics of television: essays in cultural criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 17.

²¹ Dyson & Lee (2000a), 61; also Barlow (1986), 34.

²² A similar role-division occurred in the Suzuki production., on which see Carruthers & Yasunari (2004), 142–43.

²³ D.M. Carter, *The politics of Greek tragedy* (Bristol: Phoenix, 2007), 142.

²⁴ E. Fischer-Lichte, 'Thinking about the origins of theatre in the 1970s' in E.Hall, F. Macintosh & A. Wrigley (eds.), *Dionysus since 69: Greek tragedy at the dawn of the third millennium* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 341–43, identifies a similar process at work in Gruber's production of Euripides' *Bacchae*, arguing that 'to stage a text means to perform a sparagmos,' and 'a text can never keep its so-called "integrity" unless it is dismembered... Without the dismemberment of the text, there cannot be a performance.' Each (re)-staging is thus a sacrificial act.

²⁵ Dunn (1996), 102. Carruthers & Yasunari (2004), 173, comment on Suzuki's similar continuation of Euripidean deconstruction.

²⁶ Dunn (1996), 109–12, focuses instead on the body of Hecuba as the site where Troiades' textual "disfigurement" is realised onstage.

²⁷ See Barlow (1986), 35, on Troy's reconstruction via the choral odes.

²⁸ Croally (1994), 205.

²⁹ Conacher (1967), 145, more cautiously identifies the 'recognition that, in a sense, Trojan greatness and future fame depend on this utter ruin which the gods have sent.' Fame is antithetical to wholeness.

³⁰ S. Letzler-Cole, *The absent one: mourning ritual, tragedy and the performance of ambivalence* (London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1985), 1–40. See also G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous voices: women's laments and Greek literature* (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. 127–70 on lament in Greek tragedy specifically.

³¹ This line is deleted by Tyrrell on metrical grounds, but Lee (1976), 82–83 states that 'it is better to leave the text unaltered... The verses are not intended to be antistrophic.'

³² Letzler Cole (1985), 9.

³³ The Kosky production replaces Euripides' choral odes with a range of European music drawn from a range of classical, folk, and popular registers, which both fragments and universalizes female suffering.

³⁴ Carruthers & Yasunari (2004), 124–47; Hartigan (1995), 39–45; Hall (2004), 19; Carter (2007), 155–58, discuss various war-torn twentieth-century states to which productions of *Trojan Women* have referred.

³⁵ See Fischer–Lichte (2004), 339.

³⁶ R. Garland, *The Greek way of death* (London: Bristol Classical, 1985), 101; Croally (1994), 74; C. Sourvinou–Inwood, “Reading” Greek death: to the end of the classical period (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 123ff.

³⁷ M. Dyson & K. H. Lee, ‘The funeral of Astyanax in Euripides’ *Troades*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120, 17–33, 2000, 17–33.

³⁸ M. Alexiou, *The ritual lament in Greek tradition*, revised by D. Yatromanolakis & P. Roilos (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 4–7, 131–39; Garland (1985), 21–37.

³⁹ R. Rehm, *Marriage to death: the conflation of wedding and funeral rituals in Greek tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 22; Garland (1985), 24.

⁴⁰ Rehm (1994), 133.

⁴¹ Letzler Cole (1985), 5; Sourvinou–Inwood (1995), 109–30, on Greek burial and closure.

⁴² Holst–Warhaft (1992), 128.

⁴³ Holst–Warhaft (1992), 127–70. Alexiou (2002), 14–23, reviews the evidence.

⁴⁴ Perris (2010), 181–91, and Gamel (2010), 153–70, provide the most recent theoretical positions on the text / performance dialectic. For further bibliography on this topic, see n.2 above.

⁴⁵ Green (1994), 5.

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The Women of Troy: Barrie Kosky's 'operatic' version of Euripides

Michael Halliwell

University of Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Once again ... Myth and History stand before me with opposing claims ... forcing me to decide whether it was a musical drama, or a spoken play, that I had to write. —Richard Wagner¹

Music's function in opera is fundamentally escalatory—it should transport one from the quotidian to the transcendental. Music enlarges character, expands and transcends situation, and engages the audience on a non-verbal, emotional level. The use of music in dramatic representation is multi-faceted and complex. At its most elaborate as manifested in opera, it frequently functions in a narrative fashion—the role of the orchestra being analogous to a narrator. The orchestra can 'describe' and 'comment' on events as they occur, it can also recall events from the past as well as foretell the future—as Wagner's operas so eloquently demonstrate. Music in opera also suggests interiority and depth in regard to character depiction. By means of the music which surrounds the characters and establishes a unique sonic world, it provides access to the thoughts and emotions of the characters and adds a sense of depth and complexity to two-dimensional characters. Through the more than four centuries of operatic development, composers have devised certain musical tropes which have come to represent a wide variety of emotional states ranging from ecstatic joy to insanity. Central to the understanding of the 'meaning' of music in opera is the vocal performance itself with the human voice being the most individual, expressive and even 'vulnerable' instrument of all. The opera aria is the main revelatory form in which characters reveal themselves to the audience, but also through that unique operatic form, the multi-layered ensemble, we simultaneously learn much about characters.

The level of the sophistication and complexity in the way music is used varies considerably throughout the wide variety of music theatre works. Music is used with a different level of complexity and intention in film, and a film without a musical score would be a rarity. Music has been used extensively in western spoken drama from the time of the Greeks, and opera's *raison d'être* was the belief by a group of Florentine noblemen in the late sixteenth century that they were revivifying ancient Greek and Roman drama in this new dramatic form. Opera's founding figure is Orpheus, and the first surviving opera that is still performed regularly today is Claudio Monteverdi's *Orfeo* from 1607. Thus opera has been inextricably bound up with Greek and Roman myth and drama from its inception to the present day.² It is with this in mind that I would like to approach the use of music in Barrie Kosky's adaptation/appropriation of *The Trojan Women*—that is, to look at the role of the music in the play from this quasi operatic perspective.

Kosky's reputation in opera is as an innovative yet frequently controversial director, who has always attempted to stretch the boundaries of the art form in his productions, often infuriating and scandalizing many of the opera's sometimes conservative audiences. It is apparent that opera's stylization and essentially non-realistic mode has influenced much of Kosky's overall theatrical output. Many have argued that Kosky's undoubted musical knowledge and skills have not always been apparent in his approach to opera; there has never been, however, any question regarding his appreciation and deep understanding of the power and effect of music on the stage. What struck me in his adaptation of the Euripides play is the complex role that the music performs and the weight that it is expected to carry in the dramatic thrust of the production. Music forms the backbone of the production, and it certainly does much to propel the emotional narrative of the play. The question is: does it turn Greek tragedy into opera?

Kosky himself describes his use of the songs in the adaptation as the means by which the women characters “hang onto their sanity,” commenting that music is their “last stop before madness, exile or death.”³ Operatic characters are defined, expanded, and frequently ‘redeemed’ through their music. One can think of many characters in opera, from the protagonists of Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea* (1642) to the title figure in Benjamin Britten’s *Peter Grimes* (1945), who apparently possess few redeeming features, yet their musical characterization is ultimately redemptive in overall effect. Can one view Kosky’s choice of and use of music in this light? It is obvious from its pervasive prominence that music is intended in the performance of *The Women of Troy* to carry more weight than mere ‘incidental’ music. Viewed from this perspective it could be argued that the music drives the action just as it does in opera, and I would estimate that in terms of running time the actual performance of the musical numbers has almost as long a duration as the spoken text. Kosky’s deliberate jettisoning of much of Euripides’ text and his replacing it with music perhaps gives us a clue to his overall intentions in this production. But it is how the music is used that is crucial.

At first the songs occur in the ensemble or small chorus of three women, then solo lines emerge from the choral texture, and finally Hecuba has her own solos, joining Andromache and the chorus at one point. In this sense the dividing line between the chorus and the soloist becomes blurred and the three women begin to acquire individuality, particularly in vocal terms, but never in a true operatic fashion where they might simultaneously be expressing different thoughts and emotions in ensemble. The spoken text of this adaptation has been pared back severely from the original play so that the music can play a central role, almost through-composed in operatic terms as some numbers move without pause into the next.

There are several ways of considering the way music is used in the production. On one level the songs provide moments of beauty and repose in what is an extremely bleak play and an even bleaker adaptation. Frequently the performance of the songs is accompanied by acts of immense violence and cruelty counterpointed with a constant background of very loud gunshots as well as screams from the women. In this way the songs are used as a contrast to this violence, both physical and verbal, and they often become moments of what appears to be hope and perhaps even redemption. The songs function in a similar way to the text of the adaptation which juxtaposes language of rhetorical expansion and lyrical beauty with coarse and brutal utterance describing acts of almost unimaginable cruelty and horror. As Peter Craven has observed, “Kosky is keen to avoid anything that might seem to prettify the brutality of Euripides’ play. This is the text stripped bare and rendered bloody... .”⁴ On another level, the songs sometimes provide a commentary on the action, reflecting both emotionally and in a broad narrative sense what is happening on stage. Although they do not advance the action as such, they supplement the action on an emotional rather than a narrative level, functioning as a form of emotional subtext rather than narrative propulsion. In opera, the music, including the arias, ensembles, and choruses, as well as the orchestral accompaniment, is the narrative force, and therefore it is misleading to assume that one can comprehend the narrative purely from the libretto. On perhaps a more superficial level, the songs in Kosky’s production provide a linking mechanism between scenes, analogous with much film music, which is used to underscore the emotional contours of the action and provide a bridge between scenes occurring at disparate emotional levels. I would, however, question whether they have the same kind of narrative function that operatic music exhibits, despite this perhaps being Kosky’s underlying intention.

For Euripides’ chorus, Kosky substitutes a trio of three women who sing, as Craven observes, “as a comfort that is clutched at like a dream, in the manner of Girl Guides in a concentration camp.” They sing madrigals, “the formalized poignancies of the Renaissance that rediscovered the ancient world as a glamour and a humanistic ideal. They sing in the teeth of violation and sadistic revenge.”⁵ Hecuba and Andromache sing two Dowland songs in a curious form—tuneless and off-pitch “Sprechgesang”⁶—also joining the other three voices at times. The tonal and expressive potentialities of the piano are used in a limited way: the most frequent form of accompaniment is chordal, often in the form of spiky staccato

chords which introduce and accompany the songs. This use of the piano seems intended as a musical counterpart to the frequent use of offstage gunshots, and the piano sound is often aggressive and harsh, providing a musical counterpoint to the gunshots. Occasionally there are virtuosic flourishes from the piano, but for the most part the accompaniment is extremely minimalistic and discreet, often only providing tonal orientation for the singers rather than any real accompanimental support or direction for the voice.

The songs in the adaptation are presented in several ways. The audience enters to the sound of rather somewhat fuzzy recorded 'musak' which disappears as the action begins. In front of the stage is a piano and this provides the accompaniment to the performed songs in the play, almost in a cabaret-like setting. Recorded music is used occasionally and in a limited way during the play. The voices of the three female performers are a soprano and two voices lying more in the mezzo soprano range. All three singers are also called on to use a 'belt' voice in addition to the more 'legit' or 'pure' voice that they more frequently employ.⁷ Thus, there is a combination of vocal styles ranging from cabaret or pop to a more 'pure' classical style in some of the pieces.

The first of the three John Dowland songs is "Now, O now I needs must part", a part-song which is sung by the chorus of three voices. Why Dowland? His music has a grace and elegance, and the way the music is structured offers the potential for flexibility in the vocal delivery. These songs, as well as the other music, present a strong contrast when juxtaposed with the brutality and frequent verbal and physical crudity of the production. In addition, the Dowland songs can be regarded as laments or songs expressing deep pain and sorrow; in this they are representative of the melancholy which characterizes much of his music. The songs can be performed unaccompanied, or with a simple accompaniment, which historically would have been a solo lute or a small consort of instruments.

Now, O now, I needs must part,
Parting, though I absent mourn.
Absence can no joy impart:
Joy once fled cannot return

Refrain:

Sad despair doth drive me hence;
This despair unkindness sends.
If that parting be offence,
It is she that then offends.
While I live, I needs must love.
Love lives not when hope is gone.
Now, at last, Despair doth prove
Love divided lovest none
Sad despair doth drive me hence.⁸

This first song occurs after an exchange between Hecuba and a disembodied male voice (which it later transpires is that of Menelaus), presented as if it were a public announcement which reappears throughout the proceedings. The song is introduced by slowly-spaced chords in the piano with the off-stage gunshot 'accompaniment'. The song is originally written for four vocal parts but is reduced to the three voices. It begins with a solo voice singing the melody line, and then the other voices join. It gradually gains in volume and assurance, but as a new verse starts, it is silenced by a gunshot. This is followed by Cassandra's outburst in which there is extreme distortion of the language—she is so distraught and traumatised that her text is distorted semantically as well as aurally. Her raving is in vivid contrast with the grace and beauty of the song with its high-lying descant, which, it appears, cannot be

sustained in this brutal environment. This silencing suggests that music is unequal to the challenge, a common operatic trope where the singing voice is silenced and replaced by the speaking voice or complete vocal and orchestral silence.

Cassandra's 'aria' is interrupted by single chords and then a solo voice singing the opening lines of the tenor aria of Nadir from Bizet's opera, *The Pearl Fishers*:

Je crois entendre encore,	I still believe I hear
Caché sous les palmiers,	hidden beneath the palm trees
Sa voix tendre et sonore	your voice tender and deep
Comme un chant de ramier!	like the song of a dove
O nuit enchanteresse!	oh night enchantress
Divin ravissement!	divine rapture
O souvenir charmant!	delightful thought
Folle ivresse! doux rêve!	mad intoxication, sweet dream
Aux clartés des étoiles,	in the clear starlight
Je crois encore la voir,	I still believe I see
Entr'ouvrir ses longs voiles	in between the long sails
Aux vents tièdes du soir!	of the warm night breeze
O nuit enchanteresse! etc	oh night...etc.
Charmant souvenir!	Delightful thought! ⁹

In terms of familiarity, this well-known aria is probably second only to the celebrated tenor/baritone duet from the opera. It has a sweetly lilting melody with a transparent, graceful accompaniment. The words express a sense of wonder and longing for the voice of the beloved, Leila. In the opera it takes the form of a serenade, but in this adaptation of the play the effect is more of a lament. The first verse has a simple chordal accompaniment and, as in the preceding Dowland song, there is excessive bending and even distortion of the rhythm of the vocal line. This reaches an extreme where there is an extended pause on a high note at the end of the verse. In a sense this is almost a parody of an operatic tenor or soprano clinging on to high notes to show off. The effect, however, is deliberately unpleasant as the voice loses its vibrato and takes on a hard edge.

The second verse has all three voices, again with extreme rhythmic distortions punctuated by gunshots. This is almost a jazz-like approach with a similar rhythmic freedom, and the piano part becomes more expansive, underscoring the barcarolle rhythm with the occasional flourish in the right hand. However, the voices are deliberately unsteady and tentative with very uncertain pitch, and again the sustained high note at the end is estranged and, it must be said, deliberately out of tune as well. With this song we see the first incongruity between the words of the song and the context in which it is sung, which, although it expresses a sense of longing, could not be said to convey a similar level of pain and melancholy as several of the other songs. One could argue, however, that Kosky uses this excerpt precisely for the fact that it fetishises voice as a disembodied element, something pure and outside the world of the play. This alerts us to the fact that the songs in the production are used frequently more for their aural qualities than for any intrinsic meaning inherent in their texts. One could also rather unkindly note that there is the expectation that the audience would not understand the French text as it might the songs sung in English. There is a sense that Kosky wishes the music to carry a significant weight, but for which both the choice of music and its performance is somewhat inadequate.

After a brief, frenzied outburst from Cassandra, the three voices commence the Dowland song once more, this time—in contrast to *The Pearl Fishers*—with much more vocal assurance and confidence. This is a sustained musical sequence with a great deal of aural contrast. The music is finally silenced with a gunshot after the word 'despair' has been sung. However, the Bizet soon starts up again; this time,

however, it is sung much more aggressively and angrily, with a more substantial piano presence. At first it is a solo voice with chordal accompaniment, but the second verse suddenly has the piano in a more virtuosic vein with glissandos and wild flourishes of broken chords and arpeggios—almost as a parody of pianistic virtuosity.

The song comes to a deliberately ‘big’ ending with a sustained high note. Both voice and piano exhibit parodic elements in strong contrast to the way the music has been used up to this point, where the suggestion of sadness, melancholy, and pain have been the main features in terms of performance style. Again there is a certain amount of incongruity with this sudden burst of musical virtuosity, which self-consciously draws attention to its status as a musical performance. In a sense the music ‘intrudes’ on the pain being expressed by characters on stage—the performance of the music is foregrounded at this point: we are alerted to the fact that we are watching a performance. This is almost a moment of Brechtian “*Verfremdung*” where empathy for the characters on stage recedes. Several reviews of the production made the point that Kosky, through some extreme elements in the production, alienates the audience from any sense of empathy for the characters. Perhaps here in a subtle way a similar strategy is being pursued through the mode of musical performance? While opera frequently embodies moments of extreme virtuosity, the intention is almost always character- and situation-driven, as virtuosity is a powerful means of character revelation. One need only think of the series of cascading notes that Lucia sings in Donizetti’s opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* as she sinks into madness: virtuosity in this form is the trope of madness. One must question whether this is Kosky’s intention.

Finally, the music is interrupted by the disembodied voice over the speakers informing Cassandra that she will be ‘shipped away’. This is accompanied, *sotto voce*, by the voices and piano intoning the Bizet melody wordlessly to a strongly rhythmic accompaniment as background to Cassandra’s almost feral declamation. There is a brief moment of silence from the chorus as she continues, then discrete chords start the next song, the Schumann part-song, “*In meinem Garten die Nelken*”:

In meinem Garten die Nelken
mit ihrem Purpurstern
müssen nun alle verwelken,
denn du bist fern.

The carnations in my garden
with their crimson center-star
they all must wilt away now,
because you are afar.

Auf meinem Herde die Flammen
die ich bewacht so gern,
sanken in Asche zusammen,
denn du bist fern.

The flames in my hearth
I so loved to watch,
they crumbled to ashes,
because you are afar.

Die Welt ist mir verdorben,
mich grüßt nicht Blume Stern,
mein Herz ist lange gestorben,
denn du bist fern.

The world went sour,
with neither flower greeting me nor star—
my heart died away long ago,
because you are afar.¹⁰

This is the only song which is performed much as intended: in the original composition it is written for three female voices with piano accompaniment (here the German text does express a sense of pain, but certainly not to the extreme that is portrayed on stage). It is sung without any distortion, although the piano accompaniment is much simplified from the original. Several times during the song the disembodied voice is heard instructing the women to ‘move to the wall’. A strong sense of incongruity is present in the opening words of the song with its depiction of a pastoral scene with the purple carnations, but the vision turns to ashes with the realization that the beloved is distant and the implication that he/she will return no more. There is a protracted pause on the word “*gestorben*” (“*died*”), and a silence

after it. Finally, the announcement halts the song and the last five bars are omitted, thus creating the impression of incompleteness. There is a long, silent pause, and then chords from the piano start the next piece, the farewell trio from Mozart's opera *Così fan tutte*.

Soave sia il vento,	Gentle be the breeze,
Tranquilla sia l'onda,	Calm be the waves,
Ed ogni elemento	And every element
Benigno risponda	Smile in favour
Ai nostri/vostri desir.	On their wish. ¹¹

Again this is sung in a mode close to the original version (accompanied by muffled screams). Of course, in the opera, this is sung by the young girls Dorabella, Fiordiligi, and the older Don Alfonso as they wave goodbye to their young friends Ferrando and Guglielmo, who appear to be leaving for the war. Not having the male voice providing a counterpoint to the two female voices somewhat distorts the piece, and the words are in starkest contrast to what is actually occurring on stage. The song ends suddenly, on a rather out-of-tune chord, without the final bars as in the score, which again creates a sense of incompleteness and distortion.

Così is all about deception and things not being what they seem, although this is a moment of genuine emotion in the opera as the two women really believe what appears to be happening. Alfonso is the deceiving puppet master, however, and there is great irony in his vocal line which moves in counterpoint to that of the women. But in the use of this excerpt in *The Women of Troy*, the subtlety of Mozart's music does not appear to be highlighted. There is probably an added irony in the fact that this trio is so well-known out of context, primarily in advertising as well as its use in film music, and is a self-consciously 'beautiful' piece of music. Both operatic excerpts, in terms of their words as well as the context in which they occur, have little to do with the events being portrayed on stage, whereas the other songs, particularly the three Dowland songs, express grief at parting and loss and thus more strongly reflect the emotions of the play at the point at which they occur.

There is a brief silent pause, and then with a broken chord introduction, the Dowland song, "Sorrow stay" begins:

Sorrow stay, lend true repentant tears,
 To a woeful wretched wight,
 Hence, despair with thy tormenting fears:
 O do not my poor heart affright.
 Pity, pity, pity, help now or never,
 Mark me not to endless pain,
 Alas I am condemned ever,
 No hope, no help, there doth remain,
 But down, down, down, down I fall,
 And arise I never shall.¹²

This is sung by Hecuba in a quasi "Sprechgesang" style with a minimalist accompaniment, which, in a sense, approximates the freedom and flexibility of the lute, and here the words certainly do reflect the context in which it is sung. Her vocal style seems to suggest that the sweep of the melody has been silenced by the horror on stage allowing only occasional short bursts of melody; it is as if the sweetness of tone which would sustain the melody has become impossible in this context. Hecuba distorts the rhythm as well as the melody of the song. The question arises whether this is a conscious musical choice in terms of the style of the performance, or whether this has been done to accommodate the abilities of an obviously untrained singer. It is certainly a powerful moment where the distortion of the expected mode

of performance conveys great depth of emotion. It is a moment of stasis where it is as if time has been suspended—musical time subverts chronological or even stage time. This song ends a long and almost continuous sequence of music which is followed by Scene 6: Hecuba's long speech 'aria'. This part of the production certainly uses music in a way which approaches the operatic.

At the end of this there is a brief snatch of recorded music followed by the voice instructing the women to 'take their boxes, quickly'. There is the sound of a ringing telephone which continues as the music stops. Immediately Hecuba starts the third Dowland song, "In darkness let me dwell", one of his most acclaimed songs:

In darkness let me dwell, the ground shall sorrow be,
The roof despair to bar all cheerful light from me,
The walls of marble black that moisten'd still shall weep,
My music hellish jarring sounds, to banish friendly sleep.
Thus wedded to my woes, and bedded to my tomb,
O, let me, living, living, die, till death do come.¹³

This is sung as a solo by Hecuba, again with minimal piano accompaniment, in a similar vocal style to her previous song. Again, the words strongly reflect the dramatic context. The vocal delivery is probably even more extreme than the previous Dowland song; at times the vocal timbre is made to be as ugly as possible with a hard, vibrato-less delivery that deliberately distorts the beauty of the song.

Scene 8 is an extended exchange between Hecuba and Andromache culminating in the dragging away of Andromache's son and is followed by the song, "The lament of the blind", by the Croatian composer Josip Slavenski, sung by Hecuba, Andromache, and the chorus of three voices. This is a choral arrangement from "Six Serbian Folksongs" for mixed voices. The words of the song describe the pain and tribulations endured by the blind speaker who calls on God to bless those who still are able to enjoy the fruits of their sight. The song as published is for four voices and the text is usually sung by three voice parts while the fourth part sustains a singing note on the wordless syllable "Oj!"

What Kosky has done is to ignore the text and have all the voices declaim this wordless syllable, sometimes following the melody which is passed from part to part, while also at times sustaining a single note. Again, there are just a few chords in the piano. The declaimed syllables are 'aie', which suggests Jewish liturgical laments and it builds in intensity through the plangency of the female voices. The vocal presentation is free and rhapsodic, with a strong improvisatory sense, and the higher voices frequently float freely above the sustained harmony in the lower voices. This piece of music most closely reflects and captures the emotion and mood of the women in the play, and it is a moment where an operatic intensity is achieved. The women attempt to protect Andromache's son, but they are left huddled against the wall and lit starkly from the side. This is a powerful moment both musically and visually. Again there is a sense of the collective with occasional voices emerging out of the choral texture—there are moments when the singing becomes closer to screams rather than tonal effects.

Without a break, four spread chords in the piano, Gesualdo's "Mercè!, grido piangendo" from the Fifth Book of Madrigals of 1611 is introduced:

Mercè!, grido piangendo, ma chi m'ascolta?	"Mercy!" I cry, weeping. But who hears me?
Ahi lasso, io vengo meno. Morrò dunque tacendo.	Alas, I faint. I shall die, therefore, in silence.
Deh, per pietade! Almeno, o del mio cor tesoro,	Ah, for pity! At least, oh treasure of my heart,

potessi dirti pria
ch'io mora: "Io moro."

let me tell you before
I die, "I die!"¹⁴

This is a sudden musical change as the musical formality of the madrigal is strongly contrasted with the freedom of the previous folk song. The choice of Gesualdo is interesting, since, apart from his great musical reputation, particularly as a composer of madrigals, he is notorious for an incident of great violence during which he murdered his wife and her lover and left their mutilated bodies outside the wall of his palace for all to see. It has often been suggested that his complex music is inflected by a sense of guilt resulting from this event. The performance of this madrigal, which in its original form is for five solo voices, follows immediately from the preceding piece and retains much of the sense of freedom and anguish conveyed in that, although in broad terms it remains musically reasonably close to the original score. There is an aggressive quality, however, at the beginning of the piece, which becomes more subdued at the words, "alas, I faint". The piano is discreet, providing orientational chords rather than accompaniment. The original madrigal was intended to be performed unaccompanied. Here the words are frequently broken in the middle, thus distorting the semantic sense of the text.

The next music that occurs is a snatch of recorded music from the speakers—a typical 'Motown' sound which again 'accompanies' the horror on stage and the incessant gunshots off stage. This presages the entrance of Menelaus in a wheelchair, followed by the scene with Menelaus, Helen, and Hecuba. As Menelaus finally confirms that he will "sacrifice her on the floor of the family home" the chords of the song, "When you're smiling", start:

When you're smilin', keep on smilin'
The whole world smiles with you
And when you're laughin', keep on laughin'
The sun comes shinin' through

But when you're cryin', you bring on the rain
So stop your frownin', be happy again
Cause when you're smilin', keep on smilin'
The whole world smiles with you.¹⁵

At this moment the incongruity of the music and the context in which it occurs is most deliberately acute. It is reminiscent of the use of songs in Kubrick's film *A Clockwork Orange* and its many subsequent imitations, and is a self-consciously estranging moment emphasizing the trope which runs through the production: the absolute banality of evil. If what we have witnessed is a form of Holocaust then perhaps taking one's cue from Adorno, the only kind of music that is appropriate to the horror is the empty words and trite melody of this song.

Only the chorus of the song is sung by the three women. Once more the song is accompanied by staccato chords in the piano. However, the piano gradually becomes more frenzied and discordant as the women of the chorus are threatened; finally the music disintegrates under the pressure of constant horror. More and more gunshots ring out as the music grows wilder, and there is the sense of an approaching climax being signaled in the music. The music is finally silenced by the killing of the three women, and their bodies are loaded onto the trolley. The human voice, that most poignant, fragile yet powerfully expressive of all musical instruments has finally been silenced. This act is a metaphor for the destruction of all humanity; it is the final music in the play as the final scene with Hecuba and the body of Andromache's son is played out in 'silence'—the more effective after the musical frenzy of the preceding scene.

The range of music used in the production is varied and offers stark contrasts. John McCallum posed the

question in his review: “So what is uplifting about all this horror? What makes it a great tragedy, rather than just a nightmare?” His answer: “It is, as you’d expect with Kosky, the music [...] Relentless tales of disaster and suffering have to have some point in their telling, and here it is that, in the face of all this, people still sing.”¹⁶ The women of the play use music as a form of resistance to the violence to which they are subjected. Kosky remarked that “I always use music because it liberates theatre and takes you into the poetic ... I have a rule that if I can find a song or piece of music to convey what it takes to say in a great many words, then I will.”¹⁷

Several reviews commented on the unrelenting portrayal of the violence and degradation which results in a lack of audience empathy for the characters. Craven argues that the production “works as a series of shocks that afflict, then numb, the audience.”¹⁸ But it is through the music that Kosky wishes his audience to ‘connect’ with these characters. His choice of music and the performance skills of his women do evoke empathy from a frequently horrified audience. Is it opera? I’m not sure. However, I would argue that the nature of the performance of the final song in the play—not so much the banality of the song but the violence to which it is subjected—suggests that even music is not enough. It is the culmination of a consistent musical strategy throughout the production which, it seems to me, leaves the audience with a sense that even music cannot transcend the despair and darkness at the heart of this production. Somewhat crudely expressed, Kosky finally ‘kills’ even the music, leaving the horror intact.

Perhaps there can be no art post Holocaust? Craven notes that

the choruses in this production provide what may be a nearly intolerable accompaniment to what is essentially a ritual of genocide. But these bits of Dowland and Gesualdo do not individuate the collective experience of grief the way Euripides’ chorus does. They work the other way, as a dreadfully precarious retreat into a world of courtly graces. The stratagem is brilliant, though it ignores the fact that Euripides’ choric music is as wild and many coloured as Mahler’s.¹⁹

I do not see it as a ‘retreat into the world of courtly graces’. Rather, that world is subverted by the mode of performance as well as the situation and events in the production—this world of grace and beauty evoked by the music cannot be sustained in Kosky’s bleak world view. There are few ‘courtly graces’ in this musical performance with its frequent distortions and musical inadequacies, and the songs, finally, cannot provide access to this world. While the intention might have been to provide moments of beauty, these are overwhelmed by the horror. At the end of many operas (not to mention other dramatic representations) we leave the theatre feeling deeply moved and ultimately uplifted despite the subject matter. Does this happen at the end of this production? I am not sure, and I’m not sure it succeeds as opera; Kosky’s production choices have, perhaps, finally destroyed the power of music to transcend the horror.

notes

¹ Wagner, Richard (1851: online), “Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde.” [Projekt Gutenberg-De](#). [12/09/2007.]— (1966). “A Communication to My Friends”. Richard Wagner’s Prose Works. Trans. William Ashton Ellis. New York, NY: Broude Brothers. 269–393.

² The most recent new ‘Greek’ opera performance I have come across is a production at the Globe Theatre in London of an operatic version, directed by Derek Walcott, of Seamus Heaney’s version of Sophocles’ *Antigone: Burial at Thebes* (2004). This new opera, according to many of the critics, suffered the fate that many plays turned into opera endure: a faithfulness to the text that impedes the music.

³ The Women of Troy. Program note.

⁴ Peter Craven, “A nightmare by glaring torturer’s light.” (*The Australian Literary Review*. November 5,

2008. Vol 3, No 10. 18–27), 19.

⁵ Craven, 18.

⁶ A form of ‘speech–song’ developed in the early twentieth century as an expressionist vocal technique where musical pitches are suggested rather than fully sung.

⁷ The use of the female voice in musicals, where the chest register is predominant, is often described as ‘belt’, while there are times when a more ‘classical’ operatic quality is called for, known colloquially as ‘legit’.

⁸ Lute Songs of John Dowland. Ed. David Nadal. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997. 14.

⁹ George Bizet. Les pêcheurs de perles. Miami: Edwin F. Kalmus, 43–48. Translation: [The Aria Database](#)

¹⁰ Robert Schumann, Opus 29. London: Peters, 1985 (PE.P02393). 102–5. Translation Richard Stokes: www.hyperion-records.co.uk

¹¹ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. *Così fan tutte*. London: Novello, 1963. 60–65. Italian with English translation.

¹² Lute Songs of John Dowland. 62.

¹³ Lute Songs of John Dowland. 130.

¹⁴ Carlo Gesualdo. Madrigals. Ed. Dennis Stevens. New York: Gaudia Music, 1992. 64. Translation: [The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Text Page](#).

¹⁵ Larry Shay, Mark Fisher, and Joe Goodwin (1928). First performed in 1929 by Louis Armstrong, who made it famous.

¹⁶ John McCallum. Review of *The Women of Troy*. *The Australian*. September 23, 2008.

¹⁷ Barrie Kosky interview by Bryce Hallett. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. September 6, 2008.

¹⁸ Craven, 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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The Women of Troy—New and Old

Michael Ewans

The University of Newcastle

This article begins by examining the relationship between the version of the text which Kosky used for his 2008 Sydney Theatre Company production and the original Euripides; I then assess some aspects of the production itself which are relevant to my argument, and finally I contrast the performance context of Euripides' original production in Athens in 415 BCE with that of Kosky's version, performed starting in September 2008 at the Wharf Theatre by the Sydney Theatre Company. This contrast raises significant questions about Kosky's aims and achievements as a director, which I consider in conclusion.

Euripides' cry of angst against war was almost bound, sooner or later, to attract the attention and the talents of Barrie Kosky. Plotless, episodic, *The Trojan Women* is a sustained and intense outcry against the horrors which war inflicts upon women and children. *Troades* is arguably one of Euripides' finest plays, alongside *Bakchai* (a version of which Kosky incorporated into *The Lost Echo*), and *Medeia*.

But of course, being a classical text in regular patterns of Greek verse, it had to be Koskyized! As the first stage in their work, Kosky's collaborator Tom Wright prepared a version of the whole text, based on consultation with a number of existing translations. This was a version of the whole text, even though Kosky and Wright had already decided to cut Euripides' choral lyrics and replace them with songs of lamentation; in the actual production these were sourced from a wide variety of musical styles and genres, ranging from John Dowland to Slovenian folk song. Already in this first version the measured cadence of Euripides' iambics had been replaced by short sharp lines, and in the much shorter performance text the ideas and thoughts in the original Euripides can only be described as having been 'sexed up'—or, to be more precise, sexed up and violenced up, with the intensity considerably raised. I thought it would be worth looking at an example of this process in some detail, so here is Menelaus' first speech on entry in my own accurate version of the Greek, and in the Wright/Kosky version (there is in this passage only one change from Wright's first version); additions to Euripides are marked in bold.

Passage 1: a close rendering of the original Euripides by M. Ewans

MENELAUS
 860 Oh beautifully shining sun of this, the day
 on which I get my hands on her, my wife.
 I came to Troy, not as they think
 to get that woman, but to get the man who came and took
 (treacherous guest) my wife out of my home.
 Well, with the gods' help he has paid
 the penalty; his land has fallen to Greek spears.
 And I have come to take the Spartan woman (I can't speak
 870 her name with any joy)—my former wife;
 I know that she's here in the prisoners' quarters,
 counted along with all the other Trojan women.
 The men who won her by their labour with the spear
 gave her to me to kill, or if not to take
 her back to Argive soil.
 Well, I decided not to kill Helen
 in Troy, but to take her back by ship
 to Greece and there hand her over to die,
 the penalty for all the good men who perished at Troy.
 880 Servants, go into the house

and bring her—drag her by her bloodstained
hair; and when winds come that blow
our way, we'll send her back to Greece.

Passage 2: Wright/Kosky version (invented additions to Euripides in **bold**; alteration between first version and performed version in *italics*)

Feel that sun!
Some days you are glad you're alive!
I get my hands on her again
Helen
Still my wife
After all this
Still mine.
Everyone
Greek, Trojan
Man Woman
Living, dead
And probably those not yet born
Think I waged this war for her
To get back in those loins
But I didn't
I came here to get him.
The insinuating worm
The effete smarming boy
Who slept under my roof
Abused my hospitality
Stole my property. My wife.
He's paid
With his blood. The gods made sure.
Not just the man,
His people
That nation
Skewered on Greek spears. [*shredded by Greek blades.*]
Now, at last,
I claim my Helen—
I still can't say that name
Without feeling sick.
She's my property again
Bound and tied up
With a nice little tag
Just like all the rest of my prizes.
Men died—
My men—
To get her back.
So I can just dispatch her here
Quick slit of the neck-vein
In the blink of an eye
Or I can ship her back to Greece.
Yes, she'll be a moist little piece of cargo

Trussed up with a ribbon
Like a present
A gift to my poor people
They can watch her writhe in agony
 As I kill her there
 At home.
 Drag her out.
 Bring her out here.
 All that golden hair matted and caked in the blood of men.
 Soon as the winds change for the good
 We sail.

It is a fairly minor change to add one line to Menelaus' introductory words. Much more interesting is the rhetorical expansion on 'everyone' (in the original an anonymous 'they') who thought he waged this war just for Helen—

Greek, Trojan
Man Woman
Living, dead
And probably those not yet born

—the sort of exaggeration on which Kosky thrives. Thereafter the sexuality of the speech (almost non-existent in the original) is sharpened up:

[they] think I waged this war for her
To get back in those loins

And in the same vein Paris ('treacherous guest' in Euripides) becomes

The insinuating worm
The effete smarming boy

to convey the extent of the new contempt.

Kosky's production memorably uses the image of woman as commodity, literally packaged in cardboard boxes (see below), and this directorial vision is foreshadowed (presumably deliberately) in another expansion on the original Euripides:

She's my property again
Bound and tied up
With a nice little tag
Just like all the rest of my prizes
 Then comes graphic violence:
 So I can just dispatch her here
Quick slit of the neck-vein
In the blink of an eye.

Finally the themes of packaged woman, sex ('moist'), and violence are combined together in the last addition:

Or I can ship her back to Greece.
Yes, she'll be a moist little piece of cargo

Trussed up with a ribbon
Like a present
A gift to my poor people
They can watch her writhe in agony
 As I kill her there
 At home.

In these ways the text becomes a suitable vehicle for the production which Kosky created; it is clipped and elliptical compared to the relatively leisurely flow of Euripides' rhetoric, and it contains additions which emphasize three central themes of Kosky's production—sexuality, violence, and the commodification of women.

Similarly elsewhere:

MALE VOICE
 Cassandra was not a straw.
 Agamemnon had already chosen her.

HECUBA
 To be his wife's slave.

MALE VOICE
 No, to be his.
 His...
 Hole.

Euripides is not euphemistic about what function Cassandra will serve in Agamemnon's house ("the dark mating-rites of the bed", 252), but he is certainly not this direct. The Greeks preserved an absolute separation between tragedy, in which obscenity has no place, and comedy in which it was uninhibitedly displayed. Nor is his Cassandra, the special prize of the king, raped (as in Kosky) in a cupboard by a lowly guard and next seen with bloodstained panties.¹

One final example: Andromache on Helen. Euripides (or as close as I can get in English) first:

Child of Tyndareus, you are not Zeus' girl.
 I say you had many fathers—
 an avenging Fury, Jealousy,
 Slaughter and Death and all the evils earth brings forth.
 770 I'll never say Zeus was your father,
 you who killed so many Greeks and Trojans.
 Die! Your lovely eyes so shamelessly destroyed
 the famous plains of Troy.

Wright and Kosky render this (far more melodramatically than in the original, but in highly evocative, almost poetic language) as follows:

Helen
 Daughter of god
 So everyone calls you.
 But who are your real fathers?
Shit-stinking creatures of night

Whirlwinds of hate
The lust of blood in the mouth,
 Death himself—
 These fathered you.
 Zeus never fathered you
 You turned your whore eyelashes to us
 And death was smeared on our faces.

There is to no doubt that what Wright and Kosky have created, in this and a number of similar places in their script, is far more vivid and powerful than Euripides' original text. The third of the 'big three' Athenian dramatist simply lacks, at climactic moments like this, the immense verbal power of Aeschylus and Sophocles; their language is tighter and richer, and their imagery is far more intense.

This translation is, as Jason Blake rightly remarked in the *Sun Herald* review, 'brutally eloquent'.² And the brutality is almost all Wright and Kosky; see especially the extended, vivid and violent invention in Hecuba's description of the entry of the wooden horse and the sack of Troy in Scene 6, far more brutal—and poignant—than the chorus' lyric account in the original Euripides. Are modern audience sensibilities too scarred for the restraint with which Euripides portrayed, in my first example, Menelaus' hollow rhetoric, and his weakness? Or are there other reasons for the heightened levels of sex and violence in the Kosky/Wright performance version of the text? I shall return to this question after considering the production.

The set (by Alice Babidge, with input by Barrie Kosky) is a modern, indoor equivalent to the timeless, placeless nowhere in front of the captive women's tents which was Euripides' original setting. Filing cabinets, cupboards, lockers, and shelves occupy the entire rear wall of the stage, creating an oppressive effect even before the cupboards and lockers are used to torture the prisoners. Terrifyingly loud bursts of live gunfire are frequently heard from offstage, to supplement the violence which takes place onstage, and masked male functionaries cross the playing area seemingly at random, taking no notice of the female prisoners trapped there unless they have a reason to do so. The visual imagery of the show is all too familiar to western audiences from the exposure of practices at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay; the prisoners, who bear visible signs of having already been tortured, are hooded, forced to stand on boxes,³ and in a cruel touch they are even made to help their captors: as the hooded Hecuba is stripped of her crown and robes, she is made to hold the plastic bags into which her jewellery is placed as it is removed from her. She ends up clad only in a shift.

In all these ways the internal agony of the prisoners is externalised—a familiar expressionist move, of a kind which Kosky uses many times during the production. At the end of the play the chorus of three and Hecuba are all forced brutally into the lockers, after which the women of the chorus are summarily shot so that only Hecuba survives; in our overpopulated modern world, the victors have no need for a workforce of foreign female slaves, and so Euripides' original ending, in which the chorus depart sorrowfully for the Greek ships, would be inappropriate for Kosky's contemporary production.

Some scenes are stunning—in particular the gibbering madness of Cassandra, as portrayed by Melita Jurisic (who also plays Andromache and Helen—an inspired tripling of roles). All three of these royal ladies end up being packaged, sealed inside boxes (of different shapes) with an over-the-top amount of packing tape: woman literally as commodity. Other scenes are simply puzzling—why on earth is Menelaus, who in Greek mythology was still young enough at the end of the war to be seriously tempted by Helen's sexuality (he is not more than 40 years old, by any reasonable count) portrayed by Arthur Dignam as a grey-haired, impotent-looking old man in a wheelchair?

Kosky's *The Women of Troy* is overwhelmingly and murderously violent. (I especially liked the touch of

the torturer who crosses right to left empty-handed, and a moment later crosses left to right carrying a giant corkscrew. And there is the tableau of the totally bloodied corpse of Astyanax—of course, in his box). Does Kosky create effects like these simply because he can and because he wants to? Or was the extreme intensity of the production a sign of a certain despair about his ability to communicate effectively with the audiences which his work has attracted in Australia—audiences which he was soon to leave for a major post in Europe?

The venue was the largest stage in the Wharf Theatre of the Sydney Theatre Company, which bills itself as 'Australia's Premier Theatre Company'. So their productions ought to be in some sense central to Sydney's—and indeed Australia's—cultural life. But when we examine the STC audience they are, crucially, nothing like Euripides' audience, which comprised around 14,000 people—the majority of the adult male citizens of Athens, together (almost certainly) with women and children at the back.⁴ The ancient playwrights had, conferred on them by the festival, the right of *parrhesia*—the freedom to speak to their fellow-citizens and tell them what they wanted to about the issues which were currently affecting Athens. And this is what Euripides did. As Tom Wright correctly writes in his program note:

The year before *The Women of Troy* premiered, Athens had defeated the city of Melos [which had refused to join the Athenian alliance] and had controversially put the entire male population to the sword before enslaving every woman and child. In the audience for the first performance of the play would have been many members of that great democracy who had, less than twelve months earlier, lined up Melian men and slit their throats one after the other. The audience would have been littered with good citizens who had Melian women and children as slaves in their homes and businesses. None of this can have been far from the mind of anyone listening to Hecuba's descriptions of war, or its aftermath.

Euripides' play is a scathing critique of war, and of what we would now call human rights abuses, delivered directly to an audience which included many perpetrators—men who had committed the atrocities, and men who had voted for them. And he needed no onstage violence, no repeated loud offstage explosions, and no near-visible rape to make his point.⁵

At the STC, Kosky staged Euripides' drama for a very different audience, which is hardly representative of the population of Sydney, let alone of Australia as a whole. At the matinee which I attended, approximately 48% of the audience were schoolgirls from private secondary schools, and 48% were blue rinse old ladies. (The remaining 4% mainly comprised me and one of my students, together with a few elderly gentlemen). The church schoolgirls are (I presume and hope) wholly innocent of violence; and the North Shore and eastern suburbs old ladies have no complicity in modern warfare, unless you count having voted for John Howard and the Coalition as making those who did so complicit in Australia's small and token contribution to the war in Iraq. (Though this viewpoint is possible, it would be unfair, since Howard committed Australia to the so-called 'coalition of the willing' without a mandate from the electors.)

So why does Kosky inflict this undeniably powerful expressionist intensity on his audiences? Does he believe that after two World Wars, a thermonuclear Cold War, and innumerable smaller but no less dirty wars in the last 100 years (not to mention the violent, mostly American TV shows which dominate commercial television from the moment they are permitted to be screened, at 8:30 pm), the STC audience is so coarsened that violence needs to be presented on stage with the utmost intensity to awaken their jaded palates? Or is there a totally opposite reason for Kosky's practice—that modern western societies (especially Australia) are almost totally cosseted and shielded from real-life violence (it is possible to live a whole life here and never see a corpse), and deserve—perhaps even need—to be pulled as vigorously as possible out from our shelters of complacency? In discussion after the original delivery of this paper, Tom Wright claimed that Kosky considered neither of these alternatives, since his theatre pursues strategies that are deliberately illogical and beyond access to this kind of reasoning. But if a choice had to be made

then in Wright's view Kosky would most probably incline towards the second position. Euripides did not need to show overt violence on his stage: every man in his audience had fought for his city, and many of the women would have lain out and lamented the corpses of men who died in battle, and of women who died in childbirth. Perhaps Kosky sees modern life as simply too easy.

As Kosky's reputation mounts, and with his recent appointment as Intendant of the Komische Oper in Berlin, there is a danger that his role will be simply that of a (middle-aged) *enfant terrible*, hired, in a way characteristic of the contemporary German cultural scene, for his ability *épater le bourgeois*. He needs to proceed far more subtly than in *The Women of Troy*, if he is to succeed in staging complex modernist masterpieces like Janáček's *From the House of the Dead* and Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*. These two operas are ideal vehicles for Kosky's remarkable power as a director; but neither will give up its secrets if he only seeks to bludgeon his audience into subjection.⁶

footnotes

¹ In Euripides she had already been raped by the lesser Aias, as Athena states in the prologue, which Kosky and Wright cut.

² Jason Blake, 'Tragedy Pulls No Punches', *The Sun-Herald*, 28 September 2008, p. 21.

³ There is special pathos when little Astyanax valiantly stands on his own little box.

⁴ It is true that the presence of women has been much debated; but to my mind the question was settled in 1991 by J. Henderson, 'Women and the Athenian Dramatic Festivals', *TaPhA* 121, 133–47. Neither the anecdote in the *Life of Aeschylus* about the appearance of the Furies in *Eumenides*, nor the joke at Aristophanes *Peace* 962ff., make any sense if women were not present.

⁵ The nostalgic and escapist choral lyrics, which Kosky and Wright cut, make a poignant contrast in the original Euripides with the brutality of the dialogue scenes.

⁶ Remarkably, Kosky managed to direct Berg's *Wozzeck* for Opera Australia in 1999 with only one Grand Guignol excess. Marie did not have her throat cut with a knife, as in Berg and Büchner's text; instead *Wozzeck* wielded an axe!

“Toothless intellectuals,” “the misery of the poor,” “poetry after Auschwitz,” and the White, Middle-class Audience: the Moral Perils of Kosky and Wright’s *The Women of Troy*(or, how do we regard the pain of others?)

Marguerite Johnson

The University of Newcastle

In one of her meditations on the photographs of war in her 2002 article for *The New Yorker*, ‘Looking at War: Photography’s view of devastation and death,’ Susan Sontag refers to, by way of example, a picture of a World War I veteran “whose face has been shot away” (Sontag 2002, 89) and compares it to a work of fine art, Hendrick Goltzius’ etching entitled ‘The Dragon Devouring the Companions of Cadmus’ (1588). Sontag states that “One horror has its place in a complex subject—figures in a landscape—that displays the artist’s skill of eye and hand. The other is a camera’s record, from very near, of a real person’s unspeakably awful mutilation; that and nothing else” (Sontag 2002, 89). She comments that “there is shame as well as shock in looking at the closeup of real horror” (Sontag 2002, 89) and, further:

Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it—say, the surgeons at the military hospital where the photograph was taken—or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether we like it or not. (Sontag 2002, 89)

While the photograph of which she writes is not included in the essay, she provides several pointers to its identification: (i) she discusses conscientious objector, Ernst Friedrich, who included the photograph in his *Krieg dem Kriege* (*War Against War*, 1924), with the caption “Die ‘Badekur’ der Proleten: Fast das ganze Gesicht weggeschossen” (“The ‘health resort’ of the proletarian. Almost the whole face blown away”); (ii) she echoes part of Friedrich’s subtitle, “Almost the whole face blown away,” with “whose face has been shot away”; and (iii) she refers to “the military hospital where the photograph was taken” (Plate 1).¹

In the juxtaposition of photograph and etching (not included, but named), Sontag’s position regarding the power of photography over the “skill of eye and hand” is persuasively, and painfully, conveyed. The modern viewer gazes in wonder at Goltzius’ dying figure (Plate 2), head half-consumed and body struggling in a vainglorious attempt to stave off death,



Plate 5: Left to right: Chorus member (Queenie van de Zandt), Hecuba (Robyn Nevin), Cassandra (Melita Jurisic) from Kosky and Wright’s *The Women of Troy* (STC 2008). (Photo: ©Tracey Schramm)



Plate 1: “Die ‘Badekur’ der Proleten: Fast das ganze Gesicht weggeschossen” (“The ‘health resort’ of the proletarian: Almost the whole face blown away”) in *Krieg dem Kriege*, 217. (Photo: <http://www.zintzen.org/2007/09/08/shooting-war-casualties>)

but the same viewer gazes in shame—or, perhaps more so, in agonising, visceral empathy, at the photograph. It is the photograph that presents the ethical challenges inherent in *both* the acts of looking *and* turning away, (perchance) making a case for the latter being the lesser of the two evils. Such complexities associated with gazing at certain photographs, expressly war photographs, are further teased out by Sontag:

The first idea is that public attention is steered by the attention of the media...When there are photographs, a war becomes “real.” Thus, the protest against the Vietnam War was mobilized by images. ... The second idea ... is that in a world saturated, even hypersaturated, with images, those which should matter to us have a diminishing effect: we become callous. (Sontag 2002, 96)

We become callous, but we are also curious—voyeuristic—as the photography of misery and deformity compels us to gaze, to look and to look away, to open and to shut and to open again the proverbial shocking page in the proverbial book (the “ethical content of photographs is fragile,” Sontag 1977, 20–21).

Sontag’s contemplations on the photographic image, from her groundbreaking work, *On Photography* (1977), to her last monograph, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), clearly and intimately reflect her view of the world and her activism in particular. By living an intellectual life that regarded the pain of others, particularly those living with war, it is clear that Sontag’s controversial decision to direct Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo in 1993 was a manifestation of personal and political agendas, a response to a personal (and, naturally for Sontag as a writer, public) involvement in war and its photographic record. At the time of the staging, Sarajevo was under siege by Serb forces, the theatre was in ruins owing to previous mortar attacks, and the audience attended at its peril. Accordingly, the production represented a new paradigm concerning the role of, and moral imperatives associated with, the audience. On the one hand, Sontag’s production disallowed audience members to participate merely as audience members, merely as viewers, because of the dangers involved in attending the play. In a sense, then, she created a living war photograph in the guise of theatre and subsequently challenged the viewer to engage with the primeval empathy and shame associated with gazing at a photograph such as “The ‘health resort’ of the proletariat.” In this sense, it could be argued that through her philosophies on photography she (inadvertently?) reminded the theatrical world of the embedded reality of its craft and the enactment of it. Nevertheless, this Sarajevo sojourn was denigrated by various members of the western intellectual elite, including Jean Baudrillard:

She [Sontag] is ... fashionably emblematic of what has now become a widespread situation, in which harmless, powerless intellectuals trade their woes with the wretched, each supporting the



Plate 2: ‘The Dragon Devouring the Companions of Cadmus’ (line engraving, 25.1 x 31.5 cm) (Photo: <http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=48529;type=101.>)

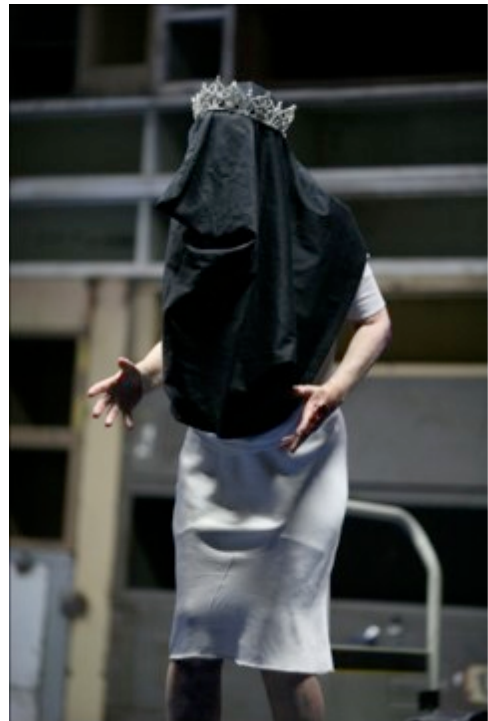


Plate 3a: Hecuba (Robyn Nevin) from Kosky and Wright’s *The Women of Troy* (STC 2008). (Photo: ©Tracey Schramm)

other in a kind of perverse contract ... (Baudrillard 47)

Baudrillard's statement is, of course, right. But it is also (and more so), clearly wrong. His truthfully casual comment on the "powerless intellectuals" is a beautifully unadorned statement of fact. It is also problematically unencumbered by the imperative to confront the mess of modern politics and ethics and the role of the arts therein.

It is Baudrillard's concept of "toothless intellectuals" (47) grappling with "the misery of the poor" (47), colliding with Sontag's questions concerning how to regard the pain of others and her efforts to do so, that form the major dialectic on which Barrie Kosky and Tom Wright's *The Women of Troy* is critically explored. Furthermore, Theodor Adorno's views on art after the Holocaust, it is suggested herein, can be seen to be in alignment with the views of Sontag under examination as both Kosky (in particular, in his role as director) and Wright draw on photography for realism or relevance while simultaneously acknowledging its limitations in a reverential nod to artistic integrity.

While Kosky and Wright do not nod to Sontag's philosophies on photography nor her version of *Waiting for Godot*, her experiences and the plethora of her opinions, so widely disseminated, underpin so much of contemporary art and political / cultural theory that they lend themselves to the following explication. This interpretive position is particularly tenable because of Kosky's decision as director to situate the tragedy within an Abu Ghraib setting, utilising the photographic record of American torture at the prison, a topic on which Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* has had widespread interpretive impact. As Louis Kaplan writes: "The book took on an even greater resonance in the spring of 2004 with the release of the Abu Ghraib torture photographs in Iraq and against the backdrop of revelations of the harsh treatment of prisoners (or so-called 'enemy combatants') in Guantanamo Bay" (unpaged). Kaplan further notes the importance of not underestimating "Sontag's influence in contemporary debates in post 9/11 visual culture regarding images of war and terror" (unpaged), citing "recent texts by important voices that have encountered (and countered) Sontag in scholarly journals," (unpaged) including Judith Butler, Karen Beckman, Manisha Basu, and Herta Wolf. Finally, Sontag's article, 'Regarding the Torture of Others,' published in *The New York Times* in 2004 is dedicated to the photographs in question.

The reconstruction of the imagery of Abu Ghraib by Kosky took Euripides' play to another level, a level of postmodern anxiety and relevance. The tragedy opened with the recreation or re-enactment of an Abu Ghraib photograph (Plate 3b) by presenting Hecuba as a modern Iraqi prisoner (Plate 3a). As she stood, or teetered, on her box, Kosky ensured the audience was 'breathless' with anticipation as the queen gradually 'came to life'—panting and panicking under her hood. Through Kosky's direction, she became a photograph that metamorphosed into a moving image; she was the newspaper 'shot' transformed on stage into television footage (that may disturb some viewers). Without prior audience knowledge of the direction the Sydney Theatre Company's staging would take, the familiar images of Abu Ghraib seemingly caused initial shock and then increasing unease in the minds of some audience members who



Plate 3b: Abu Ghraib photograph of Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh; originally published in *The New Yorker*, May 6th, 2004; taken on November 4th, 2003. (Photo: historycommons.org)



Plate 4: Left to right: Chorus member (Natalie Gamsu), Hecuba (Robyn Nevin), Chorus members (Jennifer Vuletic and Queenie van de Zandt) from Kosky and Wright's *The Women of Troy* (STC 2008). (Photo: ©Tracey Schramm)

were most likely replaying (like myself) the photographic documentation.² In a spectacle similar to, but (clearly) different from Sontag's *Waiting for Godot*, Kosky and Wright's audience was, in a way, transported through the artistry and trickery of theatre into the middle of the mess that Abu Ghraib came to signify in the collective consciousness of the west (whether one was repulsed by it or cheered it on).

It is not naive to posit that any piece of theatre that intends to contemporise, politicise, or otherwise a canonical text, such as Euripides' *Troades*, will inevitably run into obstacles and criticism. And despite the detractors of Sontag's 1993 production, her views on both photographic realism and political theatre had a resonance for me personally as a witness to *The Women of Troy*. They did so because, like photographic images of war, the production aimed to confront its audience with more than a safe simulacrum of "the pain of others" and, like a play staged *in situ* in the manner of *Waiting for Godot*, it captured the conjoint tension between art and life, creating "a perverse contract" as Baudrillard would have it. In this sense it captured an Euripidean authenticity by re-visioning yet remaining faithful to the original *Troades* as a work of art composed in the middle of the Peloponnesian War, a work produced one year after the Athenian capture of Melos—a military victory for the democratic state that involved the slaughter of the island's surviving men and the enslavement of its women and children. So too, as the propaganda machine of the United States proclaimed the supremacy of democracy over despotism, and paraded patriotism on home soil while its military power moved towards shaping yet another part of the world to its mould, its resemblance to Euripides' vision of both the Classical Athenians and the Mycenaean Greeks in his tragedy of 415 BCE was not lost on Kosky and Wright. In this sense, the production did more than present us with a work of art; it created and then occupied a place within a vertical hierarchy of representational reality or mimesis.

In order to further explicate the ethical issues involved in a piece of theatre such as *The Women of Troy*, particularly from the perspective of the audience, I have developed two hierarchies of representational reality/mimesis and located the production within each one. After the title 'Real Combat,' the cells descend in order to designate the degrees of mimesis. My first system of analysis ([Chart 1](#)) places photography and moving images in a privileged position in keeping with the tenets of Sontag, who writes: "By flying low, artistically speaking, such pictures are thought to be less manipulative" (Sontag 2003, 27). In an alternative system ([Chart 2](#)), I have moved the production to the position above photography,



Plate 6: Left to right: Chorus members: Jennifer Vuletic, Natalie Gamsu, and Queenie van de Zandt from Kosky and Wright's *The Women of Troy* (STC 2008). (Photo: ©Tracey Schramm)



Plate 7a: Left to right: Chorus members (Queenie van de Zandt, Natalie Gamsu and Jennifer Vuletic) and Hecuba (Robyn Nevin) from Kosky and Wright's *The Women of Troy* (STC 2008). (Photo: ©Tracey Schramm)

arguing that this work achieves authenticity by showing humanity and its degradation and humiliation in a far more powerful way than many photographs.

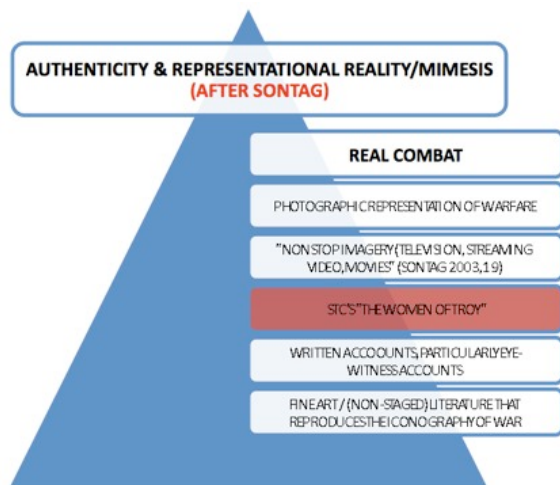


Chart 1: Authenticity & Representational Reality / Mimesis (After Sontag)

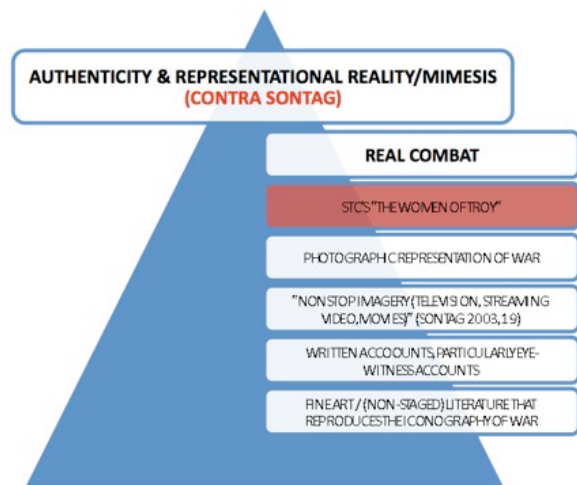


Chart 2: Authenticity & Representational Reality / Mimesis (Contra Sontag)

By adopting the second hierarchy, *The Women of Troy* (like Sontag’s *Godot*) can be interpreted as embodying “the pain of others” because, while it is art and thereby artifice, it confronts the audience with a visceral presence—humanity in pain in the form of people—close to you, the spectator—close enough to some to be smelt and observed perspiring. Yes, it is all make-up and smoke and mirrors—and no, the actors are not fainting through lack of food and sleep like Sontag’s cast, but the set, after all is radically different; the ideas may coalesce but the backdrop is not the same. Wendy S. Hesford, influenced by the tenets of trauma theory, writes of such “correspondence between the documentary spectacles of war and theatre” (Hesford 32), and the concept inherent in her phrase seems close to the uneasy, representational reality / mimesis evoked by Kosky and Wright. For example, while the audience is aware of their surroundings and the artificiality of the theatre, they also hear gun shots, see bodies rendered ugly and ravaged (see Plates 4, 5, 7a, and 7b), and see lifelike body fluids, namely blood and vomit, emit from wounded arms, legs, and the breaking of a hymen (as Wright’s script fulfils the threats of Cassandra’s defloration in the original text). Just as the world gazed at the dehumanised prisoners of Abu Ghraib, we gaze at the women of Troy. We, the audience, are the subjects observing these women, who through continual return to the photographic positions of the Abu Ghraib prisoners, are objectified by our gaze. However, their physical presence and proximity means the spectator cannot ignore their humanity.



Plate 7b: Left to right: Hecuba (Robyn Nevin) and Chorus member (Jennifer Vuletic) from Kosky and Wright’s *The Women of Troy* (STC 2008). (Photo: ©Tracey Schramm)

The stills from the production illustrate the way in which the mind or, more specifically, the memory can be stimulated into combining a previously established image with a new one that evokes the former by means of visual intertextuality. Images of the collective group, the women of Troy, show the boxes, the hoods, the cables and the dehumanisation of the photograph of the prisoner from Abu Ghraib whose covered face, ragged garment, outstretched arms, bare feet and wired hands shocked the world in 2004 (Plate 3b). The power inherent in the use of this photo graph emanates predominantly from its innate

ability to evoke a cultural intertextuality, a universal and collective history of the sites of suffering that Sontag was quick to detect in her comparison of the photographs from Abu Ghraib to American lynching pictures (Sontag 2004, 27).³ So too, Henry A. Giroux highlights the universality of suffering instigated by one's viewing of the Abu Ghraib photographs:

At one level, the image of the faceless, hooded detainee, arms outstretched and wired, conjured up images of the Spanish Inquisition, the French brutalization of Algerians and the slaughter of innocent people at My Lai during the Viet Nam war. (Giroux 4–5).

Via Euripides, Kosky and Wright add a much earlier history of human pain, recalling the Trojans and the Melians, whose sufferings at the hands of the collective Greeks and Athenians respectively, align the superpowers of antiquity to “the heavily damaged rhetoric of American democracy ... [giving way] to the more realistic discourse of empire, colonization, and militarization” (Giroux 5).

The combination of the materialisation of the visceral potential of theatre with the presence of war photography—photography that has been animated in a way, made to come alive—elevates *The Women of Troy* to this high position of reality (Chart 2). The ‘look’ of the production also generated a realism that afforded a prevailing sense of integrity: its showcasing of a sublime horror in the form of its mutilated, blood-smearred, raped and murdered heroines ensured that it achieved a more valid sense of the pain of others than a prettier rendition ever could. Perhaps one could contrast it to the visually beautiful film version by Michael Cacoyannis (1971) or the 2007 production by the National Theatre in London. But to negate the versions by Cacoyannis and the National Theatre is somewhat unfair—they are very pretty, yes—but, unlike the Sydney Theatre Company’s version, neither set out to overtly politicise the play or realistically address the pain of others, even though Euripides’ original play was highly political and empathetic.

In an essay entitled ‘An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society,’ Adorno states: “... to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric ...” (Adorno 1967; 1983, 34). Of course the dictum, so often quoted and blithely misunderstood, does not articulate an abandonment of the artistic process but acknowledges the inherent barbarism of its ongoing existence. In his observant critique of Adorno, Josh Cohen quotes Adorno’s related but often neglected pronouncement: “In its disproportion ... to the horror that has transpired and threatens, it [poetry / or, more generally, art] is condemned to cynicism; even where it directly faces the horror, it diverts attention from it.” (Cohen 64; Adorno 1970; 1997, 234).⁴ In creating literary or visual commentaries on extreme experiences the artist may well fail to effectively regard the pain of others—to the extent of mishandling trauma and/or diverting attention from it, as Cohen conjectures. And indeed, such mediums risk the erasure of reality: there is no real battlefield, no real mutilated or dead bodies, there is no photographic documentation of such, and unless the art is placed *in situ*, there is the risk of contextual absence. In relation to the Sydney Theatre Company’s production, part of the realism or authenticity of the play is its conflation of theatricality and photographic imagery.

Kosky and Wright’s women are no cherub-like companions of Cadmus being voluptuously gorged on by a whiskered, albeit taloned, dragon. And it is in the light of these ideas concerning the production that Adorno and Sontag’s theories may also be aligned to further disentangle what Kosky and Wright were aiming at, namely to draw on the power of the war photograph, but to subvert and to subject it to an almost pop-culture and /or queer art status, and to accept, even celebrate, its “necessary failure” (Cohen 64).⁵ Mimesis is about “necessary failure,” and I note in relation to this the pop-culture and, in particular, the queer art status of the production in acknowledgement of the construct of mimesis and failure. Indeed the production deliberately lacked an earnest verisimilitude, which some audience members may have found alienating, but in so doing it paid honest deference to the interplay between truth and illusion / reality and mimesis that furnished a (possibly unintentional) footnote to Adorno’s explicit dilemmas concerning poetry after Auschwitz. This is another reason for situating the production at the top of the

scale in Chart 2, for it was the impression of self-conscious direction concerning the disjuncture and nexus between truth and illusion that resulted in a mimetic production with so much force. We can never, as Adorno makes explicit, reproduce true and moral art after Auschwitz, but we can be reminded of its horror through art that is self-reflexive. This line of argument in relation to the production may also service a specific interpretation of a specific or discreet component of *The Women of Troy*, namely Kosky's collaboration with costume designer Alice Babidge and actor Jennifer Vuletic, whose shaved head, costume and make-up remind us of the prisoners-of-war of the Nazi regime (Plates [7a](#) and [7b](#)).

John McCallum, in his public address, 'Putting It Back Together and Getting It on the Road: Australian Theatre in the 21st Century' (Philip Parsons Memorial Lecture, 2010), discusses the effects of the complex mimesis of Kosky's vision, noting especially its emotional and cathartic effects:

Barrie Kosky's production of Euripides' *The Women of Troy* at the STC in 2008 was one of the most harrowing nights in the theatre that I have ever spent. It was too harrowing for many—some people I love and respect refused to see it and there were apparently many walkouts every night. We're talking about a show with no interval, so walking out is a big statement. ... And so here is another point, for all the theatre-makers here. If you challenge and confront your audience in the visceral space of live theatre, if you refuse to pander to their desire to be merely entertained, then some won't come, and some will walk out, but some—*the ones you want*—will be changed forever. (unpaged).

McCallum's response to the play reflects the hierarchy suggested in Chart 2, which privileges the production partly because of its power to cause an audience member—in this case McCallum himself—to "feel it first in your nerves, bones and flesh" (unpaged). To be well and truly "theatre fucked" as McCallum puts it, the audience must be implicated in the action, and this is what I experienced as I entered the arena of Kosky and experienced the mimesis he engineered. The likely possibility of the angst-ridden effects on the audience (after all, it is Kosky) do not concern McCallum—

If you don't like it then visit the 'uplifting' museum theatre of clever Pulitzer Prize-winning lounge-room comedies about people having trouble with their relationships; sit bereft at home on a Saturday night lamenting the passing of *The Bill*; get a Gold Ticket to Hoyts and sink into a plush chair with the 3D glasses and the popcorn; or float down in merry laughter, as the great transgressive American comedian Bill Hicks said just before he died, onto the comfy soft scrotum cushion of Dick-Joke Island. (unpaged).⁶

—for surely they are mandatory for audience purging and self-realisation.

As previously noted, Baudrillard, among others, have criticised Sontag in Sarajevo. Likewise, Friedrich was criticised for his *War on War*, and Kosky is a recurrent whipping-boy of the conservative scribe (see Connor, whose anxious review of *The Women of Troy* includes a statement reminiscent of Baudrillard on Sontag: "Kosky plays for educated philistines who, with babbling and erudite appreciation, applaud the maiming of beauty," 69).⁷ In his essay devoted to Sontag's production, Baudrillard—who would no doubt have hated Kosky's work, too—deliberates further on her motivations, specifically in relation to the western reformulation of reality in artistic mediums:

Our reality: that is the problem. We only have one reality, and it has to be rescued. And rescued even with the worst of slogans: 'We have to do something. We can't just do nothing.' But doing something just because you cannot not do it has never amounted to a principle of action or freedom. Merely a form of absolution from your own importance and compassion for your own fate. (Baudrillard 48)

By the term "our reality," Baudrillard, in addition to an obvious reference to his theory of the

simulacrum, alludes to the concept of victimhood—the star motif of the new world order in the west—or, more precisely, victimhood and its companion, suffering. In this one statement, Baudrillard negates any relevance of a hierarchy of reality in the arts that springs from a monstrous event—in this instance, combat. Sontag responded: “Baudrillard is a political idiot. Maybe a moral idiot too. ... I don’t think I would call him nihilistic, I think he’s ignorant and cynical” (Sontag speaking with Chan, unpagged).

Baudrillard’s stance and Sontag’s response raise critical issues in relation to how or where an audience is situated ethically and even extends to who should be allowed to be in the audience. Baudrillard further states that “[w]hen fighting against anything whatever, we have to start out from the evil to be combated, never from the misfortune produced” (Baudrillard 48), but if the victims of war engendered empathy in Euripides’ *Troades* 2400 years ago and the photographs of Abu Ghraib turned the eyes of the world to the citizens of Iraq, clearly there is a morally-charged symbiotic relationship between subject (spectator) and object (performers) that Baudrillard has missed in this instance. Baudrillard would perhaps view the strained positioning between reality, photography, and theatre in *The Women of Troy* as an example of western fascination with grief, suffering, and victimhood—a glib performance of pain without an examination of the evil that caused it. He would perhaps deny cathartic knowledge in this theatrical instance if not *in toto*.

The Sydney Theatre Company’s production of *The Women of Troy* links the play and these images, thereby evoking a multilayered and intertextual response to the piece that resonates during and long after the performance. But, have we learned anything from the experience as Sontag advises we should if we are to be deemed worthy viewers of graphic images? I would argue yes. The visceral nature of the production, its links to a real-life situation and its photographic documentation, its evocation of a reality within an environment of mimesis are all in keeping with tragedy’s moral imperative to educate the audience, to enlarge sensibilities, to remind us of our humanity, to take us from the position of voyeur to “moral witness” (Hesford 32),⁸ to provoke catharsis.

Sontag knew of such things. Kosky plays with them. Adorno is still subject to misunderstanding. And Baudrillard watched Sarajevo from his lounge-room.

footnotes

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²This was particularly so on opening night, the first time I saw the production, when reviews, of course, had yet to be published.

³A comparison also made by other commentators; see, for example, Apel, Delevante, and Hesford.

⁴Interestingly, Adorno, in his formulation of the new means by which to regard the Holocaust, regarded the plays of Beckett as possessing more truthfulness than any other work of art; see Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (especially: “Today the primacy of the object and aesthetic realism are almost absolutely opposed to each other, and indeed when measured by the standard of realism: Beckett is more realistic than the socialist realists who counterfeit reality by their very principle,” 406); also *Negative Dialectics* (380–381); see also Harding.

⁵See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 2.

⁶See also McCallum and Hillard: “The visceral shock that this creates in the theatre is not an Aristotelian

catharsis of pity and terror but more a Meyerholdian, even Artaudian, catharsis of psychic trauma and bodily emissions, provoking a kind of horrified ecstasy” (132).

⁷See also McQueen–Thomson on Kosky’s direction of the Bell Shakespeare Company’s 1998 production of *King Lear*. Among the criticisms, which tend to become personal in relation to Kosky, McQueen–Thomson writes: “This cult of the individual over the work makes for easy media publicity, but militates against genuine discussion of cultural substance in theatre, music, literature and other similar fields. It also validates and encourages the public narcissism and self-display of Kosky and his kind” (15).

⁸Hesford uses this phrase in relation to “the use of the camera as an instrument of dominance and the use of the camera as moral witness” (32).

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Masks in the Oxford Greek Play 2008: Theory and Practice

Claire Catenaccio
Columbia University

The sight of the masked figure, as a purely aesthetic experience, carries us beyond 'ordinary life' into a world where something other than daylight reigns; it carries us back to the world of the savage, the child and the poet, which is the world of play.

—Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*

I. Theory

The use of masks in Ancient Greek tragedy was as integral to the performance as was the use of music, dance, choral commentary, and, indeed, poetry. All of these elements are, of course, alien to mainstream modern tragedy—to apply the word “tragedy” loosely to a different thing—and have been for the past century and a half. In deference to contemporary tastes, most performances of Greek tragedy today abandon the original media of performance, focusing instead on the modern essentials of plot, theme, and character. Yet Greek tragedy in an approximation of its original form can still impress us with something of its original force, notwithstanding the gulf in time and mores that separates a contemporary Western audience from the auditors of Aeschylus. In order to begin to understand and appreciate Greek drama under the performance conditions of the fifth century B.C., actors and audience must grapple with the unfamiliar theatrical modes that developed *pari passu* with the tragic genre, especially the use of the mask.

Unfortunately, we know much less about the use of mask, music, and dance than about ancient poetry. In consequence, reconstructing their use in relation to the texts presents us with technical challenges. Such challenges can only be resolved in practice: authority and logic must always yield to the plain proof of experiment.

In recent years, there has been an increasing tendency to recognize the unique point of entry presented by live performance. Scholarship and art can come together to enhance our understanding of the necessary union of form and meaning in Greek drama.¹ In what follows, I shall be concerned with my own attempt at a union of scholarship and practice: the masked staging, under my direction, of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in the original Ancient Greek by members of Oxford University in October, 2008. Before discussing the design and implementation of our masks, however, I shall briefly consider some of the scholars and performers whose work shaped our approach.

Many explanations have been put forward for the Greeks' use of masks, ranging from the ritualistic to the extremely practical. Practical concerns certainly played a part: masks provided clear, visual cues about



Figure 2: Cassandra Jackson with the mask of Clytemnestra. (Photo: Henry Uniacke)



Figure 1: Sketch for the mask of Clytemnestra. (Drawing: Helen Damon)

character in a vast outdoor performance space, and allowed the playwright to create a multiplicity of *dramatis personae* from a small, set number of actors. C. W. Marshall has argued that the essential information conveyed by the tragic mask was age and gender, and that the visual cues that signaled these differences were simple and standardized.² Scott Scullion has taken an even more extreme position, rejecting entirely the influence of Dionysus and cult practice. He declares that the obvious and sufficient reason for the use of masks in Greek drama is “that they help performers look less like themselves and more like the characters they are representing.”³

If we accept these pragmatic remarks as a full answer to the question of why the Greeks used masks, we find that the conditions of theatre have changed significantly enough to render these props obsolete. Intimate indoor venues have replaced large outdoor theaters; powerful lights illuminate the faces of actors onstage; makeup can convincingly make a young man appear old. We no longer subscribe to the convention of using only three actors in any given play, nor are we obliged for social and historical reasons to use only male actors. Technology has made it possible to create plays that are rather like movies, unfolding with smooth verisimilitude before our eyes. As one professor said to me, if the Greeks had had access to these same powerful theatrical tricks, would they have used masks in the first place?

These practical observations do not address the fundamental issue of how the art of masked drama worked as a coherent whole. As in any powerful art form, every element in masked tragedy must respond to every other element: none is independent or inconsequential. In this light, seeing Greek drama played unmasked is like reading Greek drama in a book, or like looking at a bleached marble bust of Aphrodite: we encounter a marvelous fragment, a once-essential element plucked out of its context by the historical accidents of textual survival. But tragedy without masks it is not what the Greeks made or experienced. Mask stands at the center of Greek tragedy. Nonetheless, my goal in directing this performance as masked was not a reproduction of the Hellenic original, but rather a reinterpretation or reappropriation.

Moving beyond the purely practical, Jean-Pierre Vernant in 1968 argued from a structuralist position that the role of the tragic mask is principally “an aesthetic one.”⁴ The Greeks were no doubt conscious of the role of beauty in their plays. Vernant’s chief interest is to distinguish aesthetic concerns from religious and ritual ones—that is, to prove that the contained experience of theatre, which the audience knows to be make-believe, partakes of the mask in a different way from the transformative, enthusiastic cults of Demeter and Dionysus. But the aesthetic importance of masks in Greek tragedy



Figure 3: Guy Westwood as Aegisthus (Photo: Henry Uniacke)



Figure 4: Emma Pearce as Cassandra. (Photo: Henry Uniacke)

bridges the divide between theatre and ritual, both of which rely on the power provided by the fixed expression, simplified features, and unblinking gaze of the mask. The mask, released from the individuality and particularity of the human face, enables the performer or celebrant to transcend ordinary reality. He can become a man, a god, a monster—in theatre, as in religion, the aesthetic properties of the mask are of supreme importance. This became increasingly clear to me during the design and rehearsal phases of our production.

Perhaps the most sophisticated study of the mask to be published in recent years was carried out by David Wiles, who approaches the subject from the standpoint both of a performer and of a scholar. Wiles's own reverence for the mask leads him naturally into the realm of religion. He argues that the Greek mask belonged to a polytheistic culture, and that its use presupposed "propositions or experiential truths" alien to monotheism.⁵ Because the social and psychological underpinnings of the ancient Greeks were so different from our own, Wiles concludes that no sharp distinction can be made between the theatre mask and the mask of the cult of Dionysus.⁶ The primary function of the tragic mask, according to Wiles, is not to seal and fix a character type, but "to transform a wearer, and to take power over an audience within the context of a culture where the aesthetic domain did not separate itself off from the religious."⁷ "Taking power over an audience" today, without invoking people's contemporary religious beliefs, requires tapping into an undying awe and fear before the strange and the monstrous.

The challenge of the stage is to wed ideas and inspirations to their concrete realization. Despite the centrality and importance of the mask in Greek theatre, surprisingly few productions have attempted their use. Two of the most important are those of Sir Peter Hall in 1981 and Ariane Mnouchkine in 1990-1992. Although more recent productions have also engaged with the mask, these two have proven especially influential; and, as will become apparent below, the design of Hall's masks was our point of departure in imagining the masks of *Agamemnon*. The mask reclaimed popular attention on the British stage with Hall's *Oresteia*, which debuted at the National Theatre in London in 1981 and traveled to Delphi in the summer of 1982.⁸ Jocelyn Herbert, who designed the masks for the production, created sculptural, almost geometrical masks, painted mostly in monochrome.⁹ After the tremendous critical success of the *Oresteia*, Hall developed his theory of the mask in *The Oedipus Plays* (London, 1996) and *Bacchae* (London, 2002), collaborating again with Herbert. Perhaps inspired by the popular reaction to Hall's work, the French director Ariane Mnouchkine's production of *Les Atrides* (performed in various locations around



Figure 5: *The mask of the Watchman* (Photo: Henry Uniacke)



Figure 6: *The Chorus of Agamemnon*. (Photo: Henry Uniacke)



Figure 7: *The masks of Agamemnon*. (Photo: Henry Uniacke)

the world from 1990-1992) drew on the Kathkali theatre traditions of India. Kathkali relies on heavily stylized makeup masks, that is, thick, colorful layers of makeup which completely disguise the face of the actor and create an alternative set of features and expressions. Like the helmet masks of Peter Hall's plays, the makeup masks of *Les Atrides* served to shock the audience out of their learned habits of viewing and forced them to engage with the play in an unfamiliar way.

The productions of Hall and Mnouchkine demonstrate that Greek tragedy can retain much of its original power, even when presented today, in a culture of significantly different structures and assumptions. Aspects of an alien theatrical tradition will require some efforts at translation on the part of both performer and audience, and, on the part of the director, a solution of a number of technical problems, such as speech, movement, dramatic interaction, and character expression, which I will address below.

In the wake of innovative practitioners, live performance has come to be seen as a viable way of understanding the function and meaning of masks. Gregory McCart, an actor, director, and playwright at the University of Southern Queensland, has tested certain hypotheses about theatrical performance in Ancient Greece through rehearsal and experimentation. McCart urges us, "like the actors of old," to don masks and "learn from the experience of performing in them something about their use and significance in ancient theatres."¹⁰ Through a series of workshops (The Theatre of Dionysos research project, 1993-94, The Oedipus the King project, 1995-96, The Medea Project, 1997, The Thesmophoriazousai Project, 1997 and the Bakchai project, 1999-2000) McCart has explored both the inherent properties of the mask—acoustic and visual—and the larger effect of masks on actors and audience. At the sensory level, McCart noted an increased respect for what Aristotle calls *opsis*, the visual aspects of theatre. His workshops resulted in "a dance-like style of performance governed by mask and space" and "a remarkably athletic interaction between masked protagonists and chorus."¹¹

McCart emphasizes the initial difficulties experienced by actors thrust into an unfamiliar practice: "when actors who are not accustomed to the mask[s] put them on, they suffer disorientation and restriction. They forget lines they have learned. They do not know what to do with their hands . . . To the observer it appears that their bodies are too small for the mask; they look, comically enough, like walking tadpoles."¹² McCart goes on to relate that this awkwardness soon gave way to a greater understanding and to the incorporation of a vocabulary of gesture—what the Greeks called *cheironomia*, "gesticulation." In fact, J. R. Green has suggested that formalized, mimetic gestures probably accompanied speech in ancient performance, underscoring important ideas, phrases, or words in the text.¹³ McCart's remarks on the central role of dance and gesture influenced the way in which the masks of my *Agamemnon* were designed and integrated into the production.

II. Practice: Concept and Design

As part of a tradition dating back to 1880, every third autumn the Oxford Classical Drama Society produces a play in Ancient Greek. Planning and rehearsing for *Agamemnon* took the better part of a year. In November, 2007 I presented the idea of a masked production of *Agamemnon* to a board of students and professors, and in December I was chosen to serve as director of the project. My initial proposal described masks as central to my conception of the play, which I imagined would be symbolic and highly stylized. The idea of using masks was met with hesitation from the members of the board, and from our faculty supervisor, Oliver Taplin, who thought the practical and technical challenges of working with the unfamiliar medium might prove insurmountable.

Nonetheless, seeing that I was determined to pursue the matter, Professor Taplin put me in contact with two designers: Helen Damon, an assistant at the Archive for Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (AGPRD) at Oxford, and Vicki Hallam, a theater and film designer in London. Damon, a former student of Taplin, wrote her undergraduate thesis on the function of the tragic mask in 5th-century theatre and

has worked on numerous productions as a costume, hair, and make-up designer. Hallam has been an active designer in masked productions of Greek tragedy for the past thirty years and served as an assistant to designer Jocelyn Herbert when Peter Hall's production of the *Oresteia* traveled to Epidauros in the summer of 1982. After an initial meeting, we arranged that Damon would prepare detailed sketches of the masks, which Hallam would then render as objects.

Over the course of several weeks, Damon and I discussed how we wanted the masks to function in the play. We imagined that our use of masks, like our use of music and dance, would celebrate the spirit of the ancient story. (It was of course impossible to reconstruct the original modes of performance.) The formality and discipline of masked acting, we hoped, would force our actors to focus their attention on performing the literal meaning of the text. Finally, the masks were intended to effect a transition from the familiar theater of facial acting and usher the audience into a strange, formalized world of symbolism and metaphor.

From the early stages of the design process, Damon and I agreed the masks should be representations of the human face with enhanced features, particularly eyes and mouths. Unlike the original masks of Greek tragedy, we imagined that each mask would be tied very strongly to a particular character, capturing essential aspects of attitude and behavior. The masks, then, would support the audience's understanding of the action, and the unfamiliar spoken Ancient Greek, by giving them a visual lexicon of the various personalities of the play.

Damon was particularly interested in the relationship between performer and mask. She designed the masks in the hope of mitigating the initial stage of "disorientation and restriction" for the actor described by Wiles and McCart. Especially for those actors who had never before worked with masks, the challenge was to forge a three-way bond between the performer, the character, and the mask. The masks were to be seen as a means to transform, not a means to disguise; without the mask, there was no character.

To this end, we began with the face of the actor. The cast was in place by late spring, and consisted of graduate and undergraduate members of Oxford University. We chose our performers on the basis of three specific skill sets: classicists and actors for the six speaking roles, singers from the various college choirs for one hemichorus, and dancers from the University dance group for the other hemichorus. The choral function was split to maximize the technical expertise of the performers, so that the six male singers remained mostly stationary during the odes while the six female dancers enacted their words with movement.

The design process began with a series of meetings where Damon and I discussed the central traits of each character. We then met with each of the six speaking actors: the Watchman, Clytemnestra, the Herald, Agamemnon, Cassandra, Aegisthus, and the chorus leader. Damon created "mood boards" for each mask, with images of the actor's face juxtaposed with photographs of historical figures, sculptures, animals, and fictional characters. Thinking of the masks as somewhere between real people and symbolic objects, Damon isolated certain features of shape and coloration in each actor's face. For instance, Cassandra Jackson, the actress playing Clytemnestra, has fair skin, pale blond hair, blue eyes, and somewhat angular features. Next, we thought about aspects of character that we wanted the mask to convey. The text emphasizes Clytemnestra's strength, resourcefulness, and androgyny—she is the woman who thinks and acts like a man. Damon then created a sketch that combined the facial structure of the actress with the strength and cruelty of the character (Fig. 1). The finished piece resembles the actor, but key features are exaggerated and carry the potential for stark symbolism (Fig. 2).

From Damon's sketch and measurements of the actor's face, Hallam shaped a mold in clay. She then made a plaster cast of the mold, which she lined with layers of brown paper and a mixture of wallpaper

paste and PVA glue to make papier maché masks. She then returned the paper masks to Damon, who painted them in acrylics. Hallam also constructed felt headpieces, which Damon sewed to the back of the masks in order to cover the actors' heads completely. Hair was made from treated yarn in various colors, which was stiffened and styled with cornstarch. When worn, the color of the mask matches the skin tone of the actor to create the illusion of a seamless line from head to shoulders (Fig. 3).

The masks were created as a set, with internal similarities and oppositions. This required seeing the actors as physiologically true to their characters – not by virtue of typecasting, but by virtue of imagination. The masks were designed as a stylization of the actors' faces in the direction of the character. For example, the relationship between the play's two female characters is reinforced by the contrast between their masks. Damon painted Clytemnestra's mask in cool blue and white tones, with a red mouth; its lines are angular, and the hair is pulled back from the face and elaborately arranged. By contrast, Cassandra's mask is painted in warm tones, with rounded features and loose, reddish-brown curls (Fig. 4).

All of our masks also emphasize the role of the eyes. Unlike the masks of Hall's *Oresteia*, which have almond-shaped holes in place of eyes,¹⁴ we agreed on brightly painted irises that would recall the inlaid eyes of ancient statues or the painted eyes of tragic masks, with only a small crescent cut around the pupil for visibility. In the finished masks, the eyes often provide a clue to aspects of character: the mask for the Watchman, for instance, has blue eyes that stand out from his weather-beaten and browned face in order to emphasize his vigilance and his hope that all may yet turn out well when his master returns (Fig. 5). Clytemnestra, too, is marked by her decade-long wait for her husband's return, and her "icy" and "steely" resolve is visible in the eyes of her mask. Cassandra's role as a prophet emphasizes her "second sight," which allows her to see the interpenetration between human action and divine causality that remains hidden for the other characters; Damon accordingly gave her round hazel eyes under raised eyebrows, as if in permanent wide-eyed shock at the visions she is doomed to see but can never communicate to others. Paradoxically, it was this very gaze that communicated what she was seeing to the audience.

The actors saw sketches and photographs of their masks at every stage of the process, and they accepted the finished products as intimately tied to the characters. Damon met with each actor for an individual fitting, and it was in this personal, even intimate setting that the actors were first "introduced" to their masks. I asked all actors to provide special boxes, lined with cloth, in which to store their masks, and I encouraged them to keep the masks with them between rehearsals. The actors' responses to the masks were by no means without ambivalence; at times, the stylization began to intrude upon the actor's identity. Cassandra Jackson, our Clytemnestra, took to wearing her hair offstage in the same style as her mask. Guy Westwood, the actor playing Aegisthus, was initially upset that his mask had such chubby cheeks, which he said made him look weak and effeminate; over the course of the rehearsal process, he made this weakness an essential part of his portrayal of the character.

The masks of the two hemichoruses were designed separately from the masks of the actors. Because the chorus in Aeschylus' text consists of old men, it was not feasible to base the masks on the features of the twelve young choristers. Considerations of cost prevented us from casting twelve individual masks, and we decided instead to cast all of the male masks from one mold and all of the female masks from another, and to adjust for individual head size with inserted pieces of foam (Fig. 6). There were benefits and drawbacks to this solution. The homogeneity of the masks helped to unify the chorus visually on the stage, but also prevented the actors from developing a strong personal attachment to their individual masks. During breaks in rehearsal, for instance, the speaking actors would always place their masks carefully in their lined boxes; the singers and dancers, by contrast, often wore their masks loosely slung around their necks, or held them casually by their elastic straps.¹⁵

III. Practice: Rehearsal and Performance

When we began to work on specific scenes in rehearsal, we reinforced the importance of the mask at every stage. An actor and I would talk through a block of text together, making sure we understood every word of the Greek and blocking out major shifts in tone and argument. When that particular piece of text was memorized, the actor would put on his or her mask, always facing away from the audience to effect the transition, and then recite the speech. Notes and discussion were withheld until the actor had removed the mask, again facing away from the viewer. I never addressed the character in mask, only the unmasked actor. In this way the work done in bare face was a rough and preliminary sketch of the scene, which was never “performed” without the mask. The actors were encouraged to treat the masks not as props, but as quasi-magical objects that bridged the gap between rehearsing a text and actually becoming a character. I asked each actor, more or less explicitly, to create and define a special relationship with his mask, whereby the mask was actually approached as if it were animate. To me the process was analogous to children in a game endowing their playthings with motive and will, intuitively and through imagination. My hope was that in putting on a mask, the actor would partly merge with the character that he had allowed the mask to become.

Musical rehearsals were led by our choral director, Oliver Hamilton, and dance rehearsals were led by our choreographer, Jessica Bland. All twelve members of the chorus had to adapt their familiar performance style to the challenges and limitations of the mask. Early in the design process, Damon and I had decided that the chorus would wear three-quarter masks, with upper lips but no chins, for reasons of cost and audibility. When we began rehearsals, the singers found that the molded papier maché upper lips of the mask changed the quality of sound as it emerged, and that it was more difficult to come in on the right pitch with their ears covered by fabric cowls. After several experiments, we decided to cut away the lips of the mask entirely, leaving the lower cheeks intact. This freed the singers’ voices considerably. The resulting masks looked at times alive, yet uncanny, because of the way in which the mouths moved while the other features remained stationary. The chorus masks as a set were less wrought than the character masks. This difference was originally motivated by economy, but the plainer masks proved in fact desirable, because in the odes I wanted the audience’s attention to be drawn to the whole figure of the dancer rather than primarily to the face.

Our dancers had perhaps the greatest adjustments to make. Bland, our choreographer, had planned several of the choral odes before returning to Oxford in September. Trained in the school of Martha Graham, Bland created complex, intensely balletic dances that often required the six dancers to be perfectly synchronized. The many leaps and turns proved very difficult to execute in masks, which limited peripheral vision, affecting the performers’ balance and ability to pick up cues from one another. After weeks of rehearsing, Bland and the dancers decided to simplify some of longer sequences and to change several group dances into solos in which the individual dancer could respond to the rhythm of the music without worrying about the movements of her fellow dancers. Thus the demands of the masks shaped the dances towards simplicity, teaching us that the mask functioned in counterpoise to other elements and at times had to be deemphasized in order for dance to move to the front plane.

Although all of the actors were excited at the idea of using masks, the first few weeks of rehearsal were exhausting. After the play closed, I asked the performers to reflect on the experience of working with masks, and many of them recalled the difficulties of this early period. Andrew Freedman, who played the Chorus Leader, later wrote to me, “Working with masks initially was a huge challenge. It seemed an unnecessary burden. At the start, it was cumbersome: it got very hot and I kept on hearing myself echo. On the stage itself, the nervous energy, the lights and the heat of the mask were initially uncomfortable.” Once he became more used to the mask, however, he was able to tap into its dramatic power: “By depersonalizing me, the mask personalized the character. My voice and actions were not mine, but I felt, thought, and believed that I was the Chorus Leader when I was on stage. Although my vision was at

times blinkered, I did not see fellow actors' faces, just masks—I saw the manifestations of their character.”

Kassandra Jackson, the actress who portrayed Clytemnestra, recalled a similar transition in her relationship to the mask: “When I was first becoming acquainted with my mask, I spent most of my time in front of the mirror.¹⁶ I had been told that the mask looked like me, that it would soon feel like a natural extension of my body, but in those early days, I was unconvinced. I was claustrophobic behind the layers of paper and pigment; my head seemed too big and every ‘natural’ gesture I made was amplified into something strange and almost grotesque. Monologues that I knew cold would vanish from my head once I put the mask on, my brain too distracted by the pressure of it on my face and my restricted visual field. At a certain point, however, it was like I passed through the looking glass and everything reversed. I no longer felt comfortable *without* my mask. The character of Clytemnestra did not reside in my body alone. It was the symbiosis of my body and the masked head that evoked her presence, with the result that if I forgot to bring my mask to rehearsal, I felt naked and diminished. Sometimes, if I caught a glimpse of myself in a mirror unmasked, I wouldn’t quite recognize myself. My head motions also began to change even outside of the theatre. Since the mask would magnify my every movement, I had to adopt a minimalist, rather stylized, gestural vocabulary from the neck up so as not to spoil the mask’s illusion.”

Both Freedman and Jackson were experienced actors, with a repertoire of techniques that had to be unlearned. Oliver Hamilton, who directed the chorus singers as well as taking one of the countertenor parts, commented that for a performer who had little experience with acting (although a great deal with singing in front of an audience), “I found the masks incredibly liberating, and found it much easier to adopt a new character. If I’d been recognizable I don’t think I’d have taken as many musical risks.”

The masks of *Agamemnon* were designed with modern performers and a modern audience in mind, and as such are very different from their ancient counterparts. The challenges facing actors, dancers, and singers who want to work with masks today are difficult, but by no means insurmountable. Our work suggests that if masks are integrated into the rehearsal process from an early stage, even actors who have had no formal physical training will be able to master the technique. This mastery is greatly facilitated by the development of an animating relationship between actor and mask, which the director can foster by providing a conceptual framework of imaginative interaction, as well as through specific rehearsal practices (e.g., never addressing the character in mask, allowing only the actor to wear the mask). The demands of masked acting led us to adopt a gestural, frontal style of performance. The actors and I reached this conclusion through experiment and through watching other actors; group sessions were especially productive in this regard. For our dancers, the practical challenges were at least as great, and radical simplification was required. Some choreography—many pirouettes in a row, canons—proved impossible.

The primary aim of the masks of our *Agamemnon* was to specify and define the bonds between actor and character and between character and audience. The character was defined through the interaction between actor and mask, a symbiosis without which no drama could be created. We wanted the audience to see neither the actor nor the mask, only the character composed of the two. Because the characters did not look naturalistically human, they appeared, in the rehearsal room and onstage, to be both less and more than human: their limited repertoire of movements and expressions took on a symbolic, mythical significance. By using masks, actors of varying degrees of experience and expressive gift were able to enter imaginatively into the cosmic cycle of crime and punishment narrated in the *Agamemnon*. The masks allowed us to transcend our particular historical moment and to refer the story to a higher plane of meaning and metaphor.

This subjective account is offered in the hope that it will shed light on the ways in which masks may be used today, and that it will encourage other performers to try their hand at the unfamiliar technique.

To obtain photographs, video, or more information about this production of the *Agamemnon*, please contact The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at Oxford (www.agprd.ox.ac.uk).

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footnotes

¹ I should make clear that my approach was primarily informed by the work of directors and performers, in particular the subjective accounts of Hall (2000) and Lecoq (2000). There are also classicists who have affected such a union of theory and practice, in particular David Wiles and Gregory McCart, whose work I shall discuss more below.

² Marshall (1999) 188–202.

³ Scullion (2002) 116. Needless to say, there exists of plethora of more nuanced positions on the function of masks, from the standpoint of, e.g., ritual, material culture, and cognition; cf. Foley (1980), Calame (1986), Pickard–Cambridge (1988), and Halliwell (1993). <

⁴ Vernant (1990) 24, 382. By an “aesthetic” role Vernant appears to mean that the primary function of the mask is to render a character visually identifiable, and to underscore the distinction between tragic hero and tragic chorus.

⁵ Wiles (2008) 202.

⁶ Wiles (2008) 205.

⁷ Wiles (2008) 225.

⁸ For detailed discussion of the Peter Hall *Oresteia*, focusing especially on the role of music, see Taplin (2005) 235–251.

⁹ Verbal descriptions, sketches, and photographs can be found in Herbert (1993).

¹⁰ McCart (2007) 247.

¹¹ McCart (2007) 253.

¹² McCart (2007) 252. This comment does not suggest to me that the masks were physically enormous, but rather that their use was unfamiliar to the performers. Over the course of centuries, iconographic evidence suggests that the shape and size of the Greek mask changed greatly; cf. Wiles (2007). The modern productions which I have been discussing all use masks that are more or less the size of the human head.

¹³ Green (2002): 93–126.

¹⁴ See Herbert (1993) for sketches and photographs. The effect is especially unsettling in the case of the otherworldly white-faced Furies, whose empty eyes recall the gaping sockets of human skulls. Cassandra in Hall’s *Agamemnon* does have painted irises and pupils, perhaps to emphasize her role as prophet and seer.

¹⁵ Damon and I were delighted to notice this same behavior among the satyr chorus members on the Pronomos vase!

¹⁶ I did not encourage the actors to work in front of a mirror with their masks, as I found it made them too self-conscious; but neither did I forbid it. Jackson, who had been trained as a dancer and gymnast, had a greater awareness of her body in space than many of the other actors, and found the mirror to be a useful tool. Some of the other performers and I experimented with videotaping their monologues in rehearsal; we would then watch and comment on the tape together, and often the tapes helped the actor to be more confident and make larger, more expressive gestures. Most effective were group sessions, where the actors picked up new techniques from watching each other.

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The Masked Chorus in Action—Staging Euripides' *Bacchae*

Chris Vervain

Introduction

The focus of this paper is the staging of the masked chorus in my 2010 production of Euripides' *Bacchae* in the Philip Vellacott translation. This production was designed for a proscenium-arch staging and created for film rather than live performance. I am a director of masked theatre, working with masks I have created myself. The conventions of modern masking that I follow emanate from Jacques Copeau and were transmitted, with further development, in a largely practice-based tradition by such directors as Michel Saint-Denis, Jacques Lecoq, and their followers. In this tradition, the mask is seen as a type of physical theatre, a form, that is, "that puts movement and action before voice and text."¹ Meaning is constituted in particular ways: through gesture, the position and movement of the masked performer's body, its physical interaction with other performers' bodies, the pathways it and they take through space, and the stage pictures thus created.

Certain fifth-century Athenian vase paintings, in particular the "Boston *Oresteia*" (Figure 1), although not overtly theatrical, may reflect an influence from the theatre.² To a practitioner of drama, these images suggest a variety of physical theatre in which enactment is almost dance-like (in the modern sense of the term "dance"). While it is not my intention to create the sort of dance theatre that I see in these paintings, I favour the idea of tragedy as a mobile form, rejecting Oliver Taplin's vision of "long static scenes" with a chorus that would have "stood (knelt or sat) as still and inconspicuous as possible."³

As the modern tradition of mask emphasises the physical aspects of performance, I have had to adapt its conventions to do justice to the complex texts of the ancient plays. The visual nature of mask in drama, however, remains at the forefront. It is also my aim to convey clearly the action of the main episodes so that it is not obscured by an atmosphere of ritual "otherness". As Stephen Haliwell observes, a "widely credited and deeply entrenched supposition . . . that tragic masks were religious in origin" still holds sway in modern scholarship,⁴ a supposition that often leads to a ritualistic interpretation of the plays. The *Bacchae* in particular has been interpreted as reflecting Dionysiac mystery cult.⁵ When tragedy is interpreted as "ritualistic" drama, for example in Peter Hall's 1981 *Oresteia*, masks may be an important ingredient. Rush Rehm, reviewing this production, describes the "alliterative language, heavy rhythms, similarity in tone and mood, impersonal masks, the ritual pulse", all aimed to produce a hypnotic effect.⁶ Precisely to avoid such an effect, I employ the techniques



Figure 2: Pentheus' desires made visible



Figure 1: Boston *Oresteia* vase painting
(Drawing by Chris Vervain)



Figure 3: The Second Messenger's account



Figure 4: The Herdman's account

of modern mask theatre in conjunction with the basic "w" questions usually associated with Stanislavski: who is doing what to whom, where, when, and why? In this way the thought processes, objectives, and interactions of the characters are plausible, but the fact of the masks rules out any idea that this is a variant of the theatre of naturalism.⁷

Although I have no intention of reconstructing ancient performance practices, I do assume that a consideration of the ancient theatre, or rather what we understand of it, can inform our practice today. The role and identity of fifth-century choruses has received considerable attention in the scholarly literature: whether they are to be interpreted as witnesses and mediators of the action for theatre audiences,⁸ as an "actor"⁹ with a fictive identity in the world of the play, as an active or purely passive entity, or as a ritual presence providing a deeper, philosophical and religious contextualisation of the action of the plays.¹⁰ The debate over whether Greek drama was predominantly an aural or visual experience¹¹ is relevant in envisaging the degree and form of the chorus' visible participation in the main episodes. These issues have informed my staging of the *Bacchae* chorus. In approaching the subject more from an applied than a theoretical perspective, I have found additional dramatic uses for the chorus. The technicalities of staging masks have revealed, moreover, that even an apparently simple matter such as employing the chorus as witness to the drama involves a choice in which the mask offers both opportunities and constraints.

Making Use of the Chorus

The chorus of the *Bacchae* are from Lydia and Phrygia, female followers of Dionysus who have travelled with the disguised god throughout various lands of Asia Minor before arriving with him in Thebes. In my production I refer to them merely as Maenads, avoiding the sort of "Asian woman" connotations of Peter Hall's 2002 *Bacchae*, in which the chorus continuously wrapped and unwrapped themselves in lengths of red cloth, conjuring up images of women in saris and in burqas only to reveal scantily dressed female bodies in salacious poses beneath. As one reviewer of Hall's production comments, "we are left pondering whether Pentheus is alone in equating Bacchic ritual with immodesty and sexual licentiousness."¹² Instead I see the chorus as part of the world of song, dance, celebration, contradiction, and challenge to established boundaries that the god brings with him. They are forces of liberation and danger, suitable companions for a god "most terrible, although most gentle, to mankind."¹³

To those ends, in my *Bacchae* I make various dramatic uses of the chorus:

First, they have an active role in which, like an "actor," they help shape the unfolding events. As one of



Figure 5: Dionysus revealed in his true form



Figure 6: The multi-mask power of the chorus



Figure 7: Dionysus reunited with his worshippers



Figure 8: Dionysus parades Pentheus



Figure 9: ... before the Maenads

the "actors," they constitute a collective character with a clear identity in the fictive world of the play's main episodes.

Second, the chorus also have another active role, more protean and less dependent on their status as "actor." They use their bodies to create special effects such as the earthquake (staggering to convey the heaving earth) and palace collapse (registering it in words and looks) of the third episode. In these examples, the chorus retain their identity of Maenads, but I also use their bodies to simulate the flame on Semele's tomb. With their flame-like movements, my chorus momentarily *becomes* the flame, an idea that accords well with the conventions of modern physical theatre.



Figure 10: *Agauē's triumph*

At a more sophisticated level in this active role, the chorus can give visual form to thoughts, desires, intentions, and so on, that are otherwise hidden or can only be inferred. They can also play a part in clarifying the underlying power relations between the figures engaged in the action. Identifying such relations can reveal that social status does not necessarily reflect relative status in interactions among characters. The King, for example, though high in social status, may score poorly in his "status play" with others.¹⁴

Third, the chorus may have a more passive role as witnesses, their numbers alone making any interaction of the main figures a public rather than private exchange. They can observe the main action and react to it in various ways, both visibly and audibly. The practical constraints of the mask govern the choices among possible reactions.

Fourth, a masked chorus in particular can establish a focal point through the power of their collective mask gaze, used to direct the attention of the audience. This function is especially useful when there are numerous masked figures present and a sophisticated action to be conveyed. At its simplest level, the collective gaze can identify the person who is speaking when mouths are not visible, and it can clarify what actions and reactions are important. The questions of who says what and who does what to whom are in danger of being obscured by poor mask work, as noted by those commentators on Hall's *Oresteia* who could not identify the speakers.¹⁵ The gaze of even a single mask also has a special power of its own, a phenomenon recognised in ancient Greece.¹⁶ This power becomes evident when the mask is turned in full frontal presentation to the audience or to sections or individual members of it. The effect is multiplied in the collective gaze of the chorus (a subject to be discussed more fully below).

Last, the chorus can, in fact, assume the role of the voice of ritual authority in an art form—tragedy—that is a hybrid with ritual elements, rather than essentially ritual. This authority is most apparent in the choral songs, with their philosophical and mythic contextualisation of the main action. In my own staging, the sense of "otherness" that features in ritualistic interpretations such as Hall's *Oresteia* has its place in the *parodos* and *stasima*. But I have also directly evoked the idea of ritual by adding an End Sequence after the concluding lines. Here the chorus take hold of Dionysus, who appears as a plant form in his final manifestation, and pull him apart. Then, using his mask, costume and ivy, they metaphorically resurrect him on a pillar around which they dance in the manner of some of the ancient vase paintings of Dionysian religious ritual.¹⁷

Chorus as Actor

In the first episode I use the chorus like an "actor" or collective character who actively participates in the story and interacts with the main figures of the drama. The Maenads, following Dionysus, have descended on Thebes, and when the King arrives they make their presence felt both visually and audibly. The drums to which Pentheus later refers (second episode, *Bacch.* 513¹⁸) are introduced in this earlier

scene to enable an auidial interaction between King and Maenads in his first speech. This is a monologue of some length (215-262). In my production the chorus are gathered around Agaue's monument (situated upstage left) when the King enters. As his speech begins Pentheus and the chorus interact: they respond defiantly to his words by sounding their instruments, increasingly irritating him. Finally he approaches them with slow menace, and they retreat around the circumference of an imagined orchestra, a circular pathway that both evokes the ancient theatre space and has certain logistical advantages for moving bodies coherently in space without obscuring the audience's sight of the masks. The tenuousness of the King's situation and his response to it are thus given visible form.

In the same scene, the chorus functions as an actor in a slightly different way. Towards the end of his first speech (248 ff.) the King catches sight of Teiresias, who has been standing in a reverie alongside Cadmus at upstage right. Pentheus instructs Cadmus to give up his ivy wreath and *thyrsus*. In my reading, Cadmus makes as if to comply but Teiresias prevents him, moving him away. The King then delivers the remainder of his speech while backing away from the seer. He now finds himself in close proximity to the Maenads, who (through the chorus leader) deliver lines that support Teiresias (263 ff.) and carry the weight of ritual authority. Pentheus is caught between two bodies of ritual significance, and their combined power places him in a low-status position. He looks from Teiresias to the chorus and then towards the audience, inviting their scrutiny of his thoughts and feelings. The three glances taken together convey his uncertainty. Finally he stalks away downstage to sit on the ground, another move which makes him appear immature and vulnerable. (Precision in gesture and timing—especially in judging the moments when the mask face should be presented to the audience—is part of the special techniques of performing in mask, of which I have given a more detailed account elsewhere.¹⁹) In this part of the scene the chorus (now less in the character of wild Maenads than as the considered voice of religious wisdom) is used in conjunction with one of the main figures, Teiresias, to expose subtle shifts of status and to further highlight the vulnerability of the King. The vulnerability of mortals in a world ruled by divine forces is an important theme of the play that I wanted to highlight.

Chorus as Mime

In the same episode, I also use the chorus to make visible Pentheus' hidden prurient desire when he speaks of the exotic stranger (233 ff). In the production as a whole, the deportment and movement patterns of figures through the space establish gender distinctions: angularity, straight lines, and direct pathways are associated with masculinity, while soft curves and indirect pathways stand for femininity. Usually operating in a "masculine" mode, Pentheus becomes one with the chorus during this part of his speech. They stand close to him, clustered on either side, softly swaying as he joins in and makes gentle curving gestures ([Figure 2](#)). His voice also takes on a dream-like quality. An agitated angular gesture signals an abrupt return to his more habitual manner of moving and speaking. In this momentary lapse, the King takes on something of the "feminine" that will be more clearly manifested later in the play.

The chorus also help uncover the underlying power relations that I read into this scene. In my vision, the King displays a certain vulnerability without his guards in close attendance. The latter stand ineffectively upstage while he, in coming downstage, has moved into a space inhabited by forces that threaten his power. He is disturbed by the Maenads and is, through his own predilections, susceptible to their influence, as I have described above. But they give way when he pursues them. The motif of pursuit, realised as a staging device, gives concrete form to one aspect of this status play.

Later in the play, with the arrival of the Second Messenger, I introduce a partial mirroring of the circular pursuit motif of the first episode, this time during the exchange between protagonist and chorus leader (1029 ff.). Now they move anticlockwise and both of them speak, while the rest of the chorus stand to one side observing. My choices here were influenced by the conventions of modern masking, which tends to avoid wholesale repetition unless exceptional circumstances demand it. (Such exceptions might include

the need to establish a ritual pattern or a rule subsequently to be broken for comic effect.) Generally speaking, variety is essential in keeping a performance alive; variations on a theme, however, are particularly fascinating and invite linkages and comparisons. This scene can highlight the different attitudes of the King and a member of the city's lower class: unlike his royal master, to whom he appears to be loyal (1032-3), the Second Messenger is able to make allowances for the chorus (1039-40).

In this second circular pursuit motif, the chorus illustrate something of the underlying, complex power relations between Maenads and guards. In giving way to the Messenger, the chorus, represented by its leader, is seen to have lower status than the guards, although her spirited words and his concessive response show that there are opposing tensions. Finally, the chorus's power to influence the Messenger, that is, to persuade him to stay and give his account when he is about to leave, indicates that this ordinary man is an empathetic being, unlike the King. To enhance this idea, the chorus leader and then the rest of the chorus take hold of his arm to reinforce their plea physically, a gesture he would not permit if he were truly a man of violence.

The attitude of this particular guard compared to that of his King is one that I associate with greater maturity. I have, therefore, given him the fifth-century signifier of mature masculinity by making him bearded. In our production he is also a guard with helmet and costume identical to those of the bodyguards who accompany the King in the first and second episodes. But he wears his helmet on top of his head, revealing that these guards are ordinary working men beneath the sinister garb. He is also the guard who earlier brought on Dionysus and advised the King to heed the miraculous occurrences surrounding the stranger (445 ff.). Again, his understanding of the clearly supernatural nature of these signs may be contrasted with the King's failure to realise their significance. The chorus, in helping to define the character of the Messenger, facilitates this comparison.

In the *Bacchae* there are two messenger scenes and also narration scenes, which I regarded as opportunities for trying different ways of staging the chorus, as well as for introducing some variety. I first considered having the chorus as an onstage audience, doing little more than listening and perhaps reacting and conferring from time to time as the offstage events are recounted. My next idea, which I used for the Second Messenger narration, was to have the chorus visualise the events so vividly described and join in with some of the partly mimed gestures that naturally occurred to the actor performing the Messenger (Figure 3). It is tempting to imagine that the *cheironomia* mentioned in ancient sources was employed in this way, an idea suggested by Walton, who envisages a messenger's words being "fortified by mimetic or atmospheric movement from the chorus to amplify his own stance and gesture".²⁰ In my work on the *Bacchae*, I found that this second alternative makes the masked chorus appear more spontaneous and childlike, their faces taking on some of the attributes of naive masks.²¹ In a discussion of the tragic mask, David Wiles speaks of a sense in which the figures of Greek tragedy "see the world as for the first time from a position of naive neutrality",²² a comment that perhaps can only be appreciated when this effect is observed on the mask face.

In the scene where Dionysus describes to the chorus how he tricked Pentheus inside the palace (616 ff.), I again found this device appropriate for the sort of theatre I was creating. Here the chorus starts by giving simple reactions, gestures and laughs of surprise and joy, acting as the perfect sycophantic audience. As the account progresses, they get caught up in the story and join in with some of the god's partially mimed gestures.

The narration of the Herdsman (677-774) presented opportunities for a more complicated mimetic use of the chorus. Rather than illustrating the Herdsman's account with mimed gestures, I decided to increase the involvement of the chorus and give the scene a boldly physical-theatre treatment by having them enact the scene being described. The Herdsman already has an onstage audience in the person of Pentheus, who moves to a downstage position to one side and settles down, semi-recumbent, facing the

audience but with mask partially turned away or lowered. The Herdsman takes centre stage, notionally addressing the King but facing the audience.²³ The chorus have the remainder of the performance space for enacting the Herdsman's account, becoming the Maenads living idyllically in the mountains, the men planning to hunt them down, the rampaging horde attacking and dismembering cattle, led by Agaue (here without distinguishing headband) (Figure 4). At the end of this enactment there is a regrouping. The text here ("Then they went back/ To the place where they had started from"²⁴) seems a signal to switch the choral identity back to that of the here-and-now Maenads of the city. As such, they can now deliver their lines to the King (775 ff.).

In the examples given above, the chorus as actor highlights some of the major dichotomies that feature in the play, namely those of gender, age and class. The distinction between the human and the divine, also a major theme, is clearly articulated in the *stychomythic* exchange between Cadmus and the god (1344-51), culminating at 1348 with Cadmus' rebuke of the god: "Gods should not be like mortals in vindictiveness."²⁵ Immediately preceding this exchange is the major speech by Dionysus, now appearing in his true form, a text which, though partially lost, has been reconstructed by Vellacott.²⁶ This powerful speech constitutes a climax in the latter part of the play, but for a modern audience it contains many obscure references and may seem overlong. To counteract this effect, my chorus accompanies his words with a disturbing twitching and wailing (Figure 5). My intention is to create a sense of religiously inspired mania and thus to reinforce the contrasting reasonableness of Cadmus in his questioning of the god. Towards the end of Dionysus' speech, the chorus form a menacing group, leaving their previous position at centre stage to approach Cadmus and Agaue. There follows another pursuit motif, now with the chorus as pursuers who surround their quarry and cause them to shift sideways from downstage right to occupy the now unoccupied central space. In their action of "herding" these main figures across the space, the chorus give visual reinforcement to the utter helplessness of Cadmus and Agaue in the face of the fate meted out to them by the god.

Chorus as Visual Focus

Through sheer weight of numbers, the chorus is a significant visual element in any scene in which they are present, even when they take no active role. But there are times during the main episodes when the audience's attention should be focussed more on the protagonists than on the chorus, whose collective presence should then be reduced or minimised. Some practitioners use the terms "major" and "minor" to distinguish between performers who should, at any moment, be the focus of attention—"in major"—while all others present are "in minor" and should not be attracting attention.²⁷ The factors determining the impact of the chorus include their configuration in the performance space, the amount of performance energy they exude as a group and whether their masks are facing out towards the audience, inwards towards the action, or elsewhere.

A chorus occupying the centre of the performance space (the equivalent of the centre of the orchestra in the ancient theatre) will command the attention of the audience, as will any figure taking this position. It is here that performers can make the strongest impact on the audience. When in "minor", the chorus should be positioned in weaker parts of the space, where they will compel less attention. If a downstage position is chosen (or, in the ancient theatre, the peripheral part of the orchestra on the audience side), the chorus needs to adopt a low stance in order to avoid obscuring protagonists situated upstage or in a more central position. They could kneel or sit, as suggested by Taplin (see above), or, in a modern production, lie down. Taplin also prescribes that the chorus be as "still and inconspicuous as possible". But stillness is not necessarily inconspicuous, and it may in fact tend to excite the interest of the audience. Instead of being entirely motionless, the chorus might observe the action, react to it, confer with one another, or be looking elsewhere. None of this should be done in a dramatic manner. In the terminology of physical theatre they should be "playing with a low level of energy."²⁸ Meanwhile, those in "major" should be performing with high energy. This "energy" is not synonymous with activity but refers to the effect

achieved by a particular, unaccustomed use of the performer's body. Barba & Savarese speak of the "extra daily body" required for performance and also describe the "retained" energy that is achieved through opposing tensions within the body, for example by a power pushing the body forward and a power simultaneously holding it back.²⁹ Physical-theatre training includes instruction in how performers can realise these tensions within their own bodies.

Mask orientation is an important element in the power of the mask gaze, particularly the multi-masked presence of the chorus. Usually masks are most powerful when in frontal presentation to the audience. In the *Bacchae's* fourth *stasimon*, a choral ode, it is appropriate for the chorus to command the entire attention of the audience. Here I position the chorus upstage initially before it moves downstage in a slow but energised manner, as though approaching and confronting the audience. Here the compelling gaze of the masked chorus is seen, magnifying through weight of numbers the power inherent in any individual mask. [Figure 6](#) shows something of the effect. In another example, when Dionysus is reunited with the chorus in the third episode, I have some chorus members playing in "major" during the chorus leader's speech (612-3) whilst the others together with Dionysus play in "minor". Those in "major" face the audience whilst the chorus members in "minor" turn their faces towards Dionysus and he faces them ([Figure 7](#)). These two images cannot wholly impart the experience of being confronted by the gaze of the mask, whose effect can be like a shock wave passing through the viewer's body.³⁰ For those who have not been exposed to this phenomenon, an image such as [figure 4](#) can be misleading. In this scene from the Herdsman's speech, masks are shown to work effectively when viewed in three quarters or profile. But the special power of the full mask gaze would be apparent to anyone who experienced it at the performance from which this image was taken. In the ancient theatre, where performers were viewed from many different angles, this powerful gaze could only have been directed to a particular segment of the audience at any given moment, and I suggest that the actors turned from one part of the audience to another, making sure no part of the *theatron* remained wholly neglected—much as modern actors do when performing in the round.³¹

This power of the mask gaze can be used to clarify the action in those parts of the main episodes when the chorus is in "minor". When the mask is turned away from the audience towards another mask or masks (or more generally towards an object, another part of the stage, an entrance or exit, etc.), it acts like a spotlight, directing the attention of the audience.³² [Figures 8 and 9](#) illustrate roughly the same moment in the performance. Viewers in a live showing would have seen the feminised Pentheus at centre stage being paraded by Dionysus before the Maenads ([Figure 8](#)). All other masks, including Dionysus', are turned towards the King. [Figure 9](#) shows something of the power of the collective gaze of the chorus directing the audience to the focal point.

In my *Bacchae* there were two scenes in which I felt the focus should be exclusively on the protagonists: the Cadmus/Teiresias interaction of the first episode and most of the Pentheus/Dionysus *stichomythia*. In a live performance I would either have placed the chorus in a weak part of the performance space, playing in "minor" with low energy, or have arranged them formally in, for example, two seated lines to the sides, masks facing inward, towards the action. In a circular orchestra, I might seat individual members of the chorus at even intervals around its circumference on the audience side, again facing inwards. In such formal arrangements it is appropriate for the chorus to be motionless, as if part of the architecture. As I was making a film in a limited space, it was simpler to have the chorus downstage to the sides, effectively out of shot. I made an exception in the second Dionysus/Pentheus interaction (642-59), where Pentheus emerges from the palace (or what is left of it after the earthquake). His prisoner, the disguised god, has escaped only to be discovered now, sitting calmly with two of his Maenads directly behind him, the three creating the image of a multiple-armed Buddha. Two members of the dispersed chorus assist the god in his playful goading of the King. With the arrival of the Herdsman imminent, Pentheus looks away upstage, trying to catch sight of him, while the god and his two followers make a

sneaky exit, though Dionysus has promised not to run away. The function of the chorus in this staging is 1) to introduce some variety into the Pentheus/Dionysus exchanges (there are in all four scenes of interaction between king and god), 2) to create a compelling stage picture contrasting the god's calm demeanor with the king's agitation and 3) to emphasise visually the slippery and devious quality of Dionysus.

In masked theatre, exits need to be clearly acknowledged visually, with the departing figures in "major" until the audience should cease to notice them. (In the ancient theatre they would either have gone out of sight into the palace or have still been making their way down one of the *parodoi*). When their exit is no longer of interest, the audience is given a clear signal that the focus of attention returns to the figures still in the performance space, one or more of whom now play in "major."

In the case of entrances when there are one or more figures already on stage, it is usual in modern masked theatre to draw attention to the new arrival, most simply by turning the masks of all those already present to face the point of entry, thus putting them immediately into "major". Even when an arrival is announced in the text, as is usual in Greek tragedy, this direction of focus is still a useful convention in masked or other visual theatre. Not acknowledging an arrival by visual means would leave doubt as to whether the audience is supposed to notice it. Even when the text does not announce an arrival, as with the entrance of the *Bacchae's* Second Messenger, the arriving character must be visually acknowledged and put into "major", if only momentarily. The figures on stage must *be seen to see* the arrival before they can be seen to react to it. The idea that figures might enter unobtrusively is nonsense in masked theatre, because a new visual element will always excite the viewer's interest. The point of focus would become unclear and the audience confused.

In my staging of the Second Messenger's arrival (1024 ff.), the chorus are semi-recumbent downstage, the final position of their choral ode (the fourth *stasimon*). They turn to face the Messenger as he enters. When the chorus leader speaks, she gets up and addresses him with her mask facing the audience, whilst the others, masks also turned towards the audience, remain lying down. When she has finished speaking, the gaze of the whole chorus returns to focus on the Messenger. This pattern is repeated in the next exchange, before the circular pursuit motif that I have already described.

The giving and taking of focus (looking at the person who is speaking, looking out to the audience when speaking oneself) is a standard device in masking. It is useful, however, to break it from time to time, in order to focus on the reactions of the person listening or just to introduce variety. In the scene under discussion I was employing the device experimentally, trying to see how well it worked with most of the chorus lying down. Although strange, the effect seemed not out of place in a scene preceding the account of the appalling events leading to the dismemberment of the King.

In the sixth episode, when Agaue is giving an account of her hunting (1202 ff.), I seat the chorus on either side of her with masks facing the audience. Having all those present facing out towards the audience will, as I have described, result in a more diffuse focus of attention. But Agaue herself wears a chorus mask, which reinforces her present affinity with the collective identity of the Maenads and completes a stage picture involving all those present (Figure 10). Moreover, although she is outnumbered, she stands speaking and gesturing while the chorus sits still, thereby attracting the attention of the audience. (While masking instantly unifies the visual impact of a chorus, it also highlights any nonconforming actions by individual members).

Cadmus arrives in the scene that follows, and I felt that the focus should be clearly on the interaction between him and Agaue. Here I seated the chorus downstage in two groups facing away from the audience, quietly and attentively watching the action but making no visible reaction until the chorus leader speaks at 1327 f., when chorus faces are turned towards the audience before returning again to the

main figures. Throughout this scene the chorus is arranged in two diagonals that clearly direct the audience towards the central action, creating a sort of spotlight effect by means of bodies rather than masks. This is enhanced by the addition of the two guards, who bring the body of Pentheus to Agaue and then stand to attention on either side, looking in at the tragic climax.³³

Chorus as Witness

In some scenes I use the chorus, playing in "minor", as a witness to the ongoing events. Far from being an "inconspicuous" presence or a group playing with low energy in a weak part of the space, they now form an important part of the stage picture, clearly paying attention to the protagonists.

In the third of the Pentheus/Dionysus scenes (787-846) that follows the Herdsman's scene, the chorus is out of shot for most of the king/god dialogue but comes back into view towards its end (840 ff.). They sit in two groups on either side of Dionysus with their masks facing the audience, listening and reacting but in an uncoordinated way, like a stage crowd. In the next episode, the feminised Pentheus is paraded by Dionysus before the chorus, which now reacts as a group (rather than a crowd) with masks mostly facing Pentheus. At 963ff. they laugh and confer with each other, masks turned towards the audience. They are now the jeering Maenads whom Pentheus, before his transformation, had at all costs wanted to avoid (842), but they are also a proxy for the citizens of Thebes whom Pentheus now wants to impress (961-2). As Dionysus delivers his parting words, the chorus grow stiller, watching intently, their masks turned towards the departing god. They make no gesture of reaction but merely "witness" with great energy.

During Teiresias' long speech to Pentheus (266 ff.), I tried a different type of staging. In this scene, where the chorus is essentially a witness rather than a participant, I stood the members of the chorus in a formal line upstage left, listening attentively. Throughout the speech they make only one gesture, raising their *thyrsos* when Teiresias speaks of Dionysus "brandishing his Bacchic staff",³⁴ and at this moment they look directly at the audience. Otherwise they stand still, the gaze of their masks focused on Teiresias. I felt it important not to interrupt the continuity of his speech with too many reactions from the chorus (although the King does react occasionally from his seated position downstage, performing with low energy, lest excessive stillness draw too much attention to him). In other scenes I felt it appropriate to incorporate visible reactions by the chorus to a protagonist's speech, but for the sake of clarity I chose a few specific moments and had the chorus react as a coordinated group. For instance, Pentheus' first-episode pronouncement that Dionysus is dead (244-5) seems a good place for the chorus to give a shocked response. Their initial bodily reaction (a fairly naturalistic jerking backwards) is followed immediately by a turning of the masks away from Pentheus towards the audience, accompanied by an enlarged gesture of surprise, before a return of their gaze to the King.

This represents a mixture of what in current theatrical usage would be termed naturalistic and stylised gestures, the former being necessary to make the latter credible. In more general terms, mask has the property of unifying what would otherwise appear to be a disparate range of performance styles. (Unlike the initial, localised bodily reaction, the enlarged gesture would appear melodramatic to modern eyes if performed unmasked). I also mention credibility because the requirement of "truth to performance" is applicable not only to Stanislavskian acting but is necessary whenever an emotional response is to be evoked from the audience. Masked theatre simply achieves it with different means from those employed in the theatre of naturalism.³⁵

Chorus as Ritual

In a somewhat creative interpretation of Plato and Aristotle, David Wiles argues that the former sees tragedy as "in essence a Dionysiac dance"—a ritual with an emphasis on religious, moral and didactic concerns—in which the chorus plays a central role. Aristotle, on the other hand, emphasises the enactment of heroic myth in a way that encourages an emotional response and marginalises the status of the chorus.³⁶ In my own staging of the main action, the chorus does take on the role of "actor", but it also,

as I have shown, performs other functions that help to convey the unfolding events. It is largely in the choral songs that I see the opportunity to realise a ritual "otherness" in the choral role. Choral song and dance in English translation, however, is a challenge. The poetry and its specific qualities—particularly metre and vowel sounds (the two most important factors in creating the emotional timbre of a piece)—are of course irreproducible in translation, and the passages of mythic contextualisation are, in meaning and philosophical profundity, quite specific to their own period. Where I felt meaning was obscure (to any but classical scholars) I cut it from the English text but reincorporated a few passages to be sung or spoken by a Greek actress in her native tongue. Otherwise the English text was spoken in unison whilst the chorus performed dance and other stylised movement relating to what I felt to be the "mood" of any particular song and its position in the play. For example, in the Vellacott translation parts of the *parodos* express ecstatic energy, but there are also passages where the energy of the chorus is more contained. I translated this idea into the language of choreography by means of a rectangular formation (three lines of three) that breaks out and regroup. I also wanted to create the impression of energy without exhausting the performers or risking collisions, an aim made more difficult by masks. My solution was a staggered entry in which the performers run on in their groups of three, stand in formation, and engage in a lively choreographed series of gestures with their *thyrsos*, the whole action accompanied by drumbeats. They then break out to interweave and sing, "On, on! Run, dance, delirious, possessed!"³⁷ before regrouping once more. The *parodos* ends in a tableau with sung and spoken Greek, together with the miming of Dionysus being penned up in the thigh of Zeus.

The first *stasimon* follows what has been, in my reading, an episode in which the chorus is considerably active and, of course, it is the ode following the energetic entry song. This position itself, together with the "quietist mood of the song",³⁸ suggested a more static and minimal choreography. Members of the chorus, in a tight group, occasionally tilt their heads but otherwise remain still, accompanied by improvised, wordless, ethereal "singing". For the other odes, I found that some passages of the Vellacott translation lend themselves more readily to a rhythmic delivery, and I used these particularly in the third *stasimon*, which I conceived as a circular dance, with clockwise and anticlockwise movement, ending in a tableau.

There is considerable variety in my realisation of the choral songs, an aesthetic quality perhaps demanded more by our own time than by the ancient theatre. But it is hard to believe that the tragic chorus would have been "straightjacketed", as J.F. Davidson puts it, in a rectangular formation "throughout every song in every tragedy for the entire duration of the fifth century",³⁹ a dismal thought indeed! Davidson himself argues the case for a perhaps-less-restrictive circular formation, which I incorporate in two of the odes. However, the modern repertoire of dance/movement presents so many possibilities that I found myself borrowing elements from various more-recent sources, the most arresting perhaps being Yukio Ninagawa's chorus of fairies in his 1994 *Midsummer Night's Dream*, rotating on the spot in clockwise and anticlockwise circles whilst standing in strict rectangular formation and, most disturbingly, making jerking movements throughout their bodies.

Conclusion

The dramatic uses of the chorus in my 2010 production of the *Bacchae* may be summarised as follows:

- as a "collective character" in the story, helping to shape the unfolding events;
- in an illustrative role creating, through bodily movement, effects such as the earthquake and the flame on Semele's tomb, and in accompanying the Herdsman's account by enactment;
- in giving visual form to the hidden desires of Pentheus and also to the underlying power relations in operation;

- in acting as witnesses and reacting in various ways to the interactions of the main characters;
- in creating a clear focal point through the power of their collective gaze, directing the attention of the audience;
- in a role of ritual authority, providing philosophical and mythic contextualisation of the main action and a sense of "otherness", most apparent in the choral songs.

notes

This was a personally funded project, involving two weeks of intensive rehearsal and three days of filming at the Chisenhale Dance Space, London, 7th-23rd April 2010. (Details of the production are available at <http://www.chrisvervain.btinternet.co.uk/page12.html>.) For this project, in some respects a development of the research undertaken for my Ph.D. at Royal Holloway University of London, I made the masks and props and recruited and directed the actors. The costumes for this production, an integral part of its visual impact, were created by Dr Rosie Wyles (www.Nottingham.ac.uk/classics/people/Rosie.Wyles). I am grateful to David Wiles, Amy Cohen, and anonymous referees for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. Any remaining errors are my responsibility.

footnotes

- ¹ Wright 2000, 20.
- ² Csapo & Slater 1994, 54.
- ³ Taplin 1978, 12–13.
- ⁴ Halliwell 1993, 196–7.
- ⁵ Seaford 1981.
- ⁶ Rehm 1985, 244.
- ⁷ Lambert 2008, ch. 8.
- ⁸ Easterling 1997, 163ff.
- ⁹ Poetics XVIII.
- ¹⁰ Foley 2003, 14ff., 1–2.
- ¹¹ Arnott 1989, 51 ff.; Walton 1984, 44 and 46.
- ¹² Wrigley 2002.
- ¹³ Vellacott 1973, 222.
- ¹⁴ On "status play" see Johnstone 1981, ch. 1.
- ¹⁵ Schulman 1981, Esslin 1982, Walker 1981.
- ¹⁶ Frontisi-Ducroux 1989, 160–4.
- ¹⁷ Some of the "Lenaean" vases, Csapo & Slater 1994, 94.
- ¹⁸ Line numbers are taken from the Loeb edition (Euripides 1938).
- ¹⁹ Vervain 2004, 254–260.
- ²⁰ Walton 1996, 51.

- ²¹ Lecoq 2006, 56 ff.
- ²² Wiles 2000, 149.
- ²³ Vervain 2004, 256.
- ²⁴ Vellacott 1973, 218; Bacch. 765.
- ²⁵ Vellacott 1973, 243.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 241–242.
- ²⁷ Wilsher 2006, 62.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 63.
- ²⁹ Barba & Savarese 1991, 19, 81, 88.
- ³⁰ When working with parties of teenage school children it is not unusual to hear gasps of genuine surprise and even fear when they are first confronted by the gaze of the tragic mask.
- ³¹ Lambert 2008, 129–131.
- ³² Vervain 2004, 256–258.
- ³³ Provided by Vellacott 1973, 240 ff.
- ³⁴ Vellacott 1973, 201; Bacch. 308.
- ³⁵ Vervain 2004, 258–261.
- ³⁶ Wiles 2000, 9.
- ³⁷ Vellacott 1973, 194, 196.
- ³⁸ Seaford 1996, 182.
- ³⁹ Davidson 1986, 41.

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Orestes Terrorist

Translated and Adapted from Euripides' *Orestes* by Mary-Kay Gamel

Directed by Danny Scheie

Music by Philip Collins

May 20–29, 2011

Presented by the Theatre Arts Department

Mainstage Theatre, University of California, Santa Cruz

Review by **Fiona Macintosh**

University of Oxford

For three weeks in February 1968, the then little known *Orestes* by Euripides was staged in William Arrowsmith's translation in the Durham Theatre on the Berkeley Campus of the University of California, with students from the Drama Department. The director was the Polish intellectual and literary critic, Jan Kott, whose recent comparative study of *Orestes* and *Hamlet* had led him to the *Orestes* in Euripides' disturbing study of the mania of the avenger. Kott, a visiting Professor in the Drama Department at Berkeley, had lived through the horrors of World War II, negotiated the perils of the Stalinist years and had recently resigned his Party membership. He knew exactly what life in Elsinore under Claudius was like; and Argos after the Trojan War, and Athens in 408BCE, were equally familiar territory. Arriving in California in the Fall of 1967 he had witnessed the repressive establishment reprisals during the Oakland anti-draft demonstrations, and in his production ugly scenes from the events, together with documentary footage from Vietnam, were projected onto the backdrop. For Kott, it was the chorus that mattered: not just in its relationship with the other characters in the play, but also and especially in relation to the audience. The use of speakers and pre-recorded material made his production a kind of Happening, in which Argos merged with Washington DC. The chorus (multiracial, male and female) were dressed like Berkeley students, whose movements enacted the lyrics delivered by an anonymous male voice, relayed via the speakers, to the music of John Cage. Their Brechtian-style message was bitter and harsh; the violence of the language was matched by visual discordances as when Menelaus burst through the screen stepping on the image of a killed Vietcong. At the end of the play, Apollo appeared as a 15-foot copy of the Statue of Liberty, with a bikini-clad Helen on its pedestal, before the chorus were reduced to automata, dancing to the strains of 'I Can't Get No Satisfaction'.¹



Annie Ritschel as Elektra, Ethan Donoghue as Apollo, and Keith Burgelin as Orestes

Photo: Steve DiBartolomeo, Westside Studio Images, Santa Cruz, CA.

Equally topical is *Orestes Terrorist*, performed this May on the Mainstage Theater of the Theater Arts Center on the Santa Cruz Campus of the University of California. This new and creative version by the classical scholar, Mary-Kay Gamel, directed by Danny Scheie, with music by Philip Collins and performed by the students of the Theater Arts program, speaks urgently to contemporary western anxieties and concerns. The play opens upon a graffiti-ridden set, disfigured with barbed wire fences and strewn with debris, within a state riven with civil war, imminent or actual. The choice of title, *Orestes Terrorist*, with its omission of the definite article, is both striking and significant. For in Gamel's version

we witness a violent world in which almost everyone is cast either as instigator, perpetrator or colluder in the violence. Here the divine machinery (read the western superpowers) has set a chaotic and internecine plot in motion; and unusually for modern productions, the divine machinery assumes a centrality within this production. Apollo (Ethan Donoghue) appears with each mention of his name and yet he is too busy philandering (his first appearance is *in flagrante* with a nurse) to reveal any higher or purposeful plan. The disaffected and thoroughly dangerous generation of mortals that ensues (read Bin Laden and his followers) lurches from one bloody plot to another in an effort to exact revenge on their erring elders (read Middle Eastern despotic rulers) and then effect their own escape and survival. *Orestes Terrorist*, like Euripides' *Orestes*, is unerring in its insistence on the collective nature of the frenzied action on display: Orestes



Jesse Buddington and Zackary Forcum as the Phrygian Slaves

Photo: Steve DiBartolomeo, Westside Studio Images, Santa Cruz, CA.

doesn't so much act as is acted upon, first by the Furies, then by Pylades (who suggests Orestes try self-defence in the Argive Assembly and when that fails, that they kill Helen and become national heroes) and finally by Elektra (who suggests the kidnapping of Hermione before she dons a suicide jacket, with which we infer she will bring about not only her own death but that of her brother and their co-conspirator as well). When the white-suited Apollo appears *ex machina* at the end of the play, his suave solutions are as imperious and empty as those pronounced by the superpowers who act on the world-stage.

Where Kott drew on avant-garde models – Brecht and the Happening – Gamel/Scheie/Collins turn unashamedly to popular cultural forms such as the modern musical (Sondheim, Lloyd-Webber) and contemporary dance and musical genres (there is an exhilarating hip hop number during the murder of Helen, which implicates the audience absolutely in the avengers' amoral web). In a world of utter spin, it is not just the politicians like Menelaus or those would-be politicians like Orestes who seek to censor reality: here the Fox News-style reporter, ingeniously substituted for the Greek messenger, deftly manipulates the citizens in the Assembly eager for celebrity so that he adroitly shapes the outcome of the trial. As with Euripides, the increasingly frenetic nature of the protagonist and his co-conspirators is matched by stylistic disjunctions: the exotic Phrygian slave's monody, for example, is effected by a sharp shift in musical idiom from the demotic to the baroque, with an aria sung by the counter-tenor (Jesse Buddington) to the accompaniment of a balletic enactment (comically yet poignantly) executed by his fellow slave (Zackary Forcum).

This is a high energy, action-packed, anarchic, deliberately messy and pacy *Orestes*, where the youthful chorus steal the show with their punk-style irreverence, insouciance and vibrancy. Three chorus members (Zackary Forcum, Areyla Moss-Maguire and Jenna Purcell) were responsible for the choreography – quite some feat that paid off particularly well in the *parodos*, where the Furies (absent in Euripides) are physically present and truly terrifying in their assault on Orestes, from below, above and around, as he is ensnared on the bottom bed of a battered bunk bed. What contributes most to the energy of the piece is the highly creative use of the stage space: just before the magnificent aerial appearance of Apollo and the scintillating Helen (played by the stunningly beautiful and plausibly devastating, callous, and uncaring Brie Michaud), the transmogrified, frenzied trio of Elektra, Orestes and Pylades, with Hermione as hostage held at knife point, fall into the wire mesh that shields the lighting gantry over the audience's heads. These terrorists could literally blow the roof off the building; or, worse, fall on top of the audience, taking us down with them.

As well as a punchy chorus line, musical theatre needs stars, and Elektra (played by Annie Ritschel) is a star in the making with a strong and impressive vocal range. Less secure are the leather-clad duo Orestes and Pylades, whose nascent homoerotic attachment in Euripides is here developed into a fully-fledged attachment, given full rein in a purgative sexual encounter in the onstage shower following the murder of Helen. Elektra's incestuous attachment to her long-lost brother, and her betrothal to her brother's lover, are elaborated in a three-way erotic encounter fuelled by the excitement of revenge. These privileged but abused, haughty yet fragile, educated and still profoundly irrational young people provide ample evidence of the damage wreaked on young lives reared under politically repressive states. Gamel/Scheie, like Kott some forty-three years previously, has found an Orestes for our times.

footnote

¹ Jan Kott and Bogdana Carpenter, 'I Can't Get No Satisfaction' *The Drama Review: TDR* 13 (1968): 143-149.

47th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Euripides's *Andromache*, Sophocles's *Philoctetes*

Reviewed by **Caterina Barone**

University of Padova

The three latest productions of ancient plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse are connected by a thematic continuity of sorts. After *Medea* and *Oedipus at Colonus* in 2009 and *Phaedra* (*Hippolytos Stephanophoros*) and *Ajax* in 2010, the XLVII season presented Euripides's *Andromache* (directed by Luca De Fusco) and Sophocles's *Philoctetes* (directed by Gianpiero Borgia), echoing the past two seasons' emphasis on female characters, passionate emotion, marginalisation and loneliness. These two arduous and seldom-staged works had not been seen in Syracuse for many years, *Andromache* having last been produced in 1964, *Philoctetes* in 1984.

Philological studies often remark on the fragmentary structure of *Andromache*, a work consisting of three different episodes and lacking a character whose presence on the stage spans the entire play. The title character, in fact, disappears halfway through the tragedy (v. 765), although it is her vicissitudes that set in motion a chain of events cogently connected by links of causality. These events concern the dynasty of the Aeacids: the conflict between the now-enslaved Andromache, Neoptolemus's concubine and mother of his son Molosso, and Hermione, Neoptolemus's young and barren wife; the violent altercation between Menelaus and Peleus; the meeting between Hermione and Orestes, who is conspiring against Neoptolemus; Neoptolemus's death as he is waylaid by the young Atreides; and the final consolatory apparition of Thetis as a *deus ex machina*.

Luca De Fusco's production is a successful synthesis of spectacularity and finesse, popularising communication and analysis of the contents. It finds a possible unifying element in the goddess, making her somehow always present as an "*a latere*" figure of the Chorus, as she delivers the *stasima* in speech and song, standing out from the group only at the ending, in order to reveal her divine nature. Hers is a spectacular apparition, clad in a long green-azure cloak that expands her size so that she occupies a large portion of the scenic space. With her bald and shiny head, her slight body and her odd movements (at times creeping, at times rolling), Thetis appears supernatural and human at the same time, an "existentialist" goddess. She has suffered for the untimely deaths of her son and nephew, and now comes to console Peleus, who has been stricken by the deaths that have befallen his house to the point of annihilating it. The final scene, in which the goddess embraces the old king who once was her husband, effects a semantic shift from Euripides's conclusion, nullifying polemic criticism of the mythico-religious tradition, opting instead for an "intimistic" interpretation.

The stage settings themselves—with the mirror-like floor of the Orchestra, emanating different reflections as the lights and the movements of actors change—evoke the marine nature of the goddess, her shifting and metamorphic essence; they create a watery landscape, punctuated by the towering remains of a ship broken in two. The gestures and dances of the Chorus are also reminiscent of waves: at times stormy and



Laura Marinoni as Andromache
Photo: Maria Laura Aureli.



Massimo Nicolini as Neoptolemus and Sebastiano Lo Monaco as Philoctetes
Photo: Maria Laura Aureli.

at times placid, they seem to immerse the characters in a fluid and all-embracing matter.

The white effigy on one of the two pieces of the wreck marks the temple of the goddess, where the supplicant Andromache seeks refuge, adrift in the existential shipwreck of a woman who once was queen and is now a slave. The ship brings the mind of the audience back to the dominating image of the Trojan war, the expedition of the thousand Greek ships and its devastating effect on the *oikoi* even in times of peace. Even years from its conclusion, the Trojan War impacts the existence of youths such as Hermione and Orestes, who grew up as “orphans” lacking firm and reliable guidance. It is also a metaphor for the “shipwreck” of heroic ethics, replaced by the logic of power, violence, arrogance and money, embodied by the capricious and humanly fragile Hermione and by the vile and conceited Menelaus, who is forced to retreat by Peleus. The clash between the Atreides and the ruler of Phthia is rendered by the director with the slow and implacable advance of the elderly king: sceptre in hand, he charismatically towers above his unwarlike opponent, who is vainly armed with a sword.

The logic of power and the ruthless pursuit of ends is the theme connecting the two tragedies of this edition of the Syracusan event. This theme is embodied entirely in the masculine in *Philoctetes*, in which the wounded warrior, abandoned by his companions on the isle of Lemnos during the voyage to Troy, is cruelly deceived by the Greeks who need him and his bow to conquer the enemy city. Here too the perverted usage of language, an instrument of deception as it is in *Andromache*, seems to reflect the degraded reality of Sophocles’ times: in 409 B.C. Athens was on the verge of defeat. Odysseus’ astute device of using the young Neoptolemus to deceive Philoctetes with a false story is a cynical expedient for achieving his purpose. In this regard, the translator Giovanni Cerri acutely penetrates the structure of the drama when he speaks of a meta-theatrical text, in which he individuates a complex mechanism of “play within the play”, with Odysseus as the secret director of a staged fiction, a show on a second level for the spectators of the tragedy.

The director stresses this meta-theatricality with ironic movements of the Chorus and the percussionist (the only musician on stage), and with the red mask and the gestures of the false merchant, both derived from the *Commedia dell’Arte*. This choice in direction contrasts with the naturalistic interpretation of the main characters, Odysseus and Neoptolemus, and with the performance of the female protagonist: there is no estrangement in her expression of the bodily and moral torment oppressing her, only a search for sympathy from the audience. The evident stylistic fracture is however mitigated by the *a cappella* rendition of the songs of the Chorus—featuring embedded fragments in the original language—and by the stylised stage settings, consisting of an imposing central block, sombre and rocky, on which the unhappy Philoctetes pitifully creeps.

The contrast of acting codes creates a chasm in the relationship between the characters and the Chorus, resulting in a partial and insufficiently profound rendition of the themes of incommunicability and the loneliness of the individual. These themes—which concern, in different ways, all of the three heroes in their relationship with the world around them—in Philoctetes’s case evolves into an utter refusal to partake of the dynamics regulating social living. His dehumanisation by the hand of his Greek comrades-in-arms, who have abandoned him to the mercy of a hostile and savage nature that makes him savage too, becomes radical in the hero through his voluntary marginalisation and his refusal to operate for the common good. From the marginality of the isle of Lemnos, Philoctetes is called to the centrality of the social gathering, an act of resolution associated with recovery from his disease, the affliction which excludes him from relations with others. The meaning of Heracles’s intervention rests thus in the recovery of the human dimension of the hero as a member of a community—a saving act for Philoctetes and a pedagogic exemplum for the author’s Athenian audience. On the Syracusan scene this complexity of interwoven meaning risks being lost in the wholly exterior spectacularity of the *deus ex machina*, as it appears from the bowels of the stony island among lights and puffs of smoke, exciting the audience into

enthusiastic applause.

This is the final image of a visually elegant staging, artfully exploiting the interplay of the black scene settings—the ship and the rock—with the whiteness of the classical-style garments of the actors and the members of the Chorus, reminiscent of the traditional iconography of Greek warriors with helmet and spear: an appositive chromatic effect which is multiplied by the reflecting surface of the mirror-like flooring.

The texts used as scripts are faithful to the originals, in the robust tradition of the Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico. Davide Susanetti's translation of the *Andromache* is frank and cutting, without evasion or softening of the violence implicit in the original, while Giovanni Cerri has produced a more classic translation of *Philoctetes*, displaying philological acuteness in its analytic exploration of the text.

A Story of the Outcast in a Warehouse: *Medea*

Opera by Luigi Cherubini

Libretto by François Benoît Hoffman/Nicolas Étienne Framéry

Conducted and directed by Andreas Mitisek

Costume design by Christine Cover Ferro

Sound design by Bob Christian

January 29, February 5 (reviewed) and 6, 2011

EXPO Building Long Beach Opera, Long Beach, California

Reviewed by **Yoko Kurahashi**

Kent State University

Long Beach Opera's website description of the first production of the 2011-12 season, *Medea*, states: "Luigi Cherubini's 1797 score heightens the passion of the classic Greek tragedy with music that remains innovative to this day. In true LBO style, this daring production will be presented in an alternative space of unexplored theatricality."¹ Under the skillfully crafted, creative direction of Andreas Mitisek (the artistic director of Long Beach Opera, conductor and set/lighting designer for this production), this 95-minute performance of *Medea* in a space within the former EXPO Furniture store's warehouse² in Long Beach, California proved a successful revival of this opera and exploration of the space.

Medea is one of the most celebrated and admired operas by Italian composer Luigi Cherubini, who wrote more than 30 operas while living in Paris from the late eighteenth through mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately, most of Cherubini's operas are now rarely performed, making this production of *Medea*, which originally premiered at the Théâtre Feydeau in Paris in 1797, all the more precious and valuable.

It was nine years after the failure of *Démophon* (1788), the opera he created for the libretto by Marmontel, that Cherubini composed the opera *Médée* for the libretto by François-Benoît Hoffman, one of the most successful librettists of his time. *Médée* was one of three opéras-comiques that Cherubini undertook in the 1790s.

The genre of opéra-comique was born in the early eighteenth century in the "great Fairs which brought together the whole population of Paris for business and entertainment" where "simple plays of an amusing, pastoral, or satirical nature," which were sung in couplets based on popular airs, and vaudeville were performed.³ By 1762, the year when the company Opéra Comique fused with its rival the Comédie-Italienne, opéra-comique had been developed into a "major art form" by the librettists and composers such as Sedaine, Philidor, Monsigny, Grétry, and Dalayrac. The distinctive feature of opéra-comique, that is, the combination of spoken dialogue with musical numbers, enabled the work to invoke "genuinely dramatic situations in scores of high musical quality."⁴



Suzan Hanson as Medea and Ryan MacPherson as Jason.

Photo by Keith Ian Polakoff. Courtesy of Long Beach Opera.

Médée, Cherubini's third opéra-comique of the 1790s, synthesizes his "experience in his earlier operas," placing, at the heart of it, "his exceptional ability to organize the sections symphonically, by motivic development and tonal movement."⁵ The spoken dialogue written by Hoffman is "propelled by moral rather than physical action,"⁶ making it possible to impart the complex emotions and feelings possessed by the heroine, the woman who is outcast by her husband Jason and is about to be expelled by his future father-in-law Creon, king of Corinth.

The premier production of Médée at the the Théâtre Feydeau was not particularly successful. The public, three years after the end of the reign of the Terror and the execution of Robespierre, were likely seeking something lighter and more amusing than Greek tragedy. The play by Euripides on which the opera is based won the third prize at the City Dionysia Festival at Athens in 431 B.C., along with two others of his tragedies, Philoctetes and Dictys, and the satyr play Theristai. Euripides's play and the myth of Medea and Jason have been adapted and reappropriated many times in literature, theatre, and music: by Seneca and Ovid (first century A.D.), by Jean-Baptiste Lully in his *Thésee* (1674), in Pierre Corneille's neo-classical adaptation (1693), in Marc-Antoine Charpentier's opera *Médée* (with Thomas Corneille, Pierre's brother, as his librettist, 1698), in Johann Christoph Vogel's *Médée à Colchis, ou la Toison d'Or* (1788), in Giovanni Simone Mayr's opera *Medea in Corinto* (1813), in Jean Anouilh's adaptation *Médée*, and in a number of contemporary works that include Roger Kirby's *Medea in Jerusalem* (2004), which is set in the Middle East with a modern Palestinian Medea and an Israeli Jason. Contemporary opera directors continue to revive and invoke this tragic tale of a powerful woman by premiering operas based on the Medea legend. In an article published in *Opera Now*, Della Couling notes that in 2003 she saw four world premieres of such works.⁷

Quite apart from the appeal of the Medea myth, the popularity of Cherubini's opera can, in part, be attributed to Maria Callas's performances as the ill-fated heroine in the 1950s and 1960s. Callas first performed the role at the Florence Maggio Musicale Festival in 1953, with Vittorio Gui conducting. A studio version, conducted by Tiullio Serafin, was recorded in 1957. Later that year, Leonard Bernstein brought the opera (starring Maria Callas) to a new level of artistry with his liberating, inspiring, and emotionally charged conducting of the score. After revival of *Medea* by Callas and Bernstein, a number of prominent singers—including Magda Olivero, Leyla Gencer, Leonie Rysanek, Anja Silja, Eileen Farrell, Anna Caterina Antonacci, Grace Bumbry, and Iano Tamar—have performed this role of a devastated, sorrowful, and revengeful woman.

Long Beach Opera's production of *Medea* is a valuable addition to the revivals of Cherubini's *Medea* and other *Medea*-based operas. Faithful to Hoffman's eighteenth century libretto, the LBO production explores human psychology, including the complex and emotionally explosive relationship between



Suzan Hanson as Medea.
Photo by Keith Ian Polakoff. Courtesy of Long Beach Opera.



Peabody Southwell as Neris and Robert Gomez as Creon.
Photo by Keith Ian Polakoff. Courtesy of Long Beach Opera.

Medea and Jason. Andreas Mitisek, who is known for his powerful, colorful, and sensitive musicality, conducts the full orchestra and directs the performance to produce a clear but emotionally charged piece. One of the strengths of this LBO production of Medea is its succinct translation into contemporary English by Mitisek and Suzan Hanson, who played the title role. As an aid to the audience, the LBO production projected supertitles on screens above the stage.⁸

While many of the past productions of Cherubini's Medea have been performed in Italian with sung recitatives written by Franz Lachner (1803-1890), Mitisek kept the spoken dialogue, as written by Cherubini, to communicate the characters' emotions and feelings. To keep the production simple and tight, Mitisek cut the chorus's parts, reducing the length of the performance to 95 minutes without an intermission. Mitisek's minimalist approach is effective and avoids the pitfalls of past productions with a full chorus that did not work well. For example, J. Wechsberg, reviewing the Vienna State's Opera's revival of Médée in 1972, criticized director August Everding's handling of the chorus that "bordered on the ridiculous,"⁹ and Robert Jacobson called the chorus in the 1982 New York City Opera production of Medea "murky."¹⁰

The raised performance space, reminiscent of a boxing ring, is located within the larger warehouse space that serves as the desolate landscape of Corinth. The audience, seated in folding chairs, faces this raised "arena" (square) stage from four sides. The seating capacity of the fourth side is reduced in order to accommodate the orchestra conducted by Mitisek. Within this cold, lifeless environment, the audience becomes part of the story as the citizens of Corinth who witness the fate of the abandoned woman. The bare industrial look of the theatre space is at different times "transformed" into a "futuristic stage," with a look of a space ship interior or a techno-disco.¹¹

The opera opens with unfathomable murmurings of Medea and the sound of heart beats, which become an eerie premonition of the tragedy that awaits all of the characters. All of the performers enter the stage, and except for Suzan Hanson as Medea, lie face down. The performers stay on the stage throughout the performance. In this "ensemble acting" style, in contrast to the star-system with multiple curtain calls between acts, the performers are able to tell the audience multiple reasons for their respective characters' actions,¹² minimizing the spectators' pre-judgment or pre-sympathy for certain characters and performers.

Although the stage is basically bare, Mitisek created variations in height on stage by adding multiple levels. For example, the center of the performance space, where Medea stays most of the time during the performance, is lower than its surrounding areas. This hollow on the stage metaphorically represents the status of Medea as the older wife that her husband Jason is abandoning to marry the younger Dirce, Creon's daughter. The atmosphere of the bare stage is changed by the characters' presence and absence, as well as by the lighting effects. The lights are all projected from below the stage, creating eerie shadows on the performers' faces. A subtle combination of blue and white light creates, depending on the base color of the costume, a pastel-purple or gray color, as evident in the duet of Jason and Medea.

Mitisek has created a contemporary feel to this production that allows the audience to relate to the characters. This is evident from the first scene, in which Princess Dirce expresses her worries about her future and her maids (two women from the chorus) console her. Instead of a timid and innocent virgin, Ani Maldjian plays Dirce as a spoiled, drunken young woman, who is devastated by being used by her father and future husband as a commodity in a business transaction. Maldjian's Dirce wears purple spandex, a leopard-patterned camisole, and a loose, sheer white blouse, a typical combination that the audience would see on the streets of California. During the scene, she consumes a bottle of wine and a small bottle of prescribed medication while her attendants, played by Ariel Pisturino and Diana Tash, try to soothe her. Between their songs, they insert ad-libs, like "yeah," or "come-on, girl." Although these ad-libs often sound too colloquial or unnecessarily casual, they certainly are able to add "gestus" to the

performance, making the character of Dirce a living human being that the audience can relate to.

In the opening scene, as the orchestra plays the overture, Suzan Hanson exhibits both Medea's rage and her sorrow through her stylized movement. Hanson wears a long, loosely fitted dark gown with a spider web or vine motif on her knitted sleeve as well as on one of her cheeks. The web pattern suggests that Medea is a sorceress. While the orchestra plays a symphonic overture filled with powerful, dramatic repetitions of up/down scales and alternations of minor and major notes, Hanson seductively and sometimes even grotesquely moves her body, including her hands and arms, invoking a dark and ominous atmosphere. Soon after this nonverbal scene, the prologue, which Mitisek and Hanson added by incorporating the lines from a translation of Euripides's *Medea*, begins. In this prologue, the characters of Neris and the Women recite the lines of the great hypothesis such as "If only it had never happened like this/If the Argo hadn't opened its sails and flown" and "If Jason hadn't deserted her for the bed of a Princess."¹³

In the legend of Medea, Medea is the daughter of the king of Colchis, who falls in love with Jason, one of the Argonauts, and betrays her father and brother to help Jason obtain the Golden Fleece that he needs to prove that his is the rightful king. After her betrayal of her own family for Jason, they sail to Corinth and marry and have two sons. In Cherubini's opera, as in many Medea-legend-based plays and operas, the story begins just after Jason abandons Medea for the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth, and Medea receives, from Creon, the edict of exile from Corinth.

Hanson interprets Medea as a powerful but vulnerable woman with complex feelings. Hanson tells the story of Medea's past—when she was young and innocent—simply and believably in intense but beautiful arias. Hanson's clear soprano voice well exhibits her character's human side as a woman who still clings to hope that she will regain her husband and as a mother concerned about the future of her children. Medea's humanity is particularly highlighted when she pleads with Creon to allow her to take her children into exile with her.

With the emphasis on mistreatment of Medea, LBO presents Medea's act of killing of her own children as the desperate act of a woman driven insane by her rage, despair, jealousy, and worries about her children's future. Her last aria painfully yet succinctly portrays the mixture of these emotions, emphasizing Medea as a betrayed wife, a despairing mother, and an exile.

One of the strongest parts of this production is the demonstration of the relationship between Medea and Jason. Ryan MacPherson as a dashing and taciturn Jason in a white dinner jacket, black pants, and loosened tie portrays a man who is torn between his political and personal choices. MacPherson and Hanson exhibit their unbreakable chemistry so intensely during their aria that I could feel the entire audience becoming tense. The electrified connection between him and Medea is amplified by the light cast from below the platform; as the two move around on the four sides of the stage, these lights reflect from their white costumes in lavender, blue, white, and even gray. The changing colors echo their ever-evolving relationship.

The tyrant who orchestrates the political union by a marriage between his daughter and Jason is played by a rather youthful-looking Roberto Gomez as Creon. Gomez interprets the leader of Corinth as a rather stiff yet somehow vulnerable (to Medea) man; at one point, he directly expresses his fear of Medea, who he believes is a force that would threaten the patriarchal world of the Argonauts.

The Overture to Act III, normally played before the curtain rises, illuminates the spoken dialogue of Neris, played by Peabody Southwell, and the Women, who describe the horrible deaths of Dirce and Creon. They describe how the veil and gown, a wedding gift from Medea, flamed up and began to eat Dirce's flesh, and how Creon, crying over his daughter's faceless and shapeless corpse, also had the flesh

torn from his bones. The use of the overture as background music to the description of the behind-the-curtain scene intensifies the horrific deaths of the two characters. Soon after, Medea appears on stage with bloody hands. Hanson emphasizes Medea's "insanity," since she does not seem to remember what she has just done until she finally confesses to Jason, "Your sons, I have killed them." The abrupt, short ending of the opera, with Neris and the two women singing "This should never have happened, If only Jason had been true, Medea never learned to hate," mitigates the blame that the audience usually places on the character of Medea.

This performance of the opera *Medea* by Long Beach Opera underscores that her terrible crimes result from her betrayal and abandonment rather than an inherently evil character. It illuminates the heroine's humanity and vulnerability by treating her as a person trapped by the greed and hatred that infests the community of Corinth. This portrayal of Medea's humanity is, along with the performance's theatricality, the most moving element of the LBO's contemporary interpretation and staging of the eighteenth century classic.

footnotes

¹ <http://www.longbeachopera.org/> Accessed 25 February 2011.

² Since it closed, the empty site of the EXPO Furniture's warehouse has become available for various groups to rent for meetings and events. LBO created and designed the set and the interior space for the production of *Medea*. Doris Koplik (Director of Media Relations, Long Beach Opera), e-mail interview, 14 April 2011.

³ Basil Deane, "Cherubini and opéra-comique," *Opera* 40 (1989):1308.

⁴ Basil Deane, "Cherubini and opéra-comique," *Opera* 40 (1989):1308.

⁵ Basil Deane, "Cherubini and opéra-comique," *Opera* 40 (1989):1310.

⁶ Hoffman wrote a text by barrowing the dramaturgy and interpretations that Pierre Corneille, Jean-Marie-Bernard Clément, and the Baron of Longepierre had employed in their work. Paolo Russo and Mary Ann Smart, "Visions of Medea: Musico-Dramatic Transformations of a Myth," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6.2 (1994):118.

⁷ Della Couling, "Opera Origins: Medea," *Opera Now* (July/August 2003):43.

⁸ Long Beach Opera always provides supertitles for all of its productions. Andreas Mitisek, phone interview, 23 February 2011.

⁹ J. Wechsberg, "A review of *Médée*," *Opera News* 36 (April 1972):322.

¹⁰ Robert Jacobson, "A review of *Medea*." *Opera News* 47 (July 1982): 31.

¹¹ This transformation is "illusionary," created by the effect of pale-blue light reflected on the stainless steel structures.

¹² Andreas Mitisek, phone interview, 23 February 2011.

¹³ Doris Koplik (Director of Media Relations Long Beach Opera), e-mail interview, 21 April 2011. The lines are from <http://www.longbeachopera.org/2011-season/medea> (site discontinued).

Interview: Theater of War

by **Amy R. Cohen** (*Randolph College*) and **Brett M. Rogers** (*Gettysburg College*)

Introduction by **Brett M. Rogers**



**Part One: Bryan Doerries and Elizabeth Marvel
in conversation with *Didaskalia***
youtube.com/v/_gPGAEPuYRs?version=3&hl=en_US



**Part Two: Bryan Doerries
in conversation with *Didaskalia***
youtube.com/v/hwj3-6EiYDk?version=3&hl=en_US

Introduction

To describe *Theater of War* (hereafter *ToW*) as ‘theater,’ or ‘a theatrical event,’ or even a ‘performance’ is to surely miss the point. Working from the argument that Attic Greek drama was primarily (though not exclusively) a mode of performance “by veterans, for veterans,” Bryan Doerries—*ToW*’s creator, creative director, and one of its producers—focuses the event on multiple activities that dramatize the experience (and costs) of warfare and provoke discussion about them.¹ The event itself falls into three stages. First, four to five professional actors sit at a table on a bare stage—no costumes, no props, no sets, no make-up, no special lighting—and perform a reading of Sophocles’ *Ajax* or *Philoctetes*. Next, the actors are replaced by another small group, made up of citizens, including veterans, often a veteran’s spouse, and usually a therapist with experience treating combat veterans, all of whom offer their own comments and experience. Finally, Doerries (in the role of emcee) invites the audience to talk about their reactions to the performance and comments, passing the microphone around. The entire event lasts approximately two hours, although discussions linger afterward.

In other words, *ToW* sits at the interstices between theatrical event and social tool. It is part classical homage, part Sophoclean revival, part town-hall meeting, part therapeutic group session, part social-impact project. Were it not for Doerries’s careful management of the audience, always steering the audience conversation back to the text of the performance, there is no little risk that *ToW* could also become part heated—even explosive—public debate on contemporary American military policy. In the open discussion, audience members speak thoughtfully, tearfully, passionately, even angrily. There is a simmering of communal emotion among the audience reminiscent not of the darkness of contemporary theater, but rather of the colorful, emotion-filled anecdotes found in the *vitae* of the Attic dramatists themselves. In short, *ToW* is a unique kind of event, a compelling amalgam of artifice and grassroots activity that asks (and answers) how ancient drama can serve society more than 2,400 years after the genre’s initial apogee.

We do not offer an extensive review of *ToW* here, in part because it is an ongoing, traveling event that

changes as its locations, cast members, and audiences change. Since its inception in 2009, there have been over one hundred and fifty performances at multiple hospitals, military bases, theaters, and universities—including recently (and perhaps significantly) Guantanamo Bay.² Rather, given its protean nature, *ToW* seems a better subject for an *interview* that offers a glimpse of the production as it moves from military communities and increasingly into the public sphere. One of our main lines of inquiry in our conversation with Doerries and regular actor Elizabeth Marvel ('Tecmessa' in *Ajax* and 'Ajax' in the female version of *Ajax*) addressed how *ToW* has developed and changed over time in terms of format, meaning, and impact. Those who wish to read written reviews of *ToW* can find a complete list of reviews on the *ToW* website,³ and we encourage readers to consult in particular Meineck 2009 and Nelson 2011.⁴

We hope that this interview will appeal to a wide variety of audiences: classicists, thespians, theatergoers, veterans, and those interested in *ToW*. Our goal was to create a conversation that might have both general and specialist interest. Part One (featuring both Doerries and Marvel) may appeal more to a general audience, while Part Two (featuring Doerries) probes more deeply into questions of interest to those engaged in ancient performance.

Scholars may rightfully wonder whether *ToW* offers any meaningful insight into ancient performance. With its clear social aim, does *ToW* belong rather to the annals of contemporary theater history or reception studies? In Part Two, Doerries at one point suggests that part of his aim with *ToW* is in fact archaeological, to "excavate" and uncover the emotions and ideas of an ancient Athenian (male, citizen-soldier) audience.⁵ Doerries's claim places him somewhat in league with a contemporary scholarly trend to examine the role of emotion in classical drama.⁶ We leave it to others to ask at least two further questions. First, how would we go about substantiating such a claim? Second, does or should this claim change the way we read, study, and perform Attic drama?

The interviews were recorded on April 4th, 2011, at Transition Productions in New York City. Bryan Doerries and Elizabeth Marvel are interviewed by Amy R. Cohen (editor, *Didaskalia*) and Brett M. Rogers (editorial board, *Didaskalia*). *Didaskalia* would like to offer thanks to Ian Dempsey and Mitch Cheney for producing this interview.

notes

¹ In conversation, Doerries (among others) attributes this observation to the clinical psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, whose work repeatedly draws connections between Greek epic and drama and the communalized experience of soldiers and veterans; see *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994), *Odysseus in America* (2002), and, for our purposes here, "The Birth of Tragedy—Out of the Needs of Democracy" (Autumn 1995) in *Didaskalia* 2.02.

² For a full list of the production history and locations for *ToW*, see <http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/overview>.

³ See <http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/press>.

⁴ P. Meineck, 2009, "'These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished': Theater of War / The Philoctetes Project," *Arion* 17.1, 173–191. H. Nelson, 2011, "Bryan Doerries's Theater of War: A New Incarnation of an Ancient Ritual," *Review: The Journal of Dramaturgy*, 21.2.22–31.

⁵ Doerries seems to assume that the primary audience for Athenian drama is composed of adult male citizen-soldiers, and some of his subsequent projects with *Outside the Wire* use Greek drama to confront the emotions of other possible identities that we know existed in one form or another in antiquity (the aged, the incarcerated). It is not clear, however, whether Doerries's notion of "excavating the ancient audience" is meant to include such populations as women, children, metics, or slaves, whose presence at

Athenian dramatic performances is uncertain. Nor is it clear how excavating the audience takes into account ancient non-Athenian audiences. For more on these issues, one may consult (e.g.,) S. Goldhill, 1997, "The Audience of Athenian Tragedy," *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, P. E. Easterling, ed., Cambridge, 54–68; M. Revermann, 2006, "The Competence of Theatre Audiences in Fifth- and Fourth-Century Athens," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 126.99–124; P. Wilson, ed., 2007, *The Greek Theatre and Festivals*, Oxford; M. Revermann and P. Wilson, eds., 2008, *Performance, Iconography, Reception*, Oxford. It would have been interesting to ask Doerries whether he has seen any variations in audience responses based on age, class, gender, race, or geographical location.

⁶ See (e.g.) D. Konstan, 1999, "The Tragic Emotions," *Comparative Drama* 33.1–21; W. V. Harris, 2001, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge, Mass.; D. Konstan and K. Rutter, eds., 2003, *Envy, Spite, and Jealousy: The Rivalrous Emotions in Ancient Greece*, Edinburgh; D. Konstan, 2006, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, Toronto.

Storm in a Teacup: an Exercise in Performance Reception in Twenty-First-Century Israel

Lisa Maurice
Bar-Ilan University

Introduction

Over the last decade, interest in classical reception has spawned various sub-disciplines, one of which is performance reception. When, in the spring semester of 2009, I taught a course entitled “Ancient theatre workshop” at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, I seized the opportunity to focus on the actual production and staging of ancient drama, and to work with an example of such reception. The course was open to all students, both classicists and those with no background in the subject seeking a “general” course, and the aim was to produce a play to be performed at the end of semester. Writing and producing this play therefore provided an opportunity to witness at close hand how a group of 21st-century Israeli students interacted with and received ancient performance in creating their own modern drama.



Figure 4: The Mirror

I. Roman Comedy and Modern Scholarship

Intellectual and academic critics have often regarded Plautus as a crude bastardiser of Greek comedy; indeed his work was primarily studied in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a means to understand lost Greek New Comedy. Despite the comic power and exuberance of Plautine comedy, and despite the fact that Plautus’ influence on later writers, particularly Shakespeare and Molière, was considerable, it was not until Fraenkel’s groundbreaking work that he began to be regarded as a figure worth studying in his own right.

Over the last twenty years, however, Plautus has begun to be appreciated as a self-conscious and sophisticated comic. Works by scholars such as Niall Slater (2000), Timothy Moore (1998) and Richard Beacham (1991) have taken a performance-based approach to the study of Plautus, an approach which has particularly revealed and stressed Plautus’ metatheatrical style. Building on these studies, C. W. Marshall (2006) utilised his own expertise in theatrical production and improvisation in attempting to reconstruct the backstage conditions of Plautine comedy in Republican Rome.



*Figure 1: Monologue of Sa'ar (Ariel Drori)
(photo: Hana Leider)*

As a result of such approaches to Plautus, I decided to focus upon Plautine comedy, and in particular the staging of Roman comedy, while running this workshop. Teaching the course gave me an opportunity to test and experience how the reality of staging affects a written text, and specifically how it might have

constrained and changed Plautine comedy. I was interested in discovering whether theories put forward about Roman comedy actually rang true in production, particularly those ideas concerning metatheatricality and the crafty slave of Plautine tradition (Segal 1987, McCarthy 2000, Parker 1989).

II. Performance Reception

With this focus upon performance, producing a modern version of a Plautine comedy was an interesting experiment in performance reception. Edith Hall has summed up the concept of performance reception as follows:

Performance Reception is as a subcategory of what has conventionally been called 'The Classical Tradition,' 'The Nachleben,' or 'The Reception' of ancient Greece and Rome. The performances . . . have all involved audiences responding to performers using their bodies, voices, and/or musical instruments in a visual or aural representation of material derived from an ancient Greek or Roman source . . . Performance Reception, at its most reductively defined, is the study of the process by which A impersonates a B derived from a classical prototype before C. . . . [I]t is the dynamic triangular relationship between ancient text, performer, and his or her audience that above all distinguishes Performance Reception from the study of the ways in which ancient texts have been received elsewhere. (Hall 2004:52)

The process of production allowed the group to investigate the relationship between text and performance in a practical manner that reflected current thinking about the nature of performance in general, and the reception of classical performance in particular. It also highlighted elements in Roman comedy that were particularly relevant to a particular group of students in twenty-first century Israeli society, demonstrating how the society in which the production takes place must invariably influence the production itself.

III. The Production Process

Underlying philosophy and approaches

Obviously one aim of the course was to put on a final performance that the audience would enjoy, but since the intention was also to investigate the issues of acting and staging from the performers' point of view, it was important to create a dynamic project that might be comparable in some way to the experience of producing and acting in a Plautine play. It was therefore important to try and enable students as far as possible to experience first hand all the elements and stages involved in dramatic production. Considerable stress was laid on the equivalent Roman process, as far as it is currently understood, and how that must have differed from the modern experience. In this respect I relied to a great extent on Easterling and Hall (2002) and Marshall (2006). Also useful were Ley (2007:268-285), McCart (2007) and Beacham (2007); Goldhill (2007), although concerned with tragedy rather than comedy, was also valuable. Overall, far more emphasis was placed on experiencing the production process than on producing something of a professional level, which would have been a daunting prospect for those with no previous background in drama.

Structure and organization of the course

A total of fifteen students participated in the course, which was thirteen weeks long, and met once a week for 90 minutes at a time. Students were expected to participate fully and to take an active part in some aspect of the production, either as actors or in backstage roles responsible for costume, set, stage managing, lighting and so on. Each student was also to keep, and submit at the end of the course, a journal documenting their ideas and progress from beginning to end.

Since one of my main aims was to recreate the actor/backstage experience of a dramatic troupe, I stressed

from the very first meeting that the work was to be collaborative and team led, although naturally, as course instructor, I had certain ideas and theories I wished to test. For that reason, I took on the nominal role of director, and acted as *domina gregis*. I nevertheless endeavoured not to impose ideas on the class, especially in early meetings.

One exception was the decision, made before the course started, to work on Roman comedy rather than Greek comedy or tragedy. This decision was in part influenced by my own research interests but also by the fact that some of the students had taken a course I had taught in the previous semester on Roman comedy and so had some background in the subject. Despite this, some of the students had no, or very limited, knowledge of Roman comedy. I therefore devoted the first two weeks to an intensive introduction to this topic, explaining central concepts of Plautine drama in class and assigning students to read several Plautine comedies in translation. The plays read were the *Epidicus*, *Miles Gloriosus*, *Pseudolus*, *Aulularia*, and *Menaechmi*, a selection dictated for the most part by the works available in Hebrew translation. Here it also quickly became obvious how much the standard of translation influenced students' enjoyment of a text; the plays which existed in the excellent translations by Dvora Gilula were far more popular than the dated versions of the *Epidicus* and *Aulularia* that were available. By the third class, the students had a very basic understanding of the genre, and discussion began.

At this stage debate focussed on which play to produce, in which language it should be performed (Latin or Hebrew) and how to make our production an authentic experience in some way. As a result of these discussions, the rather surprising decision was made to write our own play, using the elements of Roman comedy and translating them into modern Israeli society. While the class enjoyed the comedies they had read, and were excited by the prospect of performing a Plautine comedy, they felt that the effect achieved by producing one of the texts as it stood would be far from authentic, since the audience understanding and reactions would be very different from those of the Republican Romans. It was decided to try and create an effect similar to that imagined to have been created by Plautus by translating elements of Plautine comedy to modern contemporary equivalents. The aim was to attempt to create a performance that was Plautine in nature, as far as modern scholarship understands it, rather than to make the Roman comedies comprehensible and relevant to the contemporary audience by updating them in some way. Again, this decision was influenced by the stress on performance rather than text; although the students agreed that the texts of Roman comedy were often still funny in themselves, they felt that in performance much would be lost on an audience lacking the background knowledge to appreciate the play. Ironically, they considered that without the constraints of a particular character or plot, they could reproduce the feel of a Plautine comedy more authentically.

As a first stage, the class brainstormed the various elements of Roman comedy that should be incorporated: stock characters, coincidence and hyperbole were all listed as essential (Duckworth 1994:236-71, 146-59, 336). Metatheatricality and a carefully constructed plot (Maurice 2005, 2006, 2007) were included in the list, as a result of earlier class discussions and secondary reading. Other plot elements, such as mistaken identity and recognition tokens, were also addressed at some length (Duckworth 1994:147-8, 151-60). It should be stressed that while my original presentation of Roman comedy in the first classes must have played some role in selecting these elements, they were not director-selected, but unanimously (and in many cases vigorously) argued for by the students themselves. The most popular of the Roman stock characters were the *servus callidus* (crafty slave), *miles gloriosus* (swaggering soldier), *amator fervidus* (young lover) and, somewhat surprisingly to me at least, the comic chef. Another brainstorming session then took place, in which students suggested equivalent stereotypes in Israeli society that could be adapted to fit our needs.

Over the next week, each student wrote a possible plot outline and summary. These were then circulated to the entire class and discussed at the following meeting. One in particular was chosen and refined until

a workable plot and characters were agreed upon. Each student then undertook actually to write one or two scenes, using the plot structure outlined in class, and attempting as far as possible to base the dialogue on the Roman comedies they had read. This was done with varying degrees of success proportionate to the knowledge each student had of Roman comedy, as well as to their own creative abilities. It is striking to note how far the text that was produced at this stage differed from the final version, as changes and rehearsal improvisations were incorporated into the play as it developed. In the following class the text was further developed and polished, and the various dramatic roles chosen by the students. Those students who did not undertake acting roles volunteered for other responsibilities, such as music, stage management, costume, make-up, props and set design and preparation. In this way, every student was actively (although not necessarily equally) involved in some way in the production.

The remaining weeks of the course were devoted to rehearsal and to preparation of props, scenery and costume. In an effort to keep the focus on visual performance and staging, students also studied *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (Cyrino 2005:159-75) and examined stills from other modern Plautine productions in order to better understand the effect that was intended to be created. In particular, C. W. Marshall's productions (<http://www2.cnrs.ubc.ca/masc/>) as well as J. H. Starks's staging of the *Poenulus* (Starks 1997) were invaluable. These studies were useful in helping students visualise the lively nature of Roman comedy and in enabling them to understand the pace and exuberance required.

Audience and student feedback

The performance itself was attended by a group of students, members of the classics department and a few other interested parties. A programme was handed out to the audience before the show, outlining the main elements of Roman comedy and setting out the aims of the production. In general the play was well received, and the question-and-answer session held after the performance reflected the audience's interest and enthusiasm.

This enthusiasm was echoed by the students themselves. Almost without exception, the evaluation section in their production journals stressed how much they had enjoyed the experience and how much they had learnt, especially when compared with other, more traditional courses. Several described how nervous they had been at the beginning of the course, but how their confidence and interest had grown to leave them with a very positive feeling. In particular, they described their own receptions of Roman comedy, stressing how surprised they had been to find Roman comedy enjoyable, and how important it had been to them to communicate its humour to a modern audience. They emphasised aspects that had appealed to them in Roman comedy and that they had felt strongly should be incorporated into their production, and also highlighted the elements that seemed foreign and unadaptable to them.

IV. The Play: Storm in a Teacup

The Characters

The play featured the following characters, all based on Plautine stereotypes, and with names that, as often in Plautus, symbolised their character in some way:

Sa'ar ("Storm") – a young soldier, just finished his basic training, but who is also a master machinator, equivalent to the Plautine crafty slave.

Tom ("Mr. Innocent") – another young soldier, also just finished his basic training, who has become friendly with Sa'ar, and has been sent with him to the base. Tom is the son of the Chief of Staff, but has kept his identity secret so as to succeed in the army without favouritism. He also, to his father's disapproval, longs to study classics at Bar Ilan University. Tom is equivalent to the Plautine young lover.

Yafa (“Beauty”) – the daughter of the base commander, who is living on the base, and is the unwilling object of the master sergeant’s affections. Yafa corresponds to the female beloved of the amator in Plautine comedy.

Shvitzer (“Braggart”) – the master sergeant, the swaggering soldier of Roman comedy. Convinced of his own attractiveness to the opposite sex, and his bravery, Shvitzer constantly brags about his non-existent and impossible military achievements. He is in love with Yafa, who constantly rejects his advances.

The Chief of Staff – father of Tom, arriving today at short notice for a surprise visit and inspection of the base, and playing the role of the stern father (*pater obiurgator*) of Roman comedy.

Ham (“Hot”) – the cook, who has dreams of opening a gourmet restaurant and who must today produce a feast for the visiting Chief of Staff.

Plot Outline

A metatheatrical prologue, in which the audience is addressed directly by an unnamed character in classical-style dress, opens the performance. She explains that the action of the play takes place on an isolated army base, barely even known except by the handful of soldiers who are posted there, and then introduces the characters one by one. Finally she outlines the key plot element of the arrival of the Chief of Staff, whose identity as Tom’s father is a secret known only to Tom himself at that point. The prologue was based upon the prologues found in two-thirds of extant Plautine plays, and follows the role and techniques of Plautine prologues (Slater 2000:122-6).

The first scene of the play features the arrival of Tom and Sa’ar, and the meeting between Tom and Yafa, who fall in love instantly. There follows a dialogue full of puns and double meanings, in which Tom, in the style of the Plautine lover (e.g. *Cistellaria* 203–28, *Trinummus* 223–75, and *Poenulus* 249-409), his attention focussed on Yafa, hears only the end of Sa’ar’s words to him and applies them to his feelings for Yafa. Sa’ar, in a scene was inspired by *Mostellaria* 161-292, despairs of getting Tom’s attention and directs him to go off with Yafa, saying that he will report to the master sergeant.

At this point, Sa’ar hears the master sergeant, Shvitzer, approaching and directs Tom to hurry off and hide himself; Sa’ar meanwhile conceals himself behind a tree situated in the centre of the stage. Entering, Shvitzer sees Yafa and tries to flirt with her, but she evades him and hurries off after Tom. In an echo of Plautus’ *Pyrgopolynices* (*Miles Gloriosus* 1-116), Shvitzer then muses aloud on his own beauty and fictional military exploits over sixty years of Israeli history, a monologue punctuated by comments to the audience by Sa’ar, who reveals himself as Shvitzer draws to the end of his speech. Informing Shvitzer that he alone has been sent to the base, despite the orders saying that two soldiers would be sent, Sa’ar is assigned a list of chores to help in arranging the base for the arrival of the Chief of Staff later that day, and is sent to assist the cook in preparing the meal. The scene then moves to the kitchen for the first of two comic-chef interludes (*Pseudolus* 804-904, together with Lowe 1985, Gowers 1997:94, and Dohm 1964:142-152), in which Ham, the chef, watched by Sa’ar, delivers a comic monologue about the delicacies he is to prepare, all of which parody army slang.

At the beginning of the next scene, Tom and Yafa are seen, walking and hugging. They are spotted by Shvitzer, who ‘saves’ Yafa, drawing a water pistol on Tom. On discovering that Tom is another new soldier assigned to the base, Shvitzer sends the young lover to the detention cell on the base, where he is shown to be sitting in despair in the next scene. Sa’ar arrives to cheer him up, promising to help, despite his declaration to the audience in an aside that he has no plan in mind at all. He reveals that he has been

put to work because the Chief of Staff is to visit that day. Startled, Tom gasps, 'My father? My father is coming?' but then hastily tries to cover his slip, saying that he had said 'Yafa' not 'Father'. While this scene was not specifically drawn from Roman comedy, Tom's desperate language and exaggerated threats of suicide were based on the Mercator (470-4, 587-600 and 830-41, with Maurice 2003:179-181). Sa'ar's promise to Tom to help him, despite his own lack of a plan at the time, echoes the words of Pseudolus (394-414 and 562-73), Epidicus (81-1003) and Libanus (*Asinaria* 249-265); such behaviour is a feature of the Plautine crafty slave (Duckworth 1994:223-6).

Sa'ar however has put two and two together, and seizes on his new knowledge. Draped in a red cloak, against a background of the colosseum and victory music, he delivers a monologue (described as 'free-style Plautine' in tone) exulting in his own cleverness. In the manner of Plautine slaves such as Pseudolus (*Pseudolus* 574-591) and Chrysalus (*Bacchides* 925-78), he declares that he now has a plan that will enable him to punish Shvitzer, grant happiness to Tom and Yafa, and ensure his own promotion and success in the army ([figure 1](#)).

The scene then reverts to the prison cell, where Tom is dying of his love and threatening to commit suicide if he cannot be reunited at once with Yafa. Sa'ar produces the keys to the cell, describing how he managed to steal them from Shvitzer. He explains that he has persuaded the staff sergeant that Yafa wants to meet with him in secret, and advised him to put on his most impressive uniform for the meeting. This is a uniform with the insignia of the Chief of Staff that Shvitzer keeps as a fancy dress costume. Sa'ar then sends Tom off to the base commander's office, where he is to meet with Yafa, since the base commander, according to him, has left to meet the Chief of Staff, a move inspired by the words of Chrysalus to Mnesilochus and Pistoclus in the *Bacchides* (754-60). The scene ends with his delighted boasting of his own cleverness, reminiscent of Epidicus (*Epidicus* 148-9; 306-9) or Pseudolus (*Pseudolus* 507-52, 562-8).

Shvitzer's room is the setting for the next scene, which was based on *Miles Gloriosus* 1093-1136. Shvitzer is seen getting dressed in his uniform and singing to himself about his own sexiness. Sa'ar watches unseen, laughing, and then reveals himself, to Shvitzer's embarrassment. Sa'ar then sends Shvitzer off to meet Yafa, telling him that she is waiting for him in the base commander's office.

At this point Sa'ar is found by the irate chef, who requires him to help prepare the food, but Sa'ar manages to slip away as the chef practices reciting his menu for the evening. After this comic interlude, the scene changes for the last time to the base commander's office, as Tom and Yafa enter and begin to enjoy a romantic interlude, in which they are interrupted by the entrance of Shvitzer, wearing the uniform of the Chief of Staff. A chase around the room follows, as Shvitzer shouts and abuses Tom, while, with impeccable timing, Sa'ar ushers the Chief of Staff onstage in time to witness this. He intervenes, while Shvitzer blusters, complaining about the terrible new recruits he has been sent, still unaware that he is talking about the son of the chief of staff. When he finally realises the truth, he tries to correct himself, praising Tom effusively, but it is too late. The roots of the final scene can be found in various plays, but the defeat of the soldier in *Miles Gloriosus* (1394-1437) was an obvious inspiration.

At this point, the chief of staff glares at him and the scene then freezes, as the speaker of the prologue enters once again. She explains what happens next: that Tom has earned the respect of his father and been allowed to achieve his dream of studying classics; that Tom and Yafa marry and live happily ever after; that Sa'ar becomes base commander; that Shvitzer is demoted and appointed as assistant and dogsbody to Sa'ar; and finally that Ham completes his military service and opens a gourmet restaurant in Tel Aviv.

At this point, the characters unfreeze and the cook himself runs on, holding covered dishes of food. 'Did I hear my name?' he asks. 'Dinner is served! And the rest of you', he adds, turning to the audience, 'You

can go . . . There’s not enough food for all of you? Don’t you have classes to go to? Go on, goodbye!’

While this final comment parallels the final words of many Plautine comedies, the exposition given by the prologue narrator was not authentic. The students felt uncomfortable however, leaving things open-ended, as Plautus seems to do on occasion, as, for example, with the so-called unresolved romances of the *Epidicus* (Dziatzko 1900, Duckworth 1940:394-6, Fantham 1981:16-17, Lowe 2001:57). My own feeling was that the audience did not actually need things spelled out so clearly, and that the play could have been extended slightly to incorporate the necessary elements of solution. But time constraints in the end impelled the solution that was adopted here.

Structure of the Play

On the basis of earlier research into Plautine structure (Maurice 2005, 2006, 2007), which demonstrated that many Plautine comedies are clearly and symmetrically constructed, an effort was made to reproduce such a structure while writing the play. Although this was an aim, in practice it evolved quite instinctively, and the initial arrangement of the scenes in the play was almost perfectly symmetrical. The decision was taken to make the jubilant monologue by Sa’ar the central pivot, and once this was agreed, the rest of the scenes fell into place without conscious working of their order; there appeared to be an instinctive need to arrange events in a balancing manner. This structure is outlined in [figure 2](#).

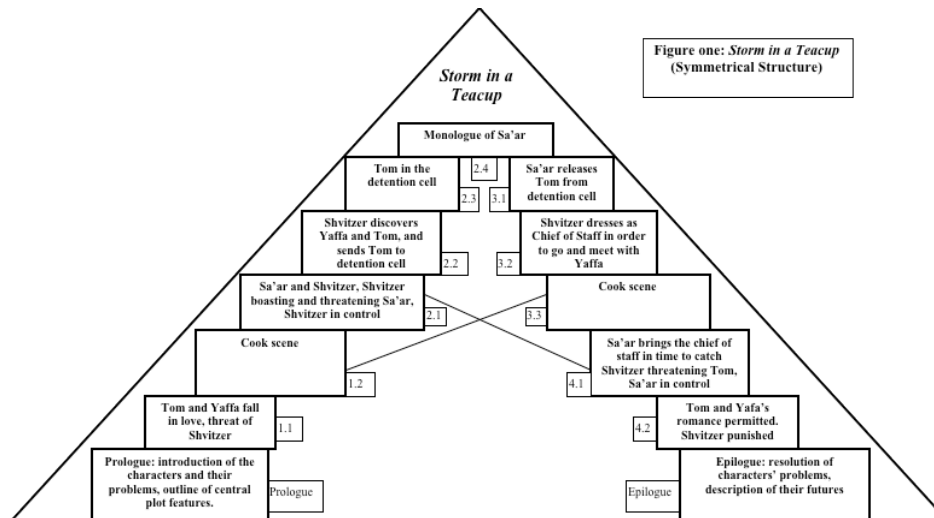


Figure 2: *Storm in a Teacup*—Symmetrical Structure

Production and Staging

Casting

Out of the fifteen students registered for the class, only two were male, and one of these two was the only student with any real background in music. In a somewhat ironic reversal of Roman stage conditions, therefore, the decision was taken therefore to have women play all parts. During rehearsal and in pre-production, debates took place as to how far to make a feature of this, and whether it would be possible to incorporate some element of double-meaning or disguise effect into the plot, based upon the fact that the male parts were played by females (Gold 1998). In the end, however, this proved impractical because of lack of time; the only hint that remained in the final production was a metatheatrical comment by the narrator of the prologue that made reference to the fact that these were male soldiers not female, despite appearances.

The fact that there were only fifteen students involved in the project as a whole, of whom a sizeable

number did not want acting roles, meant that there was very little choice regarding the allocation of parts. It was also decided not to use doubling of parts (see Marshall 2006:94-125), both because there was no need to do so, and because of a need to include every student, while at the same time not to overwhelm them. There was no audition process at all, and roles, as well as other areas of responsibility, were allocated by common agreement in class. To a certain extent, this procedure limited directorial control, since a student's willingness to play a part did not necessarily correspond with her suitability for that part.

Performance space

C. W. Marshall has convincingly argued for the fluid nature of the performance space in Republican Rome, and has described his own experiences in producing open-air productions of Roman comedy (Marshall 2006:31-48). While there would have been interesting discoveries to make if our production had been performed outside, it was felt overall that difficulties such as background noise and lack of seating would have placed unreasonable strain on the audience. In contrast to the Roman *ludi*, our performance took place on a regular day in the last week of semester, when those people who were present on campus would not necessarily have been expecting a dramatic performance. There was therefore small chance of an audience gathering to watch a play that they noticed being performed as they walked from place to place. Had there been an opportunity to put on the play at an event such as a festival (e.g. Students' Day, or a Freshers' Fair), the experiment would have had even more value. As things stood, the situation was so far removed from the original Roman experience that it was decided not to attempt an open-air production.

Another factor influencing this decision was the students' lack of experience as actors. An open-air performance requires far greater voice projection, and depending on the size of the performance area, greater exaggeration of movement; in general a less-naturalistic style of acting is required, and none of the actors felt confident enough to attempt this in the time available. The fact that the temperatures at that time of year were an average of 32°C also discouraged the class from any idea of an open-air performance.

As a result, the performance took place inside. Because of a lack of available theatre facilities, the show was performed in an auditorium usually used for conferences and lectures. The room was equipped with a projector, screen and sound system, but with no stage, only two fixed microphones, and very limited lighting. In contrast to the traditional Roman stage, the stage area itself was also relatively small and narrow. Entrances were possible from behind the stage area, through a door which led from the auditorium, or from stage right or left, which involved entering through the back doors of the auditorium and walking down past the seated audience.

Stage and Set

As is well known, the Roman stage usually involved a street scene and utilized a backdrop that represented two or three houses. Actors could enter from stage right and stage left, each of which represented a fixed point (the forum, the port, etc.), or through the doors ostensibly leading into one of the houses. The setting of the play remained constant throughout the performance; while the audience were expected to suspend disbelief and accept that the stage-set was Athens, Ephesus, or some other city, they were not asked to imagine that it would be more than one place during the course of one play (Duckworth 1994:79-88).

It was decided, as the production evolved, to depart from this convention. While the entire play took place at one location (an army base), our production moved from one part within the base to another, with scenes taking place in the cook's tent, the master sergeant's tent, the base commander's office and the detention cell, as well as outside on the base. Because of the limited personnel available and the lack of funds, it was decided to create these backdrops and changes by use of a PowerPoint presentation

projected onto the back wall behind the stage area. This device also enabled other effects, such as a burst of hearts when the love-at-first-sight moment occurred (figure 3), and the embedding of the various motif tunes that accompanied the entrances of the characters.

Props

Props were of course used by Plautus, as they were by almost every other dramatist before and since (Ketterer 1986, Marshall 2006:66-72). Staging the play quickly showed how important they are in creating effect, and how even very minimal props instantly transform the appearance of a scene. Because of financial considerations, our props were both limited and clearly amateurish in style. This aspect was emphasised, however, in order to add a metatheatrical flavour to the production. Thus a tree made out of cardboard was placed on stage at the beginning of the play, and at one point Sa'ar picked it up and held it before him in order to hide behind it. A similar effect was created for the prison scene; a prison door was made out of cardboard, and brought in and held in position by another student. This approach was also used in what turned out to be one of the funniest visual gags: when Shvitzer was dressing in order to go and meet Yafa, a frame that represented a mirror was brought on stage and held in position by two students. As Shvitzer approached the mirror and dressed, another student came on and acted as his reflection. Since this student was a tall male, this created a very funny moment that the audience appreciated (figure 4).

Other props were also limited: Yafa carried a basket of paper flowers, Shvitzer carried a water pistol shaped like an Uzi. The chef's 'kitchen' consisted of a borrowed trolley with kitchen utensils and an array of vegetables. In general, jokes about the limited budget and resultant simplicity of the set were included in the script and contributed to the metatheatrical effect, as indeed they may have done in Plautine comedy (Muecke 1986, Hardy 2005).

Costume

Again, the production's very low budget encouraged improvisation of cheap costumes. The fact that army uniforms could easily be obtained as costumes for almost all the cast was one factor that influenced the choice of play at the very outset. To the basic army fatigues were added individualising touches: the Chief of Staff had, as well as his insignia, a garland on his head that was intended to evoke both the Roman victory laurel wreath and also the feast garland so often sported in Roman comedy. Sa'ar regularly appeared without his army shirt, wearing a white T-shirt instead, and during his "Plautine monologue (freestyle)", wore a red cloak that was thrown around his shoulders as he declaimed in the manner of a successful general. The cook's costume consisted of an apron and hat worn over his army fatigues. The female parts were differentiated from the male by the fact that they wore white Roman-style dresses. These were based on the chiton principle of two rectangular pieces of cloth joined at the



Figure 3: Love-at-first-sight moment (Galit Dror as Yafa and Moriya Shal as Tom) (photo: Hana Leider)

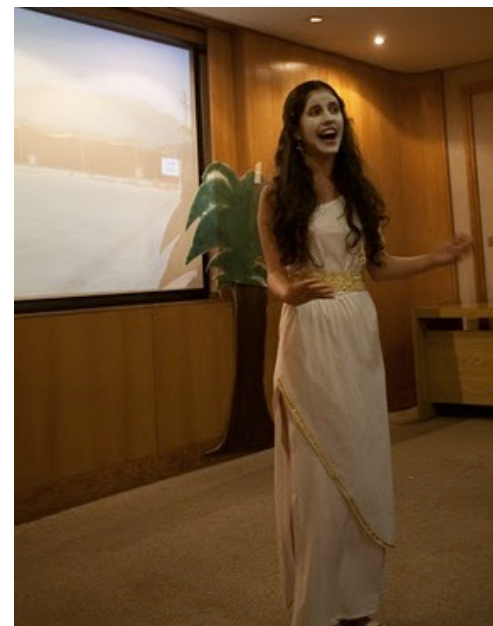


Figure 5: The Prologue (Maya Ben-Nun as the Narrator) (photo: Hana Leider)

shoulder seams and belted with a cord (Cleland, Davies and Llewellyn-Jones 2007:32-3, Croom 2002, Hope 2003, Sebasta and Bonfante 2001:221-6). The narrator of the prologue wore a tunic dress knotted at one shoulder ([figure 5](#)), while Yafa's was sewn at both shoulder-seams.

It was striking and somewhat surprising how effective these very limited costumes looked in production, and how much the costumes contributed to the creation of a particular impression or effect. The individual garments and accessories gave an immediate impression of who the character was and what his role was likely to be. It is of course well known that the stock characters of Plautine comedy wore appropriate stock costumes; but just how effective and important these costumes are was made far clearer and apparent in performance. Witnessing the audience's immediate recognition as the comic chef wheeled on his makeshift kitchen was a lesson in how much such theatre draws on physical stereotypes of character, even when that is not apparent from the script.

Masks

Any production of ancient drama must inevitably deal with the thorny question of masks. It seems clear to me that masks were used in the original Plautine productions, and that any attempt to stage a Plautine comedy should involve the use of masks (Wiles 2004; 2004b; Walton 1996:41-57; Marshall 1999; Johnson 1992; Hall 2000; Coldiron 2002). Since we had decided that we were creating a modern comedy in the Plautine style, however, and since we were staging the play under entirely different conditions, it could be argued that the criterion should not be applied. Where masks were an expected element in the Roman theatre experience, and were used to create certain effects, a twenty-first century audience would have very different expectations. Long discussions therefore took place in class concerning whether the performance should be masked, and after extensive debate, the decision was made not to attempt to use masks in our production. This was partly because of the audience's unfamiliarity with masked performance, which we felt would create distance between them and the action of the play. The actors' own inexperience was another motivating factor in this decision, since they did not feel confident that they could successfully learn to perform in masks, especially with such a short rehearsal period. In this instance the gap between Plautus' world and their own seemed very large indeed.

Yet the principle of masking was clearly an important one, and so a compromise was adopted. Inspired by traditional clown make-up, a stylized, exaggerated make-up was adopted, which attempted to give a look similar to that of a mask but without the difficulties involved in performing with a mask. The similarities between a mask and such make-up have been recognised by those involved in the world of clowning:

The wearing of a mask, red nose or make-up has a number of effects on the individual or performer. For a performer, the use of a full or half mask shifts the spectator's focus away from



Figure 6: Mask make-up of Yafa (Galit Dror) and Tom (Moriya Shal) (photo: Hana Leider)



Figure 7: Mask make-up of the Narrator (Maya Ben-Nun) and Yafa (Galit Dror) (photo: Hana Leider)

facial expression as a clue to what he intends to communicate. This means that the performer has to develop greater levels of physical skill, often in mime, to allow for communication or emotional nuance. Masks depersonalize the wearer; the individual's identity is abnegated, replaced instead by a new and different individual. The mask separates the performer from the spectator and reinforces the spectator's role as observer of a world different from their everyday reality. The mask also frees the performer psychologically, for the behaviour is the behaviour of the mask and not the performer behind it.

Yet there are also differences between such make-up and masks:

In contrast, the red nose focuses the audience's attention on facial expression rather than bodily movement. It also signals the clown's difference from normal people and the brightness of the colour draws the audience's eyes to the clown's face, thus highlighting nuance, which is particularly important in a silent performance. Make-up has a similar impact in that it creates a sense of otherness and the positioning of colour on the face, particularly in combination with a red nose, makes the clown's face fascinating for the audience. (Peacock 2009:15)

Bearing this in mind, we aimed to create make-up that was as masklike as possible, but not with the brightly exaggerated features that would lead to this 'sense of otherness' and create distance between the audience and the performers. An oval white, clearly defined make-up base was therefore employed for all characters. Other features were then added to this base but in a less-exaggerated fashion than in clown make-up. Thus Tom and Yafa both had red but not outsize lips and red hearts painted on their cheeks ([figure 6](#)); Sa'ar was given circular ruddy cheeks; and the cook sported a twirling moustache drawn on in black. The make-up of the person speaking the prologue was entirely white, but she wore no make-up on her eyes and mouth, which created a very mask-like effect as she appeared to be looking and speaking through holes in a white mask ([figure 7](#)).

Music

Since very few of the course participants had any background in music, attempts to introduce anything approaching Plautine *cantica* were, regrettably, abandoned at an early stage. Instead, a motif tune was composed or chosen and adapted for each character, which played whenever he or she came on stage, whilst other tunes provided background to scenes in keeping with the atmosphere of the action (a love scene, a chase, etc.). These musical motifs were played through the sound system, rather than with live instruments, so the modern production differed in this respect as well from Roman comedy. Music therefore played an integral part of the play, but unfortunately not on the scale it undoubtedly played in Plautine comedy (Duckworth 1994:361-4; Moore 1988, 1999). This lack actually confirmed to me just how central music was to Plautine performance, for I felt that although our production in many ways did manage to recreate a Plautine atmosphere, in this aspect it failed to do so, and the whole performance was far more sedate and restrained than a musical version would have been.

V. Observations: The Practice of Play-Making

As stated above, one of the major aims of this course was to experience how in practice a play develops from an idea, via a text, to a staged production in rehearsal and in performance, and to observe the differences between each of these stages. The presence of noticeable differences between text and performance, which reflects that the text is an intermediate stage rather than a final product, underlines the importance of performance reception as an area of research that is distinct from textual reception. Such differences might also help us to understand better the practical aspects of production and staging of Roman comedy itself, as the modern process of performance illuminates the ancient.

C. W. Marshall has suggested that improvisation is likely to have played a considerable part in Plautine

comedy, meaning that in this semi-literate society, the script may not have existed before performance, and that the play itself was to a certain extent a collaborative effort on the part of the authors, following the basic plot, characters and outline laid down by the playwright (Marshall 2006:260-79). Overall, our experience confirmed many of Marshall's theories, and lent weight to the idea that improvisation was a feature of Plautine comedy.

In the case of our modern play, a product of an 'almost entirely literate' society, we started with a script (which was nevertheless produced collaboratively). It was striking, however, how far that initial text differed from the final performance. Ideas that evolved only in rehearsal were adopted, speeches were refined and altered as the actors experimented with the sound and feel of the text. The importance of blocking the scripts immediately emerged, as the group grappled with the logistics of the plot and the importance of creating a credible sense of space in the audience's eyes. Inconsistencies that were unnoticeable in the text became glaring when on stage, and conversely plot discrepancies that were agonised over on occasion were barely discernible in a staged performance. It became clear in performance that the audience followed the plot by focusing on the general appearance and the actions far more than on the actual words, although snappy dialogue and gags remained of vital importance in sustaining audience interest and enjoyment.

One aspect of this emphasis on the appearance of the stage action was that a large number of physical moves and visual gags emerged as the play (as opposed to the text) began to take shape. These were often the funniest parts of the performance. For example, when rehearsing the scene in which Shvitzer is dressing to go and meet Yaffa, one of the students commented that the actress playing Shvitzer was shorter than Yaffa, but that he must have a different view of his own appearance. From this came the idea of having a mirror frame and a taller male actor, representing Shvitzer's mental picture of himself, mimicking Shvitzer's movements as he dressed to a musical accompaniment; this was in the end one of the most popular moments of the show. It was not an idea that could have emerged however from the script alone. It was only when watching the scene in action that the incongruity and comedic potential emerged. This experience brought home to the students the difference between reading a text and watching a play, and demonstrated just how much modern scholars lack in possessing only written texts of the performances.

The role of the audience also played a part in the improvisational nature of the performance. It was clear that, inexperienced as the actors were, they responded to the presence of the audience by adding unscripted lines or moves, according to expressions they saw on people's faces, or audience laughter. A professional group of actors would surely have reacted even more. Similarly, it is very likely that the play itself would have changed from performance to performance if a series of performances had been held, according to the audience and atmosphere on a particular day, as actors improvised and reacted to these elements (*cf.* Marshall 2006:73-82).

VI. Perspectives: The reception of Roman comedy in 21st-century Israel

Plot and Subject Matter

One of the most enlightening aspects of teaching this course was observing how certain elements of Roman comedy were received by Israeli students of the twenty-first century. As so often with reception studies, appreciation of these elements can lead to a deeper understanding not only of Roman comedy of the second century BCE but also contemporary Israeli society. It also highlights the fact that similar processes must have taken place at every stage of the reception of Plautine comedy throughout history, as different societies responded to the plays according to their own contemporary concerns and interests.

One obvious point was the focus on the *miles gloriosus* as a figure in the modern production. This stock

character was a figure that appealed to the students, who were well able to identify the blustering soldier as stereotype with a great deal of comic potential. Throughout antiquity, war was a normal part of everyday life (Patterson 1993:94). During the Hellenistic period, warfare became the pursuit of full-time professionals. Hellenistic kings needed large forces and supplemented their armies with hired mercenaries and specialists. The professional soldier was such a common figure that by the end of the fourth century he had become a stock character in Athenian New Comedy, where he is depicted as a boastful, hard-drinking philanderer (Trundle 2004:34).

The Roman Republic was a society in which the military was of even more central importance to society than it had been in the Hellenistic kingdoms, and Plautus' plays reflect this importance. In general, the Plautine comedies are shot through with military language and metaphors (Fraenkel 2007:159-165; MacCary 1969), and his audience seems to be preoccupied with war (Harris 1979:43). During the period in which Plautus wrote his plays changes were occurring, as years of seasonal warfare gave place to an ongoing military presence in areas far from Rome (Harris 1979:157-60), but the army played no less pivotal a role than it had done for earlier generations.

Although Plautus took the figure of the braggart soldier from his Greek models, he used this character precisely because it was relevant to his own society, and it is likely that his portrayal of the soldier carried somewhat different connotations for his spectators than Menander's did for a Hellenistic audience. Thus John A. Hanson argues that, although Pyrgopolynices is a Greek figure, Plautus presents him in such a way as to suggest a Roman military leader (Hanson 1965). (On the other hand Leach [1979] sees Pyrgopolynices as different from other blustering Plautine soldiers, and as an enemy soldier, whose defeat and humiliation would have delighted the audience.) As Segal points out, the mockery of the soldier in Roman comedy also reflects his importance in society, for comedy typically makes fun of figures most revered in real life (Segal 1987:124-8).

Israel is also a society in which the military plays a central and important role. The threat of warfare is ever-present, and the citizen army is held in high esteem. Serving in the army acts as a kind of rite of passage and unifying force for young Israelis, and brings with it entitlement to participation in civil society. As one scholar has written,

Army service and the sense of its supreme importance is a common experience. Sephardic and Ashkenazik, secular and modern Orthodox – all experience the same system . . . Everyone who is bodily able goes into the army . . . Israeli leaders over the years understood this well; they knew the army . . . was the key agent of socialization in a largely immigrant and very heterogeneous society. (A. M. Garfinkle 2000:116; Helman 1999:194)

Similarly, the military as a whole, and soldiers in particular, are held in high esteem in Israel. As Garfinkle stresses, 'Being a professional soldier in Israel is a very high-status profession. Being a member of an elite battalion, such as the Golani brigade, is the dream of thousands of boys. Far more Israeli youngsters want to be air force pilots than wealthy businessmen or movie stars or sports heroes' (Garfinkle 2000:110). Because of this high status accorded to the figure of the soldier, which allows him to be mocked by comedy, the boastful soldier was a character who had resonance for the modern Israeli students participating in the class, and this figure quickly became central to the play.

Although the army hierarchy in Israel is characterised by being a flat hierarchy, the military is nevertheless one of the few places in which a formal hierarchy exists and is accepted. In most other areas of society social structures are conditioned by a range of factors such as ethnic background, economic status, education and so on. The divisions between members of social groupings are often fluid and social mobility is common, while hierarchy and formality are rare in most aspects of life from business to education. Republican Rome by contrast, as a hierarchical society in which citizens (and non-citizens)

were divided into different social ranks according to ancestry and wealth, offered very different social conditions. That comedy exploited these social conditions by overturning and breaking social boundaries—for example, by allowing slaves to triumph over senators and young men over their fathers—has been explained in depth over the last twenty years (Segal 1987). The use of the army as the setting for the modern production therefore made somewhat easier the application of Roman comedy, with its reversal of roles, to such a differently structured society.

Modern anthropological research has also highlighted connections between the army and acting. The development of stereotyped roles within the platoon has parallels in the stock characters of Roman comedy. Thus one study talks of the ‘the emergence of “characters” within the battalion’s sub-units (the company clown or the platoon’s “expressive” leader, for example)’ (Ben-Ari 1989:374). There is also a sense that taking on the identity of a soldier is a kind of adoption of a role, for the act of going into uniform for military service (in this case reserve duty) is also described as the putting on of a costume: ‘Many soldiers refer to the wearing of uniforms on the first day of reserve duty as the donning of disguises, as the bearing of masks’ (Ben-Ari 1989:378). Such factors probably subconsciously attracted the students to a military setting for their adaptation of Plautus.

Tone of the play

One rather surprising aspect that emerged throughout the production process was the students’ attitude towards sexuality, in particular sexual innuendo. I was startled to realise that in the liberated noughties, the majority of the group were very uncomfortable with openly using sexual innuendo. They were shocked by their early reading of Terence, whose rape references in the *Eunuchus* and *Adelphoi* appalled them, and they would clearly have been very ill at ease performing Aristophanes. It should be noted that this was not a religious group of students, and all apart from one had served in the army. Whether the attitude of the group as a whole is representative of wider groups, be it the university, or Israeli youth as a whole, can obviously not be argued on such slim evidence; but it was an interesting point to observe nevertheless. It may have been that Plautus (as opposed to Terence and Aristophanes) appealed to them specifically because they did not find his humour and attitude towards sexuality threatening. Roman republican society is often cited as being morally strict; it might be that Israeli society, which is frequently also regarded as conservative, relates more easily to the values of Plautus’ time than to those of other classical periods. It is also possible that the overt sexuality in the Plautine plays studied was so limited that the students were able to interpret them in a way with which they felt at ease; this interpretation may also be greatly removed from the staging of the plays in Republican Rome. If so, it is an interesting reception of Plautus in 21st century Israel.

VII. Results and Conclusions

The experiment of staging a Plautine-inspired modern comedy was an enlightening experience. It demonstrated that in this reception of Plautus at least, improvisation and fluidity were an integral part of the production process, and physical and visual humour were of paramount importance. To this extent, then, this project supported modern theories concerning Plautine comedy. It was also clear that many aspects of Plautine comedy were as accessible today as they must have been more than two thousand years ago when they were first performed. Much of the humour proved to be both universal and unbounded by time or place. Metatheatrical aspects still appealed, while the strength and flexibility of stock characters was apparent. Some of the themes of Roman comedy also had resonance for this particular group, who particularly identified with the contemporary military stresses and references apparent in the Plautine corpus, and with the lack of overt sexuality apparent in so many other examples of comedy throughout history. On the other hand, some aspects of Plautine comedy were alienating for these students, in particular the use of music and masks. Many of the conditions of staging were also different, particularly with regard to performance space and the abilities and situation of the *grex*. In

order to counter these difficulties, changes were obviously made in this reception of Plautus, although further experiments of this nature could perhaps take these elements more into account. Despite these changes, one thing emerged above all: that the reception of Plautine comedies in performance has interest and fascination for audiences and performers alike in the very different worlds in which they are performed, even in the twenty-first-century society of the modern State of Israel.

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Oedipus

by Seneca
Translated and adapted by Ted Hughes
Directed by Matthew Moore
July 28 - August 14, 2011
Stanford Summer Theater
Nitory Theater, Stanford University

Review by **David J. Jacobson**
University of California, Berkeley

For the concluding play of Stanford Summer Theater's thirteenth season, the Memory Play Festival, Artistic Director Rush Rehm selected Ted Hughes's translation and adaptation of Seneca's *Oedipus*. The National Theatre in London commissioned Hughes in 1968 as a last-minute replacement for David Turner, whose translation director Peter Brook found unsuitable to his vision of the production. Within a few weeks Hughes delivered a raw, visceral script, stripped of the original's lengthy rhetorical speeches, references to divinities, and elaborate metrical structures (elements that Hughes believed had not stood the test of time), but brilliantly capturing the essence of Seneca's play.

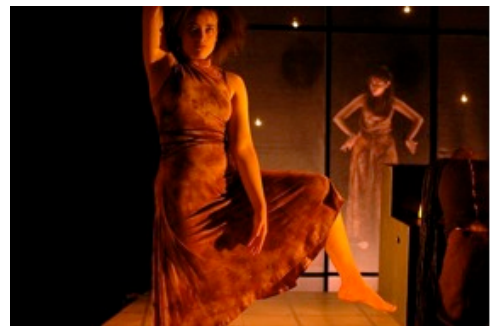
Hughes's *Oedipus*, like Seneca's, spotlights the verbal, poetic arts at the expense of more dramatic qualities. Director Matthew Moore's *Oedipus* manages to redress the balance through the carefully planned use of space, music, dance, and acting that complements the power of Hughes's poetry. The Stanford *Oedipus* was played in an intimate black-box theater on a slightly raised trapezoidal stage with an illuminable circle downstage at center. Large aisles flanked the stage, providing ample room for entrances and exits, as well as an unobtrusive space for the chorus to sit when they were not directly engaged with the action. Stage right led to the city center of Thebes, stage left into the palace. Above the stage were small pendant lights, which lent a nocturnal air to the play. And while this illumination stood in tension with the chorus's opening words ("night is finished"), it elegantly represented the "reluctant" sun whose "sickly daylight" was filtered through the cloud of plague.

On entering the theater, the audience saw the stage covered with a white satin sheet; Thebes was presented as a bed. There was no throne yet, just two black blocks situated behind the stage. During the first two acts these were moved onstage, sat or stood upon by various characters, until finally, by the end of Act Two, a rudimentary throne had been formed upstage. In Act Four, the throne's arms were attached as Oedipus learned who his real mother is. The symbol of Oedipus's royal authority gradually took shape before our eyes, but its complete form was bitterly ironic and short-lived.

The palace façade was a scrim employed sparingly to good effect. The play opened with the Sphinx, ominously silhouetted, wings outstretched. Her voice, like Creon's during his ventriloquism of Laius in



Matt DiBiasio as Oedipus and Courtney Walsh as Jocasta.
Photo courtesy of Stanford Drama.



Leigh Marshall (front) and Sukanya Chakrabarti (performing hand-dance) as Chorus members; Matt DiBiasio as Oedipus.
Photo courtesy of Stanford Drama.

Act Three, was given an otherworldly timbre with the aid of a microphone as she roared her programmatic riddle:

show us
 show us
 a simple riddle lift everything aside
 show us
 a childish riddle
 what has four legs at dawn
 two legs at noon three legs at dusk
 and is it weakest when it has the most?
 'I will find the answer' is that an answer?
 show us

The metatheatricality of the repeated “show us” was nicely underscored by the chorus’s whispered echo of the final utterance. Indeed, *we* were shown. The scrim’s second use came at the close of Act Three. As the chorus danced and chanted their ode downstage and Oedipus crouched against his throne upstage, with his back to the audience for the first time, one of the chorus members (Sukanya Chakrabarti, who also played Phorbas) performed an elegant Indian hand dance. The blocking here focused attention simultaneously on the ruler whose control was slipping away and on the motif of hands (used visually throughout this production—Oedipus was seen often methodically rubbing his arms from his biceps down to his fingertips, as if they were itching to do something), foreshadowing the moment when his fingers will finally tear his eyeballs from their sockets. The best use of the scrim, however, occurred at the end of Act Four. Jocasta, having failed to persuade her husband-son to stop seeking the truth, slinked offstage. As Oedipus continued to press Phorbas for information about his birth, we saw Jocasta behind the scrim. At times she covered her face with her dress and put her hands on her head or her face. Her pain was palpable. The staging here implored the audience to recall Sophocles’ *Oedipus* and to interpret Jocasta’s silent exit, visible despondency, and her actions behind the scrim as portents of the queen’s imminent suicide. But this is Seneca, not Sophocles, and the audience’s partial recollection of how things are “supposed” to unfold effectively echoes the imperfect memories and (mis)recollections of past events by characters within the play.

Spatially, the stage comprised two semidistinct places: downstage was associated with Thebes at large, while upstage, which represented the palace and the area immediately before it, was closely tied to the inner workings of the city’s politics. The interconnectivity between these two spaces, growing as the play progressed and the characters (Oedipus and Jocasta in particular) moved more freely up and down the stage, was neatly presaged by the drama’s opening scene, in which a shirtless, bearded Oedipus clad in dark, red-trimmed trousers entered from the door that admitted the audience. He confidently told the Sphinx “I will find the answer,” and then approached Jocasta, who, now visible beneath the sheet, beckoned him seductively with a gentle flip of the fabric. They embraced, enveloped each other in the



Thomas Freeland as Laius.
 Photo courtesy of Stanford Drama.



Matt DiBiasio as Oedipus and Courtney Walsh as Jocasta.
 Photo courtesy of Stanford Drama.

sheet, and lay together. The incestuous union covertly enacted before us upstage soon spilled over onto the rest of the stage as Oedipus and Jocasta moved forward and discussed the role of kingship. Thus the cause of the plague (shown upstage) and its effects on the rest of the city (downstage) were concisely presented. Throughout the play, but especially during the union of Oedipus and Jocasta, the music of Michael St. Clair facilitated a deeper engagement with the events onstage. His original compositions, prerecorded and played over a sound system, used a range of tonalities to augment (and sometimes even generate) the emotional tenor of each scene.

Occasionally I found the staging distracting. One challenge facing all directors of this play is how to get Oedipus's sword onstage. In this production the Slave places it on the throne before delivering his messenger speech. While this staging is not without precedent, it is awkward at best, leaving us wondering why he had the sword to begin with and why he placed it where he did. I would have preferred Oedipus to wear the sword from the beginning or to be equipped with it at some point during the play, perhaps at the end of Act One as he assumes his kingly garb during the choral ode. Twice I found the blocking at odds with the verses. At the opening of Act Two, Oedipus stood at the front of the stage, looking at the audience as he announced Creon's entrance, but Creon entered from the stage-right aisle *behind* Oedipus and therefore could not be seen by the king. The other instance occurred during the extispicy scene as Manto (Beth Deitchman), kneeling near the front of the stage, described how the altar's smoke encircled the king's head. Oedipus mimed this action, but he was standing at some remove behind her and was thus out of her visual frame. Moore was certainly right in placing Manto and Teiresias downstage, in a position of visual prominence, but the difficulty in staging could have been overcome easily if Manto broke her forward-looking gaze and followed the imagined smoke from the altar as it made it way toward Oedipus.

The examination of the sacrificial entrails, which has provoked much debate about the difficulty and even possibility of its performance, was staged with minimal props. Manto, with her father Tiresias (Raine Hoover) standing to her right on one of the black boxes that would later make up Oedipus's throne, knelt before a gold bowl filled with red fabric as she related the ghastly details of the sacrifice. And although we were asked to imagine a great deal, Deitchman's delivery was thoroughly convincing. The wise decision to forgo stage blood for cloth linked the satin sheet of Act One with the queen's black, red-trimmed dress with a bright red lining—a stark contrast to the white one she donned at the beginning of the play.

The acting was strong, often mesmerizing. Courtney Walsh delivered an engaging and sympathetic Jocasta, always in full control of her role, the stage, and the props. In Act One, for example, she deftly rolled the large sheet into a small, joyless bundle as she described Oedipus's gestation:

when I carried my
first son
did I know what was coming did I know
what ropes of blood were twisting together what
bloody footprints
were hurrying together in my body

Walsh flawlessly communicated Jocasta's complex tangle of emotions—love, pain, anger, resentment. The queen's suicide, committed by plunging Oedipus's sword deep into her womb, balanced this scene perfectly. Thomas Freeland was brilliant as Creon. In Act Three, standing atop the illuminable circle—a space associated with death throughout—and lit from beneath with an eerie green glow, he gave voice to Laius. Freeland's performance here was so captivating that when Creon broke free of the trance some members of the audience gasped. Max Sosna-Spear (Slave / chorus) delivered one of the best messenger speeches I have ever seen, exemplifying the self-restraint of the actors and of Moore in trusting the

effectiveness of Hughes's poetry. Standing somewhat stiffly, arms to his side, Sosna-Spear's static recounting of Oedipus's gruesome self-blinding was a lesson in the power of vocal modulation and poetic delivery. As Oedipus, Matt DiBiasio was perhaps too loud and forceful from the start, certainly conveying the king's imperious nature, but obscuring much of Oedipus's emotional journey by failing to adjust his vigor and volume. This approach, however, did effectively spotlight Oedipus's change in character after his blinding. Eyeless, and again shirtless, Oedipus stumbled onstage, mounted his throne, and sang "all is well." He spoke with such a profound sense of relief that he seemed almost drunk, and exchanged his previously rigid stance (an effective expression of the king's political inflexibility) for a slouching, head-hanging posture, at times even sitting or kneeling on the stage.

When the chorus (Sukanya Chakrabarti, Beth Deitchman, Raine Hoover, Annika Kumli, Leigh Marshall, Max Sosna-Spear) took the stage, their presence was often riveting. Nowhere was this more evident than at the end of Act Two, where Hughes replaced Seneca's "Ode to Bacchus" with a ritualistic chant that begins:

OOO-AI-EE . . . KA
 CHANT 3 TIMES
 REPLY 3 TIME

Whereas Hugh endeavored "to make a text that would release whatever inner power this story" has to "unearth . . . the ritual possibilities within it," Moore goes one step further, excising Hughes's text completely and transforming the ode into a vigorous "dance against the dead."¹ This was, without question, one of the best moments of the play. The "ode," a perfect marriage of driving music and energetic movement, utterly captivated the audience, drawing us into the ritual of both the moment and the play. Through the ritual we became invested in Thebes' fate. When the dancing and music ceased abruptly, the spell was broken and we returned (unhappily) to confront our dying city. Moore took a risk in adopting a modern idiom—the scene had the intense, pounding energy of a rave or music video—to convey something of a "ritual experience" for an audience composed predominately of older members of the Palo Alto and Stanford communities, though some undergraduates were in attendance. But the risk paid off and the audience seemed to be drawn quite wholeheartedly into the action.

While the choral odes of Seneca's *Oedipus* are often viewed as extraneous, Moore's production emphasized them. The sheer physicality of the chorus, particularly in the "dance against the dead," showed that despite the seemingly incurable suffering that afflicted the city, a vitality still remained in Thebes. Plague victims at the beginning, the chorus showed strength and resilience as the play progressed. Their final dance, performed as Oedipus blindly made his way offstage under the green-lit "exit" sign (through which he had made his first entrance), was a far cry from Hughes's concluding stage direction: "*The Chorus celebrate the departure of Oedipus with a dance.*" Mirroring their earlier encircling of Oedipus and Jocasta immediately after the sheet scene, a dance which grew ever more violent and concluded with their falling into a lifeless, plague-destroyed heap atop the illuminable circle, the chorus this time stood around Jocasta's corpse and raised their arms calmly over their heads like a blooming flower. Thus the play ends. The celebration is muted and understated, but the effect of the renewal is made clear.

note

¹ T. Hughes. 1969. *Seneca's Oedipus*. London. 7–8.

Sophocles: Seven Sicknesses

Adapted and Directed by Sean Graney
September 6-October 23, 2011
The Hypocrites
at The Chopin Theater, Chicago

Review by **Teresa M. Danze Lemieux**
University of Chicago

Of established Chicago-based off-loop theatre today, The Hypocrites might be the most consistently cutting edge company around. Since its founding in 1997 by Sean Graney, The Hypocrites have gained a reputation for boldly tackling absurdist playwrights and throwing a bit of the humorous into straight-laced tragedies, winning countless accolades from local reviewers and multiple Joseph Jefferson nominations and awards. Their original approach is supported by a mission to make a "Theater of Honesty" in which actors strive for "genuine emotional vulnerability" while acknowledging the artificial nature of theater by "embrac[ing] high theatricality." They vow to abide by authorial intent, to create a new experience for every production, and to respect their audience, but they reserve the right to break all their own principles.¹ Apply this philosophy to Sophocles and the results are anything but conventional. In 2001, Graney adapted and directed *Ajax*, adding Edith Hamilton (an influence on all of his work with Greek tragedy) as a character—a narrator who commissions the play's invented Jacobson family of three to perform the roles alongside a choral group of mustachioed sailors.² While it opened to mixed reviews, the play received a Jeff nomination for best adaptation. The Jeff recommended *Oedipus* in 2009 seemed more to the critics' liking as a "rock opera"³ set in a carnivalesque back alley. Iocasta downed bleach while singing a lounge song in a port-a-potty; balloons were tossed around between actors and audience.⁴ Most recently, The Hypocrites tackled all seven of Sophocles' fully extant tragedies as *Sophocles: Seven Sicknesses*, the highly anticipated four-hour epic adaptation written and directed by Sean Graney and performed at the Chopin Theatre in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood, September 6–October 23, 2011. This review will look at how the adaptation succeeds as both a performance and as a reworking of the seven original tragedies.

For a contemporary audience that expects the familiar tones and circumstances of realistic film, TV, or theater, nothing could be more foreign than choral song and dance, the framework of a largely unfamiliar mythology, and the poetry of Sophoclean speech. Consequently, the uninhibited



Figure 1: Jeff Trainor as Oedipus with Sarah Jackson and Shannon Matesky as the Nurses.
Photo: Matthew Gregory Hollis.



Figure 2: Lindsay Gavel as the Blind Seer (front) with Tien Doman, Erin Barlow, and Walter Briggs.
Photo: Matthew Gregory Hollis.



Figure 3: Erin Barlow as Jocasta.
Photo: Matthew Gregory Hollis.

Hypocrites are the perfect group to tackle what modern audiences often consider to be the impenetrable oddities of Greek tragedy. They break these unfamiliar elements down and rebuild them into an ambitious tragicomedy filled with emotional depth, sophisticated staging, and perfect comedic timing. By bringing death from behind the scenes, laughing at tragic irony, and altering the plays to emphasize an identifiable theme, Graney in particular translates Sophocles for the popular American palate. For purists, Graney's work in the *Seven Sicknesses* as a whole might be regarded as a failure. The gods are largely absent, stories are twisted to facilitate loose connections between the plays, and Graney's adaptations of *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae* betray some of the core elements that make the originals uniquely Sophoclean. But for viewers who are open to bending the rules, as indeed Athenians must have been in regard to their own mythological and narrative expectations, this production of Sophocles' seven extant works offers a riveting, fast-paced evening of compelling drama with a dash of Aristophanic humor thrown into the mix.

The play as a whole is divided into three parts, and each part is subdivided into acts that are grouped according to the status of honor within the plays. "Honor Lost" contains "Oedipus," "In Trachis," and "In Colonus," while "Honor Found" comprises "Philoctetes" and "Ajax." "Elektra" and "Antigone" conclude the evening under the title of "Honor Abandoned." Two intermissions, the first with a Mediterranean meal, separate the three parts. The acts within the parts follow each other without interruption, the mopped-up blood of one tragedy preparing the way for new misery in the next. The honor and dignity prized by the protagonists in "Honor Lost" cannot prevent their tragedies, written by the Fates and ensured by human pride. While Philoktetes and Ajax find ways to recapture honor, it comes at a cost: Philoktetes must abide by Heracles' will and Ajax must die. By the end of "Honor Abandoned," we have learned that honor is an unattainable goal as long as the sins of man continue to afflict us.

This search for honor takes place neither on a battlefield nor before the doors of a palace but within the sanitized space of the hospital. Upon entering the theatre, ushers direct the audience through swinging doors that open directly onto the set by Tom Burch and Maria Defabo—a raised galley stage disguised as an operating room complete with white linoleum, harsh lighting, and an operating table. From there, audience members must choose to sit either left or right of the stage while vulnerably on display to the earlier arrivals who have just completed the same ritual. Our traverse of the stage into an intimate space fit for fifty challenges us to accept our exposure: we are all ill and in need of a cure, all responsible for and complicit in the process.

As we settle onto our pillowed bench seats with drinks from the lobby bar, preparing for four hours of advertised blood and bawdy humor, the cast of twelve actors arrives onstage in costume with energetic and jovial smiles to welcome audience members. In accordance with what we have come to expect from this theatre company, costuming for *Seven Sicknesses* avoids the traditionally classical and instead favors bold colors and contemporary silhouettes. Indeed, Alison Siple's costumes speak volumes about each character without suggesting any one time period. Menelaus could be a WW II general in his trench coat and military hat, while Iocasta would easily fit in with the New York socialites of the new millennium in her jewel-tone sateen dress. Though it is hard to say whether Chrysothemis's bright pink petticoat skirt would better suit Elle Woods of *Legally Blonde* or one of the Pink Ladies from *Grease*, either character would be at home in Siple's wardrobe and Graney's adaptation of the *Electra*. The initial preview of actors in costume ultimately reminds us that we are about to see familiar stories in a new way, presented by a group that doesn't take itself too seriously—a realization that puts us at ease with the strangers we're actually rubbing elbows with.

The opening of the first act shows immediately what kind of adaptation we are in for. Instead of the silent supplication of the priests and children found at the beginning of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, two young Nurses in aquamarine dresses with white aprons (Sarah Jackson and Shannon Matesky) enter

through the swinging doors. One is newly hired, the other experienced. "Don't speak, just work," the latter exclaims. You can feel the classicists in the room take note: this is your chorus and it is not traditional. In fact, Graney's chorus sings only once and it barely speaks. These women are here to bandage wounds, sever the gangrenous foot of Philoktetes, and mop up the bloody aftermath of every eye-gouge, suicide, and murder that occurs onstage. This is not to say that there are no genuinely choral elements in the production. The protagonists and minor characters facing a critical moment in each play sing the lyrics from Bruce Springsteen's album *The River* to the tunes of Kevin O'Donnell's soft musical score. These heartfelt ballads of nostalgia and blue-collar strife suspend the rapid pace of the show and temper the mood, helping us cope with the death and tragedy we have or will soon witness on the stage. Philoktetes' ode to his amputated foot, sung in the lyrics of the Springsteen album's title track, is oddly touching, and "Fade Away" turns Ajax's suicide by a five-foot butcher knife into a poignant inevitability that is as much about his loss of honor as about the loss of his relationship with Tecmessa. Had the Nurses been given the choral task, the middle-class woes of the Springsteen lyrics would have been an apt parallel to the popular beliefs and narrative commentaries found in the choral odes of antiquity. But Graney's final product was undeniably moving.

Graney's style of writing is unquestionably popular, and sometimes his characters dwell on a point *ad nauseam*, but there are tender moments of poetic language and intelligent humor that artfully tap into the heart of human struggle. "Philoc-titties" seems a cheap joke, and the moral importance of making a choice becomes an obvious refrain. Yet the depth and sense of humor characteristic of Graney's work often appears at traditionally tense and uncomfortable moments to great effect, turning what has been accepted as ironically tragic into something morbidly humorous. When Oedipus rails at Creon in the first act for his supposed part in a conspiracy, condemning him to exile, Creon responds in rightful disbelief with "Are you, like, banishing me?" The collective laughter from the audience applauds Graney's juxtaposition of casual language with an arcane practice, and Zeke Sulkes's pitch-perfect tone of absurdity and shock reflects the underlying emotion that every audience member surely felt on first hearing this tragedy.

The production's serious moments are no fewer or less ingeniously written than the comic. In the "Oedipus," the news that Oedipus was adopted strikes him like a thunderclap headache, forcing him to contemplate the revelation while Nurses take his blood pressure (Figure 1). Oedipus imagines himself as two persons suddenly faced with one another in the present—"Someone else slept with my lovers," he desperately exclaims. "Who am I, who is he?" His awakening to this first point in his horrific journey of self-discovery throws into question the very substance of his being, making him a stranger to the man he has become but preparing the way for his rebirth through blindness. Graney deftly articulates the larger questions at work in "Oedipus" without falling into clichés about finding oneself, while the emotional truthfulness of Jeff Trainor's Oedipus captures the weight of the tragedy before his character knows exactly where it will lead.

Each section of the heptalogy could stand alone as a complete play, but the arrangement of the sections is so important to the staging that the whole production is best reviewed from beginning to end.

Understandably, the "Oedipus" is the most thoroughly developed of the seven tragedies. A man in extreme pain enters after the Nurses, who place him on a gurney and attend to him to as Oedipus looks on, showing a likeable if somewhat uncomprehending concern for the man's life. The Blind Seer (played with delight by Lindsey Gavel) is aptly costumed as witchy old bag-lady in a wheelchair whose sharp tongue goads Oedipus into revealing his impatient side (Figure 2). There is no effort to age the dignified and graceful Jocasta (Erin Barlow), but her dark wig suggests concealment. Her death through the consumption of bleach recalls the 2009 production but seems more apt in the hospital setting of "Oedipus" (Figure 3). One reconfiguration of the story in particular demonstrates both the efficiency of Graney's staging and his ability to make poignant theater. The Sick Man (Robert McLean) who enters in the prologue and remains onstage in the operating room is revealed to be the man who handed over the

infant Oedipus. Unaware of the original oracle, he is completely innocent of acting with foreknowledge, and is guilty only of pity for the innocent. In contrast, Sophocles' original Oedipus must twist the arm of the Herdsman to hear the truth that he knew of the oracle and ignored orders to expose the infant. Oedipus the politician and the blue-collar Sick Man are bound by their generous acts of compassion, but the consequence for the Sick Man ends there, while Oedipus must now live with the shame, gouging his eyes out center-stage for all to witness. But Graney's Creon—a smarmy, sharp snake in the grass—is entirely unsympathetic to Oedipus' misfortune, banishing him and his two daughters from Thebes and thus facilitating their return in the third act.

"In Trachis" demonstrates most clearly both the dominance of Graney's vision and his departure from Sophocles' text. While the play capitalizes on themes that reflect the Sophoclean version, e.g., the destructive consequences of despotic sexuality and blinding emotion, it comes at the loss of Hyllus's difficult decision to end his father's life and of the intriguing complexity of Sophocles' Deianeira, whose desperate need for love tragically outweighs her otherwise rational and compassionate nature. This Deianeira is a shrill and suspicious desperate housewife consumed with a lust and pride that rages as fiercely as those of her absent husband. While Deianeira still attempts to win back the affection of Heracles by applying Nessus's supposed love charm to a robe (considered here to be a woman's trifle rather than a religiously significant gift), in Graney's version the charm is not his clotted blood but rather bloody semen that Deianeira harvested herself from the dying centaur, who had wooed her in the past, as she recalls with girlish delight. Deianeira's hope is that Iole, the household "infection," will be "ejaculated" from Heracles' mind. Iole, meanwhile, dressed in a luxurious red-and-gold gown, becomes the more understanding female, sympathetically summing up Deianeira's pain: "You've been replaced like a pair of old batteries." Her purity will cleanse the house of disease, claims Philoktetes, a clever replacement for Lichas in this act. Our pity is for Iole even as we watch Deianeira end her own life, the victim of blind trust. Walter Brigg's Herakles lacks the sustained urgency of Sophocles' character (his distress over his melting flesh and exposed veins quickly recedes) but he is an arrogant and fierce figure who will achieve his ends by any means necessary. Intent on marrying off Iole to Hyllus, he threatens to beat his slightly effeminate son into submission if he doesn't agree. This Hyllus has always disappointed his father, but he eagerly runs off to marry Iole with only slight resistance—a far cry from the Hyllus of Sophocles' original *Trachiniae*, who struggles to resolve misunderstanding and to accept his fate after succumbing to his own emotional blindness. Philoktetes instead must be the one to bring Herakles to the incinerator to help him end his destructive lust and lies.

Of the three Theban acts, "In Colonus" ventures farthest from the original, but it proves as engaging as the others. Polyneices is a drunken frat boy who needs his father to reinstate him as ruler of Thebes. Creon, for his part, needs Oedipus to return because Eteocles is as much of a disaster as his brother. To raise the stakes and force Oedipus's decision, the oracle of Oedipus's death is suppressed in this version until the Blind Seer arrives. Oedipus will give good fortune to the city in which he is buried, she reveals; where he chooses to die is up to him. But Athens will not prove to be as gracious a home for Oedipus as in Sophocles' version. After consulting repeatedly with the Athenian council, Theseus begrudgingly offers Oedipus respite, but only to antagonize Thebes, expressing his enmity for that city with the modern Greek gesture of spitting on Creon's shoes. After Creon departs, Theseus drags Oedipus to his death offstage and orders Antigone and Ismene to go back to their home. Their expulsion not only emphasizes the theme of greed and selfishness for political ends that runs through the entire production; it also puts Antigone and Ismene back in Thebes for the final act of the evening, the chilling and heartbreaking "Antigone."

"The Philoktetes" also exhibits a shift in the storyline in the service of Graney's thematic interests, but with more complexity of character. While Odysseus remains the cunning, deceptive warrior of tradition, Neoptolemus is a weak, indecisive young man whose first act onstage is to vomit at Philoktetes' stench,

but who eventually has the stomach to deceive just as well as Odysseus. This nerdy and overly earnest child of Achilles, played endearingly by Geoff Button, struggles with his duty to deceive. He has no chance to reveal his remorse out of pity, however, because the Carrier (the ubiquitous Messenger of each play clothed in flannel with the rod of Asclepius on his back) soon enters. He explains that only the bow is needed, not Philoktetes. This unusual twist makes sense of the shifting requirements of the oracle that were left unexplained in the Sophoclean version, but it leads Neoptolemus to become a deceiver himself. Neoptolemus counsels Philoktetes to pretend that he forgives Odysseus for trying to steal his bow and agreeing to come to Troy but never following through. The evils of deception for any reason and Neoptolemus's rediscovery of his *phusis* through pity—two elements that strongly define the Sophoclean nature of this tragedy—are suppressed in The Hypocrites' version. Instead, Neoptolemus develops a thicker skin while learning the art of cunning. In many ways, this is a more satisfying character than the Neoptolemus who succumbs to Philoktetes' coercion at the end of Sophocles' *Philoktetes*. Though Philoktetes tries to remain on the island with his bow, Herakles intervenes. Selfishness is the greatest disease of mankind, Herakles argues: Philoktetes must let kindness crack corruption and truly forgive Odysseus, since it is time for them to stop treating each other like animals. Herakles' counsel is a truly modern sentiment but one that Graney skillfully adapts to the Philoktetes myth.

It is hard to choose which adaptation is the most successful, but "Ajax" must be among the top three. The act opens with an sensitive yet morbidly humorous montage of madness. Instead of Odysseus and Athena gazing upon the blood-stained and maddened Ajax, as in the original, a flock of sheep enters the stage, bleating its way into Ajax's mind. These aren't just any sheep, but politicians in sheep's clothing. Dressed in blue with a red sash and sheep-headed cloaks, they taunt Ajax, who wields a large butcher's knife. They surround him, fall when they are hit, and then rise up again in a life-sized version of whack-a-mole, mocking Ajax with the repeated refrain that the army "nee-ee-ee-eeds" clever politicians like Odysseus, not dull-headed warriors. It is both a hilarious and a haunting representation of madness that brings the audience to pity Ajax as much as Odysseus did in the original prologue. Ajax's suicide does not clearly center upon his disgrace when he realizes what he has done, however, because his concubine Tecmessa, dying from the wound he gave her while slaughtering the sheep, begs him to stay for Erysakes' sake. Her death onstage is completely unnecessary, but our hearts go out to Erysakes (Geoff Button), who gazes at his parents while quietly singing "The Price We Pay." Now orphaned, the boy must help Philoktetes bury them both at the behest of the callous Agamemnon, who bites into an apple with arrogant gusto, the same apple one could imagine that Iole carried with her when she arrived in Trachis. Odysseus finally professes pity for Ajax, explaining that he could see Ajax felt loss and sadness in his killing of the sheep despite being mad, but chose to push honor into their hearts in the wrong manner. Odysseus vows that they will show the honor that Ajax tried to push into the political sheep by justly burying him. With the transfer of Achilles' "unchinkable" armor to Odysseus, there is a new world order, Agamemnon claims. Given what we've seen of Odysseus, from his days as a deceiver in the previous act to his new persona as a compassionate peacemaker, the world looks hopeful despite the death it has cost.

The final part of the play, however, will erase all hope of a cure. "Elektra" remains closely aligned with its original in plot and character, but also shows the efficiency and ingenuity Graney shows in his other acts. At the opening of the act, the ghost of Agamemnon stands onstage dressed in a white suit and military hat, commanding the awestruck Orestes and Pylades to avenge his death and bring justice to Argos. As they exit, Elektra (Lindsey Gavel) enters with tokens of her father in hand, covering herself with mud, nursing a cough, and ignoring the rotten apples that lie before her. She has been sick for a while, lamenting her father's death and her mother's infidelity, but she has never translated her words into the tasks required to avenge Agamemnon. Her inaction is palpable. Clytemnestra (Tien Doman), a vision of June Cleaver dressed in royal blue with perfectly coiffed hair and an upbeat attitude, is equally unmovable in her conviction that she was justified in her murder of Agamemnon. We can't help but agree, given the Agamemnon we've seen in previous acts, and her frustration with Elektra's self-pity

reflects our own. Erin Barlow's truly brilliant Chrysothemis steals the scene, however, channeling Reese Witherspoon in both appearance and manner. Her acceptance of their situation has rewarded her with crisp, pink dresses, perfect pony-tails, and a comfortable life. While she takes Elektra to task for not acting on her desire to take revenge, Chrysothemis refuses to help her commit murder and warns that Elektra is destined for death. "Just don't die on my stuff," she concludes. Highly comical, she is hardly the woman of *sophrosune* that Sophocles depicts in his figuration of the character, but she is an ample foil to the yearning Elektra. The pain of Elektra's isolation does not escalate as it does in the Sophoclean version. The extended scene of mourning over the urn is omitted; the recognition occurs when Orestes reveals a stuffed bear he has had since infancy. Graney uses this moment as an opportunity to lighten the mood before the brother and sister rejoice in their reunion. It takes the reappearance of Agamemnon to chide their mirth with a reminder of the acts they must accomplish, realigning the action towards its morally ambiguous conclusion.

Not surprisingly, "Antigone" is the most intimate and unsettling of the adaptations and also the most tragically gratifying. Antigone is an exquisite figure of strength, a determined young woman played with subtle maturity by Erin Barlow. We have seen her grow up from a terrified child in "Oedipus" to a helpless but devoted teen in "In Colonus." Now clothed in a wedding gown, Antigone digs her brother's grave in the middle of the stage, quietly and firmly intransigent. Creon arrives with lunch in hand, warning her of what will happen when she touches her brother's body, pleading with her to stop. The hospital setting is somewhat unsuited to the action of this final play: Antigone shovels dirt out of the trap doors at stage center. But the incongruity is no less absurd than the activity of the Nurses far upstage, who spend a portion of the act pouring ketchup into Heinz bottles on the operating table. Even these antics, however, are played convincingly. The tender moments between uncle and niece as they share a modest meal, failing to reconcile their differences, are effective and touching. These two have seen more tragedy and felt its effects more profoundly than anyone else, we sense. Their shared experience binds them as much as their blood, yet it also hangs over them like a cloud waiting to unleash a storm of contempt. Creon's increasing frustration creates a tension that finally snaps in a foreseeable yet shocking conclusion. Pushing Antigone into the grave, he beats her with the shovel and closes the trap doors, covering the spot with the overturned operating table while she cries for help from below. The carnage builds as the play comes to an end on top of her grave, the sins of pitilessness, ignorance, and selfishness terrorizing the family until no one, not even Ismene, remains. As the lights dim, the Nurses begin to clear away the bodies. They have seen this before. They will see it again tomorrow.

New Yorkers will be able to experience the monumental achievement of this adaptation when a remount of the *These Seven Sicknesses* opens at The Flea Theater on January 19, 2012, with a cast of 38 known as "The Bats." Classicists above all will appreciate the inside jokes, alterations in the dramatic plot, inclusion of obscure myths, and efficient use of character if they enter with open minds, eager to engage with inspired playwriting and a bold artistic vision.

notes

¹ The Hypocrites, "Our Mission," <http://www.the-hypocrites.com/mission> [accessed November 16, 2011].

² Based on reviews of the performance: Chris Jones, "'Ajax' too clever for its own good," <http://www.chicagotribune.com/>, May 11, 2001 [accessed November 23, 2011]; Lucia Mauro, "The Hypocrites' 'Ajax' at The Viaduct", Chicago Arts Scene Commentary for the Week of May 7, 2001, <http://www.chicagotheater.com/revAjax.html> [accessed November 23, 2011].

³ Scotty Zacher, "Review: Hypocrite Theatre's 'Oedipus'," <http://chicagotheaterbeat.com>, June 9, 2009 [accessed November 23, 2011].

⁴ Based on reviews of the performance: Nina Metz, "Sophocles gets rich dose of pop culture," <http://www.chicagotribune.com/>, June 8, 2009 [accessed November 23, 2011]; Scotty Zacher, "Review: Hypocrite Theatre's 'Oedipus'," <http://chicagotheaterbeat.com>, June 9, 2009 [accessed November 23, 2011]; Kris Vire, "Oedipus," <http://timeoutchicago.com/>, May 31, 2009 [accessed November 23, 2011].

Ancient Drama in Performance: Theory and Practice

We are pleased to present the proceedings of Ancient Drama in Performance: Theory and Practice (Didaskalia 8.21–8.31), organized by current Didaskalia editor Amy R. Cohen, who introduces the collection.

In earlier volumes of Didaskalia, these articles might have constituted an individual, themed issue. In our new practice of publishing a continuous annual volume, such collections will be numbered in sequence but will bear an indication of their related theme in the table of contents. These Ancient Drama in Performance pieces will all have “ADIP 1” as part of their references on the site, but they may be cited simply by their volume and number.

Amy R. Cohen
Randolph College

In October 2010, inspired by the success and importance of the biannual Blackfriars Conference,¹ Randolph College hosted *Ancient Drama in Performance: Theory and Practice* to coincide with the college's production of *Hecuba*. Readers of *Didaskalia* are friendly to the underlying inspiration of the conference: the potential for new insights by means of investigating ancient drama as it was practiced and as it is practiced. The conference brought together students, scholars, and practitioners of ancient drama on the campus to learn from one another within the context of an ancient playing space.²

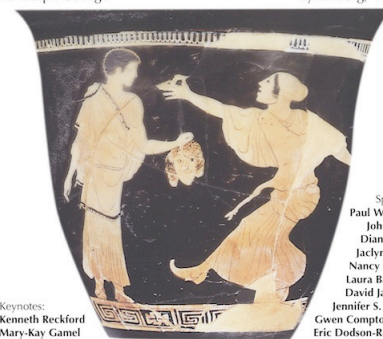
We invited conference-goers to witness and reflect on an original-practices production and to share and discuss other productive ways of playing Greek drama. They had the opportunity to use student actors to demonstrate their theories, if they chose, and to present them in a context that insists on the play as an experience.

All the conference speakers were invited to contribute to these proceedings: some authors chose to give us permission simply to present the video of their talks, others have paired their text with a record of the talk on the day, others include their talk from the conference along with an expanded version of their paper, and some have developed or changed their thinking to such a degree that video from a year ago would be incongruous.³

Jennifer Starkey began the day's proceedings, and begins this collection, with “[Play in the Sunshine](#),” in which shows how Athenian playwrights could use the sun itself as a dramatic tool. Nancy Nanney's “[Adapting Hecuba: Where Do Problems Begin?](#)” proposes a pedagogically fruitful classroom script. Jaclyn Dudek, inspired by Shakespeare performance, suggests a new staging in “[The Twice Born and One More: Portraying Dionysus in the Bacchae](#),” and David J. Jacobson, raising important points about pronouns, shows what not to do with Aristophanes in “[A Gestural Phallacy](#).” In “[Double the Message](#)” Diane J. Rayor solves a casting problem in *Antigone*, and Eric Dodson-Robinson solves a staging problem in “[Performing the 'Unperformable' Extispicy Scene in Seneca's Oedipus Rex](#).” Using a scene from

ANCIENT DRAMA IN PERFORMANCE: THEORY AND PRACTICE

October 9–10, 2010 The Mabel K. Whiteside Greek Theatre
Randolph College Lynchburg, Virginia



Keynotes:
Kenneth Reckford
Mary-Kay Gamel

Speakers:
Paul Woodruff
John Given
Diane Rayor
Jaclyn Dudek
Nancy Nanney
Laura Banducci
David Jacobson
Jennifer S. Starkey
Gwen Compton-Engle
Eric Dodson-Robinson

in conjunction with the 2010 Randolph College Greek Play: *HECUBA*

<http://faculty2.randolphcollege.edu/ancientdrama> 434/947-8306
sponsored in part by The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities: www.virginiafoundation.org vfh

THE PRACTICE MATTERS TO THE UNDERSTANDING

The Conference Flyer

Sophocles' *Elektra*, Paul Woodruff stages and reflects on "[Compassion in Chorus and Audience](#)," and John Given demonstrates some solutions for the modern director who is "[Staging the Reconciliation Scene of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*](#)." Finally, Laura Banducci's "[The Delayed Feast: Plautus in its Festival Performance Context](#)" shows how Plautus withholds satisfaction from a hungry audience.

We also present here in its entirety the video recording of the keynote address by Kenneth Reckford, entitled, "[Euripides' *Hecuba*: the Text and the Event](#)," in which he gives his ideas about the two parts of *Hecuba* and the loss of innocence, and how we might understand how Euripides engages Aristotelian catharsis and recognition. The talk, however, ranges widely as Reckford touches on Shakespeare and Ibsen and Stoppard, the prickly difficulties of translation and collaboration, what constitutes the shocking, and, in general, what changes and what endures in the theater.

The other centerpiece of the day was a production of Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street's *Hecuba in a New Translation*. The two authors collaborated on a powerful, poetic script, which appears here alongside the working script for the production and a video of the October 9th performance. After the show, Mary-Kay Gamel led a wide-ranging [Talkback](#) that engaged conference participants, spectators, and cast and crew with many issues of theory and practice that arose in the play.

The great variety of topics at the conference and the different sorts of problems presented and solved by consideration of what happens on the stage show that, indeed, "the practice matters to the understanding."

notes

This is a revised version: it omits a paragraph that explained a delay in 8.32 and 8.33, and it includes the paragraph that now introduces those two pieces.

¹ A conference at the [American Shakespeare Center](#) in Staunton, Virginia, the [Blackfriars Conference](#) brings together scholars and practitioners of early modern drama in a replica of Shakespeare's indoor theater. The Blackfriars Conference also inspired the very short presentation times (only 10 or 13 minutes), enforced in our case by a fury (rather than a bear).

² The conference would not have been possible without the hard work of Rhiannon Knol (conference assistant), the friendship of George Fredric Franko (co-conspirator and on-call master of ceremonies), and the generous support of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.

³ The video quality is the best that was available. Some talks include their question and answer period afterwards, but the sound quality was such that some questions are unintelligible, and so we have cut some portions.

Play in the Sunshine

Jennifer S. Starkey
University of Colorado

“We are not conscious of daylight as that which displaces darkness. Daylight, even when the sun is clear of clouds, seems to us simply the natural condition of the earth and air. When we think of the downs, we think of the downs in daylight . . . we do not usually envisage the downs without daylight, even though the light is not a part of the down itself. . . . We take daylight for granted.” — Richard Adams (*Watership Down*, 176)



Conference Presentation
 video: Randolph College
[youtube.com/watch?v=Hz0K5dLUYZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz0K5dLUYZU)

It is common knowledge that Greek tragedy of the fifth century was performed in outdoor theaters. It is also a commonplace that actors, chorus, and audience were thus exposed to the vagaries of the elements: clouds, wind, storms, etc. What is not common is an appreciation of the dramatic possibilities offered by the fact of natural light.¹ Indeed, natural lighting might seem more a limitation to be worked around than a fount of dramatic potential. A range of technology is available to the modern playwright who wishes to create meaning or atmosphere through lighting: colored lights, spotlights, moving lights, or no light at all. He may use lights to make his stage more realistic or eerily unreal, to highlight certain characters or action, to startle the audience, or to effect visual illusions.²

The Athenian playwright had none of this, and without modern technology, he would not have been aware of the lack as we are today. But he did produce his work in the same theater and at the same time every year—that is to say, the Theater of Dionysus at Athens and the Great Dionysia in March.³ This regularity afforded him ample opportunity to become closely acquainted with patterns of sunlight and shadow in the theater at that time of the year and enabled him to factor them into his dramatic scheme. The time of day, the fall of light and shadow across the stage and orchestra, the visible passage of time, and the very presence of the sun are all elements that he might have taken into account when composing his play.⁴ He would not have felt *compelled* to do so; I do not contend that every play makes equal use of the sun, or that a play which does use it very thoroughly loses all meaning if not performed in March in the Theater of Dionysus. But the light was always there, and thus was one of the many dramatic tools which the playwright could work into his play if and as he saw fit. The sun, its light, and the shadows were not limitations but supplements, utilized to enhance and complicate the meaning inherent in the text. This paper’s thesis, then, is simple: we should not, as Richard Adams suggests we often do, “take daylight for granted.”

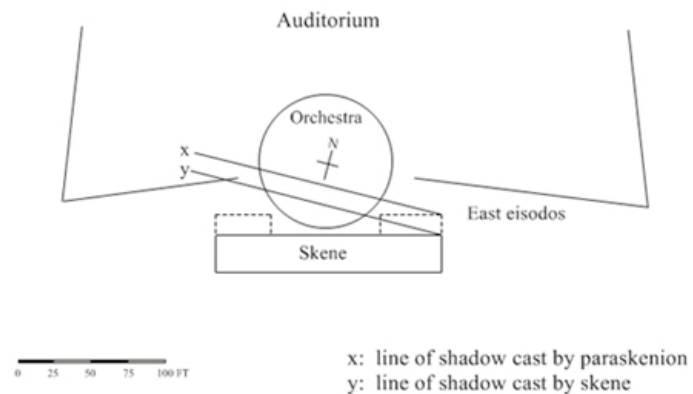
It seems to me that the sunlight in an open-air theater can have three fundamental effects on a performance. First, of course, is realism. It requires no great effort to imagine a morning scene when it is in fact morning. This is a very simple use, however, and contributes little to one’s experience of the play beyond a touch of vividness. And several tragedies set at other times of the day (or even night) surely would not have lost their impact by being performed under the morning sun. Nevertheless, this most basic level of realism makes possible the second fundamental effect of sunlight: it acts as a sort of bridge between the mythical world of the play and the real world of the audience.⁵ Where the sun exists in both, it brings the two worlds closer together. It may encourage the audience to view action otherwise removed to another time and place in the light of their own world, or, on the other hand, it may allow the ambiguities of the drama to seep out into the real world. Finally, the dynamic interaction between

dramatic theme and natural light may suggest especially effective patterns of staging.

I will attempt to demonstrate the value of reading Greek tragedy with an appreciation for the natural light through examination of key scenes in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. But first I will explain briefly my principal assumptions about the geographical orientation of the theater and how its lighting was affected by surrounding buildings, and examine the evidence for the time of day when the plays were performed.

The Theater of Dionysus is built into the south slope of the Acropolis on a generally north-south axis. A person standing in the orchestra looking toward the center of the auditorium would be facing north-northwest (see [fig. 1](#)).⁶ In late March, when the Great Dionysia was held, the sunrise is very nearly due east—in fact, straight down the east entrance, or eisodos.⁷ With the sun at this angle, the east wing of the auditorium could have cast significant shadow only on the spectators, but not on the orchestra or stage.⁸ Though the Odeion of Pericles and the hall to the immediate south of the stage-building (skene) would have increased the shaded area significantly,⁹ they probably were not built until after 458. While it remains possible that in Aeschylus' day there was another large building in the spot later occupied by the Odeion, it is safer, in the absence of any positive evidence, to assume that there was not.¹⁰

Fig. 1: Aeschylus' Theater, 458 B.C.



So Aeschylus' orchestra will have been largely and uniformly illuminated except for the area immediately in front of the skene.¹¹ While this structure may not have been a permanent feature of the theater in this period, it must be acknowledged that *Agamemnon* requires a stage-building for entrances and exits into the palace, and a fairly hefty one if the watchman at the beginning is to be perched on the roof—in other words, a structure sufficiently large and solid to cast a noticeable shadow on the stage.¹²

But how long a shadow, and at what angle? It is generally assumed that the tragedies of the Great Dionysia were performed in the morning, with the satyr play at the end providing a sort of transition to the comedies in the afternoon.¹³ If so, then the skene cast a shadow at an angle of approximately 15°. While we cannot know precisely at what time the first play began, it may not matter much: whether the performance started at dawn or a couple hours later, the sun would still be in the eastern part of the sky and the area in front of the skene would still be in shadow, which is all that I require for my interpretation of *Agamemnon*. The length of the shadow makes no difference.

So the first play of the trilogy began sometime in the morning with the sun casting its light into the orchestra along the east eisodos and with shadow fronting the skene. Our next task is to examine specific references to the sun, light, day, and their counterparts in the text of *Agamemnon* and consider their possible ties to the actual lighting in the theater.

Agamemnon is incredibly complex in its use of light, both natural and poetic; its imagery is deeply imbued with interconnected dichotomies of light and darkness, good and evil, life and death, victory and defeat. But the symbolic value of light turns out to be slippery and ephemeral, and may be blurred when

connected to other themes. On the purely literary level, light and darkness in the *Agamemnon* have been effectively analyzed by Nicholas Russo.¹⁴ Since I do not intend to repeat his project, I will limit my discussion of imagery to those passages which either bear directly on the staging or characterize light and darkness within this play; these characterizations can then be applied to an interpretation of the action on the visual level. More precisely, I will first discuss the beacon, whose resonance is felt well beyond its appearance in the prologue scene: several characters connect it closely with the sun and the dawn (itself described as a mixture of day and night), thus creating a network of varied and sometimes-contradictory meanings for light and darkness in the play. Then I will consider how these dynamics operate in two specific scenes: Agamemnon's arrival and entrance into the palace over the tapestries, and Cassandra's impressive performance.

A physical description of the Aeschylean stage is simple. The play's focal points are the palace where Clytemnestra and Aegisthus reside, and the east eisodos, which serves all other entrances and exits.¹⁵ Given the fall of light and shadow over the acting area, the palace is defined by darkness, in all of its manifestations, while the eisodos and orchestra are defined by light. But it is not enough simply to know (or to speculate) whether a character stood in an illuminated or a shadowed area; first we must understand what meaning(s) Aeschylus attaches to light and darkness in his text. For example, the action begins at dawn, an inherently liminal time partaking of both night and day; furthermore, the east is naturally associated with the true sun visible to the audience, as well as with Troy, the beacon, and Agamemnon's return from Troy, all with their own connotations. The fall of Troy, for instance, is a glorious victory on its face, but also a nighttime scene of bloodshed and Greek sacrilege.¹⁶ Such conflicts of meaning saturate the play and call into question any straightforward interpretations of "light" and "darkness." This ambiguity then extends to the real light and shadow of the theater and hence to the audience's perception of the characters and action within them. And all of this begins in the prologue with the first mention of the beacon.

The watchman stationed on the palace roof sets the scene in darkness, but immediately before dawn.¹⁷ His first words about the beacon seem to indicate instead that he is awaiting the rising sun (8-10).¹⁸

καὶ νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τό σύμβολον,
αὐγὴν πυρὸς φέρουσιν ἐκ Τροίας φάτιν
ἀλώσιμόν τε βᾶξιν.

And now I'm looking out for the agreed beacon-signal,
the gleam of fire bringing from Troy the word and
news of its capture.

The watchman's initial description of the beacon is vaguer than the translation suggests; as a "token of light" (a rather obscure phrase) and a "ray of fire," it evokes the sun, and only when we reach the end of line 9 (ἐκ Τροίας φάτιν, "word from Troy") do we realize what he is actually watching for. Nevertheless, he has drawn attention to an inherent similarity between the beacon and the sun, and this will become important after the choral entry (parodos), when dawn has fully arrived and the chorus finds reason to doubt whether there was a beacon at all.¹⁹ Even now, it is not clear whether the long-awaited beacon is really a good thing, for the watchman goes on in the next lines to link it to the capture of Troy (symbolic of both glory and carnage) and to Clytemnestra; here she is ambiguously characterized as a possessor of "power" (κράτος) and a "man-counseling heart" (ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ), and we surely already know her malicious intentions toward Agamemnon.²⁰ So right from the start the beacon's meaning is taken along two parallel lines: on the one hand, conflated with the sun and the new day, on the other hand, problematized by connections to the events at Troy and to the sinister Clytemnestra. The beacon's likeness to the sun is as much visual as conceptual, as demonstrated again by the watchman's language when he

actually sees the beacon (20-4):²¹

νῦν δ' εὐτυχῆς γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγῆ πόνων
εὐαγγέλου φανέντος ὄρφναίου πυρός.

ὦ χαῖρε λαμπτήρ νυκτὸς ἡμερήσιον
φάος πιφαύσκων . . .

But now may there be a happy release from misery
by the appearance in the darkness of the fire that brings good news.

O welcome, beacon, bringing to us by night a message of light bright as day . . .

Line 21 is remarkably oxymoronic in its phrasing—literally, “a propitious shining dark fire.”²² The primary intended meaning (as conveyed in Sommerstein’s translation) is obviously that of a light shining out of the darkness, yet the idea of a dark fire and the apparent contrast between the first and last pairs of words (“propitious shining” / “dark fire”) should give us pause. Further, the adjective “propitious” (εὐάγγελος), while eminently suitable for a beacon, is also the adjective applied to a welcome dawn later at 264, though this dawn will not turn out to be propitious for everyone. When he spies the beacon, the watchman at first seems to hail it as a “light of night” (λαμπτήρ νυκτὸς), which could be taken to mean a light belonging to night or a light consisting of night—in either case, a troubling collocation.²³ The “day light” (ἡμερήσιον φάος), which Sommerstein renders as “light bright as day,” is another ambiguous expression that heightens the confusion between the (imagined) dramatic beacon and the real sun.²⁴ In addition to uncertainty as to whether the watchman is actually seeing a beacon or only the sun, the audience may feel uneasy about the nature of a beacon (and a sun) which supposedly heralds victory but to which the vocabulary of night is so readily applied.²⁵ Conflation of the beacon with the sun suggests that the beacon may not be real; problematization of the beacon through its connection to other themes, together with conflation of night and day, suggests that day (represented most vividly by the real sun) is not as favorable a thing as might be expected. The sun and its light lie at the heart of the play’s perversion of moral values and are instrumental to Aeschylus’ creation of an atmosphere of unreality, where even the natural world is not what it seems. These dynamics continue after the parodos in Clytemnestra’s opening words, a prayer that “a dawn of good-tidings may be born from its kindly mother, night” (264-5).²⁶ This passage contributes to a larger theme in which parents beget children like themselves²⁷ and qualifies the apparently propitious rising of the sun by connecting it closely to the night. It may be significant that Clytemnestra, who resides in the darkened palace and (as far as I can tell) never moves beyond that shadow, considers this particular dawn to be wholly positive and refers to night as “kindly,” normally a euphemistic and apotropaic title, though she probably means it literally. Since we in the audience know what she intends, we may comprehend the threat behind her superficially pious words.

As she explains the beacon’s significance, the chorus questions the validity of her information and wonders whether she might be relying, unwisely, on a dream or a rumor (with the implication that the beacon is no more reliable than these). Though Clytemnestra takes offense at their questions, we have seen that the conflation of sun- and firelight create good dramatic reasons to doubt that the beacon really did shine, and ten years of waiting make it all the more incredible that victory has been won at last. But Clytemnestra’s initial responses to the chorus’ questions enhance the atmosphere of unreality by blurring normal conceptions of time (278-80):

Χο. ποίου χρόνου δὲ καὶ πεπόρθηται πόλις;
Κλ. τῆς νῦν τεκούσης φῶς τόδ' εὐφρόνης λέγω.

Χο. καὶ τίς τόδ' ἐξίκοιτ' ἄν ἀγγέλων τάχος;

Cho. Within what time has the city actually been sacked?

Cly. Within the night, I say, that has but now given birth to the present day's light.

Cho. And what messenger could come here with such speed?

First, the continuing conflation of day and night. As at 265, Clytemnestra's language here characterizes dawn as a transitional period and links the current light to its mother, night, rather than to the day; as if to emphasize the relationship, she settles φῶς τόδ' ("the present day's light") snugly in the middle of the line, between the words describing night.²⁸ Her statement further attenuates the usual normative boundaries between light and darkness, which can no longer be understood as straightforwardly good and bad. The victory at Troy was achieved *last night; this morning*, so closely connected to mother Night, will answer that victory with the return and brutal murder of Agamemnon.

Second, the contraction of time and space implied by line 280. The chorus is amazed that a message could have traveled over such a great distance so quickly, and Clytemnestra readily explains it to them. What is never explained is how Agamemnon and his men are also able to travel such a distance so quickly. One may object that we should not press Aeschylus too hard for complete temporal accuracy; I would respond that he himself draws attention to the disjunction in passages like the one just cited.²⁹ Perhaps more explicit is Agamemnon's later speech, when he declares that the smoke, embers, and ashes of Troy are still visible (818-20), again emphasizing the temporal immediacy of its razing only the night before. The new dawn brings many things with it: a beacon, victory at Troy, and the return of Agamemnon, all virtually concurrent with each other. The fuzziness of the temporality gives the play an atmosphere of unreality made all the more unsettling by the fact that the day and sun, with which all of these things are associated, *are* real and so link the worlds of the audience and the characters. The solid reality of the morning sunlight contrasts with the seeming unreality of Agamemnon's victory and voyage in the night, and with the speciousness of the light as a harbinger of good fortune.

The uncertainty surrounding the beacon's light is carried further when the chorus leader, still mistrusting the beacon, spots an approaching herald and declares (489-92):³⁰

εἰσόμεσθα λαμπάδων φαεσφόρων
φρυκτωριῶν τε καὶ πυρὸς παραλλαγᾶς,
εἴτ' οὖν ἀληθεῖς εἴτ' ὄνειράτων δίκην
τερπνὸν τόδ' ἔλθὼν φῶς ἐφήλωσεν φρένας.

We shall soon know about the beacon-watches
and fire-relays of the travelling light-signals,
whether they are indeed telling the truth or whether
the coming of this joyful light has beguiled our minds like a dream.

His indirect question in 491-2 suggests that the beacon may be not merely fallacious (the expected alternative to "telling the truth"), but even illusory. The phrase "the coming of this joyful light" almost reads as a correction of the beacon-oriented catalogue in 489-90, for "this light" is a rendering of the Greek words τόδε φῶς, which were used above at 279 to denote "this present day." Is this light then a meaningful signal fire or the current morning light (cheering so far as it goes but otherwise insignificant)? Even the phrase "beguiled our minds" (ἐφήλωσεν φρένας) carries a double meaning: the beacon may beguile by signifying something other than what is expected, but it may also beguile by not being there at all. Thus, the actual sun, through its earlier conflation with the beacon, becomes potentially a spurious beacon, a waking dream.³¹

The destabilization of the dramatic world is communicated out into the real world by the fact that the sun stands at the center of these ambiguities. The sun aids mystification of the real world by its association with the questionable beacon and the problematic relationship between day and night. It also contributes to that dynamic through a dichotomy of light/life, darkness/death. Light is linked to life in the ancient cliché that the sun sees all, here applied to Menelaus (whose ship was lost at sea):³² the sun sees and knows where Menelaus is, and if Menelaus in turn sees the sun, then he lives.³³ The motif of the all-seeing sun³⁴ is in some sense metatheatrical: the same “eye” not only knows the whereabouts of missing characters, but also observes the drama being performed in the theater and the spectators watching it. It thus spans the physical boundaries of the earth, as well as the temporal gap between the heroic age and contemporary Athens. That it exists both here and there (spatially, temporally) lends concreteness to the dramatic action and its unsettling motifs at the same time as it in some degree destabilizes the audience’s own sense of time and space.

Agamemnon is preceded by a lone herald; a perceptive reader has asked me why Aeschylus would allow Agamemnon’s grand entry to be anticipated in this way. I would venture that more is to be gained from first showcasing the herald’s joyful naiveté; he hails the day of return (508) and greets the entire palatial compound, including its statues, whose faces shine in the sun,³⁵ in an attempt to draw a straightforward connection between light and safety (518-23):

ὦ μέλαθρα, βασιλέων φίλαι στέγαι,
σεμνοί τε θᾶκοι, δαίμονές τ’ ἀντήλιοι·
εἴ που πάλαι, φαιδροῖσι τοισίδ’ ὄμμασιν
δέξασθε κόσμῳ βασιλέα πολλῶι χρόνῳ·
ἦκει γὰρ ὑμῖν φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φέρων
καὶ τοῖσδ’ ἅπανσι κοινὸν Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ.

Hail, palace, beloved home of my kings,
and august seats, and you deities who face the sun!
Let those eyes of yours be bright, if they ever have been before,
as you welcome your king home in glory at long last;
for he has come, bringing light out of darkness to you
and to all these people—King Agamemnon!

His effusive relief betrays the uneasy atmosphere of the dramatic action. While the army moves from a night of carnage and war into the light of safety, we know that Agamemnon’s return cannot be so simple.³⁶ The relentless intertwining of the themes of light and darkness throughout the play until now points up the shallowness of the herald’s words.

The herald’s description of the king as “bringing light in the night”³⁷ prepares us for Agamemnon’s entrance, where he appears to do this quite literally: he marches in triumphal procession down the east eisodos, a corridor of sunlit white stone, with the morning sun directly at his back.³⁸ Agamemnon moves wholly in the light of the morning sun and with that sun as an implicit escort. Clytemnestra appears at the door of the palace; if there were multiple doors, a clever producer would set her at the western end of the skene in the deepest shadow to allow the procession the greatest scope across the bright orchestra and to heighten the contrast with Clytemnestra’s position.³⁹ The purple tapestries, a symbolic river of blood pouring from palace to orchestra, also gain in meaning when that river flows from a darkened source into the light. Finally, Agamemnon’s overconfidence and blindness to the situation become more obvious:⁴⁰ like the herald, he stands in such a dazzle of light (with all its various connotations), that he is unable to see the threat.

Though the surface meaning of this scene is certainly valid—Agamemnon *does* abandon the light of life

and enter the darkness of death—there is a great deal more to it than that. It is a central theme of the play, especially where light and darkness are concerned, that nothing is ever quite as it seems. The spectator comes to this scene only after the concepts of light and darkness have been complicated, conflated, and problematized in a variety of ways. So when Agamemnon comes “bringing light in the night,” he comes bringing not only the light of military glory and salvation for his troops, but also the light of the beacon, of the sacrilege at Troy, of dawn’s liminality, of the day of his own murder. The light as embodied by Agamemnon, and the life that it represents, is about to be swallowed up in the murky interior of the palace. At the same time, the light itself has become a deceptive and dangerous thing. That Agamemnon actively brings this light suggests his culpability in what follows, just as his willingness in the end to tread on the purple tapestries is a sure sign of his downfall. While Agamemnon is unable to bring the real light into the darkness of the palace, he still bears all the weight of its meaning as he goes to his death.

After his exit, Cassandra’s sudden outburst of prayer and prophecy focuses on the light as simultaneously a source of knowledge and of violence. At 1180-3, in a frankly puzzling rush of imagery, she declares of her seer’s art:

λαμπρὸς δ’ ἔοικεν ἡλίου πρὸς ἀντολάς
πνέων ἐπάξειν, ὥστε κύματος δίκην
κλύζειν πρὸς αὐγὰς τοῦδε πῆματος πολὺ
μεῖζον.

It seems that it will rush toward the sunrise,
a bright/fresh wind, so that like a wave
it will dash against the sun’s rays, a wave of doom far
greater than this one.⁴¹

Wind, waves, and light blend inextricably. λαμπρὸς immediately suggests “bright” and therefore anticipates ἡλίου (“sun”) but properly describes πνέων (“wind”), both of them emphatically positioned. With the force of an ocean wave, prophetic power rushes like an independent source of light in direct challenge to the sunrise; it dashes against the rays of—what? At first reading (or hearing), τοῦδε πῆματος (“this doom”) appears to be the possessor of the rays, and only as the sentence reaches its end do we discover that we are to understand it as part of a comparison. For an instant, Cassandra’s mantic insight⁴² seems to confront the “rays of this doom;” and that momentary equation of the rising sun with disaster is surely as significant as the fact that Cassandra’s destroyer is Apollo, the god so often associated with light and brilliance.⁴³ This perhaps explains why prophecy can be imagined to vie with the sunlight: both are facets of the same god, different sides of the same coin, as it were. An effective staging of this moment, and perhaps the entire scene (addressed as it is to Apollo) would have Cassandra face the sun, down the east eisodos and back toward Troy, where her troubles began. This would form a sort of triangulation with Cassandra at the apex, Troy and the light on the one side, and her prophesied fate in the shadowed palace on the other. The only “escape” from the light (from prophetic knowledge, from Apollo) lies in the darkened palace—ultimately an escape from life.⁴⁴

Before she exits for the last time, Cassandra marks the power of the sun in yet one more way: she calls it to witness her doom and to pay out vengeance to her murderers (1323-6):

ἡλίου⁴⁵ δ’ ἐπεύχομαι
πρὸς ὕστατον φῶς, δεσπότης τιμαόροις
ἐχθροὺς φόνευσιν τὴν ἐμὴν τίνειν ὁμοῦ,⁴⁶
δούλης θανούσης, εὐμαροῦς χειρώματος.

Looking on my last sunlight,
 I pray that my enemies may pay to my master's avengers
 the penalty for my murder as well—for the death
 of a slave, an easy victim.

Unfortunately, much of the Greek text is corrupt, but it is at least plain that Cassandra addresses the sun with reference to her own wretched death, and the reference to vengeance is not improbable. In the end, the light of the sun is even granted the violent strength necessary to carry out revenge on the murderers who lurk in the dark, while Cassandra herself leaves the stage as little more than a shadow, or something even less than a shadow (1328).⁴⁷ The menace inherent in the light and Cassandra's image of man as shadowy and ephemeral are things the members of the house of Atreus would do well to keep in mind. But Aegisthus, at least, has not learned that lesson, for his first line upon entering from the palace salutes the kindly light of a vengeful day (1577). His words recall the naïve herald, and his application of the epithet "kindly" (εὐφρον, which may recall the euphemistic term for night) to the day is unconsciously problematic. He is the last character to speak of the light in this play.⁴⁸

Conclusion

My primary aim in this paper has been to show that the ancient playwright was not straitened by the circumstance of natural lighting in the theater in which he produced his plays. Rather, he learned from experience what dynamics of light and shadow to expect and discovered various ways of making them work for him. With its preponderance of imagery related to light and darkness, *Agamemnon* is particularly well suited to this sort of investigation, though it may actually be the product of Aeschylus' dramaturgic innovation as much as his experience of the theater: the recently introduced stage-building changed the performance space by creating a shadowed area within the sunlit orchestra, of which Aeschylus took advantage in ways unanticipated by earlier poets and audiences. Later playwrights were then able to build upon his experiment.

Much of the language in *Agamemnon* is strictly metaphorical and has no real counterpart on the physical stage. But the audience is able to contemplate many of the play's basic ideas more concretely through the light and shadow visible in the acting area. The natural light may help to establish the dramatic time of the play (e.g. morning, noontide, etc.), but at the same time, the very fact that the sun belongs both to our world and to that of the drama allows for a conflation of the two—a phenomenon not possible in a modern theater, where all lighting is artificial. In the ancient theater, some degree of realism is unavoidable. Even where dramatic time does not match real time, the audience may be aware of various role(s) played by the sun in both worlds: as an all-seeing witness, as a beacon, as the light of Apollo, as a symbol of life and hope.

Though the playwright may plan his work around the natural light and shadow, it will not seem this way to the audience; they will see only that the natural world happens to coincide in important ways with the dramatic enactment of a story rooted in Greek myth and culture. This makes the play more believable in terms of details (such as the time of day) and more especially the action itself. When *Agamemnon* brings home "light" with the sun right over his shoulder, we are given a stronger sense of the underlying struggle between good and evil, the unseen forces driving that struggle, and the interplay of guilt and justice. The shadow hanging over the house of Atreus is a real thing; it must be a more disturbing experience for the spectator actually to see that figurative shadow of murder and disaster looming over the stage. With this play in particular, the conflation of the sun with the beacon and the confusion of the normally straightforward dichotomy of light and darkness lend an air of unreality to the dramatic action. That the natural elements appear to cooperate of their own accord with the dire events of the play fits in well with the common interpretation of Aeschylean tragedy as cosmic in scope, linking the individual to

a much larger chain of causality reaching all the way up to the gods. Perversion of the natural order, ever a popular way of reading *Agamemnon*, also emerges in Aeschylus' conflation of the values normally attached to light and darkness.

In addition to making the dramatic experience more immediate and more terrifying, the poet's apparently artless involvement of the sun and its light in his production also draws the spectator into a world just as real—or unreal—as his own. An expression of Martin Revermann's may be applicable here: he finds that the boundary between worlds, "while clearly marked, is often porous, and any crossing destabilizes the fictional character of the world of the play."⁴⁹ But by destabilization of a play's fictionality, do we mean that the play becomes less believable, or more so (and its fictionality less apparent)?

notes

¹ D. Wiles (1997, 133–60) considers the movements of the sun within the spatial dimension, particularly the various associations of the left and right eisodoi, but does not delve deeply into the meaning generated by the sun itself. M. Revermann (2006, 111–3) also toys briefly with direct references to the sun in Aristophanic comedy, though his main point is the limited value of *skenographia* in a "fundamentally environmental" theater, and he does not advance beyond the use of the sun itself in straightforward realism.

² I attended a performance of the *Persians* in 2007 in which the raising of Darius was effected by blinding the audience with white light while the actor simply walked onto the stage.

³ Though plays could be performed and reperformed in the deme theaters, the majority our surviving tragedies were originally intended to be produced in Athens.

⁴ Light would also affect the reciprocity between actors and audience during a performance, as observed by Revermann (2006, 35); consequently, watching a play in a darkened modern theater is relatively a more isolated, personal experience than watching one outdoors.

⁵ What might be termed metatheater, but see E. Hall (2006, 99–141, esp. 105–11) for a word of caution regarding that term. When I employ it here, I have in mind words or acts that jar the "dramatic illusion." There is nothing inherently dramatic about the sun, but as it is an object within the play that simultaneously reaches out beyond the play, drawing attention to it may encourage the spectator to think about the dramatic action on another level.

⁶ According to C. Ashby (1998, 97–108) the precise orientation is 346.4°. This is the orientation of the theater's remains, which cannot take us further back than the Periclean reconstruction of the precinct (including the addition of the Odeion) in the 440s. It is not known whether the earlier theater was built along the same axis; S. Scullion (1994, 26–8) seems to suggest that it may have been on more of a NW/SE axis, parallel to the Odeion, and later adjusted to accommodate the stone skene and hall to the south. Fig. 1 retains the orientation of the later (extant) theater; the lengths of lines x and y do not correspond to the lengths of those shadows, which of course depend on the size of the skene and the height of the sun in the sky.

⁷ Ashby (1998, 108); the vernal equinox, when the sun rises due east, is about March 21. J. T. Allen (1937, 169–72) refutes Flickinger's claim that there was no east eisodos until the Odeion was built.

⁸ Perhaps it did in the summer months, when the sun moved further north. In March, shadow would have fallen only on the northernmost edge of the orchestra and the auditorium itself.

⁹ On the Odeion, see J. T. Allen (1941, 173–8); O. Broneer (1944, 305–12); A. L. H. Robkin (diss., University of Washington, 1976, 10–41); M. Miller (1997, 218–42). It was probably completed by 446, though some have dated it as early as the 470s, as its roof was said to have been made from the wood of ships at the Battle of Salamis.

¹⁰ One might think that without something to obstruct the morning sunlight it would have shone right in the eyes of half the audience. But this was probably less of a problem than it seems, as the spectators' gazes were directed downward from auditorium to acting area. Ashby (1998, 109–15) recognizes the problem but adds that the orientation of the theaters was probably meant to maximize warmth in the winter months.

¹¹ I am in agreement with R. Rehm (1988, 263–307) that both actors and chorus were permitted in the orchestra (see also Ewens and Ley, 1985, 75–84). I therefore use the terms “stage” and “acting area” interchangeably to refer to the entire space in front of the stage–building (skene). The shape of the orchestra (circular versus trapezoidal) makes no difference for my argument, nor does the possible existence of a moderately raised stage.

¹² For the watchman on the roof, see O. Taplin (1977, 276–7). If the *Oresteia* was the first production to use the skene (so Taplin 1977, 452–9), then this would be one of the more extreme ways in which the playwright could alter the lighting of the acting area. For the possibility that there were projecting *paraskenia*, which would also increase the shaded area, see A. W. Pickard–Cambridge (1946, 43–4 with n. 1, as well as the appendix on pp. 169–70); J.–C. Moretti (1999/2000, 377–98, esp. 397–8).

¹³ On the order of tragic and comic performance, see A. W. Pickard–Cambridge (1988, 64–5); E. Csapo and W. J. Slater (1994, 107). There may have been five comedies on the first day and only tragic tetralogies on subsequent days, or tragedies in the morning and comedies in the afternoon of every day. Even in the first case, we have no compelling reason to believe that the tragedies would not still have been performed in the morning; the main evidence for this is *Ar. Birds* 786–9 (produced in 414). Ashby (1998, 120–1; cf. also pp. 109–10), doubts that the plays began at dawn and further concludes that the texts only make reference to the time of day when it is markedly different from the dramatic time. I do not agree with this, for there are many reasons to mention the time of day beyond “setting the scene.”

¹⁴ N. M. Russo (1974). In addition to Russo, see Wiles (1997, 144–5) as well as J. J. Peradotto (1964, 378–93), and L. Moss (1977, 267–78).

¹⁵ Excepting probably the initial choral entry and final exit, if we imagine the west *eisodos* as leading to the city's interior. See Wiles (1997, 133–60, esp. 144–5), on the significance of left and right in the staging of Greek tragedy; a certain level of realism dictates that Agamemnon should enter from the east, given that two things with which he is strongly associated (*Troy* and the sun) both lie physically in the east.

¹⁶ See e.g. 326–9 (the dead and defeated Trojans), 338–42 (a warning against impiety in victory), 427–55 (the Greek dead), 527 (Trojan altars and shrines destroyed), 646–70 (the storm at sea). The best-known Greek sacrileges during the sack of Troy are the rape of Cassandra by the lesser Ajax and the slaughter of Priam at the altar by Neoptolemus; the expedition as a whole is framed by the sacrifice of Iphigenia (vividly described in the *parodos*: 146–55, 218–49) before the fleet's departure for Troy and the sacrifice of Polyxena before the return voyage. The sack itself occurs during the night, which in turn is addressed (with propitiatory *φιλήματα*) alongside Zeus as an agent of the city's destruction (355–7). Further, the net which Night uses to capture Troy anticipates the one Clytemnestra uses on Agamemnon (1115, 1382–3).

¹⁷ As confirmed in other statements (e.g., 4–8, 12–17). The dramatic time in the prologue is thus a little earlier than the actual time, though it seems to catch up after the *parodos* so that by that point the sun

may have a more directly realistic effect. On the imagery of the prologue speech, see Russo (1974, 7–18); he subscribes to an ironic reading whereby the beacon portends doom as much as it symbolizes the fulfillment of the watchman’s immediate hopes. Russo links the beacon to the stars, but he does not consider the applicability of the language to the sun as well.

¹⁸ All quotations of the Greek are from M. L. West (ed.), *Aeschylus: Tragoediae* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1990) unless otherwise noted. The translations are those of A. H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Aeschylus II*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008)."

¹⁹ See 83–7, 272–80, 475–92. Line 272 is a demand for proof; subsequent lines question whether the beacon actually has the significance with which Clytemnestra imbues it.

²⁰ The audience would already be acquainted with Clytemnestra’s treachery from Homer (*Od.* 11.404–11, 421–34).

²¹ It is possible (but unprovable) that by some stage effect a fire did flare up down the east eisodos (Russo (1974, 13).

²² J. D. Denniston and D. L. Page (1957, 21n.) on ὀρφναίου: “‘in the darkness’; elsewhere always ‘dark’.” E. Fränkel (1950, 21n.): “ὀρφναῖος occurs in Homer (only in the *Doloneia* and once in the *Odyssey*) exclusively in the formula νύκτα δι’ ὀρφναίνην, and elsewhere too is always an epithet of night or something dark.”

²³ So Denniston and Page (1957, 22n.) The genitive νυκτός (“night) could also indicate “a light during the night,” which is how Sommerstein seems to understand it, though the word order is such that this translation is not the most obvious one. D. Page (1972) and H. W. Smyth (1963) both punctuate after νυκτός, producing the sense “welcome, light of night, bringing a light of day.” Fränkel (1950) (followed by West and Sommerstein) punctuates after λαμπτήρ (“light”), suggesting rather “welcome, light, bringing a light of day of night” (or “during the night”); see Fränkel (1950, 22n.) for discussion. I leave the line unpunctuated to bring out the polyvalence.

²⁴ So also Clytemnestra’s words at 288, applied specifically to the beacon. Unfortunately, the text here is corrupt.

²⁵ Cf. also 588, where the fire is again one “of night” (νύχτιος).

²⁶ See Russo (1974, 25–6) on both the simple and the ironic connotations of Clytemnestra’s use of the proverb.

²⁷ E.g 717–36, 763–71, as well as 278–80 (discussed below).

²⁸ Russo (1974, 27) suggests that φῶς in this passage is meant to recall the watchman’s use of the same word to describe the beacon, with both types of light in turn being linked to the fall of Troy. However, night is more immediately linked to Troy, and thus dawn’s connection is only indirect.

²⁹ Therefore, while I agree with the general remarks of Taplin (1977, 290–4) on continuity of time in ancient tragedy, I cannot follow him in saying that “Aeschylus takes positive care to ensure that in performance nothing seems chronologically improbable.” Cf. Scullion (1994, 67–88) who concludes that Aeschylean drama as such had no more scenic “fluidity” than later tragedy; if so, such fluidity as we do find is all the more noticeable.

³⁰ Some manuscripts mark 489–500 as Clytemnestra’s, with the chorus returning at 501; these marginal

notations were deleted by Scaliger (followed by Fränkel, Smyth, West, and Sommerstein), though Denniston and Page (1957) and Page (1972) retain the manuscripts' attribution. See Taplin (1977, 294–7) for discussion. The need to know more about the beacon stands in contrast with Clytemnestra's earlier confidence.

³¹ At 81–2 the chorus compares old age to a waking dream (ὄναρ ἡμερόφαντον). Day is normally a time of concrete awareness, in contrast to insubstantial dreams experienced during the night. A waking dream, then, is something of an oxymoron, and indicates that the dreamlike quality of old age is not limited to physical weakness, but is almost an imaginary state of existence, just as the chorus' account of the fighting at Troy in the lines immediately preceding these was imaginary, and just as drama itself is an act of imagination. Ἠμερόφαντον suggests the unreality of the chorus' perceptions within the dramatic action, as well as the unreality of the play itself.

³² See 632–3, 676–7. Despite the title, E. Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010) has little to say about the light in the theater, but see 93–4 on the all-seeing sun.

³³ Russo (1974, 56) makes the interesting point that the account of the storm, which takes place in the night and whose results are revealed the following day, prefigures the end of the play, when Clytemnestra exposes to the light the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra.

³⁴ Elsewhere in tragedy at e.g. Soph. *Trach.* 94–102, OC 869.

³⁵ The primary meaning of φαίδροισι τοισίδ' ὄμμασιν must indicate benevolence, but the literal sense should not be ignored; see Fränkel (1950, 520n.). I therefore disagree with Denniston and Page (1957, 520n): "the adj. is purely metaphorical: we are under no compulsion to believe that the statues' eyes are, or are deemed to be, conveniently lit up by the morning sunshine." Cf. Russo (1974, 49); though he occasionally suggests that some of the imagery of light might also have been staged, he never connects it to the real sun.

³⁶ To look at it another way, the herald is not a "brilliant dynast," like Agamemnon, and therefore neither surrounded by the same social and moral ambiguities nor pursued by the same fate. Cf. M. Griffith (1995, 73): "Thus an audience in the theater experiences simultaneously (or in rapid alternation) at least three quite different perspectives on the action unfolding before it: (i) it empathizes with the ambitions or horrified anxieties of the leading character(s); (ii) it shares and enjoys the gods' or prophet's (and author's) ability to look down on those leaders, from a distance, as misguided and error-prone objects of pity or scorn; (iii) along with the fearful choral group or minor character, it gazes up at these leaders from below in wonder, as stupendously superior pillars of strength, ambition, and determination. And from first to last, safe in his/her theater seat, every member of the audience knows that this "internal audience" of minor characters and chorus, will survive, to resume their lives after the drama of the leaders has played itself out, just as they themselves (the theater audience) will resume their everyday lives upon leaving the theater. To that extent at least, these minor characters and this chorus are felt to be more like the theater audience, and closer to them, than are their leaders, upon whom so much attention (from both internal and theater audiences) is so fiercely focused." See also pp. 79–81 on Agamemnon.

³⁷ A more literal translation of φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνηι φέρων, though Sommerstein's "bringing light out of darkness" captures the herald's optimistic attitude. As we read this sentence, it initially appears that the light itself is coming until we realize that φῶς ("light") is the object of φέρων ("bringing"), not the subject of ἦκει ("comes"). Taplin (1977, 299, 302–4) describes the herald's and Agamemnon's returns in terms of light that becomes overshadowed, though he is thinking figuratively.

³⁸ See Wiles (1997, 77) for brief discussion of silhouetted figures on the stage. Russo (1974, 27–37)

argues that the beacon is personified in some sense and associates it with Agamemnon; it thus becomes symbolic of both his guilt and his ruin (p. 42)—but Russo does not connect any of this to the sun.

³⁹ This staging would also have the advantage of using more of the acting area. A central position for Clytemnestra would risk rendering the entire western half dead space—unless we assume that the chorus occupied this space or that the procession spread out to occupy the whole of the orchestra (which would make for an equally effective contrast). But Taplin (1977, 438–40) doubts that there were multiple doors until New Comedy.

⁴⁰ P. E. Easterling (1993), argues that Agamemnon’s decision is characterized by human blindness rather than impiety or hybris. For a fuller survey of this scene’s impact and implications, see Taplin (1977, 310–6).

⁴¹ I find Sommerstein’s translation of this passage to be inadequate to my purposes and have therefore rendered it into English myself. Sommerstein prefers to read in the first line πρὸς ἀντολής (“from the sunrise”) and in the third ἀγᾶς (“beaches,” which he nevertheless translates as singular). Such expressions as “so to speak” and “like a bright fresh wind” are not in the Greek and soften the language more than Aeschylus intended. Ἔοικα with a dative means “seem like,” while ἔοικα with an infinitive (as we have here) means “seem likely to . . .” Thus Cassandra’s prophecy is a bright fresh wind which seems likely to rush etc.

⁴² Russo (1974, 23–4) cites this passage (fuller discussion on pp. 69–71) as an example of light as understanding, which he also finds in the choral passage at 250–4 and the principle of πάθει μάθος (177).

⁴³ As illustrated by his common epithet Phoebus. I do not claim that Apollo is the sun, but the sunlight on the stage may recall this aspect of his divinity. Russo (1974, 73) associates Apollo (as healer and far-shooter) with light in both its positive and destructive manifestations, though I cannot see any immediate relation to light in either healing or archery.

⁴⁴ Taplin (1977, 317–21) prefers to have Cassandra continuously orientated on the skene. Though his interpretation of Cassandra’s role as leading the chorus and audience to enlightenment is attractive, I disagree with his formulation that “Cassandra’s is a journey into knowledge and insight,” since she has long possessed these things and seems finally to be divesting herself of them (literally at 1264–70).

⁴⁵ West (1990) and Sommerstein (2008) print the conjectural ἠλίου, producing “looking upon my last light of the sun”; the manuscripts’ ἠλίωι would suggest “I pray to the sun, looking upon my last light . . .”

⁴⁶ West (1990) prints this conjecture for the corruption in 1324–5.

⁴⁷ Depending on whether we read σκιά τις ἄν τρέψειεν (Fränkel, Smyth, and West) or σκιάι τις ἄν πρέψειεν (Page). For the exits of Agamemnon and Cassandra likened to shadows, see Wiles (1997, 169).

⁴⁸ Cf. Russo (1974, 77–8). At 1646, the chorus expresses the hope that Orestes is still alive to see the light so that he may take revenge—a sort of complement to the thoughts of both Cassandra and Aegisthus.

⁴⁹ Revermann (2006, 37), though he is thinking in spatial terms, and of comedy (which is in any case more topical and immediate than tragedy).

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Adapting *Hecuba*: Where Do Problems Begin?

Nancy Nanney

West Virginia University at Parkersburg

For the 2001 NEH summer seminar on “Literature and Values,” which I attended at the University of North Carolina, one of the selected readings was Euripides’ *Hecuba* (425 or 424 BCE), translated by Janet Lembke and Kenneth J. Reckford. As group leader for the *Hecuba* discussion, I created a short script that brings the original play into focus from modern, ethical points of view. The seminar participants were all assigned character roles and read their parts as if we were at a prerehearsal meeting. In this way, the “companion” script served as a prelude to a fuller examination of the ethical issues encountered in the play. In devising the dialogue, I took some liberties in considering *Hecuba* in both its own time (when staged in ancient Greece) and the present. Since the seminar, I have regularly taught Euripides’ *Hecuba* in my university courses. After students read the original play, I use the teaching script (revised over the years) in class as a discussion motivator. An updated version, akin to what was presented at the 2010 Ancient Drama in Performance Conference at Randolph College, is included here and may be further adapted at any reader’s discretion.



Conference Presentation
video: Randolph College
[youtube.com/watch?v=2a2r9NVP1nA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2a2r9NVP1nA)

In particular, the teaching script for *Hecuba*, though brief, brings to light certain less-frequently discussed aspects of the original play. One especially highlighted sequence of events occurs farther back in time than those usually addressed in relation to *Hecuba*: that is, how King Priam and Queen Hecuba treat their infant son Paris. As the legend (but not the play) tells the story, the pregnant Hecuba has a disturbing dream of a firebrand that sets fire to all of Troy. A seer interprets the dream as foretelling that the royal infant will, in time, bring about the city’s ruin. This devastating prospect prompts the king to give his newborn son to a shepherd, Agelaus, with instructions to kill the child. However, rather than kill Paris outright, Agelaus leaves him to die on Mt. Ida. Yet Paris does not die, and, amazed to see the infant still alive after lying alone for several days, Agelaus decides instead to raise the boy himself, as a shepherd.

Not surprisingly, this legendary tale has generated different versions. In one, Paris later comes to Troy and is allowed to compete in a sporting event, organized coincidentally in memory of his own presumed death. At this time, Paris’s true identity is revealed. Thus, the youthful herdsman wins not just the match but also his place back in the royal family, since Priam accepts his return.¹ Perhaps the king is so impressed by his son’s youthful prowess that he ignores the dire prophecy, or perhaps parental guilt finally enters the picture. In this version of the tale, it is apparently from Troy that Paris (perhaps still identified as a “herdsman”) returns to Mt. Ida to judge a beauty contest at Zeus’s request. Among the three contestants, each a goddess with a “bribe,” Paris chooses Aphrodite as the winner. Aphrodite in turn grants Paris her own special prize: the opportunity to bring the captivating but already-married Helen back to Troy² (with accounts varying as to whether she comes as an abducted woman or consensually). Of course, Menelaus is angered that his wife has been taken from Sparta and, along with his brother Agamemnon, amasses a Greek military force to punish Troy and reclaim Helen. Indeed, by most versions, it is “The Judgment of Paris” that is deemed the cause of the Trojan War, leading to the defeat of Troy after ten years of battle.

In Euripides’ *Hecuba*, there is no clear mention of the queen’s frightening firebrand dream, her newborn’s prophesied role in Troy’s demise, or her and Priam’s decision that their infant son should die. Euripides’ preference not to add further complexity to his multiplot tragedy suggests that the playwright may have

wanted to avoid dealing with the issue of a far-reaching fate. After all, Euripides portrays Hecuba, at least at first, as a sympathetic character unburdened by the parental decision she and Priam made about Paris many years before. Hecuba's present burdens—the loss of her husband and sons in the Trojan war, the total destruction of their kingdom, and her own current enslavement, along with that of her daughters and other Trojan women, by the Greeks—are overwhelming enough. To question her earlier actions—or even lay partial blame on her for how she and Priam reacted to the seer's interpretation of her dream—might detract from the more immediate postwar concerns in the play. Curiously, however, when we first meet Hecuba, she is still disturbed by menacing dreams, although their interpretation appears connected to other miseries: the sacrifice of her virgin daughter Polyxena to Achilles' ghost and the murder of her young son Polydorus by his deceitful Thracian protector, King Polymestor.

Even though Paris is not a stage character in Euripides' play, there is still mention of him by the Chorus and Hecuba. According to the Chorus of enslaved Trojan women, their disastrous fate was sealed "The moment the pines on Mt. Ida/ Were cut down by Paris/ To build the ship he would steer through high waves/ To the bed of Helen."³ The Chorus then explains that this plan came about "when Paris, a herdsman on Ida,/ Judges three daughters of gods."⁴ Thus, it is clear that in Euripides' *Hecuba*, Paris is still a "herdsman" when he makes his fateful judgment; most likely he had not yet returned to Troy to assume his role as a royal prince. In this case, other questions might come to mind: what compels Paris to bring Helen to Troy and how do his parents react to his "homecoming"? Do they welcome Helen? Are they pleased to possess in their midst the pride of Greece? Have Priam and Hecuba grown so confident in their long-term reign that they no longer fear their son? Over the centuries, the answers—and questions—may change, but the curiosity this play inspires is ever present.

For example, there is a section in which Hecuba acknowledges some role in the disasters at hand. When pleading with Odysseus to reverse the army's decision to sacrifice Polyxena, Hecuba tells the Greek leader that she, rather than her daughter, should be sacrificed: "Kill me without a qualm./ I gave birth to Paris/ Whose arrows shot down Achilles."⁵ One assumes, however, that she does not really blame Paris for killing Achilles during the course of the war—although one may wonder how she feels at this point about having given birth to Paris in the first place. If so, this is indeed a subtle reference to the prophecy; more likely, she simply wants to save Polyxena and is willing to die in her place. In fact, later in the play we hear Hecuba praising all of her sons and showing pride in her role as their mother: "O Priam, you owned wealth and beauty, you fathered/ strong sons, and I, gone grey, was their mother."⁶

Regardless, however, of the fact that Euripides does not specifically mention the fearful episode surrounding Paris's birth, a modern interpreter may be reluctant to dispense with Priam and Hecuba's quick choice of infanticide (even though Paris survives). Today a critic might probe Priam and Hecuba's drastic parental decision for its ethical implications in subsequent dramatic events, including the eventual destruction of Troy. In addition, the foretelling of the infant Paris's destructive future is obviously reminiscent of the prophecy that sets the Oedipus tale in motion. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (429 BCE) was staged in Athens only four or five years before *Hecuba*. In both plots, the young men—Oedipus and Paris—are recognized for forming inappropriate relationships with women. As is easily recalled, Oedipus, after killing his father, marries his mother and fathers four children incestuously; Paris steals—or entices—Menelaus's wife. Of course, Oedipus does not know until much later that Jocasta is his mother (the marriage having been "won" once he solves the riddle of the Sphinx). In the Trojan case, Paris apparently feels compulsively drawn to Helen after "winning" her with Aphrodite's assistance.

There is, however, a kind of "payback" for both Oedipus and Paris in terms of the misfortunes that strike their families and states. That is, the infanticide prescribed by their parents in response to a prophecy (troubling as the prophecy was) may be seen to undermine the ethos of family loyalty and the state as protector. If choosing to kill one's own child can be considered "acceptable," what does this say about the

ethical underpinnings of a society? Is this where problems begin for both Thebes and Troy? On the other hand, allowing for a residual culture of prophecy in 5th-century Greece, an ancient might argue that it is better to let a single person (especially an infant that has not yet substantially invested in life) die than to risk a multitude of deaths, that fate is unstoppable in any case (ergo, Oedipus and Paris were not yet destined to die no matter what actions their parents took), or that safeguarding the family and state overrides any presumed rights due an individual. This then is the point: whether Priam and Hecuba have, in this case, the parental—or royal—prerogative to decide and arrange for their son’s death is an arguable matter (from both ancient and modern perspectives) and not a simple, “understandable under the circumstances” fait accompli that can be relegated to old news. So, upon review, was it the couple’s treatment of Paris that contributed to the fall of Troy and the ashen aftermath—rather than an inflamed dream?

Indeed, whatever Euripides’ reason for leaving direct reference to Paris’s “death sentence” out of the script, Priam and Hecuba’s actions—their “solution”—still raises questions centuries later regarding the consequences for both individuals and groups. For example, in Michael Tippett’s 1962 modern opera *King Priam*, Priam expresses sincere regret for making the decision that his son must die; in this version of the tale, Priam clearly experiences fatherly compassion for Paris as well as a troubled conscience about authorizing the infant’s murder;⁷ Priam is not put fully at ease by the justification that murdering one for the sake of many is acceptable. In contrast, after hearing the seer’s interpretation of her distressing dream, Hecuba (in Tippett’s version) quickly disowns her newborn baby in an effort to ensure the safety of her husband and city. Later in the opera, Priam and his eldest son Hector are on a hunting trip when they meet the herdsman Paris, whose true identity is revealed. Priam is overjoyed that the young man has survived after all and decides to bring him back into the family fold, whatever the consequences. Later in the final act, Priam acknowledges that he *chose* fate, highlighting the issue of “choice” in life. While acknowledging the troubling nature of Priam and Hecuba’s initial decision to have Paris killed, the opera also recognizes the endurance of the father-son relationship, in this case apparently overshadowing that of mother and son.

Even a staging that remains close to Euripides’ script can have extended significance for contemporary communities. In 1995, the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco staged *Hecuba*, under Carey Perloff’s direction, with a clear reference to the Bosnian War. The chorus was performed by the KITKA vocal ensemble, an established female acappella group that draws inspiration from the music of Eastern Europe. Tippett’s interpretation, with its focus on individual choice, and the American Conservatory Theatre’s production, with its relevance to communal conflict, are just two examples of the legend’s adaptability across time, place, and genre.

In the teaching script ([PDF](#)), this underlying issue of child neglect (call it endangerment or abandonment), among the many other questions raised in Euripides’ play, is left purposely—and perhaps provocatively—unanswered. What might people do today if confronted by a prophetic vision that their child will cause them, their family, and their community irreparable harm? For a modern viewer it might be simple to say: “I don’t believe in seers.” In reply, one might argue that people still need to know how to deal with potential troublemakers—who are often themselves deeply troubled. Some individuals may be marginalized or go unrecognized for the threat they present until, in very unfortunate cases, they resort to extreme measures to address their personal/societal frustrations, as seen in the Oklahoma City, Columbine, Virginia Tech, Tucson, and Norway attacks. What can help alleviate an individual’s mounting fears, frustrations, and compulsions? In fact, one lesson to be drawn from *Hecuba* is that “avoidance” is not the solution. Was Paris intent on “stealing” Helen because his mother had been “stolen” from him early in life? Did he need to find a woman he could possess without fear of abandonment, despite the cost? Was knowingly endangering others a way of “paying back” for his own endangerment as an infant? Perhaps not. Still, considering what happened to Paris before he was even

born and soon thereafter need not be avoided in an analysis of Euripides' thought-provoking drama.⁸

We continue to study, perform, and critique Greek tragedy as script and performance not only because its actions are so intense and unnerving but also because its motivations are so deeply human and the ethical concerns it raises remain strikingly relevant. Still, from a 21st-century perspective, with multiple psychosocial theories at hand, the answers are not always clear cut. The use of a teaching script, even one written in a somewhat "over-the-top" manner, may assist students in thinking through a play's spectrum of issues. As evidenced in *Hecuba*, Greek drama continues to challenge our own concepts of "being human" as we deal with the psychological and social complexities of contemporary life.

notes

¹ Greek Mythology Index, s.v. "Paris," <http://www.mythindex.com/greek-mythology/P/Paris.html> (accessed August 3, 2011).

² Andrew Brown, *A New Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983), 144.

³ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. Janet Lembke and Kenneth J. Reckford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), lines 669–672.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 681–682.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 415–416.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 658–659

⁷ Synopses (English National Opera), s.v. "King Priam Synopsis," <http://www.eno.org/explore/knowledge-bank/synopses.php?id=319> (accessed August 3, 2011).

⁸ Related issues come to the fore in Lucy Thurber's new play *The Insurgents*, which had its world premiere at the 2011 Contemporary American Theatre Festival in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. In this play, a young woman is forced to leave college when, because of an injury, she loses her athletic scholarship. Returning to a dysfunctional family and feeling not only her own loss but the loss of a civilization, she grows increasingly fearful and frustrated in her isolation and, in her mind, identifies with a broad spectrum of insurgents. A reunited family and renewed sense of social engagement may, in time, turn this potential, gun-toting "troublemaker" into a constructive, non-violent citizen.

Adapting *Hecuba* -- Where Do Problems Begin?

~ a script composed for studying Euripides' Hecuba in the college classroom ~

For the "Ancient Drama in Performance: Theory and Practice" conference at Randolph College, in Lynchburg, Virginia, on October 9, 2010.

Prepared by

Nancy Nanney, PhD

Professor of English

Education and Humanities Division

West Virginia University at Parkersburg

300 Campus Drive

Parkersburg, WV 26104

Tel.: (304) 424-8361

E-mail: Nancy.Nanney@mail.wvu.edu

The Cast (*Students may read more than one role.*)

The Professor

Student #1 (*expressive and inquisitive*)

Student #2 (*fair minded and empathetic*)

Student #3 (*practical and well informed*)

The Ghost of Polydorus

Hecuba

The Chorus (of captive Trojan women)

The Chorus Leader

Polyxena

Odysseus

Talthybius

The Greek Soldiers

Note: The Professor and Students #1, #2, and #3 speak, as indicated, all the lines that are neither capitalized nor underlined in the script. The lines spoken by characters drawn from Euripides' *Hecuba* are ALL CAPITALIZED AND UNDERLINED; these characters' lines follow upon the Professor's introductory phrase (**written in bold print**).

(The Professor begins the presentation.)

PROFESSOR: *(Addressing the audience)* Hello, everyone. As a prelude to today's discussion of Euripides' *Hecuba*, I'd like to note some ethical issues encountered in the play. To do so, I've elicited the cooperation of several fine actors. Also, in viewing *Hecuba* in its own time and ours, I'm going to take a few liberties, as a play director or filmmaker might do.

(Speaking to the actors positioned near the Professor.) Imagine we've gathered here for a prerehearsal meeting so we can begin to explore the dialogue, action, and possible adaptations of the script. Much of what you'll read is invented and not taken directly from the original play.

(Gesturing to three of the actors) The actors reading the student roles should feel free to ask questions and make comments along the way. After the reading, we'll discuss these matters further at the Socrates Café.

(Addressing the audience and the actors) As we know, *Hecuba* is set in Thrace, in the aftermath of the fall of Troy, in the encampment of the Greek army. Having slain the Trojan men, the Greek army has enslaved the fallen city's women, including the former queen, Hecuba. All of this occurred because Hecuba's son, Paris, abducted the beautiful Helen from Greece . . .

STUDENT #1 *(Interjects)*: Excuse me, Professor, this protocol puzzles me. An army is defeated—so shouldn't a treaty be signed, prisoners taken, reparations demanded, an occupying army instructed to edify the public morally regarding the issue of abduction—you know, these sorts of things, rather than mass slaughter and enslavement?

PROFESSOR: Interesting point. **However, the commander Odysseus simply told his troops:**

ODYSSEUS: KILL ALL THE MEN! ENSLAVE ALL THE WOMEN! BURN THE CITY!

WE'RE GOING HOME! I'M TIRED OF THIS TEN-YEAR WAR! I NEVER WANT TO
HEAR THE WORD TROY AGAIN!

STUDENT #2: (*Sadly*) So many women are the victims of war.

STUDENT #3: Well, being enslaved is better than being dead.

PROFESSOR: Or is it? For the free-spirited Trojan women—as for anyone—it's hard to find
dignity and a good life in enslavement.

STUDENT #1: As for Hecuba being a victim, her former position as queen complicates
matters. Does she, along with her attendants, represent female victimization—or simply
fallen power?

STUDENT #3: And from today's perspective, aren't women, as part of the feat of liberation,
often serving alongside men wherever troops are sent? Perhaps women can now be more
easily envisioned as soldiers and officers rather than vulnerable ladies left behind.

STUDENT #2: Since the Trojan War took ten years to settle, were there no peace protests
or negotiators along the way?

STUDENT #1: Granted this is a play, but did the Trojan War ever actually happen?

PROFESSOR: Good questions, but for now, let's consider the ghost's appearance in the opening scene: Hecuba's young son, Polydorus, tells us he's been killed by his war-time guardian, Polymestor, the King of Thrace. **The murdered lad will rest in peace once he's given burial:**

POLYDORUS: MOMMY, PLEASE BURY ME AS BEFITS A PRINCE OF TROY!

STUDENT #2: This isn't an angry ghost, seeking vengeance.

STUDENT #3: The play is a revenge tragedy, but it's Hecuba's revenge, not her son's.

STUDENT #1: Why is that?

PROFESSOR: "Why?" indeed. Meanwhile, the Greeks are stalled in Thrace, for there is another ghost that does seek revenge: Achilles' ghost tells his comrades he cannot die peacefully unless Polyxena, the young virgin daughter of Hecuba, is sacrificed.

STUDENT #3: Not a minor request. For the most part, the Greeks have given up the practice of human sacrifice.

STUDENT #2: And, Greece being a democracy, the decision is left to the soldiers themselves.

STUDENT #1: The Greek commanders try to influence the demos; Odysseus is most persuasive.

PROFESSOR: **The Greek soldiers cast their vote and exclaim:**

THE GREEK SOLDIERS: KILL HER! KILL POLYXENA. HECUBA'S VIRGIN DAUGHTER BELONGS TO ACHILLES. SATISFY OUR GREEK HERO'S LAST REQUEST!

STUDENT #2: Citizens go far in honoring their heroes, but meanwhile whose suffering might be ignored?

PROFESSOR: Does Euripides distrust “the demos”? Are the Greek troops a “mob” persuaded by clever-tongued leaders to make unethical choices?

STUDENT #1: How do we recover democratic ideals in the face of ill-conceived majority choices?

PROFESSOR: **Hecuba begs Odysseus to save Polyxena, but he remains unmoved:**

ODYSSEUS: I WOULD REPAY MY DEBT TO YOU, HECUBA, BUT NOT TO YOUR DAUGHTER. WE GREEKS MUST HONOR OUR HEROES OR THE TROOPS WON'T FIGHT THE NEXT TIME. GREEKS SUFFERED AND DIED IN THIS WAR, TOO.

STUDENT #2: Is Odysseus’s military rationale justified?

PROFESSOR: Polyxena tries to resolve matters by voicing her own willingness to die.

STUDENT #3: Her stance is existential. When all else fails, she can at least control her own “attitude.”

PROFESSOR: **What is it you really care about, Polyxena?**

POLYXENA: FREEDOM! I CARE ABOUT FREEDOM! LIFE WITHOUT MORAL BEAUTY INFLICTS ENDLESS PAIN!

STUDENT #1: Is this link between morality and beauty necessary or optional for experiencing a good life?

PROFESSOR: Ultimately, Hecuba feels it’s Helen who should be sacrificed, but in the past, when Helen arrived in Troy on Paris’s arm, did anyone insist that Paris relinquish his prize? **Did Hecuba express concern about Menelaus, Helen’s lonely spouse?**

HECUBA: OH, HELEN DEAR, YOU ARE SO LOVELY. OUR TROJAN PEOPLE SURELY WANT YOU HERE, AS DO PRIAM AND I.

STUDENT #1: So, everyone was dazzled by Helen. Was this Helen's fault? Should Helen be sacrificed?

STUDENT #3: The suggestion weakens Hecuba's moral stance.

PROFESSOR: Then the Greek messenger, Talthybius, announces Polyxena's death and asks Hecuba to bury her. **A sensitive fellow, Talthybius calls into question the justice—and existence—of the gods:**

TALTHYBIUS: MY GOD! ZEUS, DO YOU WATCH OVER HUMAN LIVES? OR DO WE CLING TO SUCH A BELIEF IN VAIN, WHEN CHANCE, BLIND CHANCE, RULES US TILL WE DIE?

STUDENT #1: The age-old question: with so much injustice and suffering on earth—if the gods or God exists, does it matter?

STUDENT #3: Hecuba, in her grief, struggles over the nurture vs. nature issue.

STUDENT #2: Is the morality we espouse dependent on our upbringing or genes?

PROFESSOR: Can a play, such as *Hecuba*, yield moral instruction?

STUDENT #1: How should we interpret a play?

PROFESSOR: **The Chorus Leader asks:**

THE CHORUS LEADER: WHAT DOES IT MEAN—THESE BLOWS THAT KEEP STRIKING?

STUDENT #2: Is pain the basis of ethics or just a disruption?

PROFESSOR: Discovering Polydorus dead and convinced Polymestor killed him for his gold, Hecuba shifts from the passivity of grief to the passion of vengeance. **But the Chorus Leader cautions Hecuba:**

THE CHORUS LEADER: HEAVEN INSISTS THAT YOU BEAR WHATEVER BURDENS YOU MOST!

STUDENT #1: However, if heaven—or society—expects people to endure burdens that are

more than they can bear, can this be a just heaven or society? Pushed beyond the limits, people will rebel!

PROFESSOR: Relying on the art of persuasion and forsaking truth for rhetoric, Hecuba appeals to Agamemnon:

HECUBA: AGAMEMNON, YOU CAN SLEEP WITH CASSIE, MY WONDROUS FORTUNE-TELLING DAUGHTER. YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO MARRY HER OR HAVE HER CONSENT. BUT IT IS NOT FREEDOM I SEEK. IT IS PURE AND SIMPLE REVENGE! BRING POLYMESTOR AND HIS TWO SONS HERE! YOUR COMPLICITY WILL REMAIN SECRET. MY ACCOMPLICES AND I WILL DO EVERYTHING TO WREAK VENGEANCE ON POLYMESTOR, FOR WOMEN, LIKE MEN, HAVE AWFUL POWERS TO UNLEASH, AND IT WILL BE BEAUTIFUL!

STUDENT #3: Is this true gender equality—or the playwright's fear of women?

STUDENT #2: Has the play moved beyond communitarian ethics and pragmatism to the errantly psychological and personal?

STUDENT #3: Is it any wonder the chorus finds no consistency in the world?

STUDENT #1: Hecuba concludes that everyone is enslaved by a set of circumstances; even so, who doesn't seek an escape route? Can Hecuba's be defended?

PROFESSOR: Agamemnon agrees to Hecuba's request. An unaware Polymestor arrives with his two sons. Enticed into Hecuba's tent to view precious heirlooms, he witnesses instead the murder of his precious sons. He is then savagely blinded. Such sheer violence by Hecuba and the other Trojan women . . .

STUDENT #2: (*Interjects*) These accomplices, too, should be judged in our moral critique.

PROFESSOR: The mock trial follows. A defeated Polymestor denounces the others and prophetically foretells their doom.

STUDENT #3: So, do we agree that justice has been fully served?

STUDENT #2: Do Hecuba and the other Trojan women have a right to kill Polymestor's sons? Who speaks for these children?

STUDENT #1: Can we add the young boys' voices to the script? Can these Thracian lads also return as ghosts?

STUDENT #3: Are there any limits to adapting a play?

PROFESSOR: Has the fact that Hecuba has been OVERBURDENED by pain caused her rejection of all ethical frameworks?

SSTUDENT #3: Agamemnon gave her the option of freedom. She chose revenge.

STUDENT #2: A choice made with forethought or an irresistible impulse?

STUDENT #3: Should despair have driven her to end her own life before killing others?

STUDENT #2: Is suicide an ethical choice?

PROFESSOR: Before we answer these questions and others, we need to view one more flashback and consider an issue only obliquely referred to in the play. **After Talthybius's summons, the chorus chant and dance:**

THE CHORUS: MY FATE GAVE ME TO DISASTER,
MY FATE GAVE ME OVER TO SORROW

THE MOMENT THE PINES ON MT. IDA
WERE CUT DOWN BY PARIS

TO BUILD THE SHIP HE WOULD STEER THROUGH HIGH WAVES
TO THE BED OF HELEN

STUDENT #1: Why was the son of a king and queen simply a herdsman on a mountain top?

PROFESSOR: When Paris was born, Priam responded to a prophecy that his new son would grow up to cause the destruction of Troy. In agreement with Priam, Hecuba, then a young mother, said:

HECUBA: PARIS IS SUCH A CUTE BABY, BUT THE PROPHECY IS CLEAR. I DREAMT OF FIRE WHEN PARIS WAS IN MY WOMB. LOYALTY MUST BE TO TROY ABOVE ALL ELSE. WE MUST SEND OUR DARLING BABY INTO THE WOODS TO DIE. GOODBYE, SWEET PARIS, GOODBYE.

PROFESSOR: Although left on Mt. Ida to perish, the infant was saved by a shepherd and grew up to be a herdsman himself.

STUDENT #2: How does Paris learn of his Trojan family? How do they know it's really Paris who returns years later?

STUDENT #3: Had Priam and Hecuba forgotten the prophecy or considered it defunct?

PROFESSOR: These details could be worked out for a 21st-century audience. Perhaps the ancient Greeks already knew how to unravel this part of the story.

STUDENT #1: How can one believe in prophecies, especially a prophecy that tempts infanticide?

STUDENT #3: Ethics must evolve and challenge outdated, engrained beliefs.

STUDENT #2: Or are some truths eternal?

PROFESSOR: If we are to judge Hecuba, is her abandonment of Baby Paris where problems begin? If Hecuba were here in our midst, what would you say to her? And now I throw the discussion open to the demos.

(The End)

The Twice Born and One More: Portraying Dionysus in the *Bacchae*

Jaelyn Dudek
Wayne State University

Euripides' *Bacchae* offers a great deal of flexibility in staging and interpretation because of its mystical and exotic content. In the prominence it gives to illusion, spectacle, and forest setting, it may even be likened to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. By taking some cues from one production of Shakespeare's enchanted comedy, we may be able to enhance and perhaps even clarify the more subtle aspects of this ancient tragedy.



Conference Presentation
video: Randolph College
[youtube.com/watch?v=b-jChIEO8gs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-jChIEO8gs)

In her productions of *Midsummer*, University of Michigan Residential College Director Kate Mendeloff utilized to great success three actors to play the part of Puck. All three actors were on stage at all times, alternating and interweaving lines as well bodies to create one thoroughly nonhuman entity. The effect highlighted the full range of Puck's personality while also making his character lighting fast, if not omnipresent. Dionysus, who like Puck enjoys several different monikers, occupies a similar but more frightening position in *Bacchae*. This paper explores staging possibilities for a similar tripartite Dionysus, citing textual, mythical, and cult support for this interpretation.

Hot ice and wondrous strange snow.

As practitioners of ancient drama, we are all familiar with the problem of "schooling the audience" on obscure mythological references. A tripartite Dionysus may be useful in demonstrating some of the complexities of the mythical nexus that might otherwise be lost on a general audience or necessitate copious footnotes in the program. I argue that this staging conceit may enable a director to articulate more precisely the desired themes and tone and allow the audience to get a taste of the vast subtext behind Dionysus and his cult. Similarly, such a staging emphasizes reconciliation of the dual aspects embodied within Dionysus—drunk/sober, comic/tragic, civilized/barbarian—and therefore man's place between these extremes. For purposes of argumentation I will refer this concept as "Trionysus."

The name's the thing to catch the conscience of the King.

Pentheus is told by the god that he is aptly named for suffering. While ironic on many levels, this comment also betrays the Greek fondness for deriving people's fates from their names, often in a curious way. Yes, Pentheus means pain, but what are the meanings behind the god's titles? First we have three names utilized in the text, each with its own layer of meanings and imagery: Bromius, the "roarer," often described as bull horned; Bacchus, the wine giver; and Dionysus, the Olympian son of Zeus and Semele. Taken together, they represent the attributes of a very "*poikilos theos*" ("complicated god"). Accordingly, each manifestation of the god would be played by a different actor. Let's explore the implications: three names, three manifestations, three ways for Pentheus to get it wrong. The prominence of the god's titles, their repetition within the choruses, and god(s) in the plural running about all reinforce the gross act of impiety on the part of Pentheus, who despite all his learning ignores the overwhelming amount of etymological "proof." In effect, he is not denying one god but three, surely making him a "*theomachus*," a god fighter.

And neigh, and bark and grunt and roar and burn

Just as Puck can shift his shape to frighten the Rude Mechanicals, Dionysus takes full advantage of deception and disguise to befuddle Pentheus. A “Trionysus” staging is well suited to synchronous mayhem and, depending on the director’s taste, enhances the comedy of more macabre effects. One instance where the text and action thoroughly support such a staging is during Dionysus’ monologue in which he describes the destruction of the palace and his escape from prison. The god refers to himself or to his aspects in the third person, manifesting himself as a great bull, a fire, and as the stranger.

At this same time, Bacchus came and shook the palace and fire ringed my mother’s tomb. Seeing this, Pentheus thought the palace burned and he scampered back and forth, ordering his servants to carry the entire river to the house. . . . Then Bromius created a phantom in the courtyard, my exact copy.

These are not just reiterations of the god’s epithets but his “first names,” as it were. Here we see how the god has “split” himself into his requisite parts as he calls them by name. A second similar example of shape shifting is that described by the chorus:

Reveal yourself like Bull,
Or Snake with many heads
Or in the shape of Lion spitting flames,
Go Bacchus, wild beast.

When Pentheus, leaving the rational safety of the city, enters into a wilderness resplendent with curiosities and mirages, he says that the god appears to grow horns and two suns occupy the sky. Here the dissolution of boundaries between the literal and figurative is made apparent as reality and hallucinations intermingle to reveal the god’s true form. Pentheus sees the stranger grow horns because Bromius *has* horns. If he can see two suns, why not all three aspects of this god?

We may also construct the tripartite character of the god from his divine, transcendent, and mortal forms—from father, son, and holy ghost, as it were. Dionysus’ birth by fire, his rebirth from the father god, and his human avatar as the mysterious stranger have special significance in this play. This more “metaphysical reading” is also substantiated by the mystery cult of Dionysus and the god’s prominence within the Orphic religion, which was popular in Macedonia. According to the Orphic myth, the god Zagreus was killed and eaten by the Titans. His heart was rescued by the Olympians and placed in Semele, who later bore Dionysus. As an alternative to the Olympian concept of death, Orphic philosophy maintains the transmigration of the soul. In Orphic hymns to Dionysus he is referred to as *Triogonos* (the thrice born) and occupies a predominate role as a “dying god” archetype with close associations to the harvest cycle. Euripides may have become familiar with the Orphic conception during his stay at the Macedonian court. Throughout the text, we see a preoccupation with the image of the circle, which could be interpreted as symbolic of the rhythms of nature, the journey of soul, or the god’s own dance.

Bless thee, for thou art translated

Much study has been devoted to the “masks” of Dionysus in terms of levels of deception. The *Bacchae* is rife with tricks, traps, and disguises both literal and metaphorical, but the interplay between these two realms may be extended to the actors themselves. If a director is attempting a more traditional staging with masks, “Trionysus” could be utilized to heighten the magical and the ambiguous, or merely as a wink to ancient convention. If we take into account the three-actor rule, by which a single character may have been played by multiple actors as the scene dictated, a Trionysus staging could also be used in conjunction with masks allowing for the cycling of actors for each scene. Therefore, in a departure from

Mendeloff's original conception, in which the actors were visible and engaged at all times, *Bacchae's* three actors could change roles in between scenes, as in the ancient conceit, with the benefit of masks to ensure continuity.

My initial rationale for a Trionysus staging was twofold: as one of the tripartite Pucks, I found the division downright fun and an excellent study in ensemble acting, as well as an effective exercise in pure fantastic spectacle and visual interest. However, as I studied the text more closely, I found that this staging moved the plot along and reinforced many of the themes of the play. Whether the concept is used to demonstrate the various personalities or attributes of the god, to underscore mythic archetypes and ritual, or to enhance magical effects, such a staging creates a level of mystery and wonder that is central to the Dionysian experience. We must remember that the power of the play is the god's ability simultaneously to dissolve and then reconstitute order, leaving the audience with a sense of both awe and vulnerability—reminding us, perhaps painfully, *Lord, what fools these mortals be.*

A Gestural Phallacy

David J. Jacobson

University of California, Berkeley

One of the most intriguing elements of Greek comedy, at least to modern audiences, is the phallus. Indeed, when modern productions do find it worthwhile to equip the actors with some sort of phallus, this prop is regularly employed to great comic effect: each wave, wag, and well-timed thrust invariably provokes a laugh. Of course there is nothing wrong or inappropriate with this type of staging, but if we are interested in understanding how an original performance may have looked, it behooves us to appreciate the textual clues offered by the plays themselves as to when a gesture was or was not made, and not to seek to insert the phallus where it does not belong.

In this article I propose that some scholars, despite their best intentions of identifying and explaining what appears to be a situationally appropriate action, have mistakenly posited the performance of a gesture at *Ecclesiazusae* 470, where in fact the playwright did not intend one. The evidence against this fallacious reading is demonstrative, quite literally. I will argue that by understanding how Aristophanes uses the medial demonstrative οὗτος we can ascertain more fully what may or may not have transpired onstage.¹

The passage in question reads as follows (*Ec.* 465-72):

Βλέπυρος: ἐκεῖνο δεινὸν τοῖσιν ἡλίκοισι νῶν,
 μὴ παραλαβοῦσαι τῆς πόλεως τὰς ἡνίας
 ἔπειτ' ἀναγκάζωσι πρὸς βίαν—
Χρέμης: τί δρᾶν;
Βλ.: κινεῖν ἑαυτάς. ἦν δὲ μὴ δυνώμεθα,
 ἄριστον οὐ δώσουσι.
Χρ.: σὺ δέ γε νῆ Δία
 δρᾶ ταῦθ', ἵν' ἄριστᾶς τε καὶ κινῆς ἅμα.
Βλ.: τὸ πρὸς βίαν δεινότατον.
Χρ.: ἄλλ' εἰ τῇ πόλει
 τοῦτο ξυνοίσει, ταῦτα χρὴ πάντ' ἄνδρα δρᾶν.

Blepyrus: That's the danger for men our age:
 if the women take over the reins of the city
 they'll force us to ...

Chremes: To do what?
Bl.: To screw them! And if we can't
 they won't give us breakfast.
Chr.: You, by Zeus,
 better do that then so you can have breakfast and screw, together.
Bl.: It's awful when forced.
Chr.: But if it will benefit the city,
 every man should do that.

Blepyrus is concerned that if the Athenian government should fall into the hands of women, the old men of Athens would be at risk of being forced to have sex and, if they did not or could not comply, of being denied their first meal of the day. Alan Sommerstein has suggested that just after Chremes says δρᾶ ταῦθ' (470) he gestures with his phallus so as to explain to Blepyrus precisely what he means. His

translation is expanded with very explicit stage directions: “Well then, by Zeus, you should do *this* [*bending forward and raising his long comic phallus to his lips*], to enable you to lunch *and* to screw at the same time!” (1998, 79, italics original). This interpretation has had some sway: Jeffrey Henderson changed his own earlier translation of “By Zeus you’d better do it then” (1996, 165) to “By god, you’d better do *this* then,” while reserving judgment as to the nature and significance of the gesture itself (2002, 303, italics original, with n. 45); Paul Roche follows suit with “Then you’ll jolly well have to learn to joggle, like *this*,” explaining “*this*” with the stage direction “Taking out his stage phallus and wagging it” (2005, 622).

In support of this staging Sommerstein (1998, 180-1), transforming an idea put forth by Henderson (1991, 186) that “breakfast” is a double entendre for cunnilingus, proposes that Chremes is telling Blypyrus that he should fellate himself since this self-made “breakfast” will facilitate the erection which his age has rendered difficult to achieve. As reasonable as this idea may seem, and thus as logical (and certainly dramatically entertaining) as a gesture involving Chremes’ long phallus being bent around his fat suit toward his mouth may appear at this moment, the argument in favor of performing self-fellatio or any other act rests heavily on the shoulders of ταῦτα. But the demonstrative cannot, in fact, bear this load, and the very idea that Chremes does anything at all collapses under the weight.

This is not to say, of course, that οὗτος is incapable of looking forward, simply that such cataphoric uses of the medial demonstrative in Aristophanes (and elsewhere) anticipate not gestures or actions, but rather some type of appositive (relative clause, expegetic infinitive, if-clause, etc.).² To be sure, οὗτος is used by Aristophanes to refer to a wide range of things (people, situations, places, times), but its overwhelming and expected use is as an anaphor.

When used in the neuter plural as an adverb, here too is οὗτος anaphoric, even when it refers to an action performed onstage. In *Clouds*, just before Strepsiades knocks on the door of Socrates’ school he says, “Why do I keep loitering like this?” (131 τί ταῦτ’ ἔχων στραγγεύομαι); in *Acharnians*, the Chorus asks Dicaeopolis “Why are you twisting like that” (385 τί ταῦτα στρέφει). In both instances the actions referred to with ταῦτα precede the verbal reference to them. In English we may render ταῦτα as “thus” or “in this way,” and that certainly captures the sense, but pragmatically these instances are anaphoric and properly refer to what preceded. None of the examples of adverbial ταῦτα in Aristophanes is cataphoric.

When Aristophanes wants to point linguistically at an action performed onstage at the moment of utterance or immediately following it, he turns to forms marked with -ί or to the demonstrative adverb ὅδε (and ὀδί), which has a range of meanings: it operates as an adjectival modifier (“so”), a directional adverb (= δεῦρο), an anaphoric adverb (“like that”), and also as a cataphoric adverb (“like this”).³ In this respect it is the same as its forms marked with -ί, which, with only two exceptions (*Av.* 1457, *Ra.* 98), are cataphoric adverbs indicating an action being or about to be performed.⁴

Any movement or activity, including self-fellatio, could be marked verbally (or textually) by an adverb. *Wasps* 1210-1211 nicely illustrates the interaction between speech and gesture:

Φιλοκλέων: πῶς οὖν κατακλινῶ; φράζ’ ἀνύσας.
Βδελυκλέων: εὖσχημόνως.
Φιλ.: ὡδὲ κελεύεις κατακλινῆναι;
Βδ.: μηδαμῶς.

Philocleon: How, then, am I to recline? Hurry up and tell me!
Bdelycleon: Elegantly.
Phil: Are you telling me to lie down like this?
Bd: Not at all.

Philocleon responds to Bdelycleon's telling him to recline "elegantly" (1210) by collapsing awkwardly to the ground. The adverb ὠδὶ marks the action which takes place either as the words are spoken, or, as makes for better theater and is in keeping with the cataphoric use of ὄδε, at the conclusion of the sentence. After all, falling inelegantly to the ground while speaking is definitely one of the best ways to ensure that an audience does not hear the entirety of a line.

Since ταῦτα does not announce a forthcoming action, as we have seen, Chremes' diction at *Ecclesiazusae* 470 speaks strongly against the performance of any sort of gesture. The importance of the final exchange between Chremes and Blepyrus, then, must be evaluated in terms of the ideas expressed. Chremes, alarmed at the prospect of living in a world where the women do not give their men breakfast, replies excitedly to Blepyrus, "You, by Zeus, better do that then!" (469-70 σὺ δέ γε νῆ Δία / δοῦ ταῦθ'). His motivating concern that Blepyrus take action is appetitive, not sexual. It is the potential loss of breakfast that above all enrages Chremes—note the antilabic structure, the σὺ δέ γε, regularly employed in drama (comedy especially) in angry responses, and the excited oath νῆ Δία—and that leads him to demand, in essence, that Blepyrus do whatever it takes to avoid going hungry.⁵ Blepyrus, for his part, is anxious about the sexual politics of the whole situation. It is not so much that he is fearful that he will be unable to perform sexually, a reading that puts too much stress on δυνώμεθα (468), but that he wants the "performance" itself to be on his terms, much like governance of the polis. In replying with τὸ πρὸς βίαν δεινότατον (471) to Chremes, which I have translated above as "It's awful when forced," Blepyrus may, in fact, be making a much more emphatic pronouncement about the looming gynaeocracy, but one which is obscured by the ambiguity of the words themselves: πρὸς βίαν may be "by force" or "unwilling"; τὸ δεινότατον may mean "most awful" or "most dangerous." Blepyrus' reply to Chremes' insistent order to "do it" is, accordingly, a concise expression of Blepyrus' overarching concern about male loss of control, all of which is couched in a discussion about food, sex, and gender.

But Chremes, either ignorant of or willfully opposed to the "true" meaning of Blepyrus' words, cares not for his perspective and yet again promotes making sure "it" gets done (471-2). What we have in these lines, then, is not an instance of self-fellatio, but a straightforward plea by Chremes to Blepyrus that he "do those aforementioned things" precisely because "doing it" will be good for the city.

notes

¹ The claims made herein are based on my study of ὄδε and οὗτος in the Aristophanic corpus and a selection of Greek tragedies, the details of which I hope to present in another context. For the standard accounts of demonstrative usage see Kühner–Gerth 1898, 641–51; Humbert 1954, 29–34; Smyth 1956, 307–9; Schwyzer and Debrunner 1966, 207–11; Mendoza 1976, 92–6. See too the more specialized studies of Cooper 1998, 2290–5; Matino 1998, 108–13; Manolissou 2001; Ruijgh 2006; Bakker 2010; Jacobson 2011.

² *Ach.* 755–6; *Eq.* 520, 780; *Nu.* 418; *V.* 50, 701, 1117; *Pax* 1075; *Av.* 1221; *Lys.* 486, 649, 779; *Th.* 1013; *Ra.* 534–5, 1109, 1467; *Pl.* 10, 216, 259–60, 340, 471, 489, 594.

³ Adjectival modifier: *Ach.* 215; *Eq.* 385–6; *Lys.* 518, 1015; *Th.* 525; directional adverb: *Ach.* 745, 1063; *Av.* 229; *Th.* 987; fr. 362.2; anaphoric adverb: *Eq.* 837; *Lys.* 301; cataphoric adverb: *Av.* 1568; *Nu.* 771; *V.* 1109; *Lys.* 567, 634.

⁴ In both of these passages ὄδὶ is used cataphorically and points forward to a development of the idea.

⁵ E.g., *A. Supp.* 1056; *Ar. Nu.* 915, 920; *Av.* 1042; *Ec.* 648.

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Double the Message

Diane J. Rayor

Grand Valley State University

Messenger speeches in Attic tragedies pose difficulties for modern staging. While a truly superb actor can hold an audience's attention through a long monologue, the long report of critical offstage events can seem dull and artificial, especially when the messenger does not have a clear personality. Is the messenger addressing the chorus, other characters, or the audience? What does he do physically while providing this information? One possible solution is to change the dynamic by dividing the messenger role between two actors.



Conference Presentation
video: Randolph College
[youtube.com/watch?v=1qQXb2y9aqU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qQXb2y9aqU)

In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the Messenger or Guard reporting Polynices' burial does not present the same problems as the messenger who reports Haemon's death later in the play. The Guard projects personality from his first step on stage:

My lord, I can't say I'm breathless
from speeding here on light feet.
My thoughts kept stopping me on the path,
wheeling me around to turn back.
My heart had a dialogue saying:
"Stupid, why go where you will be punished?"
"Crazy, you dare delay again? If Kreon hears it
from another man, how will you not pay?"

(223-230)

We soon hear who he is, why he is on stage, and whom he is addressing. However, the second messenger is a generic attendant to Kreon and could easily fall into the clichéd device of center-stage address to the audience as he reports on Haemon's suicide. Yet, as Simon Goldhill reminds us, "there is always an audience onstage for the messenger, and this relationship between messenger and audience changes the rhetorical strategies of the speech" (102).

The messenger in question addresses the chorus, Haemon's mother, and, after her death, Kreon. He does not simply report events to the audience and leave. In addition to the "center-stage address," I have seen a few possible "solution[s] to the problem of an extended storytelling scene within tragedy" (Goldhill 100). In some productions, the offstage story is acted out onstage while the messenger tells the tale. This technique focuses the audience on the mimed action rather than the immediate scene. In other productions, the messenger and other characters share the messenger speeches: the messenger narrates, but the characters speak their own lines. This strategy also distracts by having offstage characters (some of whom are dead) speak, drawing attention away from the messenger and his onstage audience. What other options are there?

In workshopping my translation for an outdoor production of Sophocles' *Antigone* in 2009, we grappled with how to play the messenger who describes Haemon's death. Our solution was to divide the single messenger role between two actors. In this way, we were able to keep intact the messenger speeches and dialogue in the voices of the two messengers. Kreon and the dead Haemon could remain offstage until Kreon enters carrying Haemon, since we did not need them to act out the story or speak the relevant messengers' lines. This kept the staging uncluttered. The focus remained sharply on the messengers and on the responses to their news by the chorus and Haemon's mother, Eurydice.

As the director, Karen Libman, explains: “Two messengers tag-teamed the delivery of the message,” changing the physical and verbal dynamic of a single messenger. “The messengers spoke not only to the chorus and [queen], but also to each other” (Libman 66). They could look at one another as well as physically frame the queen. Eurydice stayed in center stage with one messenger on each side of her. The messengers, however, moved around, facing the chorus, Eurydice, each other, and the audience as seemed appropriate. This staging also allowed Eurydice’s silent exit to be observed only by the chorus, while the two messengers were engrossed in recounting *to each other* Haemon’s dying embrace of Antigone and in philosophizing on “how ill counsel / is by far the greatest evil for man” (1242-3).

For the long speech to Eurydice followed by a short interchange with the chorus (1192-1256), the two messengers took turns, in eleven chunks ranging from two to thirteen lines. Without changing any words, we discovered two voices in the single character. They reacted to each other, adding information and perspective, and even—once—disagreeing. When the chorus comments on Eurydice’s silent exit, Messenger 1 is confident that she is merely taking her grief “inside / with her servants” (1248-9), as is appropriate, rather than lamenting in public. Messenger 2, however, agrees with the chorus that “too much silence is ominous” (1256) and decides to check on the queen. Of course, the chorus’s unease spurs the messenger (whether played singly or doubly) to enter the house. Yet dividing the part allowed Messenger 2, perhaps more naturally and quickly, to agree with the chorus and exit, taking Messenger 1 with him.

By our particular division of lines, we could emphasize meaning and punctuate various sense transitions. Messenger 1 directly quotes Kreon’s reaction to first hearing his son’s voice (1211-18) and then to seeing Haemon embracing the dead Antigone (1228-30). Messenger 1 also tends toward gnomic statements (1242-3). Messenger 2 narrates more details, and seems more responsive to Eurydice’s grief (“We will know whether she hides something / quietly held back in her raging heart . . .” 1253-4). Later, when the messengers return from the *skênê* to tell Kreon about his wife’s suicide, Messenger 2 breaks it to Kreon as gently as possible: “Your wife, true mother of this corpse, is dead, / unhappy man, just now by freshly inflicted blows” (1282-3). Messenger 1, in contrast, describes how Eurydice “cursed / your evil actions as child murderer” (1304-5).

Many different line divisions were possible, of course. The point is that dividing the lines emphasized the sense in the messenger’s long speeches, and broke the potential monotony of a single speaker. It allowed for more movement and interaction among the chorus, the other actor playing Eurydice or Kreon, and the messengers. The division also physically highlighted Eurydice, even with her sparse nine lines, by framing her between the two messengers. According to Libman, this “breaking of the message into two distinct voices enlivened the scene both vocally and pictorially” (Libman 66), doubling the impact of the message.

In the oral presentation of this paper at the Ancient Drama in Performance Conference, students from Randolph College demonstrated the divided messenger scene (1192-1256) ([video: youtube.com/watch?v=1qQXb2y9aqU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qQXb2y9aqU)). My appreciation goes to Professor Amy Cohen and her students.

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Performing the "Unperformable" Extispicy Scene in Seneca's *Oedipus Rex*

Eric Dodson-Robinson

West Chester University

Several challenges would hinder any performance true to the text of the spectacular sacrifice and extispicy scene of Lucius Annaeus Seneca's *Oedipus*: bovine acrobatics, prodigious gore, the aesthetic and physical dangers of bringing livestock to the tragic stage. Consider the following excerpt (334-44):

Tiresias:

. . . Huc propere admove
et sparge salsa colla taurorum mola.
placidone vultu sacra et admotas manus
patiuntur?

Manto:

Altum taurus attollens caput
primos ad ortus positus expavit diem
trepidusque vultum obliquat et radios fugit.

Tiresias:

Unone terram vulnere afflicti petunt?

Manto:

luvenca ferro semet opposito induit
et vulnere uno cecidit; at taurus duos
perpessus ictus huc et huc dubius ruit
animamque fessus vix reluctantem exprimit.

Tiresias:

Bring the cattle and strew their necks with salted grain.
Are their faces calm? Do they bear
The rites and the touch of your hands?

Manto:

The bull reared his head high,
Facing East, and cringed from the first rays of dawn.
He turned his face, frightened, and shunned the light.

Tiresias:

Did one wound suffice to fell each to earth?

Manto:

The heifer broached herself on the exposed blade
And dropped. But the bull suffered two blows—
He rushes erratically here and there,
Staggering, and struggles to force out his heavy breath.¹

Although it is easy to argue against any staging of this scene in antiquity that would have called for virtuosic performance by live cattle, there are less literal possibilities for presenting the episode that would not have required animal actors. The question remains, then, of how the scene might have been performed in the first century C.E. In the following brief essay, I first discuss the controversy surrounding the performance of Senecan drama in general, with particular attention to what other scholars have said about the sacrifice scene in the *Oedipus*. I then highlight some of the challenges involved in the scene's

performance, and finally, I propose a solution: taking a cue from recent work that argues compellingly for a relation between the forms of Senecan tragedy and those of the pantomime, or *fabula saltata*,² I propose a stunning enactment of the extispicy scene that involves dance. My proposal is compatible both with the text of the *Oedipus* and with our current knowledge of ancient drama. My proposal calls for three speaking actors (Oedipus, Manto, and Tiresias), two non-speaking priests, and one dancer. The dancer first plays the role of the sacrificial heifer, and then of the sacrificial bull. I base my hypothetical staging on a close reading of the text of the tragedy and on recent scholarship pertaining to the pantomime. My proposal facilitates a staging of the scene that is more dynamic than previous suggestions, yet avoids the pitfalls of bringing cattle to the stage.

The plays attributed to Seneca, including the *Oedipus*, were the model for Renaissance tragedy, and Senecan drama has of course been performed many times, both in Latin and in vernacular translations, since the beginning of the early modern period.³ More recent performances of Seneca's *Oedipus* in translation include those of Peter Brook in 1968 and the Theater by the Blind production in New York in 2005. German philologists of the Romantic Era, however, citing the rhetorical and episodic nature of the plays, concluded that Senecan tragedies were originally *Rezitationsdramen* intended exclusively for recitation rather than theatrical performance. This view seems to originate in 1809, when August Wilhelm Schlegel made the claim, based on aesthetic considerations, that Seneca's plays were never intended "*aus den Schulen der Rhetoren auf die Bühne hervorzutreten*"⁴ ["to emerge from the rhetorical schools onto the stage"]. Philologists such as Friedrich Leo developed this bias into several arguments, which came to be generally accepted, against the performance of the Senecan plays.⁴ Twentieth-century scholars reexamined the question and took opposing sides. Otto Zwierlein argued that some scenes, such as the extispicy of the *Oedipus*, are "*bühnenfremde*,"⁶ or foreign to the theatre, to the extent that they are "*nicht darstellbar*,"⁷ or unperformable on stage: a controversial argument.⁸

Many scholars have made nuanced arguments about the possibilities of performing the plays. Leon Herrman, William M. Calder, L. Braun, Albrecht Dihle, Pierre Grimal, D. F. Sutton, John G. Fitch, P. J. Davis, and Frederick Ahl all argue for performance of some sort.⁹ Calder and Ahl subscribe to the view that the plays were closet drama, while Sutton and Davis argue that they were performed in large theatres.

However, the playability of the sacrifice/extispicy scene of Seneca's *Oedipus* has been considered dubious, even by those who favor performance. Scholars such as Zwierlein argue that such a scene would have been impossible to stage. G. O. Hutchinson cites it as an example of the "wildly unreal"¹⁰ and unplayable scenes in Seneca's plays. Even Fitch, who contends that *many* of the Senecan plays were written for the stage, balks at extending this claim to the *Oedipus* because the sacrifice scene presents so many practical challenges to performance. Fitch writes, "there is, however, one scene which is clearly not written in such a way as to lend itself to stage performance: it is the scene of animal sacrifice in the *Oedipus*."¹¹ Yet, others have suggested various possibilities for how the scene might have been performed. A few of these bear mention at this point, if only to demonstrate how wonderfully creative and bizarre some of the proposed and published solutions to this problem are.

Thomas G. Rosenmeyer argues that the scene could have been performed by having the sacrifice and the extispicy take place offstage,¹² an argument that has found favor with Anthony Hollingsworth.¹³ This seems reasonable and is, in fact, the easiest solution to some of the problems performance would present. In Rosenmeyer's proposed performance, Manto narrates to the audience and to Tiresias a vivid description of an action that must be imagined to be taking place offstage. Fitch points to flaws in this scenario, however, the most serious being that Manto actually handles the entrails onstage.¹⁴ Fitch rejects Rosenmeyer's conception of the scene's performance in favor of recitation.¹⁵ There have been other more adventurous proposals. Sutton posits that trained animals might have taken to the stage, or, alternately,

that “drugged calves” might have acted the roles of the sacrificial beasts.¹⁶ For obvious reasons, this is a potentially messy solution, at the very least precluding performance at a residence, unless it were held in a barn. Further, it is doubtful that either drugs or any amount of training could convince a bull to run amok while skillfully avoiding actors and audience, and then to lie down on cue. And then how would the animals make their exit? They would either have to be coaxed up and walked offstage, or dragged.

Rosenmeyer and Sutton both make important contributions toward understanding the sacrifice scene, regardless of whether or not it was actually performed according to their specifications in antiquity. Rosenmeyer emphasizes the importance of the verbal texture of Manto’s narration. Sutton, on the other hand, reconstructs the performance by considering the ways that another genre, the animal spectacle, might have contributed to the staging. If we consider performance genres popular during the first century C.E., the first to come to mind is the *fabula saltata*, or pantomime, which was all the rage at the time and much more popular than tragedy.¹⁷ The *fabula saltata* was performed onstage by a sole, nonspeaking dancer who portrayed a series of roles while a singer or chorus narrated. Broadly speaking, there are good reasons to give careful consideration to pantomime when it comes to the staging of the sacrifice and extispicy. John Jory and Bernhard Zimmerman have demonstrated that tragedy was the overwhelming subject of choice for pantomime performances,¹⁸ and that entire plays were performed in pantomime.¹⁹ Recent studies by Zimmerman and by Alessandra Zanobi have revealed formal resemblances between Seneca’s plays and the pantomime. We also know that pantomime dancers performed the roles of animals as well as those of human characters.²⁰ Therefore I would like to suggest a pantomime performance as a solution to the seemingly intractable difficulties of the sacrifice/extispicy scene.

As a thought experiment, let us imagine how recourse to the pantomime might resolve the most daunting of the problems that have troubled scholars about the scene. We might imagine a provincial official of the first century C.E. planning a production of the *Oedipus* for the public stage, or perhaps a wealthy freedman putting on the play for his guests: dinner theatre at Trimalchio’s. The producer would need three speaking actors (Oedipus, Manto, and Tiresias), two nonspeaking priests, one dancer, and, at the end of the act, the chorus.²¹

The first difficulty encountered in staging the scene is the entrance. This is how I imagine the stage to be set: Oedipus stands beside the altar, stage right. Manto stands beside the altar, stage left. Tiresias stands toward the very front edge of the performance space, stage left. At lines 299 to 300, Tiresias tells the priests (the command is plural) to drive the bull and heifer to the altar. Manto then tells Tiresias at 303, “*opima sanctas victima ante aras stetit*” [“a choice victim stands before the sacred altar”]. Yet, at 334-35, Tiresias tells Manto, “*Huc propere admove / et sparge salsa colla taurorum mola*” [“Quickly, drive the cattle here and strew their necks with the salted grain”]. I take Tiresias’s first command as the entrance of the two priests. They enter from the center door of the *scenae frons*, or from the rear center of the performance space. They hold a large, square piece of fabric stretched between them at about waist height. The dancer crouches behind the fabric, concealed from the audience. They approach the altar and stop a few steps behind it. Manto then announces, “*opima sanctas victima ante aras stetit*” [“a choice victim stands before the sacred altar”].²² When Manto describes the evil omens of the fire, I would modify Rosenmeyer’s suggestion that Manto is describing a scene that occurs offstage. While Rosenmeyer is right to emphasize that Manto’s verbal description is essential to the audience’s understanding here, I disagree that all of the action Manto describes takes place offstage. Instead, I would argue that she stands beside the altar, which is of course in plain view of the audience, and that she describes a flame the audience must imagine. At lines 334-35, the priests take a step forward toward the altar, and the dancer follows, still crouching behind the cloth. Manto then makes a gesture of strewing salted grain on the ‘cattle’ behind the sheet. The dancer, wearing the mask of a bull, rears up from behind the cloth. Manto starts back, and the dancer turns and cringes behind the cloth again. Tiresias then asks, “*placidone vultu sacra et*

admotas manus / patiuntur?"²³ ["Are their faces calm? Do they bear / The rites and the touch of your hands?"] and Manto describes the bull's movements.

The priest standing stage right of the altar holds out a stylized sacrificial knife with one hand, and the dancer, now wearing the mask of a heifer, stands slowly and turns to face the outstretched knife. The dancer gracefully opens both arms. With a decisive and majestic motion, the dancer steps toward the knife, closes both arms around it, and sinks down behind the cloth.

The dancer rises, now wearing the mask of the bull. The priest standing stage right of the altar strikes at the bull with the knife, and the bull staggers toward the other priest, who also strikes. The dancer clutches at the wounds and moves erratically back toward stage right, and Teiresias asks, "*Unone terram vulnere afflicti petunt?*"²⁴ ["Did one wound suffice to fell each to earth?"]. As Manto describes the scene, the dancer staggers back toward the priests, who lift the cloth overhead. The dancer sinks to the ground and the priests bring the cloth down to cover the body. They then raise the sheet again to hold it stretched between them, as before, in front of the dancer.

There are several advantages to the hypothetical staging of the scene proposed in this paper, not the least being that it can be performed without bringing livestock onstage. The pantomime dancer's actions bring the scene to life in a stylized yet dynamic way that avoids the spectacle of actual animal slaughter: a distinct advantage over a static staging that relies exclusively on verbal description of events. Further, this experimental dynamic staging helps us to imagine how the tragedy might have been performed in antiquity through recourse to another ancient performance genre. The experiment, in turn, leads to further problems and questions: would Seneca have turned his nose up at contaminating tragedy with pantomime? Or was the scene written for this express purpose? How common would such a hybrid performance have been? And what sort of gestures would an ancient dancer, cast in the roles of the sacrificial animals, have used? If nothing else, this experiment illustrates a vibrant possibility for staging future productions of Seneca's *Oedipus*, and demonstrates a new way in which the tragedy is indeed suited to both ancient and contemporary theatrical performance.

notes

¹ All translations mine unless noted otherwise.

² Zimmerman (2008); Zanobi (2008).

³ See, for example, Ronan (1994) 180–85; Smith (1988); Boyle (1997) 10–12; 219n12.

⁴ Schlegel (1966 [1809]) 234.

⁵ Leo (1878).

⁶ Zwierlein (1966) 24.

⁷ Zwierlein (1966) 25.

⁸ Other scholars who argue against the performance of Senecan tragedy include Marti (1945), Beare (1964), and Pratt (1983).

⁹ Herrman (1924); Calder (1975); Braun (1982); Dihle (1983); Grimal (1983); Sutton (1986); Fitch (2000); Davis (2003); Ahl (2008). Hadas (1939), and Bieber (1953/1954) also argue for performance.

¹⁰ Hutchinson (1993) 63.

- ¹¹ Fitch (2000) 9.
- ¹² Rosenmeyer (1993).
- ¹³ Hollingsworth (2000/2001).
- ¹⁴ Fitch (2000) 10–11.
- ¹⁵ Fitch (2000) 11.
- ¹⁶ Sutton (1986) 23.
- ¹⁷ Jory (2008) 157.
- ¹⁸ Jory (2008) 160; Zimmerman (2008) 220.
- ¹⁹ Jory (2008) 167.
- ²⁰ Wyles (2008) 76–77.
- ²¹ Because pantomime dancers performed several roles in succession, only one dancer is needed to play both the sacrificial heifer and the sacrificial bull.
- ²² 303.
- ²³ 336–37.
- ²⁴ 340.

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Compassion in Chorus and Audience

Paul Woodruff

The University of Texas at Austin

This version of the paper is revised and slightly expanded by the author from a transcript of the presentation.

Speaking from the orchestra, I'm in the sun, and so are you as you listen and watch from theater seats. I am familiar with performing under lights, but most of us are not used to being an audience for a classical play under a bright sun. At least I'm not. An audience in these circumstances can see itself and respond. In a football game, we know how this plays. The audience may spontaneously generate certain behaviors—cheers, songs, body motions. All stand, all sway, all roar. When our student cast here performs the *Hecuba* they do not expect behavior as raucous as that, but they should expect some effects from the audience's ability to see itself. In the football game, these effects may be controlled to some effect by cheerleaders, whose job is partly to put on a show of their own, and partly to model certain desired behaviors for the audience. The chorus in a tragic play may have a comparable function, or they may instead serve to reflect predicted audience behavior to the audience, so that the audience see themselves. In this paper I will look into these two possible roles for the chorus—modeling and reflecting—in the context of compassion.



Conference Presentation
video: Randolph College
[youtube.com/watch?v=D6ZYSdT4D-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6ZYSdT4D-U)

As a writer or director, you have to assume that the audience does have some basic skills at being a good audience for the kind of play you are going to present. You can assume, for example, that they know not to talk during a production, but you can't assume that they will remember to turn off their cell phones, so you have to remind them. And, through various devices, you may also want to teach your audience new skills and encourage them to behave in a way that suits the play you are presenting.

When we are watching a scene in the theater, other people are watching it too, and in the ancient Greeks' theater, we watch the chorus watch every episode (well, almost every episode—not the death of Ajax, for a unique example). And what do we learn from the chorus? How do they affect our experience? Sometimes the chorus may be only part of the background scenery; at other times it may be contributing to the spectacle that we are watching. Often, however, they have a role based on their status as fellow watchers with the audience, and when they do, they may affect us as an audience through modeling or reflecting.

Compassion. A typical audience to a typical tragic play has many opportunities for pity and compassion. Both pity and compassion, on the ancient Greek model, arise when we become aware of suffering in someone similar enough to ourselves that we believe it possible for such suffering to afflict us in the future. The gods, who will never feel human suffering, are not likely to feel pity or compassion. These are not precisely the same, although they have much in common. Compassion has more to do with understanding, as the Greek root of *sungnōmē* shows.

Aristotle held that one of the functions of tragedy was to arouse pity in an audience (*Poetics* 1452a2-3, 1452a36-b1, 1452b29-30), and compassion is often an explicit theme in tragedy, especially in Sophocles' work. Sophocles represents compassion as appropriate to human beings in many contexts, though perhaps not to the gods, who appear from the human perspective to be ruthless (*Women of Trachis* 1266;

cf. the exchange at *Ajax* 121-133). In the *Ajax* we have to admire Odysseus for the compassion that saves the honor of Ajax after his death; in the *Philoctetes* we are led to root for the young hero, Neoptolemus, to show compassion for the wounded archer. In the latter play, it seems that the chorus shows the way to Neoptolemus (*Philoctetes* 169-190); perhaps they are also showing the way to the audience, though it is equally possible that they are reflecting to us—and to the young hero—the audience reaction to the wounded man’s misery, thereby playing the modeling role and the reflecting role at the same time.

There is another possibility: that the chorus reflects behavior that the playwright wishes to discourage. Examples of this technique are well known from Shakespeare, who uses plays within plays (and other metatheatrical devices) to show the audience themselves behaving atrociously in a play. We see famous examples in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, in which actors behave like audience members sitting to the side of the stage in original performance style, mocking the players unmercifully. If a Greek tragic chorus mirrors our expected response, it may be showing us to ourselves in a cautionary way, as if saying, “This is how you look. Do you really want to react in this way to the scene we are watching together?”

I have no theory about this; the text does not reveal how the chorus is supposed to interact with the audience. Audience interaction is an area in which the director can decide how she wishes to use the chorus. The same scene can be played in a variety of ways. To illustrate the choices, we showed the matricide scene in Sophocles’ *Elektra*, performed by some wonderful students from this college. We used two very similar but significantly different versions. Here is the scene as I translated it:

Clytemnestra

I’m finished! Aegisthus, where are you now?

Elektra

Listen! What a horrible scream!

Clytemnestra

My child, O my child!

1410

I gave you birth! Have pity on me!

Elektra

But you had none—

There was no pity in you for the father who planted the seed.

Chorus

O City! O Family!

What misery! Your days are coming to an end.

Clytemnestra

(With a shriek)

I’m hit!

Elektra

Hit her again! Make it twice, if you’re strong enough.

1415

Clytemnestra

Another blow!

Electra

How I wish Aegisthus had the same!

Chorus

Curses fulfilled! Drop by drop, the thirsty dead,
 Alive beneath the ground, suck back the blood 1420
 Of those who killed them long ago.

(Orestes and Pylades enter through the great doors. Their swords are bloody.)

And here they are. His hand drips red Antistrophe
 From a sacrifice to Ares.
 I do not know what to say.¹

In the first version, we performed the last line as it is usually printed, following an emendation: “Ὀὐκ ἔχω ψέγειν, “I am not able to blame them.” In that version the chorus was fairly calm. They stood in a line facing the action, between audience and action. The action, in both versions, was in the middle of the orchestra, not on the raised *skene*.

In the second version, we performed the manuscript reading: Ὀὐκ ἔχω λέγειν, “I do not know what to say.” And this time the chorus reacted with a formal display of horror and compassion, expressed physically in bodily movements. The chorus did not stand between audience and action, but presented their faces to the audience.

The manuscripts attribute those last lines to Elektra, but virtually all modern editors attribute them to the chorus leader. That is a judgment call. If there is an ounce of compassion expressed in the play for Klytemnestra at this point, it is coming in this passage from the chorus in such lines as these: “What misery!” and “I do not know what to say.”

If I am right about the text, is the chorus modeling for us a compassion that we ought to feel for Klytemnestra? If so, we have perhaps been prepared for that by what Chrysothemis has said about Klytemnestra and by Klytemnestra’s own very brief moment of sorrow for the loss of Orestes earlier in the play, when she hears the Messenger. Alternatively, we might see the chorus as mirroring a horror and compassion that we might be inclined to feel but over which we ought to exert some measure of control. Is compassion here a weakness that we should fight against, or a virtuous feeling we should cultivate? The text here gives no answer, but Sophocles’ support for compassion in the other plays I mentioned earlier suggests the latter.

We did the scene first with a very passive chorus, leaving the audience to its own reaction. In this version, the chorus were simply watchers like us. Then we did the mother-killing scene with a chorus reacting in a very stylized way to the horror of it all. After that, it was time to ask the performers and then the audience how the two scenes affected them. Here are the reactions:

Raquel Cruz (actor): “I think that it depends on how you interpret it, if they are just commenting or if they are more invested I think it would depend on how passionate you want the person to be.”

Conrad Bailey (actor): “I think performing the scene the second time around it was a lot more unnerving to do it because of the way the lines are now moved around; we have many more lines in unison; it is much more easy, chanting together. The first time doing the scene was kind of scary but the second time I sort of freaked out, having that new response. It is probably closer to what Sophocles was going for—it is just much more of a reaction.”

Paul Woodruff: “I am glad to hear you say that, thank you. The convention has been to regard these lines as belonging to the chorus leader, but if you look at the passage, it’s rather like a *kommos* metrically. It does seem that the entire chorus is reacting physically and verbally to the lines. That is why I had you say more key lines in unison.”

[Some of the discussion was lost at this point, as the wind drowned the voices.]

Paul Woodruff [responding to an actor]: “Yes, I wonder if Sophocles’ chorus was allowed to model different reactions or if they had to speak with one voice.”

Audience Member: “I have a question, does it matter if we feel sorry as long as we feel *something*?—because if the whole purpose is to feel, is it the most important thing that we feel something in the audience, something other than neutral?”

Paul Woodruff: “You may feel that the show is ruined if the audience breaks out in laughter, so sometimes it is important to control the audience in some way. [The audience member is asking whether any emotional response is better than none, and I am answering that sometimes the wrong emotional response—say, laughter at matricide—is worse than no response at all.]

Eric Struble (audience member): “Is it more important to view the chorus as more of a prop or as actual people and characters in the play? If they are props, they are kind of buffers between the actors and audience—as a kind of response to what horrible thing is happening on stage—as a buffer. But if they are characters their actions are translated directly to the audience.”

Paul Woodruff: “The way we did it the first time they were a wall between the audience and the actions, and because we didn’t have a raised *skene*, which is essentially a buffer, [they filled that role]. [In the second version they were people.] Should the chorus be buffers or people? That is something to think about a lot.”

Annie Freeman (actor): “They [the chorus] are more useful as people, they have an influence on the audience, yes, but they are very useful as people. But for the actors it is good to be able to bounce off of them; if they are reacting, then I can react to their reactions on stage.”

Paul Woodruff: “Well, thank you very much, and thanks to the wonderful actors.”

Conclusion. I view this as an experiment. I think the second version affected both actors and audience more profoundly, supporting the hypothesis that Sophocles used the chorus here rather like cheerleaders—analogously, and to coin an ugly phrase, sad-leaders. Their reaction is the opposite of Electra’s outburst, and, although they support Electra, their reaction may put some distance between the vengeful daughter and us. The play is mysterious, however; aside from the lines performed in our experiment, the play seems to render no verdict on its central action, the killing of a mother by her son and his friend, with the daughter cheering them on.

note

¹ From Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff, *Sophocles: Four Tragedies*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007.

Staging the Reconciliation Scene of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*

John Given

East Carolina University

This paper describes an innovative staging of the Reconciliation scene from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (Ar. *Lys.* 1108–88), as I directed it at East Carolina University in March 2010, using an unpublished translation by Peter Green.¹ With minimal alterations to the script but a radical rethinking of the characters' actions, my cast and I aimed to communicate to our audience what we took to be the dramatic and thematic functions of the Aristophanic original, namely the restabilization of the comedy's political world and its gender roles. In Aristophanes' play, Lysistrata emerges from the Acropolis and greets the Athenian and Spartan



Conference Presentation
video: Randolph College
[youtube.com/watch?v=JpvoVlmsW0M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpvoVlmsW0M)

Ambassadors who have come to negotiate a peace settlement. She summons a personified Reconciliation, who appears as a naked woman.² While Lysistrata rebukes each Ambassador and reminds them of their common Greek heritage, the Ambassadors flirt with Reconciliation,³ distracting attention from Lysistrata's arguments. They then—under Lysistrata's direction and using multiple *double entendres*—negotiate peace by using Reconciliation's body as a map on which they stake their claims to land. Agreement reached, they all retire to the Acropolis for a feast.

To accomplish our purposes, we decided to have Lysistrata summon Reconciliation, as in Aristophanes' script, but played by a male actor, wearing a body suit padded and decorated to suggest a nude female body. About halfway through the negotiations over Reconciliation's body, Lysistrata becomes irritated at the presence of the mock-female Reconciliation. She orders him offstage with an invented line, "If we're going to build our peace on the body of a woman, it has to be a real woman." After removing her own robe to reveal a modest slip, she takes over the role herself, allowing the Athenian and Spartan Ambassadors to restart their negotiations using her body as their map. Whereas they reluctantly poked at Reconciliation's body, they now violently grope and prod the real woman, Lysistrata.

This scene was re-created at the *Ancient Drama in Performance* conference on October 9, 2010. A video of that performance is included here for the reader's reference. It featured Randolph College students Kate Allen as Lysistrata, Jose Lorenzo Alvarez as the Athenian Ambassador, and Conrad Bailey as the Spartan Ambassador; I myself played the Chorus Leader and Reconciliation, although I was—sadly—not able to wear the body suit, as I am larger than the actor who originated the role.⁴

[video: [youtube.com/watch?v=_MTpxap_Eds](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MTpxap_Eds)]

In this article, I briefly explore how *Lysistrata* destabilizes the status quo and then re-establishes it in the Reconciliation scene. I then describe several challenges that the modern director must face in staging this scene. Finally, I explain how the staging shown above met those challenges while remaining true to my reading of the play.

Lysistrata creates a topsy-turvy, "women-on-top" world in which, as is well known, the women of Greece enact a double plot, under the leadership of Lysistrata, to end the Peloponnesian War.⁵ First, they pledge to deprive their husbands of sex so as to divert the men's desire for making war to a desire for making love. Second, they capture the Acropolis and its treasures in order to starve the warmongers of their funds. The second plan climaxes in the play's *agôn*, the contest between Lysistrata and the Commissioner

(*Proboulos*). In that scene, Lysistrata famously defeats the Commissioner by expanding the domestic sphere to embrace the political world,⁶ so that women, with their experience of the domestic economy, can govern, can “treat the body politic like a freshly sheared fleece” by “put[ting] it in a bath and wash[ing] out all the bullshit” (πρώτον μὲν ἐχρῆν ὥσπερ πόκου ἐν βαλανείῳ ἐκπλύναντας τὴν οἰσπώτην ἐκ τῆς πόλεως, 574–75).⁷ With the city’s political establishment defeated, the sex-strike plot returns. After Lysistrata prevents some of her women from escaping the Acropolis for libidinous adventure, a man is spotted approaching: Cinesias, hailing (in our production) from Cockowinity, a toponym derived from the nearby North Carolina town of Chocowinity. Lysistrata sends his wife Myrrhine to him with instructions to “roast him, torture him, tease him, love him and don’t love him, give him everything—except what you swore not to!” (τοῦτον ὀπτᾶν καὶ στρέφειν κἀξηπεροπεύειν καὶ φιλεῖν καὶ μὴ φιλεῖν καὶ πάνθ’ ὑπέχειν πλὴν ὧν σύνοιδεν ἢ κύλιξ, 839–841). Under Lysistrata’s behind-the-scenes direction, Myrrhine performs a striptease for him and then deserts him and his erection. As a direct result, Cinesias convinces a newly arrived Spartan Herald to summon the Ambassadors, who soon arrive at the Acropolis for reconciliation / Reconciliation.

Once the Ambassadors agree to a peace settlement, though, Lysistrata, her women, and their plans virtually disappear. The final scene is a celebration in which someone, probably Lysistrata herself but perhaps one of the Ambassadors,⁸ instructs the men to take their wives home and to “take care that in future we *never* make the same mistake again” (εὐλαβώμεθα τὸ λοιπὸν αὐθις μὴ ξαμαρτάνειν ἔτι, 1277–78). There is no new political establishment, no new expansion of domestic efficiency into the political realm. The hope is expressed that mistakes will not be repeated, but it is merely a hope. Likewise, the women cede the control they have gained over their husband’s desires. The purpose of their oath has been achieved and they return silently home under their husbands’ auspices. The war is over; otherwise, the world is back to normal.

The return to the status quo hinges on the Reconciliation scene, which shows—quite shockingly, at least to a modern audience—the extent to which male civilization is built on the bodies of women.⁹ As Christopher Faraone has shown, Aristophanes makes possible this gendered construction of peace by tapping into multiple, ideologically fabricated models of female virtue and vice throughout the play. The old women of the Women’s Chorus are consistently depicted as the saviors of the city. They are especially associated with the religious duties assigned to Athenian women. They keep aloof from sexual desire, and their sparring with the Men’s Chorus is an education in good citizenship.¹⁰ The younger Athenian wives such as Kalonike and Myrrhine, in contrast, perform the Old Comic stereotype of women as bibulous and libidinous. They agree to Lysistrata’s plans only reluctantly and then attempt to escape when peace is not achieved at once. Myrrhine’s striptease comes perilously close to becoming Myrrhine’s betrayal of her oath, only avoided by Lysistrata’s presence and calls for restraint. Indeed, lack of restraint is the most salient characteristic of the young wives, a fact that has led several scholars to describe the young wives, like most comic female characters that predate them, as belonging to the ideologically charged category of *hetaerae* (professional escorts, we might say, rather than low-class prostitutes).¹¹

Lysistrata herself does not fit easily into either category, virtuous woman or unrestrained *hetaera*; rather, she partakes of both types. Her association with Athena Polias, protector of the city, has been well studied, and her identification with Lysimache, the historical priestess of Athena Polias, is probably right.¹² She never shows any sign of unrestrained passion. It is not even clear that she will go home to a husband.¹³ Rather, she stands as the clear intellectual and political leader of the young women. She successfully persuades the Spartan Lampito to join in the conspiracy, a move which causes all the other young women to follow suit. She handily defeats the Commissioner, not with the demagogic rhetoric or roguish ingenuity typical of male comic heroes, but with reasoned (if fantastic) arguments and trenchantly humiliating scorn.¹⁴ At the same time, though, Lysistrata more closely resembles the typical courtesan of the comic stage, or even a madam running a brothel. This is nowhere clearer than when

Cinesias approaches the Acropolis seeking Myrrhine. Lysistrata promises to fetch her but only after she asks Cinesias for a “little present for me” (τί οὖν; δώσεις τί μοι, 861) She is looking to skim some profit off the top of her *hetaera*’s fee. She abandons the plan when Cinesias offers her his erect phallus as payment, but the ambivalence of her character has come through.¹⁵

Reconciliation is unique in the play. Her nudity and silence set her apart from the play’s other women. Even after Myrrhine’s striptease scene, Reconciliation’s hypersexualized presence indicates that she is no high-class *hetaera*; rather, she falls into a lower ideological category: a lower-class (and lower-priced) prostitute, a *pornē*.¹⁶ She is a woman utterly devoid of agency, an object to be used and abused by the other characters, not only the Ambassadors but also Lysistrata, who summons her forth and oversees the negotiations. In short, Reconciliation’s presence brings *Lysistrata* into the realm of pornography.¹⁷

Through Reconciliation’s pornographic presence Aristophanes is able to bring to an end the play’s gynocracy and restore the androcratic status quo. Lysistrata’s plans had made the women equal to the men by reducing the power differential between them. The young wives had increased their power over the men’s libidinal desires. The old women had seized the Acropolis and thereby eliminated the men’s financial advantage over the city’s women. The women of the chorus had leveled the playing field of social interaction with their male counterparts. Lysistrata herself had not only overseen all these developments but had also surpassed the power of the city’s magistrate, the Commissioner. Her final defeat of him by dressing him as a corpse prepared for burial strongly marked the death of the city’s traditional male power. The introduction of the *pornē* Reconciliation, though, reintroduces the normative power differential between the play’s men and women. Reconciliation teases the Ambassadors but never controls them. Her low-class status and concomitant powerlessness allow Aristophanes to put men in charge again.

The challenges facing modern directors, then, are numerous. From a purely practical standpoint, they must decide whether Reconciliation will be played by a male or female actor and how that actor will be dressed, if at all. To my recollection, I had seen two productions of *Lysistrata* before I directed my own. In one, Reconciliation was played by a woman; in the other, a man took the role, though he wore a woman’s wig and substantial make-up. Both wore body suits that suggested maps rather than nudity, so that the punning identification of a woman’s body with landmasses was evident at Reconciliation’s first entrance, long before the Ambassadors began deploying their *double entendres*. The decision of how to cast and costume Reconciliation, then, must take into account more than the director’s available personnel and their comfort levels. It encompasses how the scene’s humor can be played.

More to the point, directors need to decide if they will preserve the pornographic spirit Reconciliation introduces to the stage. It is easy, during the course of *Lysistrata*, to lose sight of the different representations of women in the play. It is easy to present the young wives as reluctant to participate in the sex strike and desirous to escape its restrictions, but still essentially virtuous. Unlike their ancient Athenian counterparts, many members of a modern American audience, especially an audience comprising college students and faculty, will not assume that a woman’s expression of her sexual desire and her taking pleasure in sex are signs of her promiscuity. If anything, the open expression of female desire in the play may bring to the forefront the protofeminist strain that is already present in the text,¹⁸ making it easier to identify Lysistrata, Kalonike, Myrrhine and the others as a coherent and cohesive group, with Lysistrata merely having a stronger commitment to the cause than her followers. In this case, Reconciliation becomes an anomaly and can be treated as such. If the entire Reconciliation scene is performed playfully, with Reconciliation inviting the men’s advances, she can even come to represent the culmination of the women’s taking pleasure in their sexuality. Such staging is possible using the unaltered text, and it leaves the modern audience very comfortable and happy. Presumably, Aristophanes’ original audience too, at least its men (whether women were present or not), was

comfortable and happy after this scene since the pornographic depiction of women in Old Comedy was hardly anomalous.¹⁹ Such staging, then, might eliminate some of Aristophanes' gender politics, but it preserves the play's comic spirit, a goal not to be dismissed even by "serious" scholars.

In my staging, I wanted to preserve the humor as much as possible, but the gender politics also mattered. *Lysistrata* has been often used in recent years as an antiwar play, especially in the run-up to the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 2010, although the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were dragging on, the antiwar message of the play might have seemed stagnant. The possibility that the play contained a subtle reflection on how patriarchy was constructed, therefore, seemed to be a good animating force.

To allow that subtlety to be seen, I needed to preserve Aristophanes' distinctions among the female characters. The Women's Chorus had to be eminently likeable but also dominant in their battle with the Men's Chorus. I was blessed to find a Women's Chorus Leader, Alexandria White, whose beauty and small stature were counterbalanced by a fire hot enough to burn any man's ego.²⁰ The young wives also needed to be sympathetic, but also to communicate to the audience that sex filled their minds as much as the men's. Our Myrrhine, Amber Moore, projected such a sweet demeanor that it was quite a surprise when she threw herself at Cinesias (Darrell Purcell) so eagerly that Lysistrata needed to restrain her ardor from within the Acropolis. Meanwhile, Kalonike (Jennifer Latham) set up camp in a corner of the stage so that she could participate in Myrrhine and Cinesias's liaison as a voyeur, at least until Lysistrata ordered her back into the Acropolis. Danielle Bryan's Lysistrata, like White's Women's Chorus Leader, possessed both beauty and fire, but whereas White's fire was shrill and confrontational, Bryan burned with a desire always focused on a higher goal, with a sense of justice and righteousness. In addition, she projected supreme self-confidence. The only moment she showed doubt was during the prologue, when she begged for cooperation from Lampito (Leigh Wagner). Thereafter, she controlled the stage like a leader who had earned complete respect. We admittedly lost some of the ambivalence of Lysistrata's character. For audience members who read the expression of female desire as normative, Lysistrata's courtesan-like actions and words seemed consistent with her overall characterization. We did succeed, though, in distinguishing her from the rest of the women onstage, not only through behavior but also through costuming. Lysistrata wore black while the other women wore brighter colors (Myrrhine blue, Kalonike red, etc.).

In contrast to the other women, Reconciliation needed to be shown as an object of desire and/or an object of political wrangling. Her objectification could be shown through a pornographic setting or some other way, but it had to be done without losing the audience's attention and sympathy. The decision to begin the Reconciliation scene with a man dressed in a faux-naked body suit, only to be replaced by a self-degrading Lysistrata, was born of several factors: practical concerns about how to portray nudity onstage, attention to the audience's response to the arc of scenes in the play's second half, and especially the need to have Reconciliation meaningfully differentiated from the play's other women. Practical concerns arose because I was a Classical Studies professor who would be working with a cast of students generally possessing little theatrical experience. I was already concerned that my student actors would be uncomfortable with the play's sexuality and obscenity. Asking one of them to appear naked would have been beyond the pale. Moreover, even though I already had tenure, I did not feel like I possessed the sanction that would have allowed me to put anything starkly pornographic onstage, especially on a temporary stage erected in a large student-union meeting room. Such sanction might belong to a theater professor working within a recognized theater program, but probably not to other faculty. These may not be considerations scholars typically imagine when studying performance, but we must be aware of the limitations in all performance settings. Having Lysistrata dressed in a modest slip after replacing the faux-naked woman-man made possible the representation of nudity without actual nakedness. The audience had no doubt as to how they ought to "see" Lysistrata after she dropped her robe.

Once the Ambassadors began groping the disrobed Lysistrata, we knew that the audience would stop laughing, although a few nervous chuckles were heard each night of our three-performance run. We therefore carefully anticipated the arc of the last few scenes, and talked about it repeatedly during the rehearsal process. Although the first two-thirds of the play would have plenty of laughs, it was clear that the audience would be won over completely by the Cinesias-and-Myrrhine scene and that its momentum would need to be preserved. We aimed to have an ebb and flow of laughter from then until the end of the play, with each “ebb” allowing the audience to catch their breath (though without surrendering the laughter altogether) and each “flow” ratcheting up the laughter even higher than the time before. After Myrrhine’s departure, Cinesias converses with the Men’s Chorus Leader and the Spartan Herald. Here we had some lowbrow fun comparing Cinesias’s large erection to the Men’s Leader’s flaccid phallus and the Herald’s “Spartan walking-stick” (σκυτάλα Λακωνικά, 991). The laughter began growing again in the next scene, as the Semichoruses reconciled with one another, joined ranks, and delivered the parabasis. *Lysistrata* does not have a proper parabasis, but this section of the play (1043–71) contains a choral interlude directly addressed to the audience. The Chorus playfully offers the audience gifts, only to rescind the offers at the end of each stanza. Knowing these stanzas would be uninteresting to our audience, I rewrote the scene, with input from my chorus actors, as a critique of behavior on our campus.²¹ The scene stopped the show every night and thus succeeded in our goal of topping the striptease scene’s laughter. With the pattern established, we allowed the laughter to subside somewhat as Reconciliation was called forth and began teasing the Ambassadors. The audience’s expectation of another raucous scene, however, never materialized. Instead, as we prepared them to laugh again with the beginning of the peace negotiations and its *double entendres*, Lysistrata pulled off her *coup de théâtre* by inserting her own body into the negotiations and thereby plummeting the audience into almost total silence. After that scene, we were careful to bring the audience back into a good mood with the finale, although it was planned so as not to reach the comic heights of the striptease scene and the parabasis. This seemed right because, even if Lysistrata does speak in the final scene, she does not end the play triumphantly. With the restored status quo, she is now subordinate to the Athenian and Spartan men. It seemed that a slightly muted celebration of the peace was in order.

The primary factor in our staging of the Reconciliation scene, though, was gender politics, as shown in Aristophanes’ differentiation of female types. Although we could not use a naked woman as Reconciliation, we still did find a way to add an air of pornography to the scene, albeit with violence rather than explicit sexuality. The final shape of the scene resulted from a true collaboration between myself and Danielle Bryan (Lysistrata). I brought to her the idea of having Lysistrata replace a male Reconciliation, thinking that the substitution was sufficient degradation to make the point that Lysistrata had become an object of male desire. In our ensuing discussion and in rehearsals, however, it became clear to us that the substitution was not sufficient. If the Ambassadors played the negotiation sequence once with the faux-female Reconciliation and then merely jocularly repeated the scene with Lysistrata, the substitution would have had little effect. Their treatment of Lysistrata needed to be markedly different in tone, and Bryan encouraged me to have it be more violent. It became clear that, if we were going to make the substitution, only a complete degradation of Lysistrata would subvert the power dynamics we had constructed thus far. As Foley (1982, 10) notes, the power of Aristophanes’ play “derives precisely from the way Lysistrata dissipates the standard comic and even tragic expectations about the behavior of women and particularly about ‘female intruders.’” For our modern audience, who might less readily recognize Lysistrata’s abnormality and more readily accept her as a strong leader, we aimed to “dissipate” their expectations by reducing the strong woman to a passive object. Without the violence, with the men merely touching Lysistrata instead of groping her, the scene was flat, a mere curiosity at the end of an otherwise excellent performance. When we got the violence right, the Ambassadors were seen to conspire with one another across and around our heroine’s body with its shockingly passive face. It became a tense and sobering moment in which the price to be paid for political peace was eerily etched on the body’s breasts and buttocks. When Lysistrata reasserted herself and declared that the men could

not enjoy sex until they signed an armistice (1175), it was a great relief, a sign that it was permissible to laugh again, if only a little.

The scene, then, was an attempt to show Lysistrata herself winning the war by sacrificing herself in the battle. It goes beyond the Aristophanic text (though only slightly) and subverts the Aristophanic characterization of Lysistrata, but I think it brings out a critical theme that is present but risks being lost. Lysistrata becomes not the flirtatious Myrrhine of the striptease scene, but the low-class prostitute who surrenders even her own body and thereby allows the men to regain power. We see not a generic nude woman standing as the men's new toy, as in Aristophanes' original; instead we see a character with whom we have come to sympathize turned into an anonymous plaything. It was important that the Ambassadors act conspiratorially with one another as they replayed the scene. They are in collusion to regain control of the situation, to reassert their common masculinity. The scene thus introduces a concept of self-sacrifice that is admittedly more Christian than Athenian, but one that thereby communicates to the audience the gendered paradox that lies at the heart of this comedy: namely, that the women effectively seize power with the sole purpose of surrendering it to the men again, in the probably vain hope that the men will not make the same mistakes again.

notes

¹ Green's translation was largely based on the text of Henderson 1987, with occasional reference to Sommerstein 1990. The Greek I quote is from Henderson's edition. Please note that the interpolations in our production are to be attributed to me, not the translator.

² It is uncertain whether Reconciliation (and the other nude female characters in Old Comedy) was played by a real woman or a man in a padded costume. For a review of the evidence, with differing conclusions, see Henderson 1987, ad 1106-27; Stone 1984, 147-50; Zweig 1992, 78-80.

³ This stage action is, surprisingly, overlooked by some scholars, to the point that Heath (1987, 15) needs to argue for it. The Ambassadors' comments about Reconciliation's body (1136, 1148, 1158) seem to guarantee it. More to the point, even the simplest blocking of the scene would place Lysistrata and one Ambassador on one part of the stage and Reconciliation and the other Ambassador on another. Given that Reconciliation is the most eye-catching thing on stage, where else would the audience be looking and what else would Reconciliation and her Ambassador be doing?

⁴ Let me express here my gratitude to these brave student actors who played this scene before their peers and a panel of scholars with barely thirty minutes of rehearsal the day before. In the original production at East Carolina, the cast included: Danielle Bryan as Lysistrata, Tony Lewis as the Spartan Ambassador, Collin Jones as the Athenian Ambassador, and Marshall Bren Woodard as Reconciliation. The Chorus Leader's lines were delivered alternately by the Men's and Women's Chorus Leaders, played by Kelly Hunnings and Alexandria White, respectively.

⁵ On the double plot structure of *Lys.*, see Henderson 1987, xxvi-xxvii; Hulton 1972; Vaio 1973.

⁶ Foley (1982) importantly argued, contra Shaw 1975, that we ought not to interpret Lysistrata's (or *Ecclesiazusae's* Praxagora's) movement as a departure from a private, domestic, female sphere into a public, political, male sphere, as if these two spheres were mutually exclusive realms: "The structure of these comedies [*Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*] confirms the usefulness of the oikos-polis polarity in analyzing the sexual dialectic of Greek drama, provided that one sees these terms as a contradictory unity and not, as does Shaw, as a simple structural opposition" (1982, 4).

⁷ All translations are from Green's script.

⁸ I am persuaded by the arguments advanced by Sommerstein (1990, *ad* 1273–90) that Lysistrata delivers this speech, not the Athenian Ambassador. Green’s translation also gives the speech to Lysistrata.

⁹ Numerous scholars have recognized various aspects of *Lysistrata*’s return to normative political and social roles. See Fletcher 1999, 120: “In the Reconciliation scene [Lysistrata] performs another transformative act by presenting a naked woman and making her represent Greece. . . . Lysistrata performs this theatrical tour de force in order to restore the conceptual system which aligns women with the body and men with the formative principle. Certainly in this case the focus on the body of [Reconciliation] re-establishes women in the sphere of the material, while men’s organisation of her body into discrete areas that they can occupy and regulate means that they are now restored to their controlling roles.” Cf. Jay–Robert 2006, 36–41; Konstan 1995, 45–60; Saxonhouse 1980, 69–27; Scholtz 2007, 83; Stroup 2004, 62.

¹⁰ On the character of the women’s semichorus, see Faraone 2006, 209–11.

¹¹ On the character of the young wives, see Faraone 2006, 209–11; Stroup 2004.

¹² The identification was first suggested by Lewis 1955, 1–7. On Lysistrata’s virtuous and religious character, see also Anderson, 1995, 53; Foley 1982, 9–10; Henderson 1987, xxxviii–xli; Newiger 1980, 235–36.

¹³ This fact led our translator to recommend costuming her as a widow.

¹⁴ At Given 2009, 125–26, I argue that Aristophanes, by painting the Commissioner as an incompetent bumbler, is able to depict Lysistrata as an expert politician with superb intelligence.

¹⁵ On Lysistrata’s ambivalent character, see Faraone 2006, 214–19.

¹⁶ On Reconciliation as a *pornē*, see Stroup 2004, 63–66.

¹⁷ Zweig (1992) argues, from a carefully historicized perspective, that we ought to read this scene and similar scenes in the Aristophanic corpus as pornographic.

¹⁸ This was a view that we encouraged in our newly written parabasis. See n. 21, below.

¹⁹ Several Aristophanic plays contain silent and/or naked women portrayed pornographically, including *Acharnians*, *Wasps*, *Peace*, *Birds*, and *Thesmophoriazusae*. See Zweig 1992 for complete discussion.

²⁰ I want to note and even emphasize the irony of taking into account the actors’ beauty during the casting process in order to prevent the audience from objectifying the female characters until the Reconciliation scene. Am I not objectifying the women by using their physical beauty as a means to convey character? Yes, that is true, and these were issues to which I was particularly sensitive as a male director. I acknowledge the counterpurposes at play here, but this was one place where the practice of theatrical production needed to win out over the theory of academic criticism. If I had cast an unattractive woman as the Women’s Chorus Leader, it would have been too easy for the audience—men and women—to write her off as a mean, old, unsympathetic bitch. So, yes, it is true that for a play partly about critiquing stereotypes of women, I cast the play by taking into account the audience’s presumed stereotypes of women, offensive as they can be, namely that attractive women are inherently likeable and unattractive women mean. It is certainly possible, of course, to use the stage to critique the beauty myth, but *Lysistrata* would be a poor vehicle for that critique. If one chooses to produce a particular play, one must accept the limitations imposed by its script.

²¹ The theme of the new parabasis was gender relations on campus, and particularly women's self-presentation. I need to note that the entire chorus—both the Men's Semichorus and the Women's Semichorus—was played by female actors, a decision motivated primarily by the fact that we lacked a sufficient number of men. We drew attention to the abandonment of character by having one of the "men" make reference to their being "saddled with felt penises." The parabasis proceeded as follows: The women said that, in a play about sex, they wanted to talk about sex. They admitted that they liked sex, "all sorts of sex," at which point the eight women rattled off the names of sixteen sex positions and then eight slang terms for female body parts. They then transitioned to a new topic with, "We like sex. We love our bodies. We think our bodies are sexy and we love to show them off. But enough is enough, ladies." They criticized their peers on campus who seem to value sex more than learning. "There's nothing wrong with being hot and smart," they said. And they concluded with some advice for the men in the audience: "We still want the screw. But we want it when we say, where we say, and how we say." In the final line, they obscenely told the men what they could go do to themselves.

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The Delayed Feast: the Festival Context of Plautus' *Pseudolus*

Laura Banducci

University of Michigan

References to food in Plautine plays are frequent and vivid. We hear mention of sweet honey, juicy bacon, and banquet platters piled high with food. Examinations of food in Plautus have focused previously on Plautus' Greco-Roman hybridity, particularly in the cook characters. Food is also featured as evidence of Plautus' additions to original Greek texts.¹ Yet the performance of plays at public festivals and funerals, where there was a sense of "carnival"² and a public banquet, has implications for the way in which the appearance of food in Plautus' plays should be understood. In 1971, anthropologist Mary Douglas noted that the sharing of meals marks out stages within the tempo of life.³ She explains: "The meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies. Each meal carries something of the meaning of the *other* meals; each meal is a structured social event which structures others in its own image."⁴ Food in Plautus has this same temporal and referential quality. The mention of food in Plautine plays marks the progress—and sometimes the *lack* of progress—of the plot. While my larger study considers five plays by Plautus, here I will focus on the *Pseudolus*, and examine how food references punctuate the action of the play, remaining something continually hoped for but rarely attained. In the same way, the audience awaits its festival feast. Plautus' actors stand in for the audience members themselves: both want the resolution to the problems presented in the plot, and both want to get to the feast which is continually mentioned.



Conference Presentation
video: Randolph College
[youtube.com/watch?v=taIHVIS2js0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taIHVIS2js0)

Public banquets and theatrical performances

We know from the *didascalia* that *Pseudolus* was first performed at the Ludi Megalenses of 191 BCE.⁵ We can say generally that in the republican period Plautus' plays would have been exclusively performed in public at annual religious festivals with *ludi scaenici* and at public funerals that chose to sponsor theatrical events.⁶ At least eight of the public festivals in the Roman calendar had associated feasts, but access to festival food was not universal, despite the public, communal nature of the celebrations. The only festivals that had feasts open to the whole populace were the Saturnalia and the Compitalia. Otherwise, the Ludi Romani and Ludi Plebeii had the *epulum Iovis*, where only men of the senatorial class ate the meat of the sacrificial animal.⁷ The Ludi Megalenses also had an exclusive feast. It was an occasion for the exchange of food between patrician families held from the 4th to the 10th of April.⁸ The Ludi Cereales, held from the 12th to the 19th of April, were exclusive to plebeian families. This restriction was perhaps a mirror of the patrician custom, giving the plebs their own opportunity for exclusivity.

The evidence for the order of events at public festivals is fragmented and, as is often the case for evidence of civic cult, largely from the imperial period. At the Saturnalia, a public banquet ended the several-day holiday.⁹ At festivals connected to military triumphs the feast seems to have occurred at the end of the procession and performance events.¹⁰ For example, Caesar is supposed to have provided multiple banquets following the conquest of Hispania: "*adiexit epulum ac viscerationem et post Hispaniensem victoriam duo prandia.*"¹¹ Augustus' reinvention of the Saecular Games in 17 BCE featured seated banquets, *sellisternia*, following the theatrical performances on two consecutive days.¹² Therefore, though we cannot say with certainty that the public meal happened uniformly at every festival in the republican period, there was at least a tendency for banquets to finish these events. Plautine food references would be

tantalizing reminders of all of this feasting, even if they did not directly precede them.

The schedule for the beginning of the Ludi Megalenses—the occasion of the first performance of *Pseudolus*—is clearer. They began on the first day with theatrical and circus games: Cicero defends Marcus Caelius Rufus on April 4th while plays are performed nearby.¹³ The exchange of patrician dinners occurred on this first night: a calendar from CE 6-9 inscribed in the forum in Praeneste explains that on April 4th “reciprocation of dinners among the nobility habitually occurs in great number.”¹⁴ So the *Pseudolus*’ first audience, comprising diverse social classes, would have consumed dinners ranging from the very modest to the lavish.¹⁵

Meat and the festival context

Meat is by far the most frequently mentioned food in Plautus, yet meat did not form a regular or substantial contribution to the Roman diet.¹⁶ Annual festivals with state-sponsored sacrifices and funerals would have been the main contexts for the consumption of meat by a large majority of the populace of Rome. The close connection between festivals and the distribution of sacrificial meat dates back at least to Iron Age Latium. Dionysius of Halicarnassus mentions the *Feriae Latinae* on the Alban Mount, a festival at which Latin cities came together and worshipped Jupiter Latiaris.¹⁷ Because it was a ceremony creating and re-affirming the unity of the Latin tribe, if any group “failed to obtain its fair share of meat, the whole ceremony needed to be repeated.”¹⁸ In the city of Rome itself, public feasting began as early as 328 BCE with the *visceratio*, the distribution of the sacrificial meat.¹⁹

When a more specific word than *victus* is used to refer to meat in Plautus, pork is most often mentioned, followed by fish. In zooarchaeological remains from Roman Italy, pig bones are attested in increasing quantity from the pre-Roman into the Roman period. By the Roman period, pig bones make up 40 to 80% of recovered quadruped bones at urban sites in Italy.²⁰ Pig is typically described as the defining Roman foodstuff and “the choicest of all the domestic meats consumed,” having more Latin names than any other animal.²¹ It is no wonder that it appears so often in Plautus.²²

Food in the play

In the *Pseudolus*, food comments mark the progress of the plot and move us toward the completion of the story. The first mention of food is made by the brothel owner Ballio, who enters the stage scolding his slaves and demanding that they prepare his home for a banquet in the evening:

tu esto lectisterniator. tu argentum eluito, idem exstruito.
 haec, quom ego a foro revortar, facite ut offendam parata,
 vorsa sparsa, tersa strata, lautaque unctaque omnia uti sint.
 nam mi hódie natalís dies est; decet eum omnis vos concélebrare.
 pernam, callum, glandium, sumen facito in aqua iaceant. satin audis?
 magnifice volo me summos viros accipere, ut mihi rem esse reantur.
 intro abite atque haec cito celerate, ne mora quae sit, cocus cum veniat.
 ego eo in macellum, ut piscium quidquid erit pretio praestinem.²³

You! Be the couch-arranger! You! Clean the silverware and pile it up!
 Have these things prepared for when I return from the forum.
 Everything should be swept, prepped, wiped, spread, and washed and oiled.
 For today is my birthday; you should all celebrate it with me.
 Make sure that the ham, hide, tenderloin, sow are tossed in water. Do you hear me?
 I want to host important men magnificently, so they'll marvel at my property.
 Go inside and do these things quickly so there's no delay when the cook arrives.
 I'm going to the market to buy up whatever fish is there.

The sense of haste in this passage occurs in many discussions of food in Plautus. Characters always need to rush to prepare for an important party or are extremely hungry and stress that the meal must be ready upon their return. Although when other characters in the *Pseudolus* later mention feasting it is not clear that they are alluding to this particular party, Ballio's initial request for spotless couches, gleaming silverware, and cooking meat sets up an image of lavishness which persists.

Later, when Ballio is negotiating the sale of the prostitute Phoenicium with Pseudolus and Calliadorus, he explains:

Respiciam istoc pretio; nam si sacrificem summo Iovi
atque in manibus exta teneam ut poriciam, interea loci
si lucri quid detur, potius rem divinam deseram.
non potest pietati opsisti huic, utut res sunt ceterae.²⁴

I will reconsider it for a price; for, if I were in the middle of sacrificing to highest Jove, holding the entrails in my hand, offering them as a sacrifice, and some cash were offered, I would rather abandon the sacrifice. It's impossible to resist that type of piety, however other events play out.

The mention of animal sacrifice should not be separated from the idea of meat consumption, since the two were necessarily linked. When an animal was sacrificed, the inner organs, *exta*, were burnt in offering to the gods, while the rest of the animal's body was consumed by individuals at the ceremony.²⁵ In Greek New Comedy the cook himself is charged with the slaughtering of the sacrifice to be served to the diners at the later feast.²⁶

Throughout the play there are one-word food references without much context. Pseudolus promises Calliadorus that if Ballio breaks their deal, *exossabo ego illum simulter itidem ut murenam coquos*: "I will debone him like a cook does an eel."²⁷ This is interesting, since we know Ballio has gone to the market to purchase fish and that he has appointed a cook to arrive at his home. Later, Harpax, the servant of the Macedonian soldier, is exhausted and explains, *Quin ubi prandero, dabo operam somno*. "When I have lunched, I will take a nap."²⁸ These unconnected food references keep the idea of food alive in the background of the main action and on the minds of the audience. We are reminded that we have yet to see any food in the play, although a banquet was mentioned hundreds of lines ago.

The cook scene in *Pseudolus* is one extended food reference which has been handled quite thoroughly by other scholars.²⁹ It is yet another explicit reminder of the promised feast which has yet to appear. The many spices mentioned by the cook sound made up, but they contribute to the exoticism of his food preparation:

nam vel ducenos annos poterunt vivere
meas qui essitabunt escas quas condivero.
nam ego cicilendrum quando in patinas indidi
aut cepolendrum aut maccidem aut secaptidem,
eae ipsae se patinae fervefaciunt ilico.
haec ad Neptuni pecudes condimenta sunt;
terrestris pecudes cicimandro condio aut
hapalopside aut cataractria.³⁰

Those who eat the food which I have seasoned will live for 200 years.
For when I put into the saucepan cookedender, or onionmeg, or clownon, or beheadish,
the dishes themselves immediately become warmed.
These are spices for the flocks of Neptune; the flesh of the earthly animals I season with

castoroilapple or halfboiledander or allspiceria.

As the cook attempts to convince Ballio that his services are worth a high fee, we witness the importance of spices in Roman cuisine, perhaps more specifically in *haute cuisine*. Roberto Danese argues not only that Plautus' made-up spices were meant to convey a Greek origin (with their ending in *-endron*),³¹ but also that the addition of a velar *-l-* before this ending adds a "touch of rustic Sabine" to the Greek. For Danese, this multiethnic, multilinguistic allusion contributes to the cook's snobbery and the ostentation of his meal.³² While the contemporary audience's recognition of such linguistic intricacies is not certain, the passage does place an extended emphasis on taste: there is a concerted effort to create not just food imagery, but to activate some other sensory response to imagined food. Later in the cook's speech he continues to boast about his own abilities when he suggests,

Quin tu illos inimicos potius quam amicos vocas?
nam ego ita convivis cenam conditam dabo
hodie atque ita suavi suavitate condiam:
ut quisque quidque conditum gustaverit,
ipsum sibi faciam ut digitos praerodat suos.³³

Why don't you invite your enemies rather than your friends?
For I'll give the guests a banquet which is so flavorful
today and I'll season it with such pleasant sweetness,
that I'll make anyone who tastes each thing I've seasoned
nibble off his own fingers.

The word choice (suggesting the food is "finger-lickin' good") and the description in the cook scene creates a tangible sense of food. If the frequent direct addresses made to the audience in Plautine drama made them "more like participants in the drama than spectators,"³⁴ then we can think of food and its appearance in these plays as contributing to the metatheater. Timothy Moore emphasizes the metatheatrical qualities of *Pseudolus*, imagining Plautus adding self-conscious elements to the dialogue to heighten the comedy and, consequently, the audience's pleasure. Moore posits that even when the plot has not progressed at all, the play has been loaded with jokes, frivolities, and novel twists "purely for the fun they provide the audience."³⁵ In a similar vein, provoking the audience's sense of taste and smell reminds them of the roasting spits and festival treats awaiting them outside the theater.

Following the cook scene, *Pseudolus* and his assistant *Simia* devise and execute their plan to convince Ballio that he should hand over *Phoenicium*. Both slaves exult at the thought of their celebration when their plan has been successful.

Pseudolus

Ut ego accipiam te hodie lepide, ubi effeceris hoc opus.

Simia

Ha ha hae!

Pseudolus

Lepido victu, vino, unguentis et inter pocula pulpamentis;
ibidem una aderit mulier lepida, tibi savia super savia quae det.³⁶

Pseudolus

How delightfully I'll treat you today once you've finished your duty.

Simia

Ha ha ha.

Pseudolus

With lovely meat, wine, perfumes, and, between our cups, tenderloin.
And there'll be a lovely lady, who will dole out kiss after kiss.

Three hundred lines later and already drunk, Pseudolus again expresses his excitement for wine, women, dancing, and meat.

profecto edepol ego nunc probe habeo madulsam:
ita victu excurato, ita magnis munditiis dis dignis,
itaque in loco festivo sumus festive accepti.³⁷

By god, I'm totally drunk.
With such exquisite meats, such great elegance and worthy wealth,
in such a delightful setting, we've been delightfully entertained.

Finally, a banquet in celebration of united lovers ends the play; but really, we are celebrating Pseudolus' triumph. He has been looking forward to this celebration since the beginning. Pseudolus invites his master, Simo, to have a drink with him, yet when Simo suggests that the audience be invited as well, Pseudolus explains:

Hercle me isti hau solent vocare, neque ergo ego istos;
verum si voltis adplaudere atque adprobare
hunc gregem et fabulam, in crastinum vos vocabo.³⁸

Hell, they're hardly in the habit of inviting me, so I won't invite them either;
But if you wish to applaud and approve this group and this play, then tomorrow I will invite you.

The audience is both excluded from the present, onstage feast, and invited to a later feast. Closing the play with the opening of a feast probably parallels the festival context of the play's performance; with the *ludi scaenici* complete, the banquet can begin. Because this particular play was first featured at the *Ludi Megalenses*, the majority of the audience would not have been able to take part in the eating of the *victus* which is continually mentioned, but drinking and celebration were part of the atmosphere.

Conclusion

Roman public feasting brought people of different social classes together and helped to define different statuses within this collective.³⁹ Food references in Plautus mark the progression towards both the resolution of the plot and the actual public feast, but the theme of eating has deeper significance. There is also a connection between the competition for access to the banquet and the struggle for social status.⁴⁰ Parasites beg for food and complain when they are left starving outside the doors of their patrons' homes; slaves look forward to the coming festival, or skim off the top of the stew being prepared in the kitchen.⁴¹ In addition to class division, however, there is also a struggle for food on the part of the male heads of the households. The host of the meal rarely eats it. The plan is foiled in some way so that someone else steps in to consume his share, and the promised banquet never occurs, or does not occur within the action of the play. In this way, Plautus both reminds us of the divisions which were created in some public festivals and also transcends these divisions and makes his plays about a hunger for food despite one's status. The exclusivity of the meals in Plautus and the difficulty of obtaining food for many characters is a

reminder of the promised but delayed feast in the festival atmosphere of the performance. This is emphasized in the plays through the constant mention of food and through the often vivid sensory descriptions which the speakers employ.

notes

¹ Gowers 1993, 50–108; Lowe 1985a; Lowe 1985b; Hallett 1993; Danese 2002. For the cook as a comic trope in Greek New Comedy see Scodel 1993; for food as a multifaceted device in Old and Middle comedy see Wilkins 1993 and Gilula 1995.

² “Carnival” as suggested by Bakhtin as a communal opportunity for chaos and subversive laughter at the grotesque and the profane. (See for example, Bakhtin 1968, 192–195). Caryl Emerson captures the multivalence of “carnival,” explaining it as, “Christian, godly, eucharistic, inspired by the reverence for transfigured matter. . . . demonic, violent, nihilistic, indifferent to individual pain and death. . . . a form of play – either the dangerous, disobedient sort of playfulness that strategically opposes itself to centralized power, or the more stupefied sort of foolishness that emerges in a population already traumatized by terror. . . . democratic, aristocratic, a carrier of knowledge, an agent for self-correction and relief; it is also healthy.” Emerson 2002, 5, 7.

³ Douglas 1972, 62; Jones 2007, 197.

⁴ Douglas 1972, 70.4

⁵ Willcock, 1987, 1.

⁶ Ross Taylor 1937, 284. Several scholars have done a great deal of work on reconstructing Plautine chronology and the original-performance contexts of Plautus’ plays (For example, Buck 1940; Hallett 1996). For my purposes I take Paul Harvey’s advice that exploring Plautus’ contemporary sociopolitical climate can be more fruitful than attempting to link historical allusions in the text to specific production dates of the plays (Harvey 1986, 302).

⁷ Donahue 2003, 429.

⁸ Ovid *Fasti* IV 179–185, 355–360; Donahue 2003, 430; D’Arms 1984, 336.

⁹ Livy XII.1, 20; Donahue 2003, 429.

¹⁰ Kavaja 1998, 125–127.

¹¹ Suet. *Iul.* 38.1

¹² CIL VI.32323, lines 100–102, and 108–110.

¹³ Cic. *Cael.* 1.

¹⁴ Degrassi 1963, 126–133 quoted in Beard et al. 1998, vol II., 65.

¹⁵ A law was passed in 158 BCE under Gaius Fannius limiting the patrician dinners during the Ludi Megalenses to either no more than “one pullet per table” (Pliny *NH* 10.71) or no more than “one hundred and twenty asses in addition to vegetables, bread and wine; that they would not serve foreign, but only native, wine, nor use at table more than one hundred pounds’ weight of silverware” (Gellius *NA* ii.24).

¹⁶ Garnsey 1999, 123.

- ¹⁷ Dion. Hal. IV.49.2ff.
- ¹⁸ Cornell 1995, 295; Donahue 2003, 430.
- ¹⁹ Livy VIII.22, 2–4; Kavaja 1998 109–110.
- ²⁰ King 1999, fig 2, Appendix Table A. The archaeological evidence for fish consumption is problematic because of the small size and delicacy of fish bones. It is very difficult to account for differing recovery rates of fish bones at excavations in Italy. See Gianfrotta 1987, 55, 57.
- ²¹ MacKinnon 2001, 649; Purcell 2003, 340.
- ²² For pork's *romanitas* and its luxury when in excess see Gowers 1993, 69–73.
- ²³ *Pseudolus*, 162–169. Latin text from Willcock's 1987 edition. All translations are the author's.
- ²⁴ *Pseudolus*, 265–268.
- ²⁵ Kavaja 1998, 116. As discussed in the section above, this meat consumption often did not include everyone present at the ceremony, but perhaps only a select few.
- ²⁶ Scodel 1993, 164, 170.
- ²⁷ *Pseudolus*, 382.
- ²⁸ *Pseudolus*, 664.
- ²⁹ Lowe 1985a; Gowers 1993, 93–107; Danese 1997, 2002. All discuss the cook as a stand-in for the poet and as evidence for mixed culture and ethnicity in Plautus.
- ³⁰ *Pseudolus*, 829–836.
- ³¹ This is a suggestion of Gowers 1993, 103.
- ³² Danese 1997, 528–529. J. Innes Miller says these spices have “an authentic oriental ring,” connecting maccis to mace from South–East Asia (Miller 1998, 9, 58–60), while other scholars read this word as a reference to the playwright, Titus Maccius Plautus, himself (see, for example, Hallett 1993, 23).
- ³³ *Pseudolus*, 880–884.
- ³⁴ MacCary and Willcock 1976, 198.
- ³⁵ Moore 1998, 93–94.
- ³⁶ *Pseudolus*, 946–948.
- ³⁷ *Pseudolus*, 1252–1254.
- ³⁸ *Pseudolus*, 1333–1335.
- ³⁹ Donahue 2003, 425; Potter 2000; Dietler 1996.
- ⁴⁰ This theme is currently under examination by the author.
- ⁴¹ See for example, Gelasimus and Stichus in *Stichus* and Peniculus in *Menaechmi*.

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Euripides' *Hecuba*: the Text and the Event

Kenneth Reckford



**Kenneth Reckford's Keynote Address to
Ancient Drama in Performance: Theory and Practice**
([youtube.com/watch?v=oRDeBgbXGoU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRDeBgbXGoU))

We present here in its entirety the video recording of the keynote address by Kenneth Reckford, entitled, "Euripides' *Hecuba*: the Text and the Event," in which he gives his ideas about the two parts of *Hecuba* and the loss of innocence, and how we might understand how Euripides engages Aristotelian catharsis and recognition. The talk, however, ranges widely as Reckford touches on Shakespeare and Ibsen and Stoppard, the prickly difficulties of translation and collaboration, what constitutes the shocking, and, in general, what changes and what endures in the theater.

Kenneth Reckford is the Kenan Professor of Classics, Emeritus, at UNC Chapel Hill, where he taught for forty-three years before retiring in 2003. He has been recognized for his excellent undergraduate teaching and has been president of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South as well as the American Philological Association. His main interests are Greek and Latin poetry and drama, with occasional raids on English literature. His publications include *Horace*, *Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy*, and Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Elektra*.

Hecuba in a New Translation

Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street

Randolph College

Introduction by Jay Kardan

It was late in the fall of 2008 that Laura-Gray Street and I approached Dr. Amy R. Cohen with a suggestion that we provide her with a translation of Euripides' *Hecuba* to be used as a script for her production of the 2010 Randolph College Greek Play. Our interest in this project was born not of any perceived deficiency in existing published translations of the *Hecuba*, but rather of a wish to engage with a colleague in a start-to-finish process of creating a tailor-made script for the production of an ancient tragedy. Prof. Cohen had made cuts and alterations in the scripts used in her previous Randolph College productions, but she had always worked from existing translations, and we believe it was the opportunity to participate in crafting a script from the beginning that made her welcome our proposal.

The process started with a fairly literal rendering of Euripides' text into English by Jay Kardan, a professional translator and instructor of Latin and Greek at the college. From this preliminary version, Laura-Gray Street, a poet and professor of creative writing, prepared the first draft of a versified script, which was shown to Kardan and Cohen for their review. Then began a series of three-way conversations in which artistic and literal fidelity to the original was tempered by the exigencies of production. As rehearsals began in the summer of 2010, responsibility for shaping the script shifted appropriately along the three-collaborator line, away from Kardan and toward Cohen, who would direct the resulting play. Chris Cohen, composer of the music used in the production, and Randall Speer, the orchestrator and music director, contributed to the final form of the lyric passages. An examination of the two posted versions will reveal the differences between Street's rendering and the working script. The accompanying video shows the ultimate product of this collaborative process.

We flatter ourselves that the result is a *Hecuba* uniquely adapted to the aesthetic traditions, outdoor theater, and student cast of the Randolph College Greek Play. Both translators found a satisfying challenge in the collaborative process, which enabled two writers without experience in drama to contribute to a dramatic performance and to learn something of the long road leading from an inanimate text to its staged realization.



Conference Performance of Hecuba
video: Randolph College
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE)

To go directly to chapters:

1. The Ghost of Polydorus at [0:08](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=0m8s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=0m8s)
2. Hecuba, The Chorus, and Polyxena at [3:39](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=3m39s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=3m39s)
3. Odysseus at [10:02](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=10m2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=10m2s)
4. Ode 1 - O Sea Breeze at [23:25](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=23m25s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=23m25s)
5. Talthybius at [25:38](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=25m38s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=25m38s)
6. Ode 2 - When Paris First Cut the Pine at [33:26](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=33m26s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=33m26s)
7. Hecuba Laments, and Agamemnon at [35:04](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=35m4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=35m4s)
8. Ode 3 - Troy Impaled at [49:15](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=49m15s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=49m15s)
9. Polymestor and His Sons at [52:44](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=52m44s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=52m44s)
10. Revenge Taken at [57:22](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=57m22s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=57m22s)
11. Credits at [1:11:50](#)
[youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=71m50s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1sE#t=71m50s)

HECUBA
by Euripides

translated by
Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street

POLYDORUS
HECUBA
CHORUS
POLYXENA
ODYSSEUS
TALTHYBIUS
THERAPAINA
AGAMEMNON
POLYMESTOR

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Alas!

Old mother, your royal palaces are reduced to meager
corners in another ruler's tents. How poorly you fare
—as poorly as you once fared well. To balance out
your past prosperity, some god has ruined you.

HECUBA

I am old. I am plagued
by bad dreams. Once your queen, (60)

I am frail, a worn hag
you must lead from the huts.
My dear friends, sister slaves,
help me walk, hold my hand,
let me lean on your arms
like a staff. Bear me up.

My own legs are too weak
to support me. O lightning
of Zeus, tell me why

I am snatched from my sleep
by these specters of dread.
Goddess Earth, from whose womb (70)

these nocturnal invasions
emerge like the stirring
of bats, I recoil

from these nightmares
O you underworld gods,
please protect Polydorus,
my anchor and last

of my house, who abides (80)
in this Thracian domain,
in the home of a friend.

Oh the horrors I dreamed—
I still shudder with fear!

Find Cassandra or Helenus—
Ask them to read

these phantasms and explain
the young doe that was torn
from my lap and destroyed
by a wolf with bloody jaws. (90)

CHORUS

I am here—I arrived—
Hecuba— just as fast
as I could—from the tent
of my master—where my lot (100)
is now cast—where command
made me slave—I was caught
like an animal, marched
out of Troy at the point
of a spear. —I bring news
—It’s not good—I regret
I must say—I’ve been told—
the Greek army convened—
they have voted—your daughter,
Polyxena—she
is the one—it’s decided—
that she will be sacrificed.

—To Achilles.

—His ghost,
reappeared at his tomb,
as you know, in a blaze
of gold armor and rage. (110)
—The Greek sails were unfurled,
all aboard for the launch,
when the warrior’s ghost
intervened. — “Do you think
you can leave,” the wraith howled,
“without honoring me?”

—Then rough waves of dispute
overran the composure
of captain and crew—
—and the Greeks were now split
between those who would kill
a young girl—your daughter—
to appease fierce Achilles
and those who disagreed

—To your cause spoke that chief (120)

in command, Agamemnon,
—proprietor of Cassandra.

—The sons of Theseus
rebutted, —exclaiming
the tomb of Achilles
deserved the girl’s blood;
—that Cassandra’s lush bed
must kneel down and defer
to the warrior’s brave spear.

—There things stood, at a stand-
off, —an intractable draw.

—Then that wily Odysseus
spoke. —He festooned
and perfumed his appeal
—the air thick with his words—
—till his audience swooned
at his feet as he crooned,
“Who could suffer the dead
telling tales down in Hades
about Greeks who deserted
the soldiers who died
for Hellas on the fields
of war?”

(130)

—Every soldier
agreed that to slight
brave Achilles was
sacrilege.

—Sacrifice
carried the day,
I’m afraid.

(140)

—And Odysseus is coming—
—At any moment—
—He will tear the sweet foal from your breast—
—You must go—
—He will wrench your Polyxena out of your hands—

—To the ships—
—To the altars—
—At the knees of Agamemnon—
—Pray—
—Ask the gods of heaven—
—And Hades—
—If your prayers convey—
—Then your daughter is saved—
—If they fail, you must see your own child put to death—
—Her throat cut—
—And the flow of her blood from her gold-bearing neck— (150)

HECUBA *Woe-dazed, what to say,
what howl, what lament?
Forlorn and now old.
Enslaved. It's too hard,
too much to be borne.
No one to protect me.
No house. No estate.
Alas, all is gone—
my husband, my lambs.
Which way should I go?
What road should I take?
What god can I trust?
What guide can avail?
O bearers of grief,
I no longer care
for life in the light.*

Feet, lead me—step right,
left—lead this old crone
to the tent. (170)

My child! O Polyxena!
Come out and attend
your mother. Come out,
hear me!

POLYXENA The distress in your voice,

your sharp cries of dismay,
dearest mother, have flushed me
from the tent like a bird
What on earth is your news?

HECUBA O my child, my own lamb— (180)

POLYXENA Why this chill in your tone?

HECUBA I am afraid—

POLYXENA Don't stop now—
no, now I am afraid.
I hear such fear in your voice.

HECUBA My child—child
of a wretched mother!

POLYXENA And why do you say this? Tell me!

HECUBA Because they have voted—
the Greeks—to kill you
on the tomb of Achilles. (190)

POLYXENA Alas, that you utter
unspeakable woes!

HECUBA I must speak the unspeakable,
child, though it tears
me to pieces. You must know.

POLYXENA *Sad mother of mine,
what more can you take?
Such outrage and woe
abound. It's too much.
Defenseless myself,
I can't defend you;
can't lighten your grief.
Alas, I must die—*

ODYSSEUS I do. The memory cuts deep.

HECUBA How when Helen spotted you, she told me alone?

ODYSSEUS I thought I was sunk, a goner.

HECUBA Remember the beggar you were then? How you grabbed my knees?

ODYSSEUS My hands grew numb holding your robes in that death grip.

HECUBA And I spared you, *freed* you.

ODYSSEUS I see the sun today because of you.

HECUBA When you were *my* slave, remember how you said—

ODYSSEUS Hecuba, I *said* whatever it took to stay alive. (250)

HECUBA Aren't you shameless in this conduct of yours?
You yourself just admitted the mercy you got from me
and now you do me such evil in return?
O gods save us from politicians and demagogues like you
who don't care what harm you do as long as the multitudes
are pleased and the applause is loud. But tell me, what counseled
expediency led them to cast their ballots in favor
of killing my child? What in your so-called necessity (260)
requires this brutal murder at a tomb where, by custom,
oxen ought to die? Does the ghost's thirst for revenge
justify his demand for human slaughter? Polyxena
has done no harm to Achilles. Rather, he should've asked
for Helen's sacrifice, since *she* destroyed him
by steering him to Troy. Or if beauty is prerequisite
in this tribute, logic still exempts *us*
and points to Helen: she's the epitome, after all,
the absolute knockout, the stunner, the dazzling mantrap
who wronged Achilles far more than we.

And thus, (270)

my case for justice against the ghost's. Now hear my claim
on your gratitude. As you yourself have readily confirmed,

when our positions were reversed in Troy, you fell
at my feet, begging for your life. You clasped my hand
and touched my aging cheek, here. But now it's *my* turn
to fall, clasping *your* hand, touching your cheek, just so.
To ask that you return the favor and spare my child.
Please, I beg you. Don't take my daughter from me.
Let her live. Haven't enough died already?
All I've lost lives on in her. She is my solace. (280)
She is my staff, my nurse, my guide. She is my Troy.
Those with power should use that power carefully.
Those in luck should not assume that luck will hold,
as I well know. Once, I was powerful and lucky,
a queen—but no more. A day obliterated all.
Odysseus, I implore you, by your bearded chin,
have pity on me. Reconvene the army, persuade them
it's wrong to kill the very women you spared—because
you pitied them—in Troy. Remind your men that Greek
laws pertaining to murder protect enslaved and free (290)
alike, without distinction. You have the power—the authority
and the lucky eloquence. But even if you babble
or stutter, your esteemed reputation, like a steady
wind, will swell the sail of your words, carrying them
farther than those of blowhards and other lesser men.

CHORUS Who could be so calloused as to remain unmoved, hearing
your sad complaints and mournful refrains of abundant woe?

ODYSSEUS A prefatory caveat, Hecuba: Just because
I make political speeches doesn't mean that I
must therefore be your enemy, so don't in anger (300)
misconstrue me so.

First off, I acknowledge,
unconditionally, your claim on my gratitude.
You saved my life, and, by the gods, I owe you. I stand
ready to honor my debt by saving *your* life. But
my public vow to the Greek troops I must also
stand by, and that is to reward our best warrior
with Polyxena, your daughter. It's an invalid premise,
you see, to think that these two lives—yours; hers—

can be interchanged.

Furthermore, our cities
will fail if noble and devoted soldiers earn
no greater returns than do lesser men. Achilles
deserves honor and tribute more than anyone:
He died for Greece, and by the gods we owe him. (310)
What conduct is more shameless than enlisting
a man's good and faithful service while he lives,
only to throw him to the dogs when he's dead?
Well, then. And if we had to go to war again,
would we have troops ready and willing to deploy
Or would men think, *Why bother? Better to lie
low and save my own skin.* Imagine what
adverse effects dishonoring the dead would have on
recruiting efforts, on public perception, on morale.
For me, a few essential crumbs will suffice (320)
while I'm alive. But I want the full-out display
of honors and commemorations when I die,
a worthy tomb to make this life worthwhile. That's
the thing that lasts.

Third, you complain how you've suffered.
Well, we Greeks have suffered, too. Our old women
and our old men are no less wretched than yours.
Our young brides are likewise widowed of fine grooms
who sleep in Trojan dust instead their marriage beds.
Just as *we* endure these hardships, so can you.
And if you think I'm wrong to honor the legacy
of a great warrior like Achilles, then go ahead
and call me callous. The barbaric way you foreigners
use your friends and disrespect the dead—I say
keep it up. That way Greece stays on top, (330)
and you people get the fate that you deserve.

CHORUS Witness here how the violence of war enslaves,
 forcing its captives to endure the unendurable.

HECUBA O daughter, all my arguments against your murder
 were useless, feeble puffs of air accomplishing nothing.
 If you have more skill than your mother, use it now.

Like the nightingale, sing out all your notes, or you
will lose your life. Fall prostrate at this man's knee
and persuade him. He has children, too, I know. (340)
You may yet move him to pity.

POLYXENA I see you, Odysseus, how you've hidden your right
hand in your cloak and turned your face away so I
can't touch your hand or beard in supplication.
But you have nothing to worry about. I'll follow you
to Achilles' tomb, both out of necessity and
because I wish to. I want to die. I won't grovel
for my life like some lowly coward of a woman.

Why should I live? My father was king of Troy, ruler
of all Phrygians. I was born royalty, and I was reared (350)
to expect I'd marry my choice of kings, exciting rivalry
over whose home and hearth I'd grace as bride. I was
mistress of the Idaeans, center of their attention, godlike
—except in my mortality. Now that I'm

a slave, I am infatuated with death. Imagine:
some cruel-minded master could buy me for money—me,
the daughter of Priam, sister of Hector and many others (360)
—and take me to his house, force me to cook for him,
to sweep and tend the shuttle, to work day after day
while my bed, once thought fit for rulers, is polluted
by some bought slave. No, it will not happen.

That life is inconceivable. While the light
in my eyes is still free, I yield it up, giving
my body to Hades. So lead me, Odysseus; take me
to my death. I see no reason to hope for or believe (370)
in anything better. And, Mother, don't you interfere.
Help me instead. I would rather die than suffer
the shame of wearing slavery's yoke around my neck.

CHORUS The signs of good breeding are always impressive. But
nobility is even more noble when it's deserved. (380)

HECUBA You're spoken well, daughter, but there is pain in that
good speaking.

Odysseus, I understand

unhappy one, give me your sweet hand and lay
your cheek to mine. Now for the very last time,
I see the brilliant circle of the sun. Now I say
my final words to you, o one who carried me in
her womb and bore me. And now I go— (410)

HECUBA Dear child, how I,
still leashed to daylight, will mourn for you.

POLYXENA —unmarried, not royally
wed as I should have been!

HECUBA You're pitiful, child, and I'm
a wretched woman.

POLYXENA In Hades' darkness I will lie alone.

HECUBA O gods! What shall I do? Where turn to end my life?

POLYXENA I, born in freedom, to die a slave. (420)

HECUBA And I,
bereft of fifty children.

POLYXENA Mother, what do you want me
to tell my brother Hector, and Priam, my father, your husband?

HECUBA Tell them how wretched I am.

POLYXENA O breasts that suckled me!

HECUBA O daughter who grieves me with an untimely, unhappy fate!

POLYXENA Farewell, Mother, and say farewell to Cassandra for me—

HECUBA Others may fare well, but not your mother.

POLYXENA Now lead me away, Odysseus, with a veil shrouding
my head. My mother's grief has melted my heart, and I

have melted hers.

O sunlight! I will savor you
in the short time left between this moment and the sword
at Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA

Aah! I faint. My legs dissolve.
Polyxena, stay with me! Reach out your hand,
grab hold of mine. Don't go, daughter, don't leave me
childless! Let me die, my friends.

(440)

CHORUS

[Strophe A]

*O sea-breeze, wind that carries ships
across the heaving waves,
where are you now carrying me?
In what home will I be slave?*

*Will I be goods for Argos or Sparta?
Phthia, maybe?—where
they say the full Apidanus
departs the fertile plains?*

[Antistrophe A]

*Or in Delos, sent by sea-oar
to suffer life in the temple
where palm and laurel sprang up
at Leto's twinned birth-pangs?*

*Shall I, there with Delian maidens,
praise the goddess Artemis,
her golden garment, and her bow,
as I did in Troy?*

[Strophe B]

*Or in Athens? There, shall I sew
brightly threaded ponies
and yoke them cunningly to chariots
on fair Athena's robe?*

*Or perhaps embroider Titans,
which Zeus, son of Kronos,
with fists of double-edged lightening
laid quite low?*

[Antistrophe B]

from its sheath and motioned to the guards to seize Polyxena.
Your daughter, when she saw this, gave this proud speech:
“O Greeks who sacked my city, know that I die willingly,
so keep your hands off me. I will bare the nape
of my own neck to the sword. For the gods’ sakes, let me
be free of fetters when you kill me so that I may die free, (550)
and among the dead I won’t have to be ashamed,
being a queen, to be called a slave.” The troops roared
their approval, and, when Agamemnon ordered the guards
to release the maiden, they did so immediately. And immediately
Polyxena grabbed the fabric at her neckline with both hands
and ripped her dress open, exposing her breasts, her torso
smooth and perfect as a statue’s. Nude to the waist, (560)
she dropped on one knee before her executioner
and said, “Behold, young man—if it’s my breast you want
to strike, strike here; if here beneath the neck, my throat
is ready.” Neoptolemus both unwillingly and willingly
cut her throat at the windpipe. His steel sword
sliced deep, and her blood gushed out. Even as she died,
your courageous daughter took care to fall decently,
modestly covering what must be hid from men’s eyes. (570)
When she was fully dead, the soldiers busied themselves
with the tasks of death. Some scattered leaves over the body,
while others piled the pyre with pine logs. Those working
reprimanded anyone idle: “Do you stand there,
cur, doing nothing, holding neither gown
nor ornament? Won’t you go find something to give
to the bravest and most noble of maidens?” That’s how the solders
spoke of your dead daughter, Hecuba. Now you’ve heard (580)
the whole story. Having witnessed it myself,
I see you are the luckiest—and most unlucky—of mothers.

CHORUS This sorrow boils up and overruns the house of Priam
and Troy, my city, so the gods want it to.

HECUBA Polyxena, dear, I don’t know which ordeal to manage
first with so many rolling in. There is a vast
sea of pain out there. If I brace against one, another
upends me, then another again. Wave upon wave
of pain. And now I can’t sponge away all you suffered

in dying or keep myself from groaning. But I'm glad (590)
to know you died well, to have at least that bleak
comfort.

Strange to think how barren ground can,
with care—or chance, perhaps—bear fruit; while fertile land
neglected goes to seed, or worse. With people, though,
the worthless are never anything but. The noble,
likewise. Character doesn't change with life's conditions,
But what am I saying? These thoughts are arrows shot in vain.

—A moment, Talthybius. Go tell Agammenmon
something for me. Tell him: No one touches my daughter.
Ask him to keep everyone away until
I get there.

Armies—any large crowd of men—can't be
predicted. Big fields like that are always full of weeds.
Inflamed sailors, like fires, run wild. Things spin out
of control: even good men get singed with badness.

—Old woman, take this pitcher to the beach. Fill it (610)
with sea water. Carry it back to me without
spilling any. I need it all to give my child
her last washing. A bride unwedded; a virgin
bedded by death. I must bathe and lay her out
as she deserves—But how? With what treasures? —I
have nothing left. —So now what? Think, Hecuba.

—My women,
captives like me, but maybe they smuggled out a few
pretty trinkets. I'll go see.

Oh, how much (620)
greatness gone! My home, my Priam, our palace and fortune,
our children—gone now, stripped to the bone. How pointless, all
that boasting of wealth and fame. The richest are those who live
uneventfully, day after day after day.

CHORUS [Strophe]

I was tied to this fate, this sorrow, (630)
when Paris cut the first pine
on Mt. Ida to carve a mast

- THERAPAINA She doesn't see, so caught up in mourning Polyxena
she doesn't recognize the new pain set before her.
- HECUBA O gods, don't tell me it's Cassandra you've brought?
- THERAPAINA It's not Cassandra; she's alive. Prepare yourself.
I'll unwrap the corpse so you see the one you mourn. (680)
- HECUBA Aah! It's my son! My youngest son, dead!
He was supposed to be safe with the Thracian king. O Polydorus!
I'm truly dead. This sight annihilates me utterly.
- O child, child—
I start the song—
The song of death—
Sung from the heart—*
- THERAPAINA You recognize your son now.
- HECUBA Stunningly new;
newly stunning, what I see here. I see all now. (690)
- Wave after wave—
Blow after blow—
Day after day—
Sighs— Groans—*
- CHORUS It's terrible, wretched lady, the terrible ills we suffer.
- HECUBA *O precious child—
Full-wretched mother—
What fate? — What hand? —
What brought you here? —*
- THERAPAINA I do not know, my queen. I found him on the beach.
- HECUBA Did he drown? Or was he killed there on the sand? (700)
- THERAPAINA It seemed to me the waves had washed him up on shore.

AGAMEMNON I see. Which son, poor woman?

HECUBA Not one of those who died
defending Troy.

AGAMEMNON You had another?

HECUBA I did, in vain.
You see him here.

AGAMEMNON But where was he when Troy fell?

HECUBA To save his young life, his father sent him away.

AGAMEMNON Sent him where?

HECUBA To this very country in which
he now lies dead. (770)

AGAMEMNON He sent his son to Polymestor?

HECUBA Yes, and sent with him a sum of bitter gold.

AGAMEMNON But how did your son die? Who killed him?

HECUBA Who else?
Our dear, loving, loyal Thracian friend.

AGAMEMNON How shameful!
Was it lust for gold?

HECUBA Yes, Polymestor
killed for it the minute he learned Troy had fallen.

AGAMEMNON Where was your son found? Who brought him here?

HECUBA This old servant. She found his body tumbling in the surf.

AGAMEMNON Was she looking for him?

Behold a woman royal once upon a time
but now your slave; once rich in children but now
impoverished and childless; exiled, deserted, a prisoner
of war, the most wretched of humans—

(810)

No, don't go,
Agamemnon! Why do you turn away? O gods,
can I accomplish nothing? Why do we work so hard
to learn unnecessary things, when what we need
to know is how to persuade. Without the polished
art of persuasion, we can't get what we want.

It's hopeless.

(820)

I've watched my husband and all my children die; I'm now
a slave; on the horizon, smoke still spirals up
from Troy's smoldering ashes, haunting me.

All but

Cassandra.

No point invoking bonds of love, as if
caresses could be called to testify—but still,
why not?

—My lord, Agamemnon, hear me!

My daughter shares your bed. She sleeps beside you, and you
enjoy her favors. What are they worth to you, these nights
of love? What thanks are due to Cassandra? To me, my lord?
Think of this and hear me: Do you see this corpse,
this dead boy who is Cassandra's brother? By doing
good to him, you do the same for her, the one
who shares your bed. But let me speak a little more!
If I could, I'd grow tongues in my arms and hands
and hair, in the soles of my feet—a thousand tongues
all talking, all crying together, in one voice clinging
to your knees, begging you, imploring you: O lord,
O greatest light of Hellas, lend your avenging hand
to this old woman, even though she's nothing. Help her
anyway. Do your duty. Mete out justice.
Punish this heinous crime against gods and man.

(840)

CHORUS

Strange how our lives ebb and flow, defined
by circumstance and necessity, making

with honed swords, so many swords!

Your towers are crownless, shaved bare, (910)
Bruised with black ash and smoke.
Wounded Ilium, torn from your shores;
I can no longer call you home.

[Antistrophe A]

My ruin struck after midnight.
Our bellies were full of rich foods.
Mists of sleep soothed our eyes
after thanksgiving sacrifice and dance.

In our bed, my husband slept soundly— (920)
his spear at last retired to its peg—
unaware of ships at our shores
the Greeks disgorging on Ilium Troy.

[Strophe B]

I was braiding my hair, absorbed
in my sea-deep mirror, ready to sink
into bed and join my love
in woolen fleeces. But then —shouts,

battle orders, Troy impaled
by war cries: Ooh-rah, Greeks! (930)
Will you storm these hills with fire,
secure your target, and get home?

[Antistrophe B]

Wearing only a thin nightgown
like a simple girl, I left my love
to plead in vain at Artemis' shrine—
My husband dead, I was bound

in chains and yanked to sea.

*my city recedes as the Greeks set sail
Severing me forever from home,
I sank into fathomless grief.* (940)

[Epode]

*Helen, lovely but two-faced,
and her vile cowhand Paris.
Damn them both to hell!*

*I am ruined, wrenched
from my own native land
by their foul marriage-defiling bed.*

*O headwinds, over the black waves
shackle the whore at sea.* (950)
May she never see home.

POLYMESTOR My dearest Hecuba, wife of my late friend
Priam! How I pity you and your ruined Troy.
And now your precious Polyxena—dead—it's just too much.
Oh, what can we count on in this life? Nothing, I say!
Not reputation or good fortune. The gods make it all
pitch and yaw, back and forth, until we're seasick
and confused enough to worship them.
But what help (960)
is any of this with your loss?

Are you bothered I haven't
been to visit you before now? I came here as fast
as I could, Hecuba. It just so happened that I was inland,
seeing about Thracian business, when you arrived here.
As a matter of fact, I was just setting out to see you
when your servant arrived and gave me your message

HECUBA I'm mortified for you to see me in this state, Polymestor.
I've fallen so low since we last met. I'm too ashamed now (970)
to look you in the eye. So don't think of it as hostility toward you,
Polymestor. Besides, it's not customary for a woman to meet
a man's gaze.

POLYMESTOR Indeed. No offense taken, my dear. Now how can I be of service?
What are the “pressing matters” your message spoke of?

HECUBA I have some information to share with you
and your sons, but it’s private. Would you ask
your attendants to leave us for a while? (980)

POLYMESTOR Go away. I’m safe here.
Hecuba is my friend, and the Greek army
is well disposed to me.

But tell me:
How may a fortunate man such as I help
an unfortunate friend?

HECUBA First things first: tell me about the child Priam
and I gave to you for safekeeping. How is he? Does he live?

POLYMESTOR Alive and well, I assure you. In his case anyway, you’re in luck.

HECUBA O dearest friend! Your words speak to your worth! (990)

POLYMESTOR Is there anything else you wish to know?

HECUBA Does he still remember me, his mother?

POLYMESTOR Does he! He even tried to come here secretly to see you.

HECUBA The gold he brought with him from Troy—is it safe?

POLYMESTOR Quite safe—under lock and key in my palace.

HECUBA Guard it well. I hope it isn’t a burdensome temptation.

POLYMESTOR Not at all. I’m content to enjoy the wealth I already have.

HECUBA Do you know why I’ve sent for you and your sons?

POLYMESTOR I don’t. You were just going to tell me.

our business is finished, you can take your sons
back to the place you house my son.

CHORUS —You haven't yet paid the price, but you will.
—Like a man stumbling into foul bilge-water.
—Or swept from shore and drowning in the undertow.
—As the waves cover your head, you'll see how your life
is just a loan that's come due.
—Death is the payment the gods demand.
—Where justice and the gods converge, there's a maelstrom. (1030)
—Your greed for gold leads you down the road to hell.
—Hands that never held a sword will cut your life away.

POLYMESTOR O wretched me, I'm blind! Blinded of my eyes' light!

HEMICHORUS Did you hear the Thracian? Why is he screaming, my friends?

POLYMESTOR O me! My children! You have slaughtered them!

HEMICHORUS Something new and terrible has been done inside the tent!

POLYMESTOR Run, will you? But you won't escape! I will tear
this tent down with my bare hands. (1040)

CHORUS —See that? It looks like—
—Like something heavy thrown against the tent wall!
—What is all the clatter and commotion?
—Should we rush in?
—What should we do?
—Should we break down the door?
—Crisis calls! Hurry now! Hecuba needs us!

HECUBA That's right! Smash it all! Rage and roar! Break
down the door: Nothing will bring your sight back,
or let you see your sons alive again. I've killed them.

CHORUS Did you really do the things you say, Hecuba?
Have you taken down the Thracian?

*I need help. These
women, they've—won't someone
help me?—these woman
have destroyed me!
They have weapons!
My sons! Murder! Butchery!
Help! I need help!
Oh gods, the horrors.
Where can I run?
Where can I go?—Wings,
gods give me wings—
let me fly to the heavens, (1100)
into the light of Orion
or Sirius—or in my wretchedness
I must plunge into the frothing
black chasms of Hades!*

CHORUS Who can blame this man for wanting to die,
for thinking death the cure for so much pain?

AGAMEMNON I came when I heard shouts. Echo ricocheted off
the rock, spreading uproar through the army. (1110)
If we didn't know firsthand that Troy's towers
had fallen to Greek spears, the commotion
would have caused some concern.

POLYMESTOR I know that voice! O my dear friend, Agamemnon!
See what I suffer!

AGAMEMNON Dear gods! O wretched man, who has ruined you?
Who gouged your eyes and blinded you? Who killed
your sons? Whoever it was truly hated all of you.

POLYMESTOR It was Hecuba. She did all of this. She and her women. (1120)
They destroyed me. No, worse.

AGAMEMNON You, Hecuba? Is this true? Did you do these horrible things?

POLYMESTOR What? Is Hecuba here? Where? Show me so I can

I couldn't free my arms because so many of them
pressed against me. And then—o agony!—they pulled
off their brooches and pierced my eyes until the blood
ran thick. Then they ran away. I sprang up after them
like a raging animal, bashing and banging my way
along the walls, searching for them; hunting them. (1170)

These are the things I've suffered in looking out for your
interests, Agamemnon; killing your enemy.
Let me tell you, if anyone in the past has spoken
ill of women, or speaks so now or will speak so
in the future, I'll sum it up for him: Neither sea
nor land has ever produced a more monstrous
creature than woman. I say this for a fact. (1180)

CHORUS Don't blame us all solely on the basis of your woes!

HECUBA Agamemnon, never in the affairs of men
Should the tongue have more power than facts,
Rather, when someone acts well, he should speak well,
And if the opposite, his words should be rotten. (1190)
Glib rhetoric may win us over for a while,
but in the end the smooth talkers die foully.
So much for my prologue to you, Agamemnon.
Now to deal with him.

You claim that by killing my son
you saved the Greeks from another quagmire of war.
What a lie. Tell me, you scum, what possible help
could a barbarian like you be to the Greeks? Whose
favor were you currying in your eager zeal? Trying
to marry into a family? To help a relative? I remember: (1200)
you said the Greeks were going to trample all over
your country's crops. Who in earth do you think
will believe that? I'll tell you the real reason:

It was the gold. You killed my son so you could
get your hands on his gold. If not, then why is it that
while Troy still flourished, while its towers remained
intact, while Priam lived, and while Hector's spear
thrived—and you really wanted to help out Agamemnon— (1210)

how come you didn't kill Polydorus then or at least
turned him over as a threat? Instead, you waited until
you saw the smoke rising from the city that told
you our fortunes had turned for the worse. Only then
did you kill the guest you had taken into your home,
who sat helpless at your hearth. Here's more proof
of your evil: If you really had the interests of the Greeks
at heart as you claim, why didn't you give them the gold
right away—that gold you say isn't yours but Agamemnon's? (1220)
They were in desperate need then, exhausted from battle,
just barely scraping by in a foreign land. But no, even now
you're hoarding that treasure. It's locked up and well
guarded in your house, as you told me yourself. And
another thing: If you had taken care of my child,
as you ought to have, and kept him safe, you'd earn
respect and honor and worthy fame. Hard times
prove the honest friendship of good men, while
prosperity always has friends. If at some point you
were in need and Polydorus was doing well,
my child would have been a great treasury for you.
As it is, you have no friend in Agamemnon there. (1230)
Your gold is gone, as are your children,
And you must live on as you are.

Agamemnon,
if you side with Polymestor, you endorse evil.
This man has betrayed all trust. He has broken
the laws of man and god. He is faithless, irreverent,
and thoroughly corrupt. If you acquit him, what
then do your actions say about you?

CHORUS Just causes make fertile soil for strong arguments!

AGAMEMNON It pains me to sit in judgment of others' troubles, (1240)
but I must. What kind of leader would I be if I pushed
this case aside, having agreed to take it up? So here's
my verdict: Polymestor, you are guilty of murder.
Clearly, it wasn't for my sake or the Greeks' that you
killed Polydorus when he was a guest in your home,
but for the sake of getting his gold. Your rhetoric

exudes the oily panic of a guilty man uncovered.
You've misconstrued facts to put yourself
in a more favorable light. Maybe you think
killing a guest—in this case a child who'd been
put in your care—is a small matter in the larger
scheme of things. But we Greeks think of it
as heinous murder. How could I rule you innocent
and maintain a shred of credibility? I can't.
You committed a brutal crime; be prepared,
therefore, for a justly brutal punishment.

(1250)

POLYMESTOR Argh! How can it be? I'm defeated by a woman,
a slave! Condemned and punished by my inferior.

HECUBA But isn't that just, since you committed crimes?

POLYMESTOR Oh my children! Oh my eyes!

HECUBA You're suffering? What of it? I, too, lost a child.

POLYMESTOR Do you enjoy abusing me, you monster?

HECUBA Shouldn't I be enjoying my revenge on you?

POLYMESTOR But you won't be soon, when the sea spray—

HECUBA Takes me on a one-way trip to Greece?

(1260)

POLYMESTOR —swallows you up as you fall from the masthead.

HECUBA And who does the honors of pushing me into the salty brink?

POLYMESTOR You yourself will climb the ship's mast.

HECUBA Will I grow wings on my back, or what?

POLYMESTOR You'll be transformed—into a dog, a bitch with fiery eyes.

HECUBA How do you know of this metamorphosis of mine?

- POLYMESTOR Our Thracian prophet, Dionysus, told me.
- HECUBA Well, he failed to warn you of your own fate.
- POLYMESTOR If he had, you'd never have tricked me.
- HECUBA So, will I live or will I die? (1270)
- POLYMESTOR You'll die, and when you do your tomb will be called . . .
- HECUBA What? Hecuba's doghouse?
- POLYMESTOR . . . Cynossema, the Sign of the Wretched Bitch.
A bitch's grave for a landmark and warning for sailors.
- HECUBA It makes no difference to me. I've had my revenge.
- POLYMESTOR Your child Cassandra will also die.
- HECUBA That prophecy I spit back in your face! Keep it for yourself.
- POLYMESTOR This man's wife, his bitter housekeeper, will kill her.
- HECUBA May Clytemnestra never be so insane!
- POLYMESTOR She'll kill him, too, lifting her bloody axe again—
- AGAMEMNON Are you out of your mind? Or just asking for trouble? (1280)
- POLYMESTOR Kill me if you like, but a bloody bath still awaits you in Argos.
- AGAMEMNON You, get this man out of my sight!
- POLYMESTOR Did I hit close to home?
- AGAMEMNON And gag him, too.
- POLYMESTOR Go ahead, gag me; I've already spoken.

AGAMEMNON Remove him immediately. Toss him
on a desert island where no one has to listen
to his insolence.

Hecuba, you go and bury your
two dead children.

The rest of you return
to the tents of your masters. It's time to cast off.
See how the ships' sails flap and billow? The wind
is finally blowing.

(1290)

Let us pray for fair weather
and safe passage on our voyage. May this be
the end of our ordeal. May we find all things
well at home. In all our homes.

CHORUS —To the harbor now. —To the tents.
—It is time to embark. —It is time to board
our new lives as slaves. —But the taste
is bitter. —Necessity is hard.

HECUBA

by Euripides

translated by
Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street

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*Working Script for
The 2010 Randolph College Greek Play
directed by Amy R. Cohen*

POLYDORUS

HECUBA

CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN

POLYXENA

ODYSSEUS

TALTHYBIUS

THERAPAINA

AGAMEMNON

POLYMESTOR

SONS OF POLYMESTOR

SOLDIERS

GUARDS

SERVANTS

Notes on the text:

- You will find no stage directions here. Most are implied if you take cues from the text, and the rest we'll sort out in blocking. If you have a particular question, email Cohen.
- *Text in italics* will be sung, and may change somewhat by the time the songs are fully written.
- In Chorus speeches, this symbol— »» —means a change of speaker or speakers within the Chorus.
- The line numbers in parentheses on the right margin correspond to the original Greek.
- The scene numbers are our own breakdown of scenes.
- “Strophe,” “Antistrophe,” and “Epode” correspond to the matching stanzas and the codas of the original Greek.

POLYDORUS

[Scene 1]

I come from bleakest darkness, where corpses lurk
and Hades lives apart from other gods. I am
Polydorus, youngest son of Hecuba and Priam.
My father, worried Troy might fall to Greek offensives,
sent me here, to Thrace, my mother's father's home
and land of his friend Polymestor, who controls
with his spear this rich plain of the Chersonese
and its people. My father sent a large stash of gold
with me, to insure that, if Ilium's walls indeed (10)
were toppled, I'd be provided for. He did all this
because I was too young to wear armor, my arms
too gangly to carry a lance. As long as the towers
of Troy remained intact, and the stones that marked
our boundaries stood upright, and my brother Hector
was lucky with his spear, I thrived living here
with my father's Thracian friend, like some hapless sapling. (20)
But once Troy was shattered—Hector dead, our home
eviscerated, and my father himself slaughtered
on Apollo's altar by Achilles' murderous son—
then Polymester killed me. This "friend" tossed me dead
into the ocean for the sake of gold, so he could keep
Priam's wealth for himself. My lifeless body washes
ashore and washes back to sea with the waves' endless
ebb and flow, and remains unmourned, unburied.
Disembodied, I hover now above Hecuba, my dear mother, (30)
as I have for the three days since she and the other women
were brought here, captives on their way to Greece.
But however eager for home, the Greeks must wait here
on the coast of Thrace, sails slack because Achilles stilled
the winds. Appearing above his tomb, he demands my sister
Polyxena as a sacrifice to appease his wounded honor. (40)
He'll get it, too. His men won't dare refuse him. So fate
leads my sister to her death today. And my mother
will see two corpses of two children: mine and Polyxena's.
My body will wash up in the surf so she can bury me
properly. I begged this crumb of Hades, and it was granted. (50)
But for now I'll get out of the way. See how Hecuba
stumbles from the doorway of Agamemnon's tent,
upset by nightmares and visions of my ghost.
Alas! Old mother, your royal palaces are reduced to meager
corners in another ruler's tents. How poorly you fare
—as poorly as you once fared well. To balance out

your past prosperity, some god has ruined you.

HECUBA I am old. I am plagued [Scene 2a]
by bad dreams. Once your queen, (60)
I am frail, a worn hag
you must lead from the huts.
My dear friends, sister slaves,
help me walk, hold my hand,
let me lean on your arms
like a staff. Bear me up.
My own legs are too weak
to support me. O lightning
of Zeus, tell me why
I am snatched from my sleep
by these specters of dread.
Goddess Earth, from whose womb (70)
these nocturnal invasions
emerge like the stirring
of bats, I recoil
from these nightmares
O you underworld gods,
please protect Polydorus,
my anchor and last
of my house, who abides (80)
in this Thracian domain,
in the home of a friend.
Oh the horrors I dreamed—
I still shudder with fear!
Find Cassandra or Helenus—
Ask them to read
these phantasms and explain
the young doe that was torn
from my lap and destroyed
by a wolf with bloody jaws. (90)

CHORUS I am here—I arrived— [Scene 2b]
Hecuba— just as fast
as I could—from the tent (100)
of my master—where my lot
is now cast—where command
made me slave—I was caught
like an animal, marched
out of Troy at the point
of a Greek spear.

»» I bring news
»» It's not good—I regret
I must say—I've been told—
the Greek army convened—
they have voted—your daughter,
Polyxena—she
is the one—it's decided—
that she will be sacrificed.

»» To Achilles.

»» His ghost, reappeared at his tomb,
as you know, in a blaze
of gold armor and rage.

(110)

»» The Greek sails were unfurled,
all aboard for the launch,
when the warrior's ghost
intervened.

»» "Do you think
you can leave," the wraith howled,
"without honoring me?"

»» Then rough waves of dispute
overran the composure
of captain and crew—

»» and the Greeks were now split
between those who would kill
a young girl—your daughter—
to appease fierce Achilles
and those who disagreed

»» To your cause spoke that chief
in command, Agamemnon,

(120)

»» master of Cassandra.

»» The sons of Theseus rebutted,

»» exclaiming the tomb of Achilles
deserved the girl's blood;

»» that Cassandra's bed must defer
to the warrior's brave spear.

»» There things stood, at a stand-off,

»» an intractable draw.

»» Then that wily Odysseus spoke.

»» He festooned

and perfumed his appeal
the air thick with his words— (130)

»» till his audience swooned
at his feet as he crooned,
“Who could suffer the dead
telling tales down in Hades
about Greeks who deserted
the soldiers who died
for Hellas on the fields
of war?”

»» Every soldier
agreed that to slight
brave Achilles was
sacrilege.

»» Sacrifice
carried the day. (140)

»» And Odysseus is coming—

»» At any moment—

»» He will tear the sweet foal from your breast—

»» You must go—

»» He will wrench your Polyxena out of your hands—

»» To the ships—

»» To the altars—

»» At the knees of Agamemnon—

»» Pray—

»» Ask the gods of heaven—

»» And Hades—

»» If your prayers convey—

»» Then your daughter is saved—

»» If they fail, you must see your own child put to death—

»» Her throat cut—

»» And the flow of red blood from her gold-bearing neck— (150)

who wronged Achilles far more than we.
And thus, (270)

my case for justice against the ghost's. Now hear my claim
on your gratitude. As you yourself have readily confirmed,
when our positions were reversed in Troy, you fell
at my feet, begging for your life. You clasped my hand
and touched my aging cheek, here. But now it's *my* turn
to fall, clasping *your* hand, touching your cheek, just so.

To ask that you return the favor and spare my child.

Please, I beg you. Don't take my daughter from me.

Let her live. Haven't enough died already?

All I've lost lives on in her. She is my solace. (280)

She is my staff, my nurse, my guide. She is my Troy.

Those with power should use that power carefully.

Those in luck should not assume that luck will hold,

as I well know. Once, I was powerful and lucky,

a queen—but no more. A day obliterated all.

Odysseus, I implore you, by your bearded chin,

have pity on me. Reconvene the army, persuade them

it's wrong to kill the very women you spared—because

you pitied them—in Troy. Remind your men that Greek

laws pertaining to murder protect enslaved and free (290)

alike, without distinction. You have the power—the authority

and the lucky eloquence. But even if you babble

or stutter, your esteemed reputation, like a steady

wind, will swell the sail of your words, carrying them

farther than those of blowhards and other lesser men.

CHORUS Who could be so calloused as to remain unmoved, hearing
your sad complaints and mournful refrains of abundant woe?

ODYSSEUS A prefatory caveat, Hecuba: Just because
I make political speeches doesn't mean that I
must therefore be your enemy, so don't in anger (300)
misconstrue me so.

First off, I acknowledge,
unconditionally, your claim on my gratitude.
You saved my life, and, by the gods, I owe you. I stand
ready to honor my debt by saving *your* life. But
my public vow to the Greek troops I must also
stand by, and that is to reward our best warrior
with Polyxena, your daughter. It's an invalid premise,
you see, to think that these two lives—yours, hers—

can be interchanged.

Furthermore, our cities
will fail if noble and devoted soldiers earn
no greater returns than do lesser men. Achilles
deserves honor and tribute more than anyone:
He died for Greece, and by the gods we owe him. (310)

What conduct is more shameless than enlisting
a man's good and faithful service while he lives,
only to throw him to the dogs when he's dead?
Well, then. And if we had to go to war again,
would we have troops ready and willing to deploy
Or would men think, "Why bother? Better to lie
low and save my own skin." Imagine what
adverse effects dishonoring the dead would have on
recruiting efforts, on public perception, on morale.
For me, a few essential crumbs will suffice
while I'm alive. But I want the full-out display (320)
of honors and commemorations when I die,
a worthy tomb to make this life worthwhile. That's
the thing that lasts.

Third, you complain how you've suffered.
Well, we Greeks have suffered, too. Our old women
and our old men are no less wretched than yours.
Our young brides are likewise widowed of fine grooms
who sleep in Trojan dust instead their marriage beds.
Just as we endure these hardships, so can you.
And if you think I'm wrong to honor the legacy
of a great warrior like Achilles, then go ahead
and call me callous. You foreigners, feel free—
don't keep your friends friends and don't
respect the dead. That way Greece stays on top, (330)
and you get the barbarous fate that you deserve.

CHORUS Witness here how the violence of war enslaves,
forcing its captives to endure the unendurable.

HECUBA O daughter, all my arguments against your murder
were useless, feeble puffs of air accomplishing nothing.
If you have more skill than your mother, use it now.
Like the nightingale, sing out all your notes, or you
will lose your life. Fall prostrate at this man's knee
and persuade him. He has children, too, I know. (340)
You may yet move him to pity.

- POLYXENA I see you, Odysseus, how you've hidden your right
hand in your cloak and turned your face away so I
can't touch your hand or beard in supplication.
But you have nothing to worry about. I'll follow you
to Achilles' tomb, both out of necessity and
because I wish to. I want to die. If I didn't
I could be called a lowly coward of a woman.
Why should I live? My father was king of Troy, ruler
of all Phrygians. I was born royalty, and I was reared
to expect I'd marry my choice of kings, exciting rivalry
over whose home and hearth I'd grace as bride. I was
mistress of the Idaeans, center of their attention, godlike
—except in my mortality. Now that I'm
a slave, I am infatuated with death. Imagine:
some cruel-minded master could buy me for money—me,
the daughter of Priam, sister of Hector and many others
—and take me to his house, force me to cook for him,
to sweep and tend the shuttle, to work day after day
while my bed, once thought fit for rulers, is polluted
by some bought slave. No, it will not happen.
That life is inconceivable. While the light
in my eyes is still free, I yield it up, giving
my body to Hades. So lead me, Odysseus; take me
to my death. I see no reason to hope for or believe
in anything better. And, Mother, don't interfere.
Help me instead. I would rather die than suffer
the shame of wearing slavery's yoke around my neck. (350)
- CHORUS The signs of good breeding are always impressive. But
nobility is even more noble when it's deserved. (360)
- HECUBA You're spoken well, daughter, but there is pain in that
good speaking. Odysseus, I understand
that Peleus's son must be granted his sacrifice
and that your reputation must be preserved. Here's
how to accomplish both without killing this girl:
Lead me to the pyre and appease the ghost by killing me.
Indeed, I—who gave birth to Paris who with his bow
slew the great Achilles—should not be spared. (370)
- ODYSSEUS Achilles didn't ask for your death, old woman, but for hers. (380)
- HECUBA Then slaughter me with my daughter. That gives the earth

and Achilles' corpse twice as much blood to drink.

ODYSSEUS That's unnecessary. Your daughter's death is enough.
Believe me when I say I wish this one death
didn't have to be.

HECUBA Then I must die with her.

ODYSSEUS Excuse me? I'm not aware that I was taking orders.

HECUBA I'll cling to her like ivy.

ODYSSEUS Not if you obey those wiser than you.

HECUBA She's my daughter. I won't let go. (400)

ODYSSEUS And I won't go away. So take your leave of her.

POLYXENA Mother, do as I say—wait, Odysseus, have some
patience with a parent's understandable fury—
Mother, listen to me, don't try to fight those
who have you in their power. Do you want to be shoved around,
to have your fragile aged skin scraped and torn
when you fall to the ground? To risk losing your dignity
being dragged off by some young soldier? No,
Mother, it would be unseemly. Instead, dear
unhappy one, give me your sweet hand and lay (410)
your cheek to mine. Now for the very last time,
I see the brilliant circle of the sun. Now I say
my final words to you, O one who carried me in
her womb and bore me. And now I go . . .

HECUBA Dear child, how I, still leashed to daylight, will mourn for you.

POLYXENA . . . unmarried, not royally wed as I should have been!

HECUBA You're pitiful, child, and I'm a wretched woman.

POLYXENA In Hades' darkness I will lie apart from you.

HECUBA O gods! What shall I do? Where turn to end my life?

POLYXENA I, born in freedom, to die a slave. (420)

HECUBA And I, bereft of fifty children.

POLYXENA Mother, what do you want me to tell my brother
Hector, and Priam, my father, your husband?

HECUBA Tell them how wretched I am.

POLYXENA O breasts that suckled me!

HECUBA O daughter who grieves me with an untimely, unhappy fate!

POLYXENA Farewell, Mother, and say farewell to Cassandra for me . . .

HECUBA Others may fare well, but not your mother. (430)

POLYXENA Now lead me away, Odysseus, with a veil shrouding
my head. My mother's grief has melted my heart, and I
have melted hers.

O sunlight! I will savor you
in the short time left between this moment and the sword
at Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA Aah! I faint. My legs dissolve.
Polyxena, stay with me! Reach out your hand,
grab hold of mine. Don't go, daughter, don't leave me
childless! Let me die, my friends. (440)

CHORUS *O sea-breeze* [Scene 4]
that carries
ships across heaving waves,
Oh, where are you
taking me now?
In what home will I be slave?

Will I be
goods for Argos?
goods for Sparta or Phthia? (450)
Or in Delos,
sent by sea-oar,
In what land will I be slave?

Shall I, there
with Delian maidens,
praise the bow of Artemis, (460)
golden garment in the temple,
In what land will I be slave?

Or in Athens?
There, shall I sew
on Athena's bright new robe?
Or perhaps there
weave in Titans. (470)
In what land will I be slave?

Alas for my children,
alas for the fathers,
alas for our native land
now leveled and slashed by Argive spears
to ash-heaps and smoke and tears.

And so I am taken
so far from my Asia, (480)
to Europe, to be a slave.
In what foreign land does death's dark escape
condemn me to slavery and rape?

Achilles' son led your daughter by the hand to the top
of the mound. I was standing nearby. A designated corps
of young guards followed, on hand to restrain any rearing
or bolting of your calf. Neoptolemus took a gold cup,
filled it with wine, and lifted it in honor of his dead father.
He nodded to me, and on that cue, I raised my voice
over the chatter gusting around me and said, "Silence
in the ranks. All soldiers hereby stand at attention
until further orders." Thus I becalmed the entire army.

They stood hushed and breathless as Neoptolemus prayed,
"O Achilles, father and warrior, accept this cup
that the army and I offer you as a gift. Let this libation
entice your ghost to appear and drink the maiden's blood,
dark and pure. In return, grant us winds,
strong and favorable. Free the prows and bridling ropes
of our ships, and fill our sails for safe passage home."

Then, seizing his double-gilt sword by the hilt, he drew it
from its sheath and motioned to the guards to seize Polyxena.
Your daughter, when she saw this, gave this proud speech:
"O Greeks who sacked my city, know that I die willingly.
Let no man touch me. I will bare the nape
of my own neck to the sword. For the gods' sakes, let me
be free of fetters when you kill me so that I may die free,
and among the dead I won't have to be ashamed,

being a queen, to be called a slave." The troops roared
their approval, and, when Agamemnon ordered the guards
to release the maiden, they did so immediately. And immediately
Polyxena grabbed the fabric at her neckline with both hands
and ripped her dress open, exposing her breasts, her torso
smooth and perfect as a statue's. Nude to the waist,

she dropped on one knee before her executioner
and said, "Behold, young man—if it's my breast you want
to strike, strike here; if here beneath the neck, my throat
is ready." Neoptolemus both unwillingly and willingly
cut her throat at the windpipe. His steel sword
sliced deep, and her blood gushed out. Even as she died,
your courageous daughter took care to fall decently,
modestly covering what must be hid from men's eyes.

When she was fully dead, the soldiers busied themselves
with the tasks of death. Some scattered leaves over the body,
while others piled the pyre with pine logs. Those working
reprimanded anyone idle: "Do you stand there,

cur, doing nothing, holding neither gown
nor ornament? Won't you go find something to give
to the bravest and most noble of maidens?" That's how the solders
spoke of your dead daughter, Hecuba. Now you've heard (580)
the whole story. Having witnessed it myself,
I see you: the luckiest—and most unlucky—of mothers.

CHORUS This sorrow boils up and overruns the house of Priam
and Troy, my city, so the gods want it.

HECUBA Polyxena, dear, I don't know which ordeal to face
first with so many rolling in. There is a vast
sea of pain out there. If I brace against one, another
upends me, then another again. Wave upon wave
of pain. And now I can't sponge away all you suffered
in dying or keep myself from groaning. But I'm glad (590)
to know you died well, to have at least that bleak comfort.

Strange to think how barren ground can,
with care—or chance, perhaps—bear fruit; while fertile land
neglected goes to seed, or worse. With people, though,
the worthless are never anything but. The noble,
likewise. Character doesn't change with life's conditions. (600)
But what am I saying? These thoughts are arrows shot in vain.

A moment, Talthybius. Go tell the Greeks
something for me. Tell them: No one touches my daughter.
Keep everyone away until I get there.

Armies—any large crowd of men—can't be predicted.
Inflamed sailors, like fires, run wild. Things spin out
of control: even good men get singed with badness.

Old woman, take this pitcher to the beach. Fill it
with sea water. Carry it back to me without
spilling any. I need it all to give my child (610)
her last washing. A bride unwedded; a virgin
bedded by death. I must bathe and lay her out
as she deserves. But how? With what treasures? I
have nothing left. So now what? Think, Hecuba.

My women, captives like me, but maybe
they smuggled out a few pretty trinkets. I'll go see.

Oh, how much greatness gone!
My home, my Priam, our palace and fortune, (620)
our children—gone now, stripped to the bone. How pointless, all

that boasting of wealth and fame. The richest are those who live
uneventfully, day after day after day.

CHORUS

*I was tied to this fate, this sorrow,
when Paris first cut the pine
on Mt. Ida to carve a ship's beam
to sail cross the ocean's brine
to anchor the bed of Helen,
that sun-kissed, golden girl.*

[Strophe] [Scene 6] (630)

*Necessity, all entangled—
Suffering encircled by worse.
The folly that launched on Ilium
A host of woes and curse
Began when the Idean herdsman
Judged the three bickering gods.*

[Antistrophe]
(640)

*Spear and slaughter and shame:
A widowed bride in Sparta
Groans while a mother in Troy
tears at her grey thinning hair
and claws and claws
and claws at her red childless cheeks.*

[Epode]
(650)

*Your full-wretched mother—
What fate? — Oh what hand? —
What doom brought you here? —*

THERAPAINA I do not know, my queen. I found him on the beach.

HECUBA Did he drown? Or was he killed there on the sand? (700)

THERAPAINA It seemed to me the waves had washed him up on shore.

HECUBA *The nightmares winged black
They told me the truth—
My son, dead in dreams—
My son, dead in life—*

CHORUS Who killed him then? Did your dreams show you that?

HECUBA I tell you friends, a friend and ally murdered him. (710)
The king of Thrace. To whom my careful husband sent
our son—and his future wealth—for safekeeping.

CHORUS You're saying Polymestor killed your son for gold?

HECUBA *Unbearable ghost
Unspeakable death
A monstrous bad host—
A murdered young guest—

His poor broken limbs—
His sweet mangled flesh—
The traitor's damned sword—
No pity—None—* (720)

CHORUS The gods have loaded you with more pain than you
can bear.

»» But look, I see Lord Agamemnon coming.

»» Let's be quiet now.

AGAMEMNON Hecuba, why on earth haven't you buried your daughter? [Scene 7b]

I got your message from Talthybius. You said none
of us should touch her, and so, as you directed, we've
left her alone, not laying a hand on her. But you,
you take your time in a way that makes me wonder. (730)
I've come to hurry you along. We Greeks take pride
in doing things well, if such things be worth doing.
Hold on, what corpse is this I see before the tents?

A Trojan? Those are no familiar Greek wrappings.

- HECUBA O you unfortunate (and I mean me by saying
“you”), Hecuba! What should I do? Do I
beg at his knees for mercy, or bite my tongue in silence?
- AGAMEMNON Why are you turning your back to me, Hecuba?
What has happened here? Tell me about this body. (740)
- HECUBA If to him I’m nothing but a contemptible enemy and slave,
he’ll push me from his knees. I couldn’t bear that.
- AGAMEMNON I can’t read minds, you know. I can’t help unless you speak.
- HECUBA But maybe I’m seeing him as an enemy,
when, really, he isn’t?
- AGAMEMNON Still nothing? Suit yourself then.
If you don’t want me to know, I don’t want to hear.
- HECUBA I can’t do what I need to do without his help.
Why do I waste time debating? Win or lose, (750)
he’s my only hope of avenging my children.
Agamemnon, hear my supplication. I beg you
by your knees, your chin, and your happy right hand.
- AGAMEMNON What are you asking for, Hecuba? For your freedom?
That’s easy enough.
- HECUBA Sir, not what you expect. Do you see this corpse
I’m crying over? (760)
- AGAMEMNON Of course I see it. I’ve been trying
to get you to tell me about it.
- HECUBA This is the body of my son.
I carried him in my womb. I gave birth to him.
- AGAMEMNON I see. Which son, poor woman?
- HECUBA Not one of those who died defending Troy.
- AGAMEMNON You had another?
- HECUBA I did, in vain. You see him here.
- AGAMEMNON But where was he when Troy fell?

HECUBA To save his young life, his father sent him away.

AGAMEMNON Sent him where?

HECUBA To this very country in which he now lies dead. (770)

AGAMEMNON He sent his son to Polymestor?

HECUBA Yes, and sent with him a sum of bitter gold.

AGAMEMNON But how did your son die? Who killed him?

HECUBA Who else? Our dear, loving, loyal Thracian friend.

AGAMEMNON How shameful! Was it lust for gold?

HECUBA Yes, Polymestor killed for it the minute he learned Troy had fallen.

AGAMEMNON Where was your son found? Who brought him here?

HECUBA This old servant. She found his body tumbling in the surf.

~~AGAMEMNON Was she looking for him?~~

~~HECUBA No, she went to fetch
 sea water to wash Polyxena's body.~~ (780)

AGAMEMNON Polymestor must have killed him and then thrown him in the sea.

HECUBA Hacked up, pounded by waves. Look at the lacerations
 on his skin.

AGAMEMNON You are indeed a wretched woman.

HECUBA I'm already dead, Agamemnon. I'm past suffering.

AGAMEMNON Alas! Is there a woman more unfortunate?

HECUBA None, except Misfortune herself. But listen
 to my request, my supplication. See if you think
 my hardships are justified. If so, that's it; I won't
 bother you further. But if not, then please help me.
 Help me get revenge on that deceitful friend, (790)
 that fiendish and malignant host. I can't count
 the number of times he sat at my table, an honored guest.
 In thanks, he kills my son? He's a calculated, cold-blooded
 murderer. I know I'm nothing but a powerless slave, but the gods
 have power—as does the underlying law that governs
 them. It is by virtue of this law—this basic

moral code—that the gods and our belief in them (800)
exists, and we know right from wrong, good from evil.
If you corrupt this law, allowing those who murder
guests and violate the gods to go unpunished,
you poison the root of our humanity. Justice
withers and dies.

Preserve us, then, and pity me.
Step back like an artist and see the whole picture of me.
Behold a woman royal once upon a time (810)
but now your slave; once rich in children but now
impoverished and childless; exiled, deserted, a prisoner
of war, the most wretched of humans—

~~No, don't go,~~
~~Agamemnon!~~ Why do you turn away? O gods,
can I accomplish nothing? Why do we work so hard
to learn unnecessary things, when what we need
to know is how to persuade. Without the polished
art of persuasion, we can't get what we want.

It's hopeless. (820)
I've watched my husband and all my children die; I'm now
a slave; on the horizon, smoke still spirals up
from Troy's smoldering ashes, haunting me.

All but Cassandra.

No point invoking bonds of love, as if
caresses could be called to testify—but still,
why not?

My daughter shares your bed. She sleeps beside you, and you
enjoy her favors. What are they worth to you, these nights
of love? What thanks are due to Cassandra? To me, my lord? (830)

Think of this and hear me: Do you see this corpse,
this dead boy who is Cassandra's brother? By doing
good to him, you do the same for her, the one
who shares your bed. But let me speak a little more!
If I could, I'd grow tongues in my arms and hands
and hair, in the soles of my feet—a thousand tongues
all talking, all crying together, in one voice clinging
to your knees, begging you, imploring you: O lord, (840)
O greatest light of Hellas, lend your avenging hand

CHORUS

*You, my hometown Ilium, no longer
can you be called unravished, unspoiled.
Such a fog of Greeks enveloped you
with honed swords, so many swords!*

[Strophe A] [Scene 8]

*Your towers crownless, shaved bare,
Bruised with black ash and smoke.
Wounded Ilium, torn from your shores;
I can no longer call you home.*

(910)

*My ruin struck after midnight.
Our bellies were full of rich foods.
Mists of sleep soothing our eyes
when we had sacrificed and danced.*

[Antistrophe A]

*In our bed, my husband slept soundly—
his spear at last retired to its peg—
unaware of ships at our shores
the Greeks disgorging on Ilium Troy.*

(920)

*I was braiding my hair, absorbed
in my sea-deep mirror, ready to sink
into bed and join my love
in woolen fleeces. But then —shouts,*

[Strophe B]

*battle orders, Troy impaled
by war cries: "Ooh-rah, Greeks!
Will you storm these hills with fire,
secure your target, and get home?"*

(930)

*Wearing only a thin nightgown
a simple girl, I left my love
to plead in vain at Artemis' shrine—
My husband dead, I was bound*

[Antistrophe B]

*in chains and yanked to sea.
my city recedes as the Greeks set sail
Severing me forever from home,
I sank into fathomless grief.*

(940)

*Helen, lovely but two-faced,
and her vile cowhand Paris.
Damn them both to hell!*

[Epode]

*I am ruined, wrenched
from my own native land
by their foul marriage-defiling bed.*

*O headwinds, over the black waves
shackle the whore at sea.
May she never see home.*

(950)

in the future, I'll sum it up for him: Neither sea (1180)
nor land has ever produced a more monstrous
creature than woman. I say this for a fact.

CHORUS Don't blame us all solely on the basis of your woes!

HECUBA Agamemnon, never in the affairs of men
Should the tongue have more power than facts,
Rather, when someone acts well, he should speak well,
And if the opposite, his words should be rotten. (1190)
Glib rhetoric may win us over for a while,
but in the end the smooth talkers die foully.
So much for my prologue to you, Agamemnon.
Now to deal with him.

You claim that by killing my son
you saved the Greeks from another quagmire of war.
What a lie. Tell me, you scum, what possible help
could a barbarian like you be to the Greeks? Whose
favor were you trying to curry in your zeal? Trying
to marry into a family? To help a relative? I remember: (1200)
you said the Greeks were going to trample all over
your country's crops. Who in earth do you think
will believe that? I'll tell you the real reason:

It was the gold. You killed my son so you could
get your hands on his gold. If not, then why is it that
while Troy still flourished, while its towers remained
intact, while Priam lived, and while Hector's spear (1210)
thrived—and you really wanted to help out Agamemnon—

how come you didn't kill Polydorus then or at least
turned him over as a threat? Instead, you waited until
you saw the smoke rising from the city that told
you our fortunes had turned for the worse. Only then
did you kill the guest you had taken into your home,
who sat helpless at your hearth. Here's more proof
of your evil: If you really had the interests of the Greeks
at heart as you claim, why didn't you give them the gold
right away—that gold you say isn't yours but Agamemnon's? (1220)
They were in desperate need then, exhausted from battle,
just barely scraping by in a foreign land. But no, even now
you're hoarding that treasure. It's locked up and well
guarded in your house, as you told me yourself. And
another thing: If you had taken care of my child,
as you ought to have, and kept him safe, you'd earn

respect and honor and worthy fame. Hard times
prove the honest friendship of good men, while
prosperity always has friends. If at some point you
were in need and Polydorus was doing well,
my child would have been a great treasury for you.
As it is, you have no friend in Agamemnon there. (1230)
Your gold is gone, as are your children,
And you must live on as you are.

Agamemnon,
if you side with Polymestor, you endorse evil.
This man has betrayed all trust. He has broken
the laws of man and god. He is faithless, irreverent,
and thoroughly corrupt. If you acquit him, what
would your actions say about you? No disrespect, sir.

CHORUS □□□ □□□ Just causes make fertile soil for strong arguments!

AGAMEMNON It pains me to sit in judgment of others' troubles, (1240)
but I must. What kind of leader would I be if I pushed
this case aside, having agreed to take it up? So here's
my verdict: Polymestor, you are guilty of murder.
Clearly, it wasn't for my sake or the Greeks' that you
killed Polydorus when he was a guest in your home,
but for the sake of getting his gold. Your rhetoric
exudes the oily panic of a guilty man uncovered.
You've misconstrued facts to put yourself
in a more favorable light. Maybe to you
killing a guest is a small matter in the larger
scheme of things. But we Greeks think of it
as heinous murder. How could I rule you innocent
and maintain a shred of credibility? I can't.
You dared to do a brutal crime; be prepared, (1250)
therefore, to endure a brutal punishment.

POLYMESTOR □□□□□ How can it be? I'm defeated by a woman,
a slave! Condemned and punished by my inferior.

HECUBA But isn't that just, since you committed crimes?

POLYMESTOR Oh my children! Oh my eyes!

HECUBA You're suffering? What of it? I, too, lost a child.

POLYMESTOR Do you enjoy abusing me, you monster?

HECUBA Shouldn't I be enjoying my revenge on you?

POLYMESTOR But you won't be soon, when the sea spray . . .

HECUBA Takes me on a one-way trip to Greece? (1260)

POLYMESTOR . . . swallows you up as you fall from the masthead.

HECUBA And who does the honors of pushing me into the salty brink?

POLYMESTOR You yourself will climb the ship's mast.

HECUBA Will I grow wings on my back, or what?

POLYMESTOR You'll be transformed—into a dog, a bitch with fiery eyes.

HECUBA How do you know of this metamorphosis of mine?

POLYMESTOR Our Thracian prophet, Dionysus, told me.

HECUBA Well, he failed to warn you of your own fate.

POLYMESTOR If he had, you'd never have tricked me.

HECUBA So, will I live or will I die? (1270)

POLYMESTOR You'll die, and when you do your tomb will be called . . .

HECUBA What? Hecuba's doghouse?

POLYMESTOR . . . Cynossema, the Sign of the Wretched Bitch.
A bitch's grave for a landmark and warning for sailors.

HECUBA It makes no difference to me. I've had my revenge.

POLYMESTOR Your child Cassandra will also die.

HECUBA That prophecy I spit back in your face! Keep it for yourself.

POLYMESTOR This man's wife, his bitter housekeeper, will kill her.

HECUBA May Clytemnestra never be so insane!

POLYMESTOR She'll kill him, too, lifting her bloody axe again—

AGAMEMNON Are you out of your mind? Or just asking for trouble? (1280)

POLYMESTOR Kill me if you like, but a bloody bath still awaits you in Argos.

AGAMEMNON You, get this man out of my sight!

POLYMESTOR Did I hit close to home?

AGAMEMNON And gag him, too.

POLYMESTOR Go ahead, gag me; I've already spoken.

AGAMEMNON Remove him immediately. Toss him
 on a desert island where no one has to listen
 to his insolence. Hecuba—
 Hecuba, you go and bury your two dead children.
 The rest of you return
 to the tents of your masters. It's time to cast off.
 See how our sails flap and billow? The wind
 is finally blowing.
 Let us pray for fair weather
 and safe passage on our voyage. May this be
 the end of our ordeal. May we find all things
 well at home. In all our homes.

(1290)

CHORUS »» To the harbor now.
 »» To the tents.
 »» It is time to embark.
 »» It is time to board our new lives as slaves.
 »» But the taste is bitter.
 »» Necessity is hard.

Hecuba - Ode One

C. Cohen

Piano

Am Dm

What No howl fam ily no ment? For house, A

Dm Am Dm Dm Am Am

lorn now and las all is old. En my slaved it's too hard lambs to much to be borne. No What take What

E Dm Dm Am Dm Am Dm

one god to can pro tect me! tru ust? What guide can a vail O

Dm Am Dm Dm E Dm Dm Am

bear ers of grief I no lon ger care for Life in the li ight!

2

Hecuba - Ode One

28

Am Dm Dm Am

Sad De- mo ther of mine, what more can you take such
De- fense-less my self A las I must die be

35

Dm Dm Am Am E Dm Dm Am

out rage and woe con- demned it's too much I can not de fend you!
slain like a lamb and so you will watch as I'm snatched a wa- ay!

42

Dm Am Dm Dm Am Dm

My tor- ment will end I'll lie with the dead, O mo ther for

49

Dm E Dm Dm Am

you I weep and la me ent!

Hecuba - Ode One Reprise

C. Cohen

Piano

Am Dm

O Now child wave O my af - ter child wave I and

Dm Am Dm Dm Am Am E

start now my blow af - ter song blow The on song day af - ter death day from the deep sighs and the heart. groans

Dm Dm Am Dm Am Dm Dm

My own pre-cious child your full wre-tched

Am Dm Dm E Dm Dm Am

mother what fate oh what hand What doom brought you he - ere?

2

Hecuba - Ode One

28

Am Dm Dm Am

The night-mares winged black They told me the truth My
Un - bear - a - ble ghost Un

35

Dm Dm Am Am E Dm Dm Am

son, dead in speak - a - ble dreams, my death A son dead in mon-strous bad life host A mur - dered young gue - est

42

Dm Am Dm Dm Am Dm

His poor bro-ken limbs His sweet man-gled flesh The trai-tor's damned

49

Dm E Dm Dm Am

sword No pi - ty no - one

Hecuba - Ode Two

C. Cohen

Piano

Cm D# F Cm Cm Cm

O sea breeze
 Will I there be
 Shall I there with
 Orin A thens

D# D# Cm Cm D# F Cm Cm

that carries
 goods for Argos
 De lian mai dens
 there shall I sew
 ships a cross the
 goods for Spar ta
 praise the bow of
 on A the na's
 hea ving waves
 or Pth ia
 Ar te mis
 bright new robe
 oh where are you
 or in De los
 or den gar ment
 or per haps there

D# D# D# Gm F Cm Cm

ta king me now
 sent by sea oar
 in the tem ple
 weave in Ti tans
 In what home will
 In what land will
 In what land will
 In what land will
 I be slave?
 I be slave?
 I be slave?
 I be slave?
 And
 las so for my
 I am

2 D# A# Cm G#m- Ode Two D# A# Cm

chil dren A las for the fa thers A las for our na tive land!
ta ken so far from my A sia to Eu rope to be a slave!

G Cm Cm Cm Cm Cm G

Now le veled and slashed by Ar give spears to ash heaps and smoke and
In what for eign land does death's dark es cape con demn me to sla 'vryand

Cm

tears.
rape?

Hecuba - Ode 3

Piano

Am $\text{♩} \overline{160}$ Am Am Am **C. Cohen**
Dm

I was tied to this fate this sor
Ne ces si ty all en tan

8 Am Am Dm E Dm Dm

row gled When Suf fer ing en cut circled the by pine worse
On Mt. and the I fol ly that carve a launched on

15 G Dm Dm E Am Am

ship's beam to sail cross the o cean's brine to an chor the
Il ium a host of woes and curse be gan when the

22 Am E Am Am Dm Am

bed of He len that sun kissed go ol den girl.
I de an herds man that judged the three bick er ing gods.

2

Hecuba - Ode 3

AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm

29

Spear and slaughter and shame

AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm

38

a widowed bride in Sparta

Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm

47

groans while a mother in Troy

Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm

55

tears at her grey thinning hair

Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm

63

and claws and claws and claws at her red

Hecuba - Ode 3

3

71 DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm

child less cheeks.

80

Hecuba - Ode Four

C. Cohen

Piano

Am Am E Am Am Dm

You my home town Il - ium no long er can you be called un
My ruin struck af - ter mid - night(our) bel - lies were full of
I wasbraiding my hair ab sorbed in in my - sea deep mir - ror
Wearing only a thin night gown a simple girl I

Am E Am Am E Am

rav ished un spoiled? Such a fog of Greeks en veloped you
rich foods Mists of sleep and soothing our eyes
rea - dy to sink love To plead in bed and join my love
left my love To plead in bed and join my love shrine

Am Dm E Am Dm Dm Dm

with ho ned swordsso many swords. Your towers crownless shaved
when we had sac - ri ficed and danced. In our bed my husband slept
in woo - len fleece but then and shouts Battle orders my Troy im
my hus band dead I was bound. In chains yanked to

Dm Am Am Am Am Dm Dm

bare soundlyhis bruised with black ash and smoke Wounded Illium
paled sea Troy re ceeds as we set "Ooh rah Greeks!" Will you a ware of
sea Troy re ceeds as we set "Ooh rah Greeks!" Severing me storm these

2 Dm Dm Am Hecuba- Ode Four E Am

torn from your shores I can no longer call you home!
 ships at our shores the Greeks dis gor - ging on ll - i - um Troy!
 hills with fire se cure your sank target on and get home?
 e ver from home I sank in to a fa thom less grief.

Am Am E Am Am E E Am

He len lovely but two faced and her vile
 I am ru over ined the wrenched waves from my own
 O headwinds over the black waves from my shackles

Am E E Am Am E E Am Am

the cow hand Pa land ris
 the na tive at sea
 whore at sea
 Damn by their foul mayshe them
 marriage never

E E Am Am

both to hell
 fi ling bed
 see home!

Hecuba - Ode Five

C. Cohen

Piano



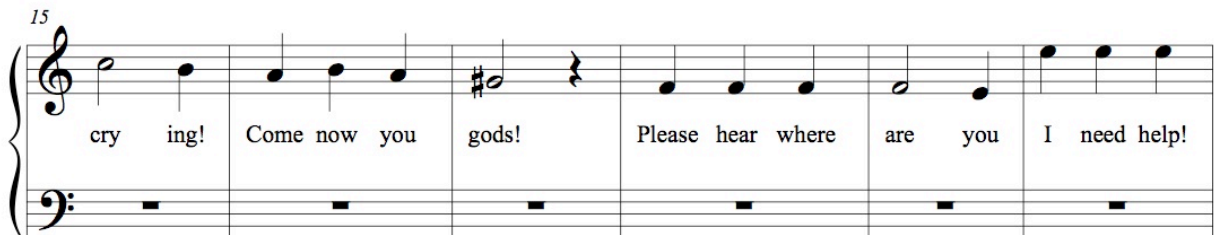
He lp me aid me! hear me you Thra cians! Bring spears you Sol diers!

7



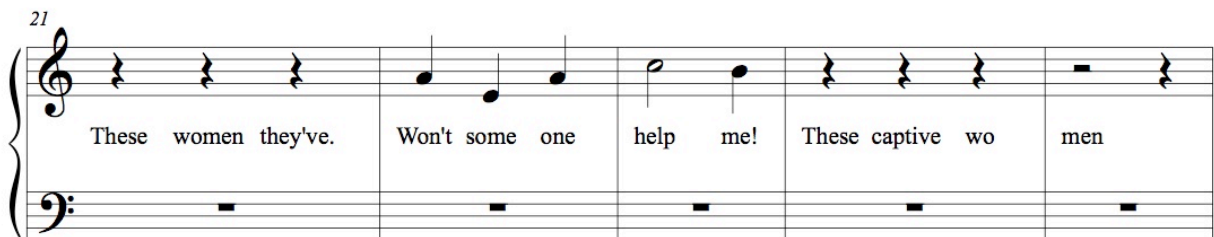
Use spurs you Horse men Co ome to me! Help me! Aid me! Help I am

15



cry ing! Come now you gods! Please hear where are you I need help!

21



These women they've. Won't some one help me! These captive wo men

2

Hecuba - Ode Five

26

Won't someone help me? I am de stroyed! O

34

gods I need wings to fly to the hea vens or I plunge down to the black

41

cha sms I in Ha des.

Talkback: *Hecuba*

led by **Mary-Kay Gamel**

University of California at Santa Cruz



Mary-Kay Gamel leads a talkback after the October 9, 2010, performance of *Hecuba* at Randolph College
([youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q))

Introduction

by **Amy R. Cohen** (*Randolph College*)

The first Ancient Drama in Performance conference featured my production of Euripides' *Hecuba* in a new translation (for the translation, working script, and video from the performance, see *Didaskalia* 8 (2011) 32). Because the conference stressed the importance of the interactions between scholars and practitioners of ancient drama, it was crucial to feature Mary-Kay Gamel, a great scholar *and* practitioner, in the program. Gamel has for years pushed the boundaries of what can be accomplished in ancient drama, repeatedly making fresh, high-stakes decisions in her directing. I could think of no better person to lead a reaction to my original-practices *Hecuba*, since at first glance our shows are at the opposite ends of the ancient-drama spectrum of production. What we all discovered in the talkback is that we simply take different paths to connecting ancient plays with modern audiences.

The discussion ranges widely: Gamel made sure we covered certain subjects, and the audience brought up things we might not have considered. The sound quality varies, and we did not always know the identity of the questioners, but the talkback is valuable for covering many questions relevant to any production of ancient drama, original practices or not.

Some of the topics of conversation:

The size of the set and *skene* (at [0:04](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=0m4s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=0m4s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=0m4s)).

Killing the children of Polymestor (at [2:50](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=2m50s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=2m50s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=2m50s)).

What the play means to us now (at [3:48](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=3m48s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=3m48s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=3m48s)).

An African American Hecuba (at [5:00](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=5m0s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=5m0s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=5m0s)).

Women and power (at [6:10](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=6m10s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=6m10s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=6m10s)).

How masks change acting (at [9:40](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=9m40s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=9m40s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=9m40s)).

Thematic doubling (at [15:12](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=15m12s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=15m12s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=15m12s)).

Doubling of Polyxena and Talthybius (at [19:08](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=19m8s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=19m8s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=19m8s)).

Doubling of Odysseus and Agamemnon (at [19:35](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=19m35s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=19m35s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=19m35s)).

Questions about the masks (at [20:50](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=20m50s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=20m50s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=20m50s)).

Emotions in the masks (at [26:28](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=26m28s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=26m28s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=26m28s)).

The choice of song, music, and dance (at [28:54](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=28m54s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=28m54s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=28m54s)).

Original masks, so why not original music (at [32:08](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=32m08s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=32m08s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=32m08s)).

The effectiveness of the chorus (at [35:01](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=35m1s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=35m1s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=35m1s)).

The community nature of the Greek Play (at [36:08](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=36m8s) [youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=36m8s](https://www.youtube.com/v/-FufxkPNW3Q#t=36m8s)).