

Panel
Greek Drama on the American University Campus
John P. Given (East Carolina University),
Bradley B. Buszard (Christopher Newport University), co-organisers

This panel brings together five classicists (one with an undergraduate collaborator) who have been actively engaged in the production of classical Greek tragedy and comedy on university campuses. The panel hopes to contribute to the emergent discourse on the performance of classical drama. New resources, such as the publications from the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) at the University of Oxford, have taken this field beyond reception studies and have carved out a new language for exploring all aspects of classical performance. Complementary to such scholarly exposition is the practice of theatrical production. For example, the APA's Committee on Ancient and Modern Performance (CAMP) has demonstrated the value of even amateur productions with their staged readings at the annual meeting, with productions ranging from Aristophanes' comedy *Birds* to Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Thespis*. It is not insignificant that CAMP falls under the aegis of the APA's Outreach Division. Theatrical performance provide classicists one of their best opportunities to share the classical tradition with broader communities, on campus and beyond. Together, practice and critique can generate scholarship in its broadest and best sense: the creation and dissemination of new knowledge.

The papers on this panel will establish the variety of classical performance in two respects. First, we aim to present a contemporary snapshot of theatrical activity in Classics programs across the entire CAMWS region. Our speakers teach at colleges and universities in the South (Virginia, North Carolina), the Midwest (Illinois), Northern Plains (Minnesota) and the West (Utah). They represent research-extensive universities, liberal arts colleges and state universities. They will discuss productions that range from classroom-originated plays to semi-professional stagings. Our snapshot will demonstrate the continuing vitality of classical theater in American higher education. Second, we will discuss the many activities that go into theatrical collaboration. To this end, our panel includes a translator, a director, a dramaturge, a composer, a choreographer and an organizer of a theatrical festival. Each speaker brings a unique perspective to the process of production. Together, we hope to reveal the large variety of ways in which classicists can—and do—contribute to theatrical production.

From *choreut* to *chorodidaskalos*: when students are left to their own theatrical devices
Eric K. Dugdale (Gustavus Adolphus College)

This paper describes the benefits that can result from student dramatic performances; it draws on the presenter's experience in organizing a biennial event known as the Festival of Dionysus. It highlights the learning outcomes that result from student performances that call on the student actors to make all interpretative and directorial decisions. It describes the presenter's attempts to simulate the festival and spatial contexts of ancient theatre and the use of a panel of judges to evaluate the performances. It offers examples of the workshop activities carried out in the classroom over the course of the semester that prepare students to make informed choices as directors and actors. Brief, focused activities allow students to grapple with key elements of ancient drama – conveying the musicality and movement of choral odes, harnessing the symbolism of stage props in tragedy, and dealing with topical references in comedy – and hone their interpretative skills in anticipation of the grand finale, their performances of scenes to a campus-wide audience. The paper articulates how performance helps students understand ancient drama on its own terms, how it develops the affective as well as the cognitive domain, and how it conveys through experience that drama is a dynamic exchange between playwright, translator, director, actors and audience.

The paper also illustrates the broader benefits to the department, college, and community at large. The Festival of Dionysus usually involves students from several classes: alongside the performances of the theatre class (taught in translation), a Greek class might perform a choral ode in Greek or a Homerist deliver a rhapsodic recitation. Such an event helps develop among students an *esprit de corps* as well as a sense of belonging in the department. It heightens the profile of the department, drawing a campus-wide audience to a classical event and garnering media coverage. And it can provide a valuable outreach tool to local high schools when the show is taken on the road, of particular importance in states (such as the presenter's) in which classics is largely absent from schools.

Over the course of the presentation, the presenter outlines some of the logistical arrangements crucial to the success of such an event. The presentation is illustrated with a series of photographs and video clips of student performances.

Musical Choruses for Euripides' *Medea*
Bradley B. Buszard (Christopher Newport University)
Raychel E. Loney Pek (Christopher Newport University), co-presenters

Our paper, a collaboration between a classicist and a student director, discusses the music, translation, and blocking that we composed for the choral odes in a production of Euripides' *Medea* last year. The choruses are the most challenging aspect of Attic tragedy to stage. The text can be desperately obscure, and in performance can be more confusing than illuminating. And despite our best efforts the text is all that survives: aside from a vexing fragment of Euripides' *Orestes* and the static evidence of Attic vases, the music and dance that originally contributed so much to the odes have been lost. Their loss is irreparable. Yet our misfortune offers an opportunity. Freed from the constraints of authenticity we may compose blocking and music that is better suited to a modern stage, that can perhaps offset the obscurity of the choral text.

In planning our production we first needed to decide which aspects of Euripides' original conception could be usefully retained and effectively performed. The original tonal scheme clearly could not. Music is not an international language, and we have no reason to believe that the original music, let alone a tentative recreation of the original could produce the same emotional response in us that Euripides' music could in fifth-century Athens. Any attempt to resurrect the original quarter-tone scheme would have interested only antiquarians. The meter likewise had to be changed. Though it would be a fascinating exercise to hold oneself to the original metrical patterns, doing so would produce a very stilted translation and would have strained the metrical abilities of the students singing in the chorus. The strophic pattern, however, was retained. and the paired strophes and antistrophes were emphasized by setting them to the same music, which in turn lent structure to the translation and limited the amount of music that the students had to learn. We considered briefly a musical accompaniment, perhaps a pair of oboes in imitation of the *aulos*, but decided instead that the chorus would sing *a capella*. The resulting music is simpler to rehearse and imparts for a modern audience an appropriate sense of gravity. It is diatonic and vaguely modal, though it avoids the old church modes that sound too alien to a modern ear. The clear sense of the tonic thus created is exploited to integrate better the choruses and episodes: each ode ends on the dominant, creating a sense of suspense that is broken by the abrupt entrance of actors.

Explicit stage directions are absent from our texts, so the entrances and exits, choral blocking, and addressees of the odes are often open to a director's interpretation. In staging the *Medea* we tried to smooth the transitions between episodes and choruses through the timing of the entrances and exits. In the fifth stasimon, for example, we bring Jason onto the stage immediately after the chorus finishes their lament for Medea's children, before they retreat to the back of the orchestra. The blocking is kept simple, almost militaristic, both because our evidence suggests that the original blocking for Attic tragedy was military in nature, and because such blocking reinforces the serious tone of the production for its modern audience. The choral addressees are, as far as possible, drawn from the clues in Euripides' text. When the addressee is unclear we direct the chorus' attention to the audience instead of a particular character, involving them more intimately in the action and allowing them some freedom to interpret aspects of Euripides' odes for themselves.

Richard Wagner said of the archaizing dialogue he composed for Alberich and Hagen in *Götterdämmerung* that he cared little whether his audience understood their words. "It will have the effect of two strange animals conversing together—one understands nothing of it, but it is all

Helen in Egypt, at the Beach, and in a Black Box
Peter H. Burian (Duke University)

interesting.”¹ Philologists are by inclination and training prone to believe quite the opposite, of course, but we cannot hope to share with everyone our love of linguistic and mythological preciousness. Let us instead adopt Wagner’s attitude. Some aspects of choral texts and their allusions will remain obscure to a modern audience, but we can still strive to make the conversation of our strange Attic animals interesting.

¹ Skelton, G. Ed. and trans. 1978–80. *Cosima Wagner’s Diaries*. No. 27. London and New York.

Helen in Egypt, at the Beach, and in a Black Box
Peter H. Burian (Duke University)

Translators want to be read, but translators of plays are even more demanding—they want to be *performed*. I have written two very different kinds of translations of Euripides' *Helen*, one very much for the page—a humble aid for those trying to get as close as possible to the Greek—and one intended from the beginning for the stage, which I had the great good fortune of seeing produced. More than that, I was privileged to work with a director, designers, actors and musicians in a shared effort to give whatever life we could to my Euripidean ventriloquism. This paper will essentially be an account of what I learned along the tortuous way from the pages of Diggle's text to a black box "stage"—about Euripides and *Helen*, about voice (or rather voices) in translation, about things speakable and unspeakable on stage, and about the trials and joys of true collaboration which, in our scholarly lives at any rate, most of us experience all too infrequently.

Classicists often appear to regard translation as the relatively straightforward (although far from easy) process of approximating as closely as possible the "meaning" of the original text. That is far from the whole story, however, and by no means the only thing a translation can aspire to. When a translation is embodied, so to speak, in performance, one necessarily becomes aware of elements beyond "meaning" lexically defined that also cry out for attention to fidelity: choices of linguistic register and other ways of establishing credible tone of voice, syntactical choices to assure rhetorical efficacy, and much more. Even more important are elements beyond the text itself that one comes to recognize as essential extensions of the translation process: the creation of movement, gestural language, a visual and spatial setting, a soundscape that become willy-nilly part of the translation's work of interpretation, of mediating a specific dramatic experience. And these phenomena can work directly with or strategically against the text, as in the case of a play whose setting is moved to a different time and/or place, or acted in an untraditional style (one cannot really say inauthentic style in the case of ancient drama, since we can only guess what that would mean and it would make very little sense to try to reproduce it). On the ground, as no one will be surprised to hear, for Greek drama the most crucial decision is likely to concern what to do with the chorus. As with textual translation, this kind of performative translation is subject to the *fort / da* dialectic of bringing the play to the audience or the audience to the play. And in such matters, of course, there is no one Right Answer.

I will provide sample passages of *Helen* and discuss some brief clips from a video of the performance.

In a Dream of Passion: The Classical Greek Theatre Festival
James T. Svendsen (University of Utah)

Ancient plays were not only performed in outdoor theatres, but most scenes were also set outdoors, in, for example, the street, the assembly, before a palace, Cloudcuckooland. Thus, both the performance techniques of ancient actors, and much of the plot, structure and dialogue of ancient plays were developed with the outdoors in mind. Does this symbiosis of fictional setting and performance space lead to idiosyncratic features of these plays? If it does, how are ancient plays changed by being performed indoors? Using Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen* as an example, I try to isolate some features particular to Greek comedy both set and performed outdoors, and consider the problem of what happens to such a play when it is brought indoors for performance. Further, I take up the possibility of moving the plot itself indoors to accommodate the indoor performance conditions as well as modern audience expectations. Should we "translate" the fictional setting as we move the performance space indoors?

A particularly important theme of *Assemblywomen* is the juxtaposition of public and private. For example, Praxagora's first speech, declaimed in high tragic style on her front lawn, describes the private ablutions and secret lives of women to which lamps are privy. Later, Blepyrus makes his entrance desperate to go to the bathroom and, hastily assuming that no one will see him at that early hour, starts to defecate on his front lawn. More than this, the staging of these scenes in an outdoor theatre means that the actors must discuss such private issues loudly, projecting their voices to the nether regions of the theatre. Blepyrus may not mutter about "shit" in an undertone; he must exclaim it, and his extended speeches on this theme suggest that Aristophanes developed this comic potential fully. These intrusions of private into public are not only ridiculous, they also provide a thematic background to the central issue of the play: the imposition of domestic principles on public policy by the wives of Athens who take over the government.

What happens when you perform such scenes in front of a dutifully attentive modern audience, with lights dimmed, microphones on and no distractions pulling their gaze to the horizon beyond the skene? As a test case, I examine two performances of an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen* (translated and adapted by Greg Robic) performed in a relatively small room at Northwestern University in March 2008 and again in a ballroom at the University of Michigan in May 2008. A striking feature of Robic's adaptation is that he takes the first scene, originally the secret meeting of wives in front of the protagonist Praxagora's house, and moves it indoors. In his version, the play opens with a domestic dialogue, and a sung duet, between Praxagora and her husband Blepyrus. Thus, his version of the play opens with a voyeuristic view into the domestic life of the main characters, set in an interior room. This is a radical change, but is it perhaps an answer to the problem of indoor performance?

In a Dream of Passion: The Classical Greek Theatre Festival
James T. Svendsen (University of Utah)

This presentation will focus on three recent productions (Euripides' *Medea*, *Helen* and *Elektra*) of the Classical Greek Theatre of Utah and Adrian Giurga's imaginative 1990 production of Aristophanes' *Frogs* to illustrate how a variety of directors have faced the challenges of staging Greek drama today.

The Classical Greek Theatre Festival (CGTF) of Utah is an annual theatrical event created to introduce and sustain the appreciation of ancient Greek theatre throughout communities and campuses in various southwestern and western states. CGTF is committed to the idea that Greek drama, like Shakespearean drama, has much to offer contemporary audiences

The festival, now in its thirty-seventh season, began in 1971 under the inspiration and leadership of Dr. Keith Engar, past chair of the University of Utah Department of Theatre, and Dr. Jim Svendsen, who has served to the present as classical consultant and dramaturge. The Classical Greek Theatre Festival was so named to reflect a multi-dimensional event that includes not only the theatrical performance but also educational components. These include lectures, post-play discussions, exhibits, symposia, films, and a study guide distributed widely to the general public and to high school and college students.

With a professional director, professional designers, composer and choreographer and actors from the University of Utah's acclaimed Actor Training Program, CGTF has grown in terms of audience size (with outside performances reaching 1,000) and has established a track record for excellence, receiving critical recognition and awards. In 1999, for example, CGTF's production of *Libation Bearers* won a regional award from the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival.

In the falls of 2001-2003, CGTF mounted and toured productions of Sophocles' series of plays on the family of Oedipus. CGTF devoted the last four years to plays focused on the Trojan War and the family of Agamemnon with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in 2004, Euripides' prequel *Iphigenia at Aulis* in 2005, Euripides' *Electra* in 2006 and Euripides' *Helen* in 2007. In the fall of 2008 Sandra Shotwell directs a musical production of Euripides' *Medea*, using the new translation by Raphael and McLeish, with original music and choreography.

CGTF is unique in its attempt to bring ancient Greek theatre to a broad American audience through modern American translations, original music, song and dance and an utterly entertaining theatricality.