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

DIDASKALIA
Volume 9 (2012)

http://didaskalia.net
ISSN 1321-485

About Didaskalia

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

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: *Didaskalia* Randolph College 2500 Rivermont Avenue Lynchburg, VA 24503 USA
Associate Editor:	C.W. (Toph) Marshall	
Assistant Editor:	Jay Kardan	assistant-editor@didaskalia.net
Intern:	Grace Gardiner	intern@didaskalia.net

Advisory Board

Caterina Barone
John Davidson
Gary Decker
Mark Griffith
Mary Hart
Kenneth Reckford
Oliver Taplin
Peter Toohey
J. Michael Walton
David Wiles
Paul Woodruff

Editorial Board

Kathryn Bosher
Dorota Dutsch
Fred Franko
Allison Futrell
Mary-Kay Gamel
John Given
Mike Lippman
Fiona Macintosh
Willie Major
Dan McCaffrey
Marianne McDonald
Peter Meineck
Paul Menzer
Tim Moore
Nancy Rabinowitz
Brett Rogers
John Starks

Copyright

Readers are permitted to save or print any files from Didaskalia as long as there are no alterations made in those files. Copyright remains with the authors, who are entitled to reprint their work elsewhere if due acknowledgement is made to the earlier publication in *Didaskalia*. Contributors are responsible for getting permission to reproduce any photographs or video they submit and for providing the necessary credits.

Website design © *Didaskalia*.

***Didaskalia* is published at Randolph College.**

DIDASKALIA
VOLUME 9 (2012)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

9.01 **Risk-taking and Transgression: Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* Today** 1
Michael Ewans and Robert Phiddian

9.02 **Review: *Lysistrata Jones*** 10
John Given

9.03 **Review: *Alexis, A Greek Tragedy*** 14
Aktina Stathaki

9.04 **Review: The Complete Works of Sophocles (Rebridged): *These Seven Sicknesses*** 17
George Kovacs

9.05 **Review: *The Women from Trachis* at the University of Michigan** 24
Amy Pistone

9.06 **Review: Imagining and Imaging the Chorus: A Study of the Physicality, Movement, and Composition of the Chorus in A.R.T.'s *Ajax*** 27
Viviane Sophie Klein

9.07 **Review: *The Oresteia* at Carleton College** 31
Eric Dugdale

9.08 **Review: Euripides' *Bacchae* at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse** 38
Ralph Covino and John Serrati

9.09 **Review: 48th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Aeschylus's *Prometheus*, Euripides' *Bacchae*, and Aristophanes' *The Birds*** 44
Caterina Barone

9.10 **Up Close and Personal: Encountering Ancient Drama through Performance** 48
Eric Dugdale

9.11 **Review: Sophocles' *Elektra* at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival** 59
Ruth Scodel

9.12 **Review: Sophocles' *Elektra* at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival** 61
Dana E. Aspinall

9.13 **"First catch your satyrs" — A Practical Approach to *The Satyr-Play(-Like?)*** 64
Anthony Stevens

9.14 **Review: Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Estonian: *Iphigenia Aulises*) in Tallinn, Estonia** 84
Laura Viidebaum

9.15 **Interview: Douglass Parker** 91
Laura Drake

Note

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

Aeschylus's *Oresteia*

Directed by Ruth Weiner
Translation and adaptation by Rob Hardy
May 11–13 and 18–20, 2012
Weitz Center for Creativity Theater
Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota

Review by Eric Dugdale
Gustavus Adolphus College

Tyrone Guthrie's 1966 production of *House of Atreus*, an adaptation of the *Oresteia*, catapulted Minnesota theater into the limelight and remains a milestone in the performance history of Greek tragedy. Ruth Weiner chose Aeschylus' foundational trilogy for the inaugural season of the new Weitz Center for Creativity Theater on the Carleton College campus in Northfield, Minnesota. Far from being a tired retread of a well-worn drama, this production, premiering a new adaptation of the *Oresteia* by Rob Hardy, offered its audience a heady bouquet of new wine drawn from an old wineskin.

Rachel Porcher and Ben Stroup as members of the chorus, photo by Linnea Bullion

The Players

Collaboration is the watchword of education in the twenty-first century. This production was an ambitious collaboration among several constituencies, and showed what can be gained when students are invited to participate in the creative process. The chorus comprised dancers from the Semaphore Repertory Company, while the character actors were largely drawn from the Carleton College Players. Others came from a class entitled *The Oresteia Project: Visualizing Greek Tragedy*, co-taught by Ruth Weiner (Theatre Department) and Clara Hardy (Classics Department). Using Simon Goldhill's *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*[1] as food for thought, the class studied a range of Greek tragedies; all class members were involved in the production in some capacity. Students created an accompanying exhibition about the *Oresteia*, featuring documentation of the 2000 Carleton production of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Weiner and Hardy's first collaboration. The production also participated in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, a partnership that provides further opportunities for selected participants, such as scholarships, internships and workshops; a KCACTF representative gave a response after the opening night's performance. With a cast of thirty-four students and a crew numbering well over a hundred, it is safe to say that the ideas explored in the *Oresteia* loomed large in the collective consciousness of Carleton College this spring.

Jessica Morrison as Cassandra, photo by Linnea Bullion

Orestes (Josh Davids) confronts Clytemnestra (Chelsea Lau), photo by Linnea Bullion

The Script

Orestes (Josh Davids) trapped by the Furies (members of Carleton's Semaphore Dance Company), photo by Linnea Bullion

Rob Hardy's adaptation has pared down the *Oresteia* to a manageable two-hour performance. It offers a stripped-down style in which every word counts and immediacy trumps Aeschylean grandeur. Classicists may miss some of their favorite Aeschylean motifs; in the Watchman's speech, for example, there is no "resting on my elbows like a dog" or "a woman's hopeful heart, which plans like a man."[2] At the same time, Hardy has succeeded in producing a script that is evocative and unhurried. Like that of Ted Hughes before him,[3] Hardy's script lingers on his favorite Aeschylean images and teases out their resonances: he expands as much as he telescopes, and he is not shy about introducing ideas and imagery of his own, as exemplified in the following extract in which the Watchman describes the sacrifice of Iphigenia:

> Ten years of watching the phases of the moon:
> the new moon as modest as a girl,
> the waxing moon pregnant with light,
> the waning moon sharpened like a blade above the house.
>
> *(Dancer enters and begins.)*
>
> Ten years ago I stood here and watched Iphigeneia
> carry the bridal torch through these palace doors.
> She was as modest as the new moon.
> The only sorrow she knew was in the songs
> she sang in the evening, to her father's guests,
> when their brains were heavy with wine.
> She didn't understand how they looked at her,
> or what lust and cruelty was in their hearts.
> Agamemnon told her she would be a bride.
> She went from the house to meet her husband
> with flowers in her hair, like an unplowed meadow,
> like a heifer wreathed for sacrifice.
> If she trembled, and if her step was hesitant,
> it was from fear of the unknown life that awaited her.
> She had heard her mother's screams in childbirth,
> seen the bloody bedsheets, held the baby Orestes
> still slick with his mother's blood.
> She thought marriage must be a slow murder.
> But she knew that she herself came from her mother's blood.
> She knew that, somehow, this was what made life possible.
> So she went to meet her husband with a terrified joy.
>
> *(The Chorus Leader sets her torch in a torch holder at the front of the stage.)*
>
> But when she reached the altar, her father bound

her hands and feet, and held a knife to her throat,
and called on Artemis to receive his sacrifice.
And with her last breath, Iphigeneia cried out—

Chorus C
Clytemnestra!

(Exit Watchman. The doors of the palace open and Clytemnestra enters.)

Clytemnestra
(raising her hands to the fire) At last!
(addressing the Chorus) Troy is fallen!

In Aeschylus' version, Iphigeneia is only briefly (*Ag.* 228–47) the focalizer in a scene which otherwise concentrates on the tragic choice facing Agamemnon. Hardy's adaptation gives full weight to Iphigeneia's pathos, drawing attention to the relationship between mother and daughter. Indeed, Iphigenia appears onstage as a mute character dressed in full bridal attire. This snippet also illustrates a number of other characteristics of Hardy's adaptation: it maximizes the dramatic potential of stage entrances and exits; it harnesses the symbolism of stage props and stage action; it makes use of poetic devices such as antilabe, bold metaphor, and repetition ("Ten years" recurs as an antiphonal refrain eight times in the exchange between the Watchman and the Chorus). It retains many fundamental elements of Greek tragedy while offering much that is new.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in its handling of social issues. In his "Adaptor's Note" in the program, Rob Hardy alludes to the impact of a trip to Greece in March 2011 at a time when the country was experiencing social and economic turmoil, noting that "some of that contemporary unrest has found its way into this retelling of an ancient story." Hardy's adaptation presents issues in a more direct and less allusive manner than does Aeschylus. For example, the second stasimon of the *Agamemnon* begins as a fable:

Once a rich man brought
an orphaned lion cub into his home.
Its fur was soft and golden.
It curled and slept
beside the man's children.

The violent history of the Pelopids is narrated within this fable; then the chorus declares "Helen! . . . She was the lion . . ." A few lines later, Helen becomes the archetypal woman:

Woman is the lion
a man brings into his house.
When he lies with her,
he makes his bed in the wilderness.
He knows her power is older than his,
in league with the earth and darkness,
and with Artemis, the goddess
who nurtures every wild thing.

The effect of Hardy's adaptation is to place issues such as gender conflict front and center in a way that

forces an audience to notice and engage with them. As an essay in the program ("Myth, Gender, and Politics in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*") noted, "Aeschylus has fused this progress from archaic revenge to trial by jury with a different one: the shift from powerful female to powerful male." In my experience, students often fail to appreciate fully this aspect of Aeschylus' trilogy on first encounter. This is unlikely to be the case for those reading or watching Hardy's adaptation, which is full of striking imagery of gender, gender conflict, sex, and reproduction. For example, Clytemnestra describes her knowledge of the truth of Troy's capture in terms of childbirth:

> I knew this truth when it was
> the faintest glimmer of light. I understood it.
> I felt it moving inside me,
> this great truth waiting to be born.
> But you would only believe it
> when it was put into a man's words.

By introducing the imagery of reproduction within the context of perception, the play challenges the privileging of the male as the rational sex and anticipates Apollo's argument that it is the male who is the true progenitor.

Another main concern of Hardy's script is the violence of war. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* explores the costs of war too, but to a lesser extent. If Aeschylus' Herald is triumphant at the conquest of Troy and relieved to see an end to the suffering, Hardy's Messenger is presented as a veteran who cannot adjust to civilian life ("It feels as if I've been through / the end of the world, / and I don't belong to the new world / that's taken its place"), whose soul has been destroyed by what he has witnessed ("There's nothing left. / Not even our humanity"), and who, like Wilfred Owen, rejects "the old lie" about the honor of war ("I don't want the songs of poets / to tell me what we did was glorious. / I want to forget it ever happened"). One of the strengths of Hardy's script is that it engages with today's concerns alongside those of fifth-century Athens.

The Performance

In her "Director's Note" in the program, Ruth Weiner comments on the centrality of the chorus to ancient drama. This focus was certainly borne out in the performance, in which the chorus demonstrated the remarkable visual and emotional impact that a full-size tragic chorus can achieve. The decision to assign the speaking roles to three chorus members and the dancing to sixteen experienced dancers avoided the problem of audibility that plagues many performances of Greek tragedy in which chorus members speak while dancing. It also allowed the three *coryphoroi* to interact with the other speaking characters in more naturalistic ways. Judith Howard's choreography exhibited remarkable variety. At times the chorus danced in set pieces evocative of ancient routines, with the sixteen choreuts (fifteen female and one male) arranged in rows and at one point breaking into schematized arm movements, reminiscent of ancient *cheironomia*, that had a distinctly martial effect.

This was certainly not, however, a production aiming at historicizing authenticity; rather, it succeeded in conveying the vitality and versatility of the ancient chorus in a modern register. The large size of the chorus was frequently put to powerful visual and auditory effect. At the arrival of Agamemnon atop a Second World War jeep, the chorus parted to form a sizeable crowd lining the parade. In the opening scene of the *Eumenides*, the tightly clustered and chaotically arranged forms of the chorus of Furies lying prostrate created a powerful tableau suggestive of a writhing snake pit. In the *Libation Bearers* the rhythmic tick-tock sound of the chorus marching *en pointe* suggested the passage of time as Orestes

approached his grieving sister. Vocalizations also often took on a musical quality. Music composed by Mary Ellen Childs further accentuated the emotional intensity of many choral scenes. As Cassandra invoked Apollo in the *Agamemnon*, the chorus swirled around her in a dizzying vortex that was heightened by trenchant string music; in the closing scene of the *Libation Bearers*, the metallic rasp of a chainsaw played as Orestes was cornered and attacked by a hooded chorus of zombie-like Furies.

At the City Dionysia of 458 BC, young male choreuts in Aeschylus' chorus performed as elders of Argos, slave women, Furies, and satyrs in successive plays. At the Carleton performance, their modern counterparts surprised the audience by the rapidity with which they transformed from Argive townspeople into feral beings in the second stasimon of the *Agamemnon*; with a deft adjustment to costume, the band that had served as a girdle was now tossed savagely between clenched teeth in a wild dance enacting the violent coming of age of the lion cub. Their white mask-like makeup and deep-sunk purple eyes by turn conveyed grief and savagery. The chorus frequently served as the emotional barometer of the play; their jubilance at Agamemnon's triumphal arrival was instantly quelled by the arrival of Clytemnestra, whose presence injected tension into the atmosphere. It was only towards the end of the *Eumenides* that the chorus's intensity flagged somewhat. It is a real challenge to know how a chorus of wild Furies should act in a trial scene without being distracting, and after a while their occasional hisses and snarls became predictable. At Orestes' acquittal, the Furies' reaction was flat (after initial howls of dismay), and the choreography of this scene was rather static in comparison to the rest of the play. The character actors played their roles with conviction and nuance. Perhaps the boldest directorial choice was to cast the only black actor in a white cast as Cassandra, thereby accentuating Cassandra's "otherness." Jessica Morrison, the actor in question, commanded the stage with her powerful yet distant performance.

Greek tragedy offers a different kind of suspense from that of most modern drama, a suspense predicated on the anticipation that accompanies a storyline familiar from myth. At the same time, Aeschylus and his fellow tragedians knew how to take their plots in unexpected directions. In the *Agamemnon*, for example, Cassandra ignores Clytemnestra's summons to enter the palace, remaining onstage until she decides knowingly to go in to her death. This production exploited both types of suspense to powerful effect. When Orestes confronts his mother, she engages him in a prolonged exchange in which she reasons with him, reminds him of Agamemnon's wrongdoings, and appeals to their familial bonds. The brief moment of doubt in Aeschylus' play, in which Orestes appeals to Pylades for direction, is expanded into a protracted scene rife with suspense, tension, and a maelstrom of conflicting emotions. Orestes and Clytemnestra engage in a macabre pas de deux in which Orestes lunges at his mother with the knife even as she seeks to draw him into her embrace. Audience expectations are at once met and confounded as Orestes drags his mother offstage and the palace doors clang shut.

The tapestry scene is another in which the performance played with audience expectation. A long red carpet is rolled out diagonally across the stage at the end of the Messenger scene, thereby building anticipation of Agamemnon's arrival and emphasizing Clytemnestra's powers of anticipation. When Agamemnon makes his triumphal entrance, Clytemnestra bids him enter the palace with the invitation:

> This carpet is laid for you, Agamemnon.
> After everything you've done,
> after everything you've accomplished—
> it's not right that you should enter the house
> like an ordinary mortal—

Agamemnon demurs; such an act would not be looked upon kindly by the gods or his men. So far

everything is going according to Aeschylus' script. But then the plot takes several surprising twists:

> **Agamemnon.**
> *(To the Chorus)*
> Take away this carpet.
> A king can walk on the ground like other men.
>
> **Clytemnestra.**
> *(To the Chorus)*
> Wait.
> *(To Agamemnon)*
> Why do we fight, Agamemnon?
> I wanted this to be a new beginning.
> We've spent ten years married to each other's absence.
> We can't keep looking past each other
> at the people we've created to fill that absence.
> We have to learn to see each other again.
> I want to know you as I once knew you,
> before the war came between us.
> This carpet isn't laid out for a conqueror,
> or a man who would make himself a tyrant—
> it's laid out for the bridegroom coming home to his bride.

As in Aeschylus' version, Clytemnestra plays the dutiful wife awaiting her husband's return. But in Hardy's version, Clytemnestra transforms the tapestry into the red carpet renewing their wedding vows. When Agamemnon continues to hesitate, Clytemnestra makes a bold move:

> *(To the Chorus)*
> Take away the carpet.
> *(The Chorus moves to roll up the carpet.)*
>
> **Agamemnon.**
> *(To the Chorus)*
> Stop. Leave it.

This scene did not quite work in its execution. In the lead-up to this climax, the chorus and Clytemnestra had been very careful to step over the carpet without treading on it, but Clytemnestra then walks on it alongside Agamemnon as they go up the aisle into the palace. But the scene did succeed in investing the carpet with a symbolic significance to which the audience could relate, in building anticipation, and in highlighting the war of wills that Clytemnestra wins even as she seems to defer to Agamemnon.

Through its simple and effective stage action, this production communicated much that lies at the heart of ancient dramaturgy. The variety of ways in which entrances and exits were staged (cf. Taplin 1978)[4] was remarkable. Among the most memorable was Orestes' re-entry after dragging his mother into the palace to kill her: shaken and spent, he tumbles out of the palace, collapses to his knees, and declares "It is done." Stage props were also used to powerful effect. For example, the boots that Agamemnon removes in order to walk on the carpet remain downstage as a haunting foreshadowing of his impending death (cf. the fascinating use of boots in scene xiii of Farber's *Molora*), recognized as such by Cassandra alone. In the opening scene of the *Libation Bearers*, Electra discovers the discarded boots and then agrees to let

Orestes try them on; they function as the recognition token as well as an accessible symbol of Orestes' coming of age as he steps into his father's shoes.

Stage machinery was also used effectively. Agamemnon's arrival in a jeep, pushed onto the stage by attendants, had all the grandeur of a triumphal procession, contrasting strikingly with the ignominy of the catering trolley on which his corpse and Cassandra's lay in their final appearance. One of my students commented that she had never really understood the *ekkylema* until she saw it come to life in this production. The relative positioning of characters in this tableau also conveyed volumes: with the chorus gathered around the *ekkyklema*, Clytemnestra delivered a speech from the safety of the palace roof, seeking to persuade the restless crowd below that she is a liberator rather than a murderer.

Costuming reinforced characterization. Before Agamemnon's death, Clytemnestra had been wearing a business suit in muted grey; when she emerged on the palace roof, she had changed into an elegant evening gown in deep burgundy. In her encounter with Orestes her bare shoulders gave her a softer and more vulnerable appearance.

The set design by Joe Stanley was a tour de force. The darkly brooding presence of the palace façade with its monumental double gates at stage right contrasted with the precariously constructed raised platform at stage center, its steps comprising an assemblage of upturned wooden crates, bricks, barrels and other materials suggestive of a warehouse or military encampment. Their effect was to de-monumentalize, to convey fragility and decay. A higher balcony at stage right was used by the Pythia, Athena, and Apollo as a platform from which to deliver set pieces.

Modern audiences are not as practiced as their ancient counterparts in engaging their mind's eye to bring imagery to life. The production made frequent and effective use of projected images—for example, to instantiate the snake in Clytemnestra's dream and Clytemnestra's ghost in the *Eumenides*. Perhaps the most striking sequence was a video representation of blood spreading and cascading down a staircase. The set incorporated scrim onto which images were projected, its textured and undulating surface adding an ethereal and eerie quality to them. The political graffiti that covered the palace walls in the opening scene of the *Libation Bearers* created an edgy juxtaposition of new and old, and a timely reminder that political supremacy is always susceptible to reversal.

My colleague Yurie Hong and I brought a group of seven students to the first night of the show; most of them had just acted in their own performances of Greek drama. The elation that they exuded at seeing Greek tragedy come alive and the flurry of energetic discussion that the performance provoked are testimony that it had succeeded in offering audience members "some juicy food for thought," to quote a line from the program.

notes

[1] Goldhill, Simon. 2007. *How to stage Greek tragedy today.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[2] Sommerstein, Alan H. 2008. *Aeschylus II, Oresteia: Agamemnon, Libation-bearers, Eumenides.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[3] Hughes, Ted. 1999. *Aeschylus: The Oresteia.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

[4] Taplin, Oliver. 1978. *Greek Tragedy in Action*. London: Methuen. For entrances and exits in the *Oresteia*, see pp. 31-40.