

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.

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DIDASKALIA
VOLUME 11 (2014)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

11.01	Review - <i>If We Were Birds</i> at the Nimbus Theatre Clara Hardy	1
11.02	Review - <i>All Our Tragic</i> at the Den Theatre Ruth Scodel	6
11.03	Review - <i>All Our Tragic</i> at the Den Theatre Daniel Smith	9
11.04	Review - 50th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Aeschylus's <i>Oresteia</i> and Aristophanes' <i>Wasps</i> Caterina Barone	13
11.05	Currency Exchange: Staging Aristophanes' <i>Wealth</i> in New Orleans Karen Rosenbecker and Artemis Preeshl	16
11.06	Review - <i>Agamemnon</i> at Savannah State University Ruth Scodel	37
11.07	<i>Philoctetes</i> as a Health Educator Robert Hackey	39

Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 11 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

If We Were Birds

Written by Erin Shields

Directed by Lee Hannah Conrads

September 13–27, 2014

20% Theatre Company

Nimbus Theatre

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Reviewed by **Clara Hardy**

Carleton College

In late September the state of California enacted a "yes means yes" law, aimed at clarifying the standard for consensual sex. In response to the heightened attention to sexual misconduct on college campuses, Camille Paglia published a provocative opinion piece for Time Magazine titled "The Modern Campus Cannot Comprehend Evil: Young women today do not understand the fragility of civilization and the constant nearness of savage nature." strongly implying that sexual violence is a natural and inalterable impulse of men.

Continuing bad news out of Syria reminded me of the reports last year concerning the use there of mass rape as a weapon of intimidation and control. And in this context I find myself reflecting on the 20% Theatre Company's recent production of Erin Shields' 2010 play *If We Were Birds*, a powerful dramatization of the tale of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela.

Shields' text joins those of Timberlake Wertenbaker (*The Love of the Nightingale*, 1988) and Joanna Laurens (*The Three Birds*, 2000), also dramatic adaptations of the story, based largely on Ovid's version in *Metamorphoses* 6. Ovid recounts how King Pandion of Athens gives his daughter in marriage to King Tereus of Thrace; after some years in this remote country she asks her husband to bring her sister Philomela to visit. Tereus goes to Athens to petition Pandion for this favor, but there falls violently in love with Philomela. When he gets her back to Thrace he tells Procne that Philomela has died at sea; keeping her imprisoned, he rapes her repeatedly, and when she threatens to tell the world of his act he cuts out her tongue. Philomela weaves a depiction of her story into a tapestry which she manages to have delivered to her sister; Procne then rescues her and wreaks vengeance on her husband by killing their son Itys, cooking his flesh and feeding it to Tereus. When she and Philomela reveal what he has eaten by displaying Itys' head to him, all three are transformed into birds.

It is not hard to see the attraction the myth holds for female playwrights. Most obviously of interest is the figure of Philomela, resisting the silence imposed upon her and reclaiming a voice against her assailant through the female art of weaving. That the story's central relationship is between sisters is also a tantalizing contrast with the more usual mythological focus on fathers and sons. And the sensational



Chorus members Katherine Engel, Tara Lucchino, and Siddeeqah Shabazz. Photo by Blythe M. Davis.



King Tereus (Ethan Bjelland) meets Procne (Jill Iverson), as King Pandion (Dann Peterson) and Philomela (Suzi Gard) look on. Photo by Blythe M. Davis.

events of the story—rape, mutilation, infanticide, cannibalism—surely also exercise a perennial if morbid fascination.

Shields has given her text the form of Greek tragedy, complete with a chorus of women who amplify and comment upon the action. It is, in fact, the addition of the chorus to the narrative taken from Ovid that reveals Shields' central interest in the story, and gives the play its haunting force. Within the world of the play, the six women of the chorus (Conrads added one to Shields' original chorus of five) portray war-captives presented as slaves by Tereus to Pandion, king of Athens. They thus provide part of a larger social context to what could be just a family tragedy (brother-in-law rapes sister-in-law). This context is amply indicated in Ovid's version even if slaves are absent from it: the marriage of Procne and Tereus is part of an economy of war, trade, and the exchange of women which binds civilized Athens to barbarian Thrace politically and militarily. Thus the fate of Procne, taken by Tereus in exchange for his military help, is different only in degree from the (raped) captives made slaves by war. Shields makes the point more explicitly than Ovid, but she has not imported it artificially; it is certainly already implied in the frame Ovid gives the story.

Shields takes this frame—the transaction between Tereus and Pandion that equates military and sexual favors—and elaborates upon it in the scenes between the men. King Pandion is obsessed with the violence of warfare, pressing Tereus for the gory details of battle and indulging in an extended set of metaphors comparing sword to penis: "your Peter the Great, your pork, your ninja, your purple-headed yogurt-slinger . . ." He laughs off Tereus' account of the Theban king's anger at his soldiers' rape of local women ("if we had to pay soldiers in gold, our coffers would be empty"). When Tereus presents the chorus of slaves as his gift to Pandion, it seems only logical that the reciprocating gift must be also a woman ("Girls. Girls! . . . Girls. My girls"). The horrific repercussions of this persistent association between sex and military violence finally come home to Procne when she finds Philomela in the hut: "I knew he needed . . . I knew he had to . . . I thought there was a difference between family and war."

Just as the passages on war reveal the ways state and interstate structures are implicated in sexual violence, Shields is clearly interested in extending the entire complex forward to our own time. For while the chorus play war-slaves within the world of the play, in the interludes between scenes they give voice to the testimonials of women raped in wars of the twentieth century. Shields drew these from accounts of survivors of conflict in Nanking, Berlin, Bangladesh, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Rwanda; Conrads has added Armenia. It was in fact Shields' initial encounter with the use of rape as a weapon of war in the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict that inspired her to write the play: "I wanted to write a play that explored



King Tereus (Ethan Bjelland) meets Procne (Jill Iverson), as King Pandion (Dann Peterson) and Philomela (Suzi Gard) look on. Photo by Blythe M. Davis.



Procne (Jill Iverson) prays to Poseidon. Photo by Blythe M. Davis.

the personal viciousness of sexual violence and spoke to the tragic history of perpetual rape as a weapon" (Ue 2013:98).

I saw two performances of Conrads' production; both times some people with me expressed ambivalence about the chorus' narratives and their place in the play overall. The students I brought wondered whether it was, in some way, disrespectful of or untrue to Ovid to import these modern accounts into his mythic narrative. Was the effect primarily to distract our attention from Philomela's story to our own more familiar world? Did the unavoidable anachronisms produced by moving back and forth from the world of myth to the twentieth century mar the integrity of the whole?

Interestingly, Shields herself had worried about this issue, and therefore removed all specific markers from the testimonials of each conflict: "At one time in the writing process, I made it clear which character was from which conflict. I found during readings of the piece, however, that my ear would jump at the word 'Nazi' or 'Tutsi' . . . Rather than support the central story, the chorus distracted me and made me long to hear more details about each specific twentieth-century conflict. This was detrimental to the central story arch" (Ue 2013:101).

Perhaps because this practice of interweaving modern narratives in the context of ancient tragedy is not uncommon (Ellen McLaughlin, for instance, has done this in her workshop / productions of Euripides' *Trojan Women*), I was neither confused nor distracted by the choral interludes. In fact, I found them particularly effective in this context, for two reasons. First, Shields has structured the play as a retrospective narrative, told from the perspective of its ending. Philomela's opening line, in response to the chorus' whispered encouragement of "Speak it, speak it, speak it," is "The gods have sewn my tongue back in." Her unfolding tale of rape and trauma, then, is a survivor's memory, and the choral testimonials offer recurring if subtle reminders of this. "I believe the only thing that can make trauma bearable is to tell the story" says Shields (Ue 2013:102). This aspect of Philomela's story brings a new and interesting perspective to bear on the theme of voice and silencing: Philomela's ability to "tell the story" is exactly what will reunite her with her sister, much as the chorus' testimonials effect a kind of global sisterhood.

But most prominently, the choral interludes raise the question of metamorphosis—change—in a manner analogous to Ovid's own. As is often the case in the *Metamorphoses*, the transformations at the end of this tale do not alter but rather crystallize and preserve for all time the relations among the three figures and their most prominent traits. Shields has Philomela suggest this notion at the beginning of the play: "Not much has changed, now that I'm a bird . . . especially the size of my fear." This wrenching sense of surface alteration without essential change is replicated in the choral testimonials, which relentlessly repeat the same acts in different places and times. Not much has changed indeed.

And yet there is a difference between our world and Ovid's, and there is a sense in which a feminist sensibility sits uneasily in what is arguably a misogynistic narrative structure. The least successful aspect of both the play and this production was the sisters' rapid turn to vengeance, and the horrific nature of that vengeance. Shields' text tries to prepare for this with the choral interlude following Procne's request



Chorus members in a movement sequence. Photo by Blythe M. Davis.



Chorus members surround Philomela (Suzi Gard) in the Hunting Cabin as Procne (Jill Iverson) finds her. Photo by Blythe M. Davis.

to Tereus to bring Philomela for a visit. After a testimonial involving a woman who fought back and wounded her assailant, each of the members of the chorus declares in violent detail what she would do, given the chance, to the soldiers who raped her. The last says to Procne:

I will make him pay
for everything he has done
for everything he is doing
for everything he will do.

And you, you will do the same.

Later, as Procne persuades herself to go through with the murder of Itys, she looks ahead to his life as a Thracian soldier, foresees him, like his father, raping and mutilating; as in the line quoted above, past fuses unsettlingly with future. Change is impossible.

Shields, asked why she chose the story of Procne and Philomela rather than any of the other rape narratives in Ovid, replied "Violence begets violence. Everyone is culpable. No one is innocent. The power of this human truth makes us uncomfortable" (Ue 2013:100). The play returns repeatedly to images of blood, which effectively join the ideas of violent sex, military violence, and the chain of vengeance: from a chorus member's plaint "Blood is something you can't control . . . I can't seem to stop bleeding" to Tereus' repeated excuse while he rapes Philomela "It's my blood, you understand . . . it's my blood that will not be deterred . . . it's my blood" to Procne's plea to Philomela that she look at her "with those eyes that have watched the blood stream from your body."

Yet Procne's murder of Itys and the horrific meal she serves her husband were clearly felt in the ancient world to be disproportionate, excessive, and thus typical of the female chaos that ensues in response to male transgression. Medea's response to Jason, Deianeira's to Herakles, Clytemnestra's to Agamemnon, all fall into this pattern, the total effect of which is to show women as more violent than men (see, e.g., Joplin 1991:49), requiring more control.

The play's script struggles against this aspect of the myth, or at least betrays discomfort with it, by shrinking the space given to the sisters' vengeance relative to the rest of the story: Procne's discovery of her husband's savagery, through the murder of Itys and Tereus' meal, to the final metamorphosis, takes only 11 of the play's 77 pages (for contrast, in Ovid's text the same events constitute about forty percent of the whole). The audience has very little time to process the violent impulses of the sisters, and the acts are so extreme that it is almost impossible to maintain the dramatic illusion that has been so gripping through the rest of the performance. Perhaps in recognition of this difficulty, Conrads seems to have decided to heighten the artificiality of the climax. While Itys had been indicated in earlier scenes in a stylized (and very effective) manner, one chorus member supplying baby sounds while Procne cooed to a cloth bundle, at the culminating dinner-scene what Philomela displayed to Tereus and the audience was a clearly plastic doll's head that looked mostly like a Halloween decoration. It was at least my experience that this jolted me out of the world of the play back to a sense of the whole as a performance. But given the text and the subject, it is not easy to see how else the final scene could have played out.

This slight quibble with what is inherently an almost unstageable ending did not in any substantial way undercut the powerful effect of the production. Suzi Gard and Jill Iverson both gave mesmerizing performances as Philomela and Procne. Shields has filled out the sisters' relationship by adding scenes from their late childhood where they display their budding sexual curiosity and playfully rivalrous interactions; Procne's fear and excitement before her wedding and Philomela's loving but naive encouragement are beautifully played, and are especially touching for anyone in the audience who realizes what's coming. Dann Peterson as Pandion and Ethan Bjelland as Tereus were also very strong;

while Bjelland physically was a surprising choice for Tereus (he is wiry and somewhat boyish), the effect was in some ways more terrifying than if he had been a more imposing figure. All six women of the chorus (Laura Mason, Cynthia Hornbeck, Siddeequah Shabazz, Dana Lee Thompson, Katherine Engel, and Tara Lucchino) were superb with what must be very difficult material.

The set, spare but suggestive, centered on the red throne of Pandion (or Tereus, when we were in Thrace); thus the sign of male political power underlying the events was always present. The hut in the woods was indicated by a rolled-on cart surrounded with wooden posts, through which the chorus wove strips of fabric, suggesting Philomela's loom. One of the most effective touches was the tapestry itself, a white sheet spread on the floor upon which members of the chorus pantomimed a stylized dumb-show of Philomela's rape and mutilation.

Shields' play and Conrads' production sparked fascinating and probing discussions afterwards, and have stayed with me in the weeks since I attended the shows. I am grateful to 20% Theatre for bringing this provocative text to life on stage, and I will certainly look for opportunities to teach it in future. Maybe then the world around me will not so exactly reflect the themes of the drama. But that seems, alas, all too unlikely.

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All Our Tragic

Written and Directed by Sean Graney

August 10–October 5, 2014

The Hypocrites

The Den Theatre

Chicago, Illinois

Reviewed by **Ruth Scodel**

The University of Michigan

The program for Sean Gurney's *All Our Tragic*, a premiere by The Hypocrites at the Den Theater in Chicago, promises:¹

The 32 Surviving Greek Tragedies (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides) compiled into a single 12-hour Epic.

Well, not quite. The twelve hours include several breaks, so the actual running time is about nine hours. Because the theater provided food, there was a single 12-hour experience, though. The author-director says on the company's webpage:

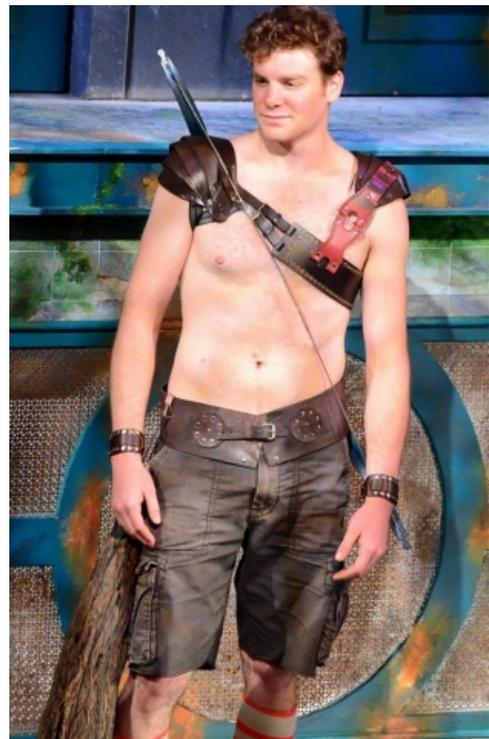
I want to create a modern Festival of Dionysus, the immersive, durational-theater experience of the Ancient Greeks for which these plays were originally written. These incredible festivals were designed to encourage civic conversation about important contemporary topics by incorporating music, politics and eating.

The food provided was very good but vegetarian (falafel)—not quite a massive public sacrifice. And a small theater is not quite a festival setting. Yet the effect was special, different from a regular night out to see a play, and the audience did come to feel like a community. So as festival, the event was successful.

Graney is not a classical scholar, obviously. It does not matter that he does not seem to know that two of the plays are almost certainly not by the Big Three. "Compiled," though, is not the right word for what he has created. Some tragedies are recognizable although they have been compressed: *Trachiniae*, *Philoctetes*, Sophocles' *Electra*. I recognized very few lines (the opening of *Trachiniae*), and thought that there were lost opportunities to use the actual texts. Some plays have been radically transformed: the Danaids become seven sisters (the two youngest, Helen and Klytemnestra, are said to be babies), four of whom kill their would-be husbands, Kyklopes, sons of Eurystheus the Necromancer, with



Emily Casey as Helen. Photo by Evan Hanover.



Walter Briggs as Herakles. Photo by Evan Hanover.

umbrellas given them by Herakles. The relation of some of the tragedies to this production reminded me of the old joke about waving a bottle of vermouth over your gin and calling it a martini. "Cousin Dolon" rushes off to spy on the newly-arrived Greeks, and the return of his wolfskin proves his death: so much for the *Rhesus*. A chained Prometheus repeatedly rejects Herakles' offers of rescue, because this idiot cannot be the hero whom Prometheus knows will come; the *Prometheus* we know is already over. Herakles destroys Troy to protect it from Xerxes—so much for *Persians*. But, of course, I was surely the only member of the audience ticking off the titles as the motifs went by. The presiding spirit was Ovid's, rather than that of any Greek poet, as the play turns the tragic corpus (along with the *Iliad* and some other interpolations for continuity) into a *carmen perpetuum* that moves between humor and pathos at alarming speed. There are no gods, although there are prophecies and magical potions, while Aigeus (more prominent than he is in extant tragedy) is literally a goat-man.



Emily Casey as Mouse. Photo by Evan Hanover.

It was difficult by the end of the evening to remember exactly what had happened in the early afternoon. The entire work is in four parts, *Physics*, *Politics*, *Patriotics*, and *Poetics*. *Physics* includes Herakles and Medea. *Politics* is set at Thebes, with vicious operators in power suits, including Agave and Jokasta. Ancient gender norms are not relevant here—similarly, the pretense that Iphigenia is to marry Achilles is absurd because Achilles, loving Patroclus, is gay. Without gods, the maenads of *Bacchae* became a women's political movement called "the Foxes," and Tiresias is blinded by Pentheus on stage before Pentheus is killed by a completely sane and calculating Agave. The Trojan War occupies *Patriotics*, while *Poetics* represents its aftermath. There is a great deal of blood in this show (63 deaths, according to one review—I did not count), along with considerable amiable silliness: Herakles gets his idea of what a hero is from a pamphlet that looks like a *Little Golden Book of Heroes*; Deianeira is obsessed with baking. Ion-Haemon carries around a tortoise (I wondered if this idea was stolen from Stoppard's *Arcadia*, though it could also be a pun on the species Hermann's tortoise); Orestes has a teddy bear named "Barristophanes."

The Seven Sisters serve as an organizing thread: Asterope, Glauke, Kreusa, Alkestis, Klytemnestra, and Helen, and I think Agave. Their deaths punctuate the day. Various mythological characters are merged—Patroclus becomes a son of Herakles, replacing Hyllus, Philoctetes takes on the role of Iolaus, and Ion, after his recognition, is the son of Creusa the wife of Creon, and so becomes Haemon—all of which helps keep the number of characters under control. Herakles (whose family is threatened by Eurystheus) is driven mad by a drug poured on him by Eurystheus, and kills two of his legitimate children. One, a girl called "Mouse," given to dancing around while blowing a soap-bubble pipe, survives the attack so that she can die in the adaptation of *Heraklidae*, while the other is Patroclus. The composites and compressions were only occasionally bothersome (I felt a certain distress at Theseus' reluctance to accept Oedipus at Athens, but he had no chorus to take on the task). Even with the composites, 51 named characters are played by fourteen actors, along with the three Odd-Jobs and six "Neo-Titans" (who play the Kyklopes, Polynices' ragtag army, and warriors at Troy). Odysseus and Tiresias were both female (Tiresias once had a relationship with Creon, who abandoned her). The cast, the lighting, and the costuming all won my highest respect.

In *Helen*, Menelaus was confronted with the Helen he has brought from Troy and a duplicate who claims that her double is the witch Theonoe, and neither he nor the audience has any way to know which is the real Helen. He kills one of them (I think it was the Trojan Helen), and the remaining Helen carries her head around until she herself is killed (after she is not transported to heaven as she expects in what is left

of *Orestes*). The genuine doubt about which Helen is real is very effective; I was not so sure about the severed head, and in the godless world of this show Helen's expectation of apotheosis did not make much sense. I do not know how this confusion would be interpreted by viewers who do not know the *Orestes* (almost all of them—some audience members had done quick reviews of mythology in advance, but I doubt that it was much help).

Each of the eight acts begins with the entrance of the Odd-Jobs—Alice, Sophie, and Elsie—who are a chorus and perhaps Muses. They sing, mostly folk songs and a bit of opera—the show begins with "Long, Long Ago" and ends with "Hard Times Comes Again No More"—with great charm, along with announcing what year we have reached in the story (it covers 75 years) and how long each intermission will be. Each act opens as one of the characters declares "I love this time of day" and claims that the light provides a sense of oneness with the world, although that tranquility does not last.

Sometimes the format is generous to the characters. Antigone and Orestes especially benefit from the time to develop and are deeply moving. The Clytemnestra of this version cancels her murder plan until it turns out that Cassandra is pregnant and Agamemnon plans to name her baby "Iphigenia." The change allowed the sequel to follow mainly Sophocles while presenting a more Euripidean Clytemnestra. This all worked very well. Other moves left me mystified. Hermione, a pretty airhead in pink, is unwillingly married to Neoptolemus, becoming his partner in a therapeutic-recreational Trojan War re-enactment center where she plays Polyxena and is contented, not wanting to be rescued by Orestes; the two characters, played by the same actress, seem to have merged. I was confused to see Orestes kill Neoptolemus and then Neoptolemus leave with Hermione; perhaps, because he has become an actor of his past, he exists in a theatrical world in which death is only temporary.

The piece indulges in considerable humor (*Physics* is mostly mythological burlesque). I suspect there were pop-cultural jokes that I missed; my favorite bit of actual allusion was the mute Pylades—there was a nice running gag in which characters other than Orestes forget Pylades' existence—a wonderfully creepy figure who reminded me of Lurch on *The Addams Family*. In one respect, though, the show is ideologically bent to gloom: the happy endings are all removed, and so are most of the edifying moments. There are no noble Euripidean self-sacrifices, and Iphigenia is killed before she can finish her patriotic speech. Alkestis is brought back to life as Mormo, with snake hair. Orestes is the only survivor of this version of *IT*. Not only are Pylades and Iphigenia ground up as bat food, but Menelaus drops by to share the same fate. On the other side, the characters share sympathies over their divides: Antigone and Creon have a genuine conversation as she stands in the grave she has dug (before he bashes her over the head with the shovel and pushes her in), and the play ends with a tender meeting between Orestes and (the ghost of?) his mother. The general message seems to be kindness and forgiveness, and I am not about to argue with it.

I certainly hope nobody in the audience mistakes this play for a Greek tragedy or tragedies, but it does demonstrate the theatrical energy that the texts and their cultural prestige can generate. And it was a great way to spend a day.

notes

¹ Editor's notes: Daniel Smith reviews the same production in [Number 3](#) of this volume. A remount of the production is planned for next summer during June 20–August 9, 2015.

All Our Tragic

Written and Directed by Sean Graney

August 10–October 5, 2014

The Hypocrites

The Den Theatre

Chicago, Illinois

Reviewed by **Daniel Smith**

Michigan State University

The Hypocrites' website describes *All Our Tragic* as “a modern Festival of Dionysus,” using the keywords “immersive” and “durational” to establish the production's bona fides as contemporary popular and avant-garde theatre.¹ Immersive theatre experiences along the lines of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (an adaptation of *Macbeth*) attempt to surround audience members with a fully realized stage world. Durational performances bring audiences together for a longer-than-average amount of time; a good example is Elevator Repair Service's *Gatz*, a six-hour stage adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* that includes the entire text of Fitzgerald's novel. *All Our Tragic* is thus pitched more toward contemporary theatregoers than to classicists, though classicists should find much to admire in this accessible and ambitious project. Adapter-director Sean Graney brings a sense of whimsy, a philosophical bent, and a willingness to rewrite myth in a provocative effort to argue for the relevance of Greek tragedy in the contemporary world. The result is a monumental theatrical event that is always engaging, though very likely to confound purists.

A bar in the Den Theatre lobby and tables with food in various corners of the performance space contribute to the festive atmosphere. The durational nature of the performance is indicated by a chart on a chalkboard that is situated near one of the food tables (and on the way to the restrooms). With a stenciled sign inviting viewers to “Please Enjoy Our Food,” the chart lists each of the individual plays and indicates when breaks will happen, and for how long. The chart also notes the attribution of each original Greek play with Aeschylus', Sophocles', or Euripides' initial in a box, using multiple boxes when more than one author treated the same story. Several of Graney's titles elaborate on themes or suggest his restructuring: Euripides' *Heracles* becomes *Rage, Herakles, Rage*; Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is called *Labors and Lies*; *Oedipus at Colonus* becomes *The Crypt*; a section that includes *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* falls under the heading *Old-Fashioned Honor*. At the bottom of the chart is a timeline that starts with Prometheus in the year 0 and proceeds incrementally to the year 75.

An immersive dynamic is established through the placing of audience members in two banks of seating across from one another, which allows for the observation of others' reactions. The many breaks encourage conversation; I sat with a group of classicists from Northwestern University, and we had several spirited discussions throughout the day.



Erin Barlow and John Taflan as *Antigone* and *Oedipus*. Photo by Evan Hanover.



Geoff Button as *Orestes* and Tien Doman as *Klytaimnestra*. Photo by Evan Hanover.

Tom Burch's scenic design draws on Greek and Roman theatre practices, with two raised platforms at either end of the playing space. The set has been painted to create a marbled effect, using blues, greens, and oranges for a vibrant color palette. The lower platform has one metal door and a multilevel playing area composed of wooden slats. A trapdoor functions as a variety of tombs and funeral pyres throughout the course of the day. A ramp inverts the idea of the Greek ekkyklema; instead of wheeling bodies onto the stage after offstage violence has occurred, characters tend to die onstage and be dragged off. The space provides a number of useful hiding places, offering opportunities for theatrical surprises. The higher platform has three doors, with very little space for playing in front of them. The verticality of this platform is used to great effect, notably by Medea.

As the show begins, Odd-Job Alice and Odd-Job Sophie enter through two of the three doors. They are soon joined by Odd-Job Erdie. It is Erdie's first day on the job, a nebulous service-industry position that involves playing various musical instruments and singing. Their costumes (designed by Alison Siple) evoke the image of waitresses or nurses (a holdover from Graney's earlier *Sophocles: These Seven Sicknesses*). As a Greek chorus, the Odd-Jobs generally comment on the action through song, sometimes enhancing the mood and sometimes offering ironic commentary. Their repertoire consists mainly of American folk songs: "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again," "Shenandoah," "All the Pretty Horses." They also sing excerpts from *The Magic Flute* at one point. These musical choices encourage reflection on the kinds of music that have been popular at different historical moments, reminding us that Greek tragedy provided both popular entertainment and opportunities for political reflection.

As announced by the Odd-Jobs, *All Our Tragic* is divided into four major sections entitled "Physics," "Politics," "Patriotics," and "Poetics." "Physics" focuses primarily on Herakles and Prometheus, but also includes the stories of Medea, Phaedra, and Alcestis. "Politics" covers the Theban cycle, giving pride of place to Antigone. The Trojan War is the main topic of "Patriotics," while *The Oresteia* serves as a centerpiece for "Poetics."

All Our Tragic streamlines character relationships by creating new familial bonds among several figures. Graney's revision of Aeschylus' *Danaides* is instructive with regard to his principles of adaptation. Retitled *Seven Sisters*, this version enumerates the unwilling brides, who are betrothed to seven Cyclopes, and recasts Herakles in the role of Danaus. Herakles gives each sister an umbrella as a wedding gift and suggests that they use the sharp points of the umbrellas to kill the Cyclopes. After the husbands have been murdered, their father Eurystheus the Necromancer curses Herakles and the seven sisters. The sisters then become an organizing principle for the entire production, as one by one they die in a variety of tragic circumstances, some in supporting roles (Glauke, Agave, Asterope) and others in more central parts (Alkestis, Klytaimnestra, Helen).

Graney's production strives for immediacy, filtering the Greek myths through later European versions and American popular culture. This mediation is apparent in the listing of character names in the program: telltale diacritical marks on Phèdre and Médée indicate the appropriation of these characters in a French literary and operatic canon. Médée's costume and make-up are reminiscent of the fashion choices of the teenaged witches in *The Craft* (1996). Herakles carries a *Little Golden Book* that features himself as a hero, and constantly expresses the hope that he will merit inclusion in stories for children. Portrayed as dim-witted and sweet, Herakles pursues an existential quest to create himself. Another of Graney's interventions is the plight of Alkestis after she is raised from the dead. In a nod to the horror genre, particularly the mythos of "The Monkey's Paw" or *Pet Sematary*, Alkestis becomes a zombie-like Mormo.

The section titled "Politics," mainly devoted to Oedipus and his descendants, combines twentieth-century French versions of these stories with American political and cultural references. A focus on irony and an interest in playing the incest narrative for humor suggests a debt to Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale* or

Gide's *Oedipe*, while a stripped-down aesthetic of theatricality evokes the spirit of Anouilh's and Giraudoux's classical adaptations. The majority of costumes in this section are the contemporary business suits of the political class; Jokasta strongly resembles Hillary Clinton. The conflict between Eteokles and Polynikes for the throne of Thebes emphasizes their adolescence. Polynikes' band of insurgents, called the Comptrollers, indulge in the pleasures of hacky sacks and energy drinks. Graney's adaptation is also infused with political theory that postdates the Greeks: expanding on Machiavelli, Creon asks Antigone whether it is best to be Faithful, Friendly, or Feared. She replies "Faithful;" Creon vacillates between "Friendly" and "Feared."

The language in *All Our Tragic* is generally simple and direct, though with a flair for alliteration. Some characters speak in a childlike manner. Graney has previously used childlike language to both comic and tragic effect in his play *The Fourth Graders Present an Unnamed Love-Suicide*. In *Antigone*, Haemon's dialogue indicates his emotions at the end of his lines, as though he were speaking internet chat-speak or emoticons aloud. Other characters tend to speak more sparsely, though some have catch phrases (Herakles: "Ha-Hey!") or employ incantatory speech ("Orestes, Orestes, who is this Orestes?"). The following excerpt from Antigone's speech to Creon gives a sense of how Graney handles the more serious moments: "We are all fools chasing around toy trains of other fools. We kill one boy to get his train and that train gets stolen by another boy so we kill again to retrieve it. We are idiots killing idiots because we've got nothing else to do and we can. We make nations that say it's okay to kill other nations. And we say that our patriotics is better than the patriotics of other nations, when in truth our nation is nothing more than a few poetic words on an old piece of paper."²

Antigone's use of "patriotics" as a neologism meaning "ideology of patriotism" provides the title for the next section, which incorporates *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Rhesus*, *Philoctetes*, *Ajax*, *Hecuba*, *The Trojan Women*, and additional material from the Iliad into a narrative of the Trojan War. In contrast to some of the violent material here, the costumes in this section maintain a sense of play. Achilles' impenetrable armor is a long knit sweater. Mockery continues to be made of Philoctetes' lucky fur cap. The frenetic movement of Ajax's "sheepies" brings a moment of joyous levity that heightens the pathos of their eventual demise. Cassandra gives out knitted hearts to those who are marked for death. Neoptolemus is particularly affected by what he sees and does in the war. Agamemnon learns little. Odyssea (a female Odysseus) speaks into a tape recorder, but ultimately decides to destroy this journalistic evidence. The last part of "Patriotics" is called *Troyfall*, and the way the characters use this phrase makes it sound like a video game.

A significant aspect of Graney's adaptation is the absence of the gods. While religion and the supernatural are present, no gods appear as characters and few are mentioned by name. This approach is remarkably successful in some cases. For instance, the sacrifice of Iphigenia is rendered all the more shocking because of its senseless basis in mob mentality. Of course, the overarching decision to remove the gods has implications for dramatic structure, particularly with regard to the plays of Euripides. When gods are important characters in the original, the version in *All Our Tragic* tends toward brevity. In these cases, the omission of the gods is less effective. Without Aphrodite and Artemis, *Hippolytus* is told almost entirely in a monologue by Phèdre. Similarly, Graney removes Dionysus from *The Bacchae* and turns the eponymous maenads into a women's political group called The Foxes. The lack of goading by Dionysus leads to confusion about why Pentheus decides to put on a dress.

Moving into the *Oresteia* near the end of the performance, the omission of the gods emphasizes chaos and existentialist angst. With no Apollo to purge his guilt and no Athena to reintegrate him into the community through legal justice, Orestes wanders the earth in a hell of his own making, pursued by "Furies" who exist only in his mind. On his journey he encounters his sister Iphigenia in a gory Grand Guignol version of *Iphigenia in Tauris* (which appalled some of my classicist friends). He also takes

Hermione hostage and later stalks her to her home with Neoptolemus. Hermione and Neoptolemus engage in therapeutic reenactments of the Trojan War. Orestes calls Klytaimnestra back from the dead to help assuage his guilt, but is unable to follow her instructions. She sings a song to comfort him, and the rest of the actors enter in street clothes to create a ritual ending for the performance.

That this last section is called “Poetics” works on multiple levels. Graney has included the one extant trilogy, juxtaposing it with some of the weirder surviving tragedies. This section also includes *Elektra*, which was treated by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Graney layers on the evidence of Elektra’s recognition of Orestes, including a footprint, a scar, a lock of hair, and his own intervention: a stuffed animal named “Bearistophanes.” Finally, there is an explicit conversation about why we tell stories and why we make theatre. “Poetics,” for Graney, is not merely a method of analyzing and adapting Greek tragedies, but raises living, breathing questions for our world today. It is certainly worth the effort to take twelve hours out of our busy lives to reflect on these aesthetic questions as well as on the political, moral, and philosophical questions raised by Greek tragedy.

notes

¹ Editor’s notes: Ruth Scodel reviews the same production in [Number 2](#) of this volume. A remount of the production is planned for next summer during June 20–August 9, 2015.

² Transcribed from Johnny Oleksinski, “A Speech from ‘All Our Tragic,’” Chicago Tribune August 19, 2014. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/video/chi-antigone-all-our-tragic-erin-barlow-story.html> Last viewed November 8, 2014.

The 50th Season of Classical Plays at Syracuse's Greek Theatre: Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and Aristophanes' *Wasps*

May 9 to June 22, 2014

L Ciclo di Spettacoli Classici

Teatro Greco di Siracusa

Syracuse, Italy

Reviewed by **Caterina Barone**

University of Padova

Aeschylus's *Oresteia* was chosen to celebrate the 100th anniversary of classical plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse. The tradition began in 1914 with the staging of *Agamemnon*, organized by the promoting committee of the time, which later evolved into the INDA (Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico–National Institute of Ancient Drama). Celebrating the centenary with the entire trilogy seems like a logical step. It is however less easy to grasp the INDA's decision to split the work in two shows (*The Agamemnon* separately, *Coephoroi* and *The Eumenides* combined), entrusting the staging to two different directors: Luca De Fusco for the first, Daniele Salvo for the latter two. The resulting lack of homogeneity interferes with comprehension and full appreciation of Aeschylus's superb ideological design. The two separate shows were conceived and directed differently, with different qualitative results; both nevertheless featured leading actors of an excellent level, and were received favourably by the audience. The first is more introspective and refined, the second more geared towards the spectacular. What they do have in common is Monica Centanni's communicative and evocative translation, as well as stage settings and scenery designed by sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro (who also designed the costumes). Pomodoro created an abstract space, inhabited by geometrical architectural elements and by a majestic bronze portal, which marks the entrance to the palace of the Atreidai, the backdrop to the tragic fate of this accursed clan.

For the *Agamemnon*, Luca De Fusco covered the large proscenium with a thick layer of peat: the members of the Chorus and some of the tragedy's characters sink into it, at times to the point of being almost buried. Agamemnon (Massimo Venturiello) in his turn also emerges from that earthy expanse, rising from a chariot that holds him like a sarcophagus, and is exhumed by the frantic movements of the Chorus. Beside him stands the seer Cassandra (Giovanna Di Rauso), his illustrious prisoner, who shares the lethal fate that awaits the victorious leader after Troy, a fate that will be delivered by the hand of Clytemnestra.

The dark soil which devours the characters is a strong sign with various values, representing the grave of reason, murdered by the madness of the war against Troy, as well as an ancestral womb protecting and



F. Scianna as Oreste and E. Pozzi as Clytemnestra in Coefore. Photo by Franca Centaro.



M. Venturiello as Agamemnon in Agamemnone. photo by G. L. Carnera.

keeping alive the meaning of that ancient saga, later to transmit it to posterity through an evolutionary genesis of sorts. The action takes place in an archaic and primordial time dimension, and the deep contact with earth and soil creates a sense of the chthonic dimension permeating the world of the living. Pain and suffering penetrate into all characters, beginning with the sentinel (Marco Avogadro), whose anguish foreshadows the gory events to come. And there is no triumph in the victorious survivors: no triumph in the Herald (Mariano Rigillo), who recounts with dismay the woes of the long siege and finally collapses overwhelmed by tears; no triumph in Agamemnon himself, who rises bare-chested from the chariot and later wears his weapons again to enter the palace, the very weapons that hold no power to defend him. He is guided into the palace—walking on red carpets, a visual representation of his hubris—by the ghost of his daughter Iphigenia, the victim of his madness.



Banda Osiris and the cast of Vespe.
Photo by Maria Laura Aureli.

Above all others looms Clytemnestra (Elisabetta Pozzi), ambiguously persuasive in the monologues of the deception, and then fierce in the execution of her vengeance. The golden armour she wears as she greets Agamemnon stresses her warlike dimension: a woman “with a manly heart” who nevertheless longs for peace in the end, after so much blood has been shed. The tragedy ends with Aegisthus (Andrea Renzi) rendered neurotic by the events, in which he appears as but a faded and cowardly supernumerary, utterly unable to control them.

The music by Antonio Di Pofi, played entirely on a piano with a percussive sound, was written in contrast with the archaic atmosphere of the ancient drama, as if to stress the contemporary gaze we cast upon the roots of our culture; the movements performed by the Chorus and by the dancers (choreographed by Alessandra Panzavolta) tend instead to evoke a timeless dimension, albeit steeped in classical poise.

In *Coephoroi* and *Eumenides* Daniele Salvo relies on paroxysmal, exasperated, vocal and physical expressiveness, just as he did the year before when he directed *Oedipus the King*. At the beginning of the tragedy the Chorus of coephoroi accompany Electra (Francesca Ciocchetti) to the grave of her father, achieving a strong visual and emotional impact. The atmosphere is tense and solemn; the grief of Trojan slaves dressed in black garments and veils blends with the despair felt by the young daughter of Agamemnon in a riotous sound mixture, supported by the complex musical symphony created by Marco Podda: archaic echoes and classical tonalities in an amalgam that evokes a cinematic feel. Later, pursuing the emotional peak which is the openly declared stylistic approach chosen for his staging, the director follows an ascending climax, up to the point of breaking one of the taboos of Greek theatre: murder taking place on stage. Orestes (Francesco Scianna) slaughters his mother (Elisabetta Pozzi) in front of the spectators, in a Grand Guignol of sorts that seeks justification in tragic afflatus. The appearance of the Erinyes, dressed in a leotard that makes them look like colourful skeletons, adds more fuel to the wildfire of violence and fury.

And so the play reaches its last act, in which *Eumenides* represents the founding of western justice as an overcoming of the archaic law of retaliation. The tragedy opens with the distressing appearance of the Pythia (Paola Gassmann) aghast from her vision of Orestes besieged by the Erinyes, and it develops into a journey through monumental statues, stunning choreographies and spectacular effects, such as the appearance and the displacement of the god Apollo (Ugo Pagliani) on a movie-set dolly, or the introduction of gigantic scales on stage. All is geared towards magniloquence, except for the role of

Athena, interpreted by Piera Degli Esposti, who confers measure and aplomb to the image of the founding goddess of the Aeropagus. In the bedazzlement caused by lights and smoke, the ending features the appearance of a naked young woman with a newborn in her arms, as if to signify the coming of a golden age, heralded by the transformation of the Erinyes into Eumenides: a device chosen for dramatic effect that dispels all traces of the unhinging unresolvedness that is intrinsic in the ending of the *Oresteia*—an aspect that has been repeatedly stressed by exegetes, literati, and directors.

A “sword-and-sandal” style staging, executed with great attention to detail, exploits Daniele Salvo’s ability to coordinate complex movements onstage (choreographed by Alessio Maria Romano) and to gratify the taste of a broad audience. But is this the right way to keep the essence of the classical tradition alive? The massive issues raised by Aeschylus’s text—the administration of justice, the relationship between men and women, the value and role of ancestral forces in the social fabric of a pacified society—fall apart and are pulverised by the impact of staging effects. All remains on the surface, enfolded in a formal exaggeration that overflows, and often demolishes, the bounds of balance.

The cycle is completed by the staging of Aristophanes’ *The Wasps*. This work contains the author’s criticism of the administration of justice in Athens at the end of the fifth century and an exposure of the perverse mechanisms governing trials by a jury of citizens. It also contains reflections on old age and on the role of the elderly in society, as well as on the emotional bond between sons and fathers.

The Wasps is not one of the best works by the Athenian playwright and it features a hiatus between the two different thematic nuclei, although they find an embodiment in the main character, the elderly Procleon, with his addiction to courts of law. Marco Avogadro attempts to bridge this dramaturgical gap by capitalizing on the play’s levity and relentless gags, but this emphasis detracts from the balance of the play, putting more focus on entertainment than on structural themes. Conversely, balance and efficacy are achieved in the search for parallels between the Athenian world and contemporary society, without the use of implausible forced analogies. Modern relevance is also suggested by Alessandro Grilli’s translation, which pays attention to the contemporary while never substituting it for the ancient. Original names and characters are preserved and allusions to politicians are aimed at depicting a certain type of person rather than a specific individual.

A characteristic feature is that the Banda Osiris, who complement the play with irreverent and outlandish music, are present onstage. They participate with musical and physical forays, transforming their instruments into imaginative figures (composite brass hornets, stylized ballerinas), and enliven the action by emphasizing its surreal and satirical aspects. A potpourri of opera selections with a completely new twist (surprisingly performed by soprano Adonà Mamo), fragments of classical music, canzonettas, the fanfare of the Bersaglieri corps, Italian partisan and fascist anthems, and much more creates a musico-dramaturgical dimension of its own, parallel to the verbal. The protagonist (Antonello Fassari) is opposed by his son, Anticleon (Martino D’Amico), and supported by the Chorus of old men (guided by Francesco Biscione and choreographed by Ivan Bicego Varengo) who share with Procleon his passion for trials and courts of law: they are buzzing wasps, perched in the cells of the beehive wall that serves as a background. For their part, the household slaves Sosias (Sergio Mancinelli) and Xanthias (Enzo Curcurù) support their young master. It all ends with Procleon dancing frantically in his underwear: deprived of his main occupation, the old man frolics pathetically, inebriated with music and wine.

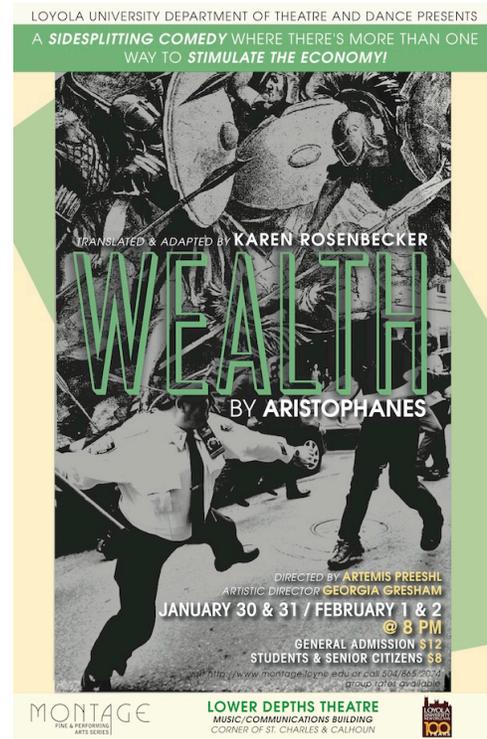
Currency Exchange: Staging Aristophanes' *Wealth* in New Orleans

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Introduction

At the heart of Aristophanes' last extant comedy, *Wealth* (c. 388 BCE), lies a set of uncomfortable questions about the nature of economic inequality: "Why do the rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer? Why is it so hard to get ahead, no matter how hard I work? Why do I get punished for playing by the rules while others get rewarded for breaking them?"¹ Although Aristophanes raised these issues of poverty and equity in another millennium, they are still decidedly current and universal concerns. Given socioeconomic events in the United States surrounding the Great Recession of 2009, and a series of well-publicized disasters in New Orleans from 2005–2013 (as well as the power of theater to frame the aftermath of catastrophe and to represent the complex and painful connections between those who suffer and those who prosper), we felt that a staging of *Wealth* in New Orleans had much to offer to a contemporary audience.² In January 2013 we had the opportunity to translate and adapt *Wealth* as part of the spring schedule of performances presented by the Department of Theatre and Dance at Loyola University New Orleans. The production aimed to take *Wealth* into a modern setting, using post-Katrina New Orleans—and post-Great Recession America in general—as a backdrop for exploring the problematic moral and economic questions posed by the original. This article is a discussion of our production choices in translating and adapting *Wealth* and in mounting such a production with a student cast and crew, and for a predominantly student audience. Thanks to talk-back sessions and post-production surveys of various student groups who saw the play, we can also address how our production choices were understood and appreciated, and what the students' reactions might suggest about working with a genre as particular and peculiar as Old Comedy at an undergraduate level.



Background on Aristophanes' *Wealth*

Wealth begins with two men, the farmer Chremylus and his slave, Cario, following at a distance behind a blind and shabby hobo. Unsurprisingly, when the pair asked Delphi to explain the unfair distribution of wealth, the response was not an answer to the paradox of the inverse relationship of moral merit to material reward, but rather an injunction to "follow the first person you meet." As it turns out, the hobo is none other than the titular god of Wealth, who has been blinded by the malice of Zeus and condemned to wander the mortal world as the victim of greedy and corrupt men. This mishandling of Wealth explains the poverty suffered by decent men, but it also hints at the solution: healing Wealth will allow him to shun the wicked and visit the good, thereby equitably sharing wealth in all its forms. To this end, Chremylus and Cario enlist the help of a chorus of farmers and their skeptical neighbor Blepsidemus in order to fight off the goddess of Poverty, to trick Asclepius, the god of healing, into assisting them, and to

frustrate a series of interlopers bent of delaying or derailing the financial realignments. In the end, although the main characters are enriched beyond their wildest dreams, questions regarding the fairness of the redistribution of resources remain unanswered, and we are left with the unsettling conclusion that Chremylus and his allies may have simply transferred wealth, rather than shared it.

For those familiar with Aristophanes' comedies, a poor man employing a crazy scheme to achieve world-altering results is the expected structure for the plays. But what makes *Wealth* unique is its subject matter and focus. Throughout *Wealth*, Chremylus is not beset by a figure of political or social importance, nor by the ravages and disasters of war;³ instead, his antagonist and the catalyst for change are what occur in the wake of such things. The impoverished conditions common to most of postwar Greece and the universality of Chremylus' questions to the oracle allow *Wealth* to speak not only to the situation in Athens, but to that in other cities as well.⁴ Throughout fourth-century Greece, the economic and social upheaval caused by the Peloponnesian War continued well after the formal cessation of hostilities in 404 BCE, with many cities suffering from endemic poverty, ongoing food insecurity, and a chronic lack of basic material goods.⁵ Conditions were so grim that protestors advocating debt forgiveness rioted in the city of Argos, even going so far as to attack rich citizens; several of their victims were beaten to death.⁶ In Athens, the speechwriter Lysias wrote of the public anger aroused by rumors that certain grain dealers were manipulating wheat prices for their personal gain.⁷ By the middle decades of the fourth century, the Athenian economy had become so bad that the city needed to subsidize the price of theater tickets through a fund called the *theorika*, so that all citizens could attend the City Dionysia.⁸ This level of impoverishment had its greatest impact on farmers like Chremylus, who were the majority of the population. For average citizens like him, whom we envisaged as the ancient equivalent of "the 99%," the beginning decades of the fourth century were hard times indeed.

Post-Great Recession America, Post-Katrina New Orleans

This chronic and widespread economic distress in *Wealth* was our initial point of connection between ancient original and modern adaptation. In millennial America, the financial catastrophe created by the bursting of the housing bubble in 2006 and the subsequent economic stagnation of the Great Recession—the effects of which have extended well into 2014—provide a contemporary context and parallel to the ongoing poverty of fourth-century Greece. Likewise, the upwelling of public anger as exemplified by the traction and longevity of the Occupy Movement,⁹ an international grassroots protest movement begun in 2011 and focused on addressing income inequality, and the infuriating perception that wealth is still being transferred into fewer and fewer hands,¹⁰ create a modern counterpart to the expressions of citizen anger preserved by Diodorus Siculus and Lysias.

Just as the Athens of *Wealth* may "stand in" for many other cities in fourth-century Greece, so too we felt New Orleans was particularly suited to be a modern locus for a discussion of civic suffering. Although Hurricane Katrina made landfall in August 2005, the recovery of New Orleans is still playing out some ten years later. During the years after the storm, the culpability of the Army Corps of Engineers in failing to maintain the federal levee system, the mismanagement of aid efforts by FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), and the inefficiencies of the various state and local recovery programs have all been well-documented and ongoing problems for the city. Between 2010 and 2013, several other events created another round of problems for the residents of New Orleans. In 2010, the Deep Water Horizon Oil Spill not only harmed the Gulf's fragile coastal wetlands, but also profoundly affected the commercial fishing industry in the region and damaged consumer confidence in Gulf-sourced seafood. In 2013, the "Mother's Day Shootings"¹¹ saw gang tensions erupt into a gun battle at a neighborhood parade, leaving four spectators dead and 20 injured. That same year, a series of indictments for graft charges were brought against Mayor Ray Nagin; convicted on 20 of 21 counts, Nagin will probably face up to ten years of jail time as a result.¹² Such events have harmed more than New Orleans's economy, infrastructure, and

housing stock; these social tragedies draw negative attention in the media and alter public perception of the city. Across the nation, there is a sense that New Orleans “can’t seem to catch a break,” and that perhaps its famous epithet, “The City that Care Forgot,” has now acquired a grim, second meaning.¹³ Despite economic and civic malaise, theater in post-Katrina New Orleans has provided a unique environment for connecting issues facing the city—and increasingly the nation as well—with questions asked by playwrights many times removed from post-millennial New Orleans.¹⁴ In staging *Wealth*, we wanted to be part of that conversation by adapting the play so that it highlighted the parallels between the economic chaos onstage and the economic chaos in “the real world,” with New Orleans serving as a setting but also acting as a representative for any city suffering the economic downturn.

City Dionysia and Mardi Gras

We also made the choice to set *Wealth* in New Orleans because of the strong parallels between the culture of dramatic festivals in Athens and Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans. For both cities, these rituals are much more than religious rites; they may also serve to express their city’s collective concerns and convictions. The idea that Athenian theater and civics were related is not a new one, but in recent decades classical scholarship has revealed the extent to which Attic drama mirrors the institutions of the polis.¹⁵ Old Comedy in particular features a level of topicality and immediacy in its commentary that tragedy, which speaks through the veil of myth, cannot. In addition, the privilege of self-assertion and license enjoyed by Aristophanes’ characters offers them the opportunity to directly criticize and actively challenge aggravating circumstances and individuals within their city, and in so doing to create sweeping changes.¹⁶

The connection between Mardi Gras parades and social commentary is perhaps not so well known. The tradition of Mardi Gras krewes creating individual floats or even shaping their whole parade to comment on the “state of play” in New Orleans is a tradition that dates back to the founding of the Mystick Krewe of Comus in 1856 and continues through the modern era. Krewes are capable of stinging and focused social commentary; in 1877, for example, the Krewe of Momus produced an entire parade, some 20 floats, entitled “Hades: A Dream of Momus,” which represented the city as the Underworld in order to criticize the waste and injustices associated with the Reconstruction-era government. More recently, Krewe D’Etat, as part of the 2006 Mardi Gras, which fell approximately six months after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city, produced “d’Olympics d’Etat,” a parade theme meant to allude to the political game-playing that the city endured during the immediate aftermath of the storm. One of the lead floats, entitled “Welcome to the Chocolate City,” seized on Mayor Ray Nagin’s infamous “Chocolate City” comments,¹⁷ casting him as Willie Wonka-like figure; the float also featured visual elements depicting the city as his mismanaged Chocolate Factory and was emblazoned with graffiti based on other perceived gaffes the mayor had made during the disaster.¹⁸ Other floats extended the criticism of President George W. Bush and FEMA director Michael D. Brown; one float in particular, titled “Homeland Insecurity,” played off Bush’s then praise of Brown for doing “a heck of a job.”¹⁹

Also integral to the nature of Carnival Season in New Orleans and theatrical rites in ancient Athens are the elements of engaged spectatorship and of inversion of social norms. In this respect, Mardi Gras is a remarkable modern parallel to the City Dionysia; these festivals represent a moment in which the cities cease civic business and engage in celebratory activities that include public spectacle and private parties but which have, at their center, performances featuring masked, role-playing participants and entailing a high level of participation on the part of their audiences. For the re-presentations of Mardi Gras in *Wealth* to have the greatest effect, we ran the play through Samedi Gras (the Saturday before Fat Tuesday), to give our student cast, crew, and audience the opportunity to attend a parade before they saw the play. At all parades during the Mardi Gras season, interaction between the riders on the floats and the parade-goers is both encouraged and expected. Yelling and begging for throws (e.g., strings of beads, colorful

plastic cups, small toys) from the riders is such an ingrained tradition that many locals joke that their first words were “Throw me something, mister!” Crowd interaction goes beyond simply asking for throws; many spectators don costumes of their own, some dance and perform on the sidelines of the parades, and even the police are not immune from joining in. Certain set floats, which are fan favorites, are a cue for spectators to turn the tables on riders and toss throws back at the floats. It is also not uncommon for riders and spectators to change roles as the parade schedule unfolds; riders in one krewe enjoy their elevated, enriched status during their parade as they shower the spectators with “wealth,” but later they become spectators at other parades, joining the “poor” crowd in begging for throws. In this way, the change from rich to poor, and poor to rich, plays out on the streets of New Orleans in a manner than is not only highly participatory, but also mirrors the shifting status of characters in *Wealth*.

“Parade Culture” and Metatheater

In our production of *Wealth*, we used these traditions of the New Orleans “parade culture,” the traditions of crowd interaction and participation that are ubiquitous during Mardi Gras festivities, to create a sense that the staging was something very like a parade, an event that—like Aristophanes’ original—was conscious of its own theatricality, that was full of satire and mockery, and that blurred the line between actor and audience. Characters in *Wealth* spoke openly of their “director” and “writer”; they referred to the “sound techs” and occasionally looked off to them when a cue was unexpected or absent; moreover, we gave the actors directions to interact with the audience at certain junctures. Taking full advantage of the L-shaped seating arrangement possible in a black-box theater, we instructed Wealth upon her initial entrance to stumble into the front row of seats and touch audience members. We had Hermes step out of the action and ask an audience member for his/her program so that he could look up Carry’s name. During the *agon*, we directed Inida and Poverty to speak the bulk of their lines directly to the audience, as if they were at a town hall-style debate. And as the play moved towards its conclusion and the onstage world was enriched, Carry tossed an increasing number of Mardi Gras doubloons to audience members.

While these moments of shattering the fourth wall met with mixed reactions from the spectators, the aspect that seemed to make the most sense to all the audiences was the play’s exodus, which we represented as a “second line,”²⁰ a riotous “parade after the parade” composed of those who dance behind the “first line” of musicians, floats, and official marchers. Here, at the close of the play, the second line exodus acted as the reification of the moral ambiguity of the redistribution of wealth. Second lines are not exclusively celebratory revelries; they are also used to mark the end of certain portions of funeral rites (e.g., the sealing of the tomb and the departure of the hearse). As such, a second line is a ritual that is interchangeable and permeable; its form and action are the same whether the dance occurs at a wedding or a funeral, and it serves as an opportunity for people to join in the celebration or memorial service spontaneously.

In representing elements of Mardi Gras onstage and in tapping into the multivalent nature of these celebrations, our *Wealth* also aimed to play upon the ambiguity created by masking. To be sure, masks play different roles in theater and in a parade setting. For actors, the mask may serve to change their identity, but for the riders on the float or the spectators in the parade crowd, the masks *disguise* their identity. The resulting anonymity can be a license to engage in behaviors that are unexpected and even antisocial. In fact, the problem of masked participants acting out during Mardi Gras has plagued New Orleans throughout its history, and masks have been periodically banned from the parades and other celebrations. For example, in the 17th century, masked spectators were in the habit of throwing flour, often laced with lime, at other spectators; sometimes they threw bricks instead.²¹ Many traditional Mardi Gras activities enacted by masked “social clubs” are transgressive and would merit police involvement in a different context; at dawn on Mardi Gras day, the North Side Skull and Bones Gang, dressed in skeleton suits and masks, makes its way through select neighborhoods, pounding on doors with large animal

bones until the homeowners answer.²² In Gheens, a small town in rural southeastern Louisiana, the locals preserve the tradition of *courirs de Mardi Gras* (Mardi Gras runs), in which masked and costumed men chase and “whip” spectators, and in particular the children in the crowd.²³

It is this nature of the mask and the transgressive behavior it can encourage that we hoped to exploit in the instances of masking used in *Wealth*. In the later scenes of the play, as the characters experienced a greater and greater level of personal enrichment, they were given the opportunity to humiliate those who had previously been wealthy. Likewise, their wardrobe and makeup began to change, moving from their former worn-out clothes to the masks and costuming unambiguously associated with Mardi Gras, resulting in the concealment of their former identities as the working poor and underscoring their sense of entitlement in taking on the role of the oppressors. At the end of the play, as the characters moved to install Wealth in the *agora* as their new patron deity, the goddess herself reappeared briefly, her former beneficence likewise hidden by a mask as she demanded worship from the very people who had rescued her at the outset of the play. At the close, the full cast, many unrecognizable in their masks, danced off stage in a second line that was meant to play upon both possible interpretations for the activity as either celebration or mourning ritual.

Staging a Society on the Brink

Although the *Wealth* is unquestionably a comedy, the play’s commentary on economic disparity and the inversion of merit and reward is quite serious. For our production of *Wealth*, we signaled through the promotional artwork, the stage properties, and even the pacing of the production that, although the subject of the play was serious, the treatment it received would be satirical, critical, and comedic. Moreover, we wanted to emphasize not only the connection between ancient and modern, but also the cyclical nature of exploitation as both the oppressed and the oppressors switched roles.

To this end, within the promotional artwork, the graphic designer juxtaposed ancient and modern images in order to emphasize the blending of the two time periods, and to suggest the progressive values highlighted in the adaptation and the subsequent parodies of them. In the poster, playbill, and program, we made the conscious decision not to use an image tied specifically to either Mardi Gras or to suffering in New Orleans (e.g., no images of destroyed houses or floodwaters) because a poster featuring either of those images would have created an expectation not only of the overall subject of the play but also the style of dramatic treatment. Moreover, John Biguenet’s Pulitzer Prize-nominated *Rising Water* trilogy, which intimately examines the lives of New Orleanians during and after Katrina, had just finished a local production, and Biguenet is also a faculty member at Loyola New Orleans where we would be staging *Wealth*.²⁴ Given these considerations, we felt the promotional artwork needed to speak to the thematic issues at the core of *Wealth*, specifically questions of economic disparity and citizen action. Using elements drawn from both ancient and modern images, award-winning Loyola alumna Rachel Guillot created a master playbill that not only spoke to social unrest, but also helped to contextualize its cause and hint at the humorous treatment of the subject. The master image for the playbill features a grayscale image of Greek hoplites engaged in a disorganized scrum that elides into a black-and-white photograph of a police officer preparing to strike a protestor at an Occupy Wall Street demonstration.²⁵ The officer’s portliness and exaggerated posture suggest the bungling of the Keystone Cops rather than effective law enforcement, while his ineptitude echoes the jumble of warriors above. The transition between images is covered by the play’s title, *Wealth*, in capital letters that are outlined in the green of U.S. banknotes.

It was in the set and stage properties that the creative team decided to foreground the New Orleans location for *Wealth* through a setting that suggested a combination of local devastation along with the ongoing depredations of Wall Street. For the first half of the play, before Wealth regains her sight, the garbage-cluttered stage was dominated by a blue tarp, a sight famous throughout the Gulf South as the

marker of a home damaged by storms.²⁶ Before the shroud of the tarp was a set of steps designed to recall local artist Dawn DeDeaux's sculptural installations "STePs HoMe." "STePs HoMe" debuted in 2008 at Prospect.1, an international exhibit of contemporary art, featuring exhibits and installations across the New Orleans metro area, including several in the ruins of the 9th Ward neighborhood.²⁷ The "STePs HoMe" installations referenced the loss of homes in the damaging floods caused by levee breaches during Hurricane Katrina; each installation is composed of multiple sets of tombstone-like front steps that mark where houses once stood, thereby implying the loss of much more than the physical structure of the building.²⁸ One of the "STePs HoMe" groupings was installed on Loyola's campus for the duration of the Prospect.1 exhibit, and photographs of the installation, along with an annotated text, hung for years afterwards in Loyola's Monroe Library, making the piece known to the Loyola community of faculty, staff, and students.

Although this initial tableau was a deliberately local and somber visual, when the house beneath the tarp and behind the sepulchral steps was "restored" by *Wealth*, the tarp was removed to reveal not the expected iconic New Orleans shotgun home,²⁹ but a temple that owed more to the façade of the New York Stock exchange than to the Parthenon. The title "Wealth" was engraved upon the temple's pediment, and as the enrichment of the onstage world progressed, the temple was often lit with a cascade of flashing, multicolored lights, like those of a slot machine hitting a jackpot. As a further visual to satirize the house's function as temple of *Wealth*, the "throne" of the goddess was represented as a glittering, golden toilet, a prop meant to reference both the ubiquitous scatological humor in *Wealth* and the modern association of money with feces.³⁰

While we aimed for the conflation of local and national with the stage properties, what we hoped to convey with the pacing of the production was the rapid, topsy-turvy change that the world on the stage was experiencing, as those who had been poor suddenly became wealthy, and vice versa. This breakneck pacing was meant to highlight the morally ambiguous actions and attitudes of the suddenly rich, and to set in high relief the uncomfortable proposition that perhaps the only difference between the virtuous poor and the decadent rich was, in fact, the amount of wealth they possessed, and that those who were enriched would find themselves becoming the people they had so reviled.³¹ We felt that this irony was accentuated by the incomplete and fragmentary nature of Aristophanes' text, and decided to further emphasize those qualities in the staging of *Wealth* by creating a manic pacing evocative of "lemmings rushing to their deaths."³² With this idea in mind, we compressed the action of the play—paring down the introduction of *Wealth* and the agon with *Poverty* in particular—to a 70-minute running time with no intermission. The resulting effect for both characters and audience was the creation of a society that, although experiencing rapid change, would nonetheless repeat the same cycle of exploitation and abuse.

From Men and Poverty to Women and Poverty

Integral to the thematic program of illuminating modern concerns by repurposing the ancient was our decision to "gender swap" many of the characters in this adaptation.³³ We felt this was a fundamental step in that it allowed a point of access into a series of current discussions about the particular relationship of women and poverty in the twenty-first century. Fourth-century Athens maintained legal and social practices created to bar women from civic involvement and enfranchisement beyond their roles in religious rites and institutions; the public face of ancient Greek poverty would unquestionably have been a man's. But, in post-millennium America, it is a woman's. In each category of race and ethnicity, the majority of those living below the federal poverty level are women.³⁴ Recent national events, such as the passing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009 and the issues of workplace discrimination highlighted by the "War on Women" during the 2012 presidential and congressional campaign season, brought these concerns to the fore on a national level.³⁵ For New Orleans in particular, there is ample documentation that women, especially women of color, continue to bear a

disproportionate amount of economic hardship in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.³⁶

In *Wealth*, we focused on using the predominance of female characters to speak primarily to modern workplace inequalities and pay discrimination, specifically through the appearance and dialogue of the chorus, whom we reimagined as women trapped in poverty by the demands and vicissitudes of their minimum-wage jobs. Like Aristophanes' chorus of farmers in *Wealth*, the Working Girls of *Wealth* bemoan their poverty, but unlike their ancient counterparts, they do so through language that is focused on their employment or lack thereof.³⁷ Along these same lines of swapping gender to highlight economic disparity, we reversed the genders of the play's two allegorical deities. The god Wealth became the goddess Wealth; in this case, the shift in gender adds to Wealth's account of her exploitation at the hands of gods and men that begins the play. That Poverty (Peinia) was female in Aristophanes' *Wealth* is not surprising in that the ancient Greeks conceptualized most monsters as female (e.g. Scylla, Charybdis, the Furies). In the original, her gender is a reflection of her powerful and malevolent nature, but in our *Wealth* we wanted to tap into modern perceptions as to who controls the nation's economy; in light of this consideration, Poverty became a white man in a business suit whose dialogue was peppered with references to economic theory (e.g., Adam Smith's Invisible Hand, Thomas Friedman's Flat World, the ideal of trickle-down economics) and who consistently patronized the female characters.

In recasting the three lead characters in *Wealth* (Chremylus, Cario, and Blepsidemus) as women, we were able to create names that kept the connotations of the original Greek but also followed the program of enriching their dialogue with references to their economic plight. The old farmer Chremylus (Mr. Needy) became "Inida" (pronounced "I need a"), who is sometimes given the nickname "Needy" by her friends. Whereas Chremylus spoke of his poverty in terms of his moral merit (i.e., he was a good man who deserved to be rich), through Inida's dialogue with other characters we revealed that she makes do by enmeshing herself in "off the books" economy of rent parties and plate sales, two means of raising money common in New Orleans's black community and across the Gulf South in general.³⁸ Cario in the Greek *Wealth* is a slave whose name is itself a synonym for "slave"; we renamed the character "Carry" as an aural pun on the woman's name but also as an allusion to the action that the spelling implies; at one point the character is forced to bear Wealth on her back as she moves about the stage, literally and symbolically transferring the goddess and all she represents from one place to another. Chremylus' nosy neighbor Blepsidemus, whose name in *Wealth* indicates his over-reliance on the city government, was recast in *Wealth* as "Faith." As her name implies, the character is easily duped by authority figures, Poverty in particular, but whereas Blepsidemus' ultimate rejection of Poverty rests on his desire to feast rather than fast, Faith's decision stemmed from the revelation that, in Poverty's economy, women make less pay for equal work.

"Twice-Turned" Costuming and Mardi Gras Glitter

To further this play between poverty and social upheaval, we worked with costume director Kellie Grengs to create a wardrobe of garments appropriated from other productions or purchased at local thrift stores, and then reconstructed and repurposed them for the production. Although we did feature some elements of Greco-Roman costuming in order to continue our program of mixing ancient with modern, we hoped the modern costumes could convey a different message. During the planning of the wardrobe, we spoke of creating a "twice-turned" aesthetic as a visual signifier for the endemic lack of resources that we wanted to project. The phrase "turning a garment" describes the process of deconstructing a worn piece of clothing in order to reassemble it with the fresher, cleaner "inside" face of the fabric now turned to the outside; a "twice-turned" garment is one that has been put through this process yet again.³⁹ For those of us involved in the production, this decision to use a second-hand wardrobe was also a conscious commentary on the shrinking budgets of most theater programs. For our audience of nontheatrical outsiders, we hoped the hand-me-down, hodgepodge effect of the wardrobe would prompt reflection on

the lack of resources and the division between classes (e.g., rich and poor, human and god, elite and subaltern), as well as making them sensitive to the shift to flashier clothing and then to Mardi Gras costumes as wealth is redistributed.

In particular, the use of modern “uniforms” for some characters allowed for a secondary level of social commentary. For example, the gown worn by Just Citizen evoked both a judge’s robes and a college student’s graduation regalia, thereby playing up the civic responsibility and financial obligations of each role respectively. The uniforms of the Working Girls, evocative of big-box stores and fast-food chains, marked them as distinctly outside the economic “safety” of the middle class. The superhero costume worn by the Priest of Zeus alluded to the status he should receive as the god’s earthly proxy and further mocked his inability to derail the redistribution of wealth.

The shifts in costuming for the three lead characters (Inida, Carry, Faith) and the Working Girls, done as their enrichment occurs, acted as a visual cue to match their shifting attitudes about poverty and the poor. In particular, Carry’s move from dingy garments to sequined dress also marked her “devolution” from crusader against poverty to someone who had no qualms in saying, “Who knew poor people could be so annoying?”⁴⁰ The Working Girls displayed the greatest shift in their costuming, indicating the most pronounced shift in fortune and attitude; the trio ended the play costumed for a Mardi Gras parade, their identity hidden behind half-masks, cotton-candy-colored wigs, feather boas, and party-colored dresses. Their attitudes likewise changed from railing against the indignities forced upon them by their jobs to mocking those who come to Inida’s house for help, and finally to giving themselves completely to the madcap worship of Wealth that closes the play.

Vase Paintings and Modern Vernacular: Blocking and Dialogue

In adapting Aristophanes’ play, we sought to further the blend of ancient and modern through onstage movements and certain facets of the dialogue. For example, the blocking of the onstage movements shifted between stylized poses drawn from Greco-Roman vase paintings and sculpture, and unaffected, informal gestures, like characters hugging each other or high-fiving. In some scenes, the styles were juxtaposed, as during the *agon* when Inida and Poverty were initially held in an exaggerated tableau while Faith meandered about, inspecting the various charts Poverty had set up.

In the dialogue, we tried to convey the mixture of sacred and profane, lofty and louche, universal and local that characterizes the Aristophanic original. In one particular scene—Carry’s description of Asclepius healing a disguised Wealth—the adaptation of the dialogue employed a similar alternation between the moment of Asclepius’ revelation and the offhand and dismissive reactions of Carry and Faith. To further create this quick pivot in tone in our production of *Wealth*, one actor served as a mask for another:

(Carry positions herself behind Faith; the audience sees Faith’s lips move, but hears the deep voice of the god Asclepius. Faith stands still as a statue; her eyes are wide but her face is expressionless, like a blank mask.)

Carry: (in a deep, solemn voice) Neoclides, in return for your faith, I restore the light to your eye.

(Both actors step apart and shake themselves out, as if recovering from a moment of divine possession.)

Faith: So he (Asclepius) didn’t know it was a woman?

Carry: No, you know HMO’s only let doctors see you for like ten minutes now. He didn’t have time.⁴¹

Here, in *Wealth*, the humor of the exchange rests upon the juxtaposition of the holy moment of the god's appearance with Cario's gross breach of decorum, all of which is highlighted by the fact that he is recounting the moment to a woman (Chremylus' wife).

Wife: But didn't the god come to you?

Cario: Not yet, but he did just after that. While he was approaching, I did something really funny; I let off a ginormous fart. I'd gotten bloated from porridge, you see.

Wife: I bet that made him want to get close to you!

Cario: No, but it offended his attendants. Iaso blushed and Panacea held her nose. My farts don't smell like incense, you know.

Wife: But what about the god himself?

Cario: It didn't seem to bother him, by Zeus.

Wife: This is a pretty crass kind of god you're talking about, then.

Cario: No, he's a doctor. They're used to eating shit.⁴²

In addition, Aristophanes' consistent references to other authors and poets were adapted and updated by lacing the dialogue of *Wealth* with references to modern authors, as well as pop music and pop culture. Sometimes these were brief (Inida mentioned Tumblr, Carry invoked Orwell's "some animals are more equal than others"), but sometimes these allusions were longer and drawn out more explicitly for the audience, like this scene between Inida and Poverty in the *agon*; here, Aristophanes' reference to lyric verses was recast as a familiar quote from *A Christmas Carol*.

Poverty: There can't be a place of peace and plenty without there also being a place of conflict and deprivation. Some have to suffer so that others can prosper.

Inida: Ah, I see. So it's down to "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?"

Poverty: Don't you put your Dickens in my mouth! He was writing about abject beggary and a complete lack of resources. I'm talking about the natural fluctuations of the market.⁴³

In the original, at this juncture in the *agon*, the joke hinges on Chremylus' recasting of verses written by the lyric poet, Alcaeus, in which Poverty and Helplessness are said to be siblings.

Chremylus: (sarcasm) I am demonstrating how you are the cause of oh-so-many blessings, aren't I?

Poverty: You are not talking about my way of life at all! What you are talking about is the way of life suffered by those who are destitute!

Chremylus: Well, hasn't it been said that Destitution is the sister of Poverty?⁴⁴

Within our adaptation, in order to reflect Aristophanes' firm grounding in Athens, we decided to frame Athens *qua* New Orleans by keeping a select few of those original references (e.g., Inida consults Delphi at the start of the play, rather than, say, the spirit of Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau), but then to shift the majority of them to terminology familiar in the New Orleans vernacular. For example, Faith and Inida described their initial state of poverty in terms of "plate sales" and "rent parties," two traditional means of raising money familiar in New Orleans.⁴⁵ Later, when Carry taunted Hermes with a litany of choice foods, Aristophanes' catalogue, which stressed the god's lack of resources,⁴⁶ was transformed into a list of classic New Orleans eateries and dishes, emphasizing the local preoccupation with food, as well as the ongoing enrichment of the house.

Hermes: Please, baby, come on, please just let me inside to get something to eat. It...it smells like you've got barbeque in there.

Carry: Yep.

Hermes: (sniffing) And...and...shrimp on the grill.

Carry: We've got it all: butterfly catfish from Mittendorf's, sweet baby backribs from Rocky and Carlo's, onion rings from College Inn, oyster po-boys from Guy's, barbeque shrimps from Pascal's...

Hermes: Anything from Coquette?

Carry: Just their salt shaker.

Hermes: About time someone took that away. But I'm ravenous for the rest!⁴⁷

Results of the Production—Impact on the Audience

When we began adapting the play into what became our production of *Wealth*, we knew we had a unique opportunity to observe how our student cast, crew, and audience would react to encountering ancient comedy on the stage rather than on the page. A series of talk-back sessions, in-class visits, and a brief survey all provided us with a sense of the results of our production choices. In particular, we were eager to hear the students' take on three things: the link between New Orleans and ancient Athens, the impact of enacting a portion of Mardi Gras onstage while Mardi Gras was being held city wide, and the audience's interpretation of the overall "message" of the play. What we gleaned from these sessions suggested some specific things to us about our students' experiences with theater, and specifically with Greek drama.

It is perhaps not surprising that the reactions and perspectives of the student cast and crew differed from those of the students in the audience. Because they spent more time with the script and had background information provided by the dramaturge, director, and writer, the cast and crew had a better grasp of the parallels between the poverty of fourth-century Greece, which formed the backdrop for the original, and the disasters that had crippled New Orleans, which formed the backdrop for our adaptation. Moreover, many of them understood that the New Orleans on the stage could be seen as a "stand in" for many cities in the U.S. (e.g., Detroit, Stockton, Oakland), or even for modern Athens. Although the actors initially wondered how to interpret their characters' shifting fortunes (i.e., was it a good thing that they were suddenly rich?), they embraced the ambiguity the ending implied, seeing it as both a celebration of a new way of life and a requiem for a former one.

However, our actors did have trouble connecting with the audience through the level of metatheater we envisioned. Although our *Wealth* was not conceived as an original-practices production (i.e., no masks,

reduced choral element, modern dress), the actors were asked to engage in the presentational style of acting characteristic of Aristophanes' stage. On this particular point, theater practice illuminated an issue that work with the text could not: the actors, for all their dedication and skill, were unaccustomed to breaking the fourth wall and speaking their lines to the audience, rather than to the other characters. Although the actors did acclimate their onstage movements and points of eye contact in order to treat the audience as, in effect, another cast member, these were techniques that many of them adopted throughout the show's run, growing more comfortable and confident in interacting with the audience with each performance and with greater effect each time. For our student cast and crew, then, the challenges of our production choices were felt most keenly in the area of theater practice, rather than interpretation, as we encouraged them to embrace a style of acting that was largely unfamiliar and counterintuitive.

However, when we spoke with our student audience in talk-back sessions and via a brief survey, we found that the audience had a different set of concerns regarding the production choices we made. What emerged initially in these sessions was that our audience, almost unanimously, had appreciated the conflation of impoverished ancient Athens and post-Katrina New Orleans, but that for many the lack of background knowledge for Old Comedy profoundly affected their viewing experience. Many of the students came to *Wealth* with no background in theater, let alone Greek drama. Those students who had studied Greek theatre had some background for tragedy and were familiar with tropes such as "the fatal flaw of hubris" and the ideal of catharsis. Likewise, their experience of Greek drama came from watching, usually in a video format, a more traditional treatment of, for example, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Students were largely unfamiliar with any Greek comedy except *Lysistrata*, and only a few had seen clips or stills from a production of any comedy. Although we did not speak with or survey all the students who attended the play, the information we did receive allows us to conclude that few had ever read a Greek comedy and that none had seen a Greek comedy onstage before seeing *Wealth*.

This lack of context for what to expect from a Greek comedy versus, for example, a traditional production of Greek tragedy, drove the majority of the discussion in the talk-back sessions. In a revelation that we found surprising, the student audience expressed trouble contextualizing the pervasive metatheater of the play, as well as concern about the ongoing stream of insults the characters exchanged. In terms of interaction between actors and audience, survey respondents expressed surprise at the direct address of the acting style, and several students said that they did not know whether they should acknowledge or respond to the actors who appealed to the audience. Others noted that their previous visits to the theater in a scholastic setting (usually as part of a high-school field trip) had come with the admonition that they were to sit still and be quiet at all times. Many students came with the expectation that the decorum of a traditionalist production of *Macbeth*, for example, was typical for all live theater. For students with this background in attending theater, the obscene and aggressive nature of the humor in Greek comedy came as a shock, and one student worried that "some jokes sometimes alienated the audience." It was the entrance of the Old Cougar [Old Woman], a female character played by a male actor in our production, that gave one group in particular a sense that the audience was welcome to participate and laugh aloud at the aggressive teasing some characters experienced. In this case, the audience made the connection to pop-culture figures, such as Tyler Perry's Madea, for whom the element of drag entails the use of bawdy language, physical comedy, and a running social commentary. The audience also participated spontaneously and actively when the second line began at the close of the play; the culture of "second lining" is so strongly established in New Orleans that upon the musical cue of "Do Whatcha Wanna" by the Rebirth Brass Band,⁴⁸ the audience began clapping in time with the familiar song, even over the play's last line of dialogue, and even without knowing what sort of closure the dance provided.

For many students, the lack of traditional arcs of character and plot development was frustrating. One student's concern that "the bad guy (i.e., Poverty) did not get punished enough for his bad behavior"

seemed to reflect an expectation, created by modern drama and sitcoms, that characters bear the consequences of their bad behavior. Still others seemed to come to the play expecting Greek comedy to be similar to Greek tragedy in terms of character growth and the resolution of moral dilemmas, with one student offering, “The adaptation/the script was rather simplistic and it left very little room for character development. With this, the play lacked depth and it was difficult to be engaged as an audience member.” Another student pointed directly to the fact that the audience was puzzled by the unique form of Old Comedy, saying “I appreciate the attempt at honoring Greek tradition, but it was lost on this audience.” Despite the difficulties in understanding some of the generic facets of Old Comedy that we embraced in adapting *Wealth*, the students were able to synthesize the production’s relevance to issues in post-Katrina New Orleans, Post-Great Recession America, and even modern Greece. This level of engagement between theater and society was something we very much hoped to bring across in *Wealth*. It was gratifying to have the students respond positively to the fact that comic theater could engage in political discourse. An overwhelming majority of the students perceived the irony in the play’s suggestion that “the more things change, the more they remain the same” (this was one of the survey questions, and a point raised in talk-back sessions).⁴⁹ One student reflected on this particularly in light of the parallels between ancient Athens and modern New Orleans, writing, “I really enjoyed the juxtaposition of present versus ancient circumstance.” Most appreciated the link between the production and Mardi Gras (one wrote, “It was fun to see the Mardi Gras aspect and audience interaction”), but it was hard even in discussion to get a sense whether the students in the audience understood the ambiguity we hoped to suggest in representing the *exodus* as a second line. Although many appreciated the familiar rhythm and spectacle, no student indicated without prompting that the close of the play could be seen as both celebration and funeral, as the beginning of the new world and the end of the old, and as a foreshadowing that perhaps the characters’ access to wealth would be transitory.

Our encouraging overall conclusion from conversations with our student cast, crew, and audience was that although many of them were unaware of the conventions of Greek comedy, they were still able to “get what the play meant,” as one student put it. Certainly staging *Wealth* during a semester in which courses highlighting Greek drama were offered would have created more opportunities for all students involved to become more familiar with the genre and perhaps also expand the ways in which they connected with and interpreted the play. But we do believe the students’ appreciation of the setting and message of *Wealth* says something quite positive about the validity of our production choices, and about the power of theater to reimagine and represent events in order to speak across space, time, and cultural norms. It also suggests that students are engaged by and receptive to works of theater beyond familiar and canonical plays, and that with a modicum of introduction, they are willing and able to appreciate works from challenging genres. On a more general level, our work in translating, adapting, and performing *Wealth* has demonstrated to us that the play is eminently accessible to modern audiences. Its wry look at socio-economic reform feels familiar when staged before an audience who themselves are caught in a struggling economy. The ability of directors and translators to infuse adaptations of *Wealth* with more pointed or particular economic and social criticism—as we did—makes the play an excellent fit for skewering the fitful and fickle modern financial market and those who dream of being its master. We are thrilled to have been part of a resurgence in theatrical interest in *Wealth*, and we hope to see the play claim a place on the modern stage beside *Frogs* and *Lysistrata*.⁵⁰

Appendix I: Cast of Characters

Comparison of List of Characters in Aristophanes' *Wealth* and Rosenbecker's *Aristophanes' Wealth*; Gender of each character is indicated by (m) or (f).

Aristophanes	Rosenbecker
Cario (m)	Carry (f)
Chremylus (m)	Inida (f)
Wealth (m)	Wealth (f)
Chorus of Farmers (m)	Working Girls (f)
Blepsidemus (m)	Faith (f)
Poverty (Penia) (f)	Poverty (m)
Chremylus' Wife (f)	n/a
Just Man (m)	Just Citizen (f)
Informer (m)	Mortgage Broker (m)
Old Woman (f)	Old Cougar (f)
Young Man (m)	Boy Toy (m)
Hermes (m)	Hermes (m)
Priest of Zeus (m)	Priest of Zeus (m)

Appendix II: Full Program

The original program has detailed information about the production.

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS AND DANCE

Georgia Gresham, MFA, *Chair*

Benjamin Clement, MFA	Frances Gremillion, MFA
C. Patrick Gendusa, MFA	Elizabeth Parent, MFA
Kellie Grengs, MFA	Artemis Preeshl, MFA
Geoffrey Hall, MFA	Cherie Roberts, BA
Laura Hope, Ph.D.	Robert Self, BA
Laura Zambrano, MFA	

SPECIAL THANKS

William J. Farge, S.J., Chair, Languages & Cultures
 Bret Pennison, Purchasing Director, Loyola University
 Dean Donald Boomgaarden, College of Music and Fine Arts
 The Faculty, Staff and Students of the
 Department of Theatre Arts & Dance
 The Faculty and Students of the Department of Visual Arts

PRE-PERFORMANCE PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Wednesday, January 30th @ 7:30 PM

Dr. Karen Rosenbecker, Assistant Professor of Classical
 Studies, Department of Languages and Cultures
"Occupy Athens: Theatrical Protest in Aristophanes' Wealth"

Thursday, January 31st, 2013 @ 7:30 PM

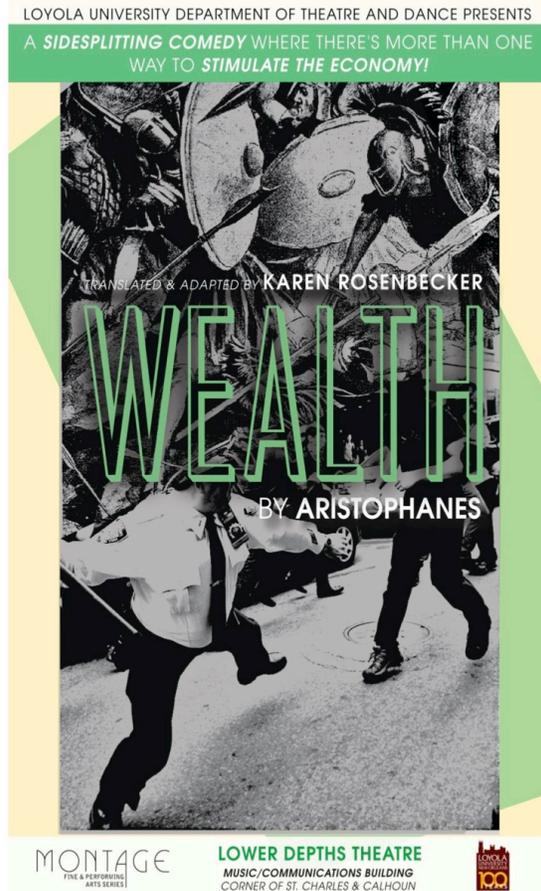
Dr. John Levendis, Associate Professor, College of Business
"The Greek Economy, a Tragicomedy"

Friday, February 1st, 2013 @ 7:30 PM

Dr. Ben Benus, Assistant Professor, Visual Arts
"Picturing Privilege: Modern Art and the Wealth Gap"

Saturday, February 2nd, 2013 @ 7:30 PM

Dr. Karen Reichard, Director, Women's Resource Center
"Pay Equity as Social Justice"



WEALTH

By Aristophanes
Translated and Adapted by
Karen Rosenbecker

Lower Depths Theater

January 30, 31, February 1, 2 @ 8 PM, 2013

Director..... Artemis Preeshl**
Costume Design Kellie Grengs*
Scenic Design Geoffrey Hall*
Lighting Design Michael Philips
Audio Design..... Kelcie Schwab*

CAST

Wealth..... Laura Chapman
Carry Alex Kennon
Inida..... Kaleigh Macchio
Faith Alina Gordillo
Just Citizen/Priest of Zeus Lauren Imwold*
Poverty/Cougar..... Sam Morel
Mortgage Broker/Hermes Parker Denton*
Working Girl 1..... Coral Serrano
Working Girl 2..... Victoria Nixon
Working Girl 3..... Ally Cohen
Boy Toy..... Akeem Biggs

This production runs approximately one hour with no intermission.

No Late and/or Re-entry to the performance is allowed.
No photography allowed.

The following translation/adaptation of Aristophanes' *Wealth* is copyrighted to Karen Rosenbecker and may not be reproduced without her express permission. 2012 ©

Throughout this project, Karen has been grateful for all the support from her colleagues in Languages and Cultures and in Theatre Arts and Dance, especially director Artemis Preeshl and the wonderful actors and stage crew who are bringing Aristophanes' work to life in this modern world.

Pre-Performance Panelist Biographies:

Benjamin Benus is an Assistant Professor of visual arts and teaches modern and contemporary art history. His current research examines the relationship between avant-garde art and information design in the early twentieth century.

John Levendis is an Associate Professor of Economics, and holds the John V. Connor Professorship of Economics and Finance at Loyola University New Orleans.

Karen Reichard is the Director of the Women's Resource Center. In her work she serves as an advocate for women's and gender issues and encourages women's empowerment and leadership. She also regularly teaches a course on gender performance for the First Year Seminar program.

Karen Rosenbecker is an Assistant Professor of Classical Studies, as well as the translator and adaptor this production of Aristophanes' *Wealth*. Please see the previous page for her full biography.

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

The Money Box

Marquette Theatre

March 8, 9, 14, 15, 16 @ 8:00 PM

March 10, 17 @ 2:00 PM, 2013

The Witness

Lower Depths Theater

April 10 & 11 @ 7:00 PM, 2013

Senior One-Act Festival

The New Mrs. Jones

The Lesson

April 15 & 16, 2013 at 7:00 PM

Does This Woman Have a Name?

An Angel Intrudes

The Perfect Relationship

April 20 & 21, 2013 at 7:00 PM

Loyola Ballet Spring Concert

Roussel Hall

April 26 & 27 @ 8:00 PM, 2013

ARTISTIC AND PRODUCTION STAFF:

Artistic Director..... Georgia Gresham*
Technical Director..... Robert Self*
Costume Director..... Kellie Grengs*
Public Relations Coordinator..... C. Patrick Gendusa*
Office Manager Cherie A. Roberts
CMFA Box Office Manager Jessica Azucena Romá
Assistant Business/Box Office Manager Frances Gremillion
Stage Manager..... Lauren Patton
Assistant Stage Manager..... Rosalind Santos
Assistant Director Charmaine Berggeen
Assistant Scenic Designer Natalie Kratochvil
Properties Mistress..... Renee LeBlanc
Graphic Designer..... Rachel Winter

CREW:

Lighting Operator..... Nicole Oria
Sound Operator..... Allison Bandera
Wardrobe Crew..... Vera Aaron & Margaret McAvoy
Property/Stagecrew Sherard Briscoe & Natalie Csintyan
Costume Shop Assistants..... Vera Aaron, Kaleb Babb*,
..... Reiley Morgan, & Yana Uvarova
Departmental Assistants..... Blaine Simon & Kaley Sise
Scenery Construction Stagecraft I Class

*Indicates membership in Alpha Psi Omega Honorary Fraternity

**Indicates membership in Actors Equity Association

Director's Note

Parable says to Naked Truth: "It is hard to look at Naked Truth. Let me dress you up a bit. Your welcome will be gained."

- Maggid of Dubno the 18th century Rabbi poet based on an Eastern European tale.

Aristophanes' *Wealth* satirizes the dramatic reversal of fortunes that occur when the blind god of wealth regains his eyesight. This play, like many others by Aristophanes, is rich with the outspoken privilege of the wise fools who dare to remake their world. Performed in 388 BCE in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes' *Wealth*—although it may be a "reboot" of an earlier production—stands as the comedian's final play. After Athens suffered a humiliating defeat by Sparta, the playwright imagines the impoverished citizens replacing a cruel and distant Zeus with the minor deity, *Wealth*. Loyola University New Orleans's production further inverts the playwright's dark comedy by placing wealth in the hands of women, akin to his other Late Comedy, *Assembly of Women*.

In a cheeky send-up that references the current state of the Greek economy and the Occupy Wall Street Movement, Greek scholar Karen Rosenbecker's new translation and adaptation asks the questions: Who acquires wealth? How is wealth gained? What happens when the balance of wealth shifts? Set in modern times, the play blends classical Greek imagery with a light-hearted, but timely, look at the way that shift work is replacing full-time jobs. By depicting a Mardi Gras-inspired type of social justice, *Wealth* celebrates the abundance and joy that comes from love of what we do in our communities.

Synopsis

By Dr. Karen Rosenbecker

In the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, following decades of warfare, the city-state of Athens is impoverished. The Athenian housewife, Inida, her friend Carry, her neighbor Faith, and the chorus of working girls attempt to uncover the reason for the ongoing poverty and the inequitable distribution of wealth. On a pilgrimage to the oracle of Delphi, the women discover the goddess of Wealth who has been blinded by Zeus. When Wealth's sight is restored, the economy will heat up. A mortgage broker, an older, amorous woman, a priest of Zeus, and the God Poverty oppose them. In the end the efforts of the women are successful, but, as a consequence, the world changes in ways that they did not predict.

Artistic/Production Biographies:

Georgia Gresham, Artistic Director of Loyola Theatre, joined Loyola University New Orleans in 1990 as Department Chair. Previously she had been on faculty at California State University-Los Angeles, Rutgers University-Camden, and the University of Wisconsin-Superior. Her B.F.A. in Theatre is from the University of Evansville, and she received her M.F.A. from Florida State University. Gresham also studied at the well known Studio of Stage Design and Forum in N.Y.C. Her work includes designs of scenery, costumes, and lighting.

Kellie Grengs has designed costumes for Loyola productions for over ten years. In addition to supervising the costume shop, she teaches a variety of classes in the department and serves on numerous committees including: Web Design + Technology, and the Staff Advisory Council. Kellie earned a M.F.A. in Costume Design at Tulane University and holds a B.S. in Apparel Design and Manufacturing from the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, WI. She is currently a Board Member of The New Freret.com and volunteer for Looziana Basset Rescue.

Geoffrey Hall graduated from NYU, Tisch School of the Arts. He has worked on Broadway, Off Broadway, feature films, regional theatres, industrials, commercials, and television as an Art Director, Scenic Designer, and Production Designer. His Loyola Scenic Design includes: *Tartuffe*, *Sylvia*, *The Laramie Project*, *9 Parts of Desire*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Bug*, *Spinning into Butter*, *Trojan Women*, *The Scene*, *Jihad Jones* and the *Kalashnikov Babes*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Almost, Maine*, *The Misanthrope*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *In the Blood*.

Robert Self is the Technical Director for the Department of Theater Arts and Dance. With 30 years of production design and management experience Robert has worked on concerts, national conventions, and touring events. His international tours have taken him to Moscow, Paris, Bonn, and Tbilisi. Locally he has won three Big Easy Awards and a Storer Boone Award for Set Design. Additionally, Robert has consulted at numerous schools and theaters having designed systems for facilities such as: Le Petit Theater, Southern Rep Theater, True Brew Theater, Carlone's Dinner Theater, Rivertown Rep Theater, Jesuit High School, St. Dominic School, and St. George's Episcopal School.

Artemis Preeshl (Director and Choreographer) was a Fulbright-Nehru Senior Researcher at Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai. Her film, *Pancha Ratna*, won Honorable Mention in DIY Film Festival's Best World Cinema in Hollywood. She has directed 45 plays, including Loyola's *Twelfth Night*, *Christmas Carol*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *The Scene* (Big Easy nomination), seventeen Shakespeare plays, and *Titus Andronicus* in Russian (Ukraine), *Top Clowns* (Kosovo), *The Parade* (Bali), *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (La MaMa) and *Commedia of Errors* (Italy). Artemis has received grants to teach *commedia dell'arte*, film and Fitzmaurice Voicework in Albania, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Borneo, and Australia. With Dr. John Sebastian, Professor Preeshl directed Loyola students in *The Ascension* for the Chester Cycle 2010 in Toronto. She performed half of Shakespeare's canon and comedy at Carline's Comedy Club. Artemis coached accents for *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Laramie Project*, *Christmas Carol*, *Bug*, *Wait Until Dark*, *Sylvia*, *Blithe Spirit* and *Godspell*. An Associate Professor in Loyola's Theater and Dance Department, Artemis teaches acting, movement, accents, voice and speech. MFA Drama; MA Dance; Deuxieme degre en français. Certified Laban Movement Analyst and Fitzmaurice Voicework Teacher, Acting Fellow (Shakespeare's Globe, London). AEA SAG-AFTRA

Karen Rosenbecker (Translator and Adaptor) came to New Orleans once upon a time ago and promptly fell in love with the city and its people. She has had the good fortune to be a faculty member in the Department of Languages and Cultures at Loyola since 2007, with time off for good behavior. Prior to coming to Loyola, Karen received her Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Pittsburgh where she was lucky enough to study Greek drama with Mae J. Smethurst and Buck Favorini, whose respective works have helped shape her own appreciation of Aristophanes.

Karen first began working with Aristophanes' *Wealth* as part of her dissertation in part on a dare from a fellow graduate student; at that time, the play was out of favor with critics and scholars. Time has a way of changing things, and Karen is delighted to be part of the renewed scholarly and popular interest in Aristophanes' *Wealth*. The play's sharp observations on human helplessness in the face of an out-of-control economy are universal and timeless, and in some ways more accessible than the pointed political satire of Aristophanes' better-known works.

This translation and adaptation of the *Wealth* is part of her ongoing work with the play which includes an article on the unique way Aristophanes uses scatology in the original Greek, as well as her recent contribution to the I.F. Grose Memorial Lecture Series, "Occupy Athens: Economy, Scatology, and Theatrical Protest in Aristophanes' *Wealth*".

Cast Biographies:

Coral Serrano Bennitt (Working Girl 1) is a junior Psychology major. Last season she appeared as Charlie in Loyola's production of *Godspell*, and Zoli and Lady in Yellow in *For Colored Girls*. Coral is originally from Madrid, Spain.

Akeem Biggs (Boy Toy) is a freshman Theatre Arts major. The "African Dream" is a little boy with even bigger dreams. His goal in life is to take care of those who have taken care of him, so that is why he chose to pursue a career in Theatre. To his Mother and twin brother, "This is for you!" Love y'all.

Laura H. Chapman (Wealth) is a senior Theatre Arts major and Dance minor. This is her first time on Loyola's stage. In Loyola's *All's Well that Ends Well* and *El Nogalar*, Laura was audio engineer and audio designer respectively. Thanks to all of her friends and family for their support. She could not have done it without them.

Ally Cohen (Working Girl 3) is a sophomore Theatre Arts major. This is her third Loyola production. She is enthusiastic to be working with the cast and crew of *Wealth*. "It's all about the Benjamins baby."

Parker Denton (Mortgage Broker/Hermes) is a senior Theater Arts major. He could not imagine a better show to end his Loyola acting career. In addition to Loyola Theatre Arts, Parker trained at Double Edge Theatre, the London International School of Performing Arts, and a winter intensive at The New Movement Theatre. He would like to thank Artemis for all of her help this semester. Thank you.

Alina Gordillo (Faith) is a sophomore Theater Arts major. This is her second main stage performance. She is excited to be working with such a cool group of people. She would like to thank her beautiful and amazing family for supporting her, always telling her to follow her dreams, and for being her number one fans.

Lauren Imwold (Just Citizen/Priest of Zeus) is a senior Theatre Arts major and African American Studies minor. Last season she appeared as Jackie in *Anton in Show Business*. Recently, she has had the wonderful opportunity to do theatre with children and the elderly in the community. Lauren is pleased to have the chance to work with Artemis before graduating. Thanks to my family and loved ones.

Alexandra Kennon (Carry) is a sophomore Theatre Arts and Journalism major. Previous Loyola credits include playing Diana in *All's Well that Ends Well*, Assistant Directing *El Nogalar*, playing The Witch in the one act *The*

Frog Prince, and assistant stage managing *In the Blood*. She enjoys riding bikes and petting cats. Many thanks to everyone in her life for being awesome.

Kaleigh Macchio (Inida) is a junior Liberal Arts major. At the age of four Kaleigh made her first debut on stage and began working in film at sixteen. She is from California and loves acting, exploring, coffee, and piano. Kaleigh is a transfer student and is thrilled to get to work with Artemis on her first Loyola play.

Sam Morel (Poverty/Cougar) is a junior Theatre Arts major. He most recently has been seen in *Spring Awakening*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *The American Century Stranger*. He enjoys long walks in any locale, variations of Indie music, and hedgehogs. He would like to extend a hug and his friendship to everyone here tonight.

Victoria Nixon (Working Girl 2) is a sophomore Theatre Arts major. She has served as the Properties Mistress for the past two seasons and is very excited to make her Loyola main stage debut.

Crew Biographies:

Vera Aaron (Costume Shop Assistant) is a senior Theatre Arts/Music Industry Studies major. This is her final main stage production after working in the costume shop for over two years. Vera will be directing "Does this Woman Have a Name?" by Theresa Rebeck for her senior capstone project on April 20th and 21st!

Allison Bandera (Sound Operator) is a senior Theatre Arts major. She is pleased to be helping out with a great production. Thank you and congratulations to the fabulous cast and crew!

Elise Berggreen (Assistant Director) is a sophomore Theatre Arts-Advertising & Graphic Design major. This is her first assistant directorship and she is delighted to have the opportunity to work with such an incredible group of people! Thank you to everyone that made this production possible. It has been an unforgettable show and I am proud to have been a part of it.

Sherard Briscoe (Stagehand) is a senior Theatre Arts major. This is the fourth production he has worked on at Loyola. Within the past year, Sherard launched a company focused on men's neckwear called Sir Vincent Designs. He is honored to work alongside such a great crew and talented cast. Enjoy the show!

Natalie Csintyan (Properties Crew) is a freshman Theatre Arts major. She is very excited to help with her first production at Loyola. Her previous theatrical involvement was with productions on the North Shore, and she is very happy to be involved with the students at Loyola.

Renee LeBlanc (Properties Mistress) is a freshman Theatre Arts major. Renee has been involved in theater since the age of ten and has been performing since she could walk and talk. She is thrilled to be working as Properties Mistress to further her knowledge of the theater universe.

Margaret McAvoy (Wardrobe Crew) is a Psychology major and Theatre Arts minor. She worked on *Blithe Spirit* this fall at Loyola, and continues to work in the costume shop. She is excited to be working with such a talented cast and crew, good luck!

Nicole Oria (Lighting Operator) is a junior Theatre Arts major. She is very happy to be working on another Loyola production and knows that everyone will be great! Break legs y'all!

Lauren Patton (Stage Manager) is a junior Theatre Arts/Journalism major. She is excited to get the opportunity to stage manage such a remarkable show. She gives a shout out to the amazing cast and crew for making this a memorable experience. She thanks her Momma for always encouraging her to follow her dreams.

Rosalind Santos (Assistant Stage Manager) is a junior Theatre Arts major. Rosalind is delighted to be working as the Assistant Stage Manager and set-dresser for *Wealth*. You may have seen her as Holly in *Anton in Show Business* or Beatrice in *When God Comes to Breakfast*. Working on the other side of the stage has been an incredible opportunity. Buena suerte mis angeles!

notes

¹ Rosenbecker, Karen. "Wealth." Script, © 2013, p. 3. For the original sentiments, see Ar. Plut. 26–39.

² Perhaps the best-known example of this is Paul Chan's 2007 staging of Becket's *Waiting for Godot* in the Lower Ninth Ward and in Gentilly, two New Orleans neighborhoods hard hit by flood damage in Katrina. Chan's decision to stage the play outdoors, using abandoned houses and debris as scenic backdrops, tapped into what he called "the terrible symmetry between the reality of New Orleans post-Katrina and the essence of this play, which expresses in stark eloquence the cruel and funny things people do while they wait: for help, for food, for tomorrow." (See Chan's introduction to the project at www.creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/chan/welcome.html and discussion of the productions at www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/arts/design/02cott.html?pagewanted=all).

³ Aristophanes' heroes often run up against characters who are drawn directly from the Athenian social/political milieu and serve as antagonists or comic foils (e.g., Cleon in *Knights and Wasps*; Socrates in *Clouds*; Euripides in *Acharnians*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Frogs*). In addition, problems created by the protracted nature of the Peloponnesian War (e.g., the Spartan depredations of Attic farmlands in *Acharnians*, the diminishment of civic festivals in *Peace*, the sexual dysfunction in *Lysistrata*) are frequently the reason for the hero's actions.

⁴ Specifically in this play, the involvement of the pan-Hellenic oracle at Delphi and the frequent mentions of Zeus Soter, whose cult was enjoying a surge of popularity across Greece (see Parker, *Athenian Religion* [Oxford, 1996]), suggest an Athens that could be any other polis. Also, references to specific Athenians are minimal and brief (cf. 174–180, 303–306, 550, 602).

⁵ For background on the endemic poverty in Athens and fourth-century Greece, see Strauss' *Athens after the Peloponnesian War: Class, Faction and Policy 403–386 B.C.* (Ithaca, 1987) and David's *Aristophanes and Athenian Society of the Early Fourth Century B.C.* (Leiden, 1984).

⁶ For a description of the Argos riot, see Diodorus Siculus XV.57–58.

⁷ See Lysias 22.1–12.

⁸ See Rhodes, *The Athenian Boule* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁹ The continually updated “Latest News” section illustrates the longevity of the movement (www.occupywallst.org).

¹⁰ A brief discussion of the transfer of wealth in the decades since the end of World War II and a comparison between the distribution of wealth circa 2013 and the distribution of wealth circa 1928 is available at www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/12/05/u-s-income-inequality-on-rise-for-decades-is-now-highest-since-1928/. While the comments to the post are anecdotal, the anger, fear, and contempt expressed in them represent an illuminating cross-section of public sentiment on the subject.

¹¹ For an overview of this series of shootings, see www.huffingtonpost.com/mobileweb/2013/05/12/mothers-day-parade-shooting-new-orleans_n_3263539.html.

¹² See www.nytimes.com/2014/07/10/us/ray-nagin-former-new-orleans-mayor.html?referrer=&r=0.

¹³ See Kocha's editorial for a discussion of that label for the city in light of recent events (www.thedailybest.com.2012/11/09/the-city-that-care-forgot.html).

¹⁴ See note 2.

¹⁵ Cartledge in his essay “Deep Plays: Theater as Civic Process in Athens” suggests that the City Dionysia, in its mid-fifth-century form, was a reflection of the highly political and competitive nature of public life in Athens, and that the drama on the stage was a mimesis of the drama in the Athenian assembly and law-courts (*The Cambridge Guide to Greek Tragedy* [Cambridge University Press, 1997]).

¹⁶ K. J. Dover refers to this behavior as “self-assertion,” a manner of comportment which characterizes all Aristophanes' heroes and many of the characters allied with them (*Aristophanic Comedy* [University of California Press, 1972]).

¹⁷ See an excerpt from that speech and Nagin's subsequent explanation of the comment at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEH9u26Vlhk>.

¹⁸ See www.asergeev.com/pictures/archives/compress/2006/504/03.htm.

¹⁹ See www.asergeev.com/pictures/archives/compress/2006/502/13.htm.

²⁰ For a general discussion of second lines, see <http://www.frenchquarter.com/history/SecondLine.php>. For their ubiquity in New Orleans culture, see the ever-changing list of scheduled second lines at www.wwoz/new-orleans-community/inthestreet.

²¹ For more on this topic, see James Gill's *The Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (University Press of Mississippi, 1997), specifically pp. 35–51.

²² Much of the early history of the various “tribes” has not been preserved (“Forward,” Mardi Gras Indians, Smith and Grovenar [Pelican Press 1994]), but the post-Katrina activities of the North Side Skull and Bones Gang have been chronicled by the Times-Picayune (Litwin, “Skull and Bones channels the spirit of Mardi Gras” [http://www.nola.com/nolavie/index.ssf/2012/02/skull_and_bones_gang_channels.html]). Many video clips of the Skull and Bones Gang making their rounds may be found on YouTube, but the following video provides a series of historical images as well as footage of modern “bones men” knocking on doors on Mardi Gras Day and yelling their traditional warning of “you gotta get your life together!” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRj7oeXyoql>).

²³ The courirs de Mardi Gras are still run in small communities in rural southeastern Louisiana (Gheens, Mamou, Iota, and others). The unique traditions of the chases, including both the pursuit of children and their various parade elements, have been described in magazines on tourism and travel (Bass, “Courir du Mardi Gras,” *Deep South Magazine*. 14 February 2011) and analyzed by academics (Lindal, “Bakhtin’s Carnival Laughter and the Cajun Country Mardi Gras,” *Folklore* 107). Although the video is not of the highest resolution, perhaps the best example of the transgressive behavior allowed during the chase is the following brief clip: the footage clearly shows a grown man, whose identity is hidden by a mask and colorful clothes, aggressively chase and tackle a child before “whipping” the boy with a fabric lash, all as amused adults look on and cheer the pursuer (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3a1pzuQzTpA>).

²⁴ See www.bigeunet.com/plays.

²⁵ View full program in Appendix II.

²⁶ To get an idea of the ubiquity of blue tarps in the Gulf South, see the photo of the houses on the cul-de-sac that appears on the homepage for the Hurricane Management Group (www.hurricanemanagementgroup.com/blue-roof-leak-plastic-tarp/). For background on the use of the tarps and the ironic message they send, see FEMA’s “Blue Roof Program” (www.fema.gov/newsrelease/2004/10/2/operation-blue-roof) and also comments on the program’s effectiveness (<http://www.pogo.org/our-work/reports/2006/co-kc-20060828.html>).

²⁷ For an overview of Prospect.1, see <http://www.prospectneworleans.org/past-prospects-p1/>.

²⁸ For background on and visuals of the installation, see www.dawndedeaux.com/steps1.php.

²⁹ See photos at http://www.nola.com/homegarden/index.ssf/2014/02/shotgun_geography_new_orleans.html.

³⁰ Freud argues that the child’s mind links feces to money, gold in particular, and thence connects money with anal eroticism (On Transformation of Instincts as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism [The Penguin Freud Library (vol. 7), 1991]). For the evolution of the connection across twentieth-century psychoanalytic literature, see Trachtman’s “The Money Taboo” (<http://www.richardtrachtman.com/pdf/moneytaboo.pdf>).

³¹ In fact, the majority of students surveyed felt that the overall message of the play was “the more things change, the more they remain the same.”

³² Translator and adapter Rosenbecker felt this sense of unseen, impending doom was so central to Wealth that she toyed with making this phrase a subtitle (i.e., Wealth or Lemmings Rushing to their Deaths).

³³ See Appendix II for a side-by-side comparison of characters’ names and genders in the original and adaptation.

³⁴ For statistical information, see the statement on women and poverty issued by the Center for American

Progress (www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/report/2008/10/08/5103/the-straight-facts-on-women-in-poverty/).

³⁵ The term “War on Women” was used widely during the 2012 campaign season to refer specifically to the perceived assault on women’s rights resulting from certain Republican Party policies (www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/12/war-on-women-2012_n_1511785.html). Perhaps the best-known sound bite relating to workforce discrimination and pay equality was Mitt Romney’s “binders full of women” gaffe during the second presidential debate (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_LQ3eHSZ9c).

³⁶ The Institute for Women’s Policy Research has compiled a 12–page overview of poverty in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma (www.iwpr.org). In addition, the meta site CivilRights.org maintains a list of papers, articles, and conference presentations that focus on the link between poverty and the effects of Hurricane Katrina, many of which speak to the uniquely vulnerable state of women (www.civilrights.org/poverty/katrina/).

³⁷ For example, in Aristophanes the line “it is really possible for us to be wealthy?”(286) in our *Wealth* becomes “if what you’re saying is true/you mean we can really be rich/we don’t have to work like we do?” [Rosenbecker, p. 11].

³⁸ The term “rent party” is perhaps most formally associated with its use during the Harlem Renaissance (www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/progress/p_rohib/rent.html). The origin of the term “plate sale” is more difficult to determine. Like bake sales, plate sales are a common fundraising tactic across the South; instead of baked goods, they feature meat dishes or even whole meals assembled and sold on individual plates.

³⁹ The best illustration of this meaning and practice is Dickens’s description of Mrs. Cratchit at the family’s Christmas dinner “dressed out but poorly in a twice–turned gown” (“Stave Three: The Second of the Three Spirits,” *A Christmas Carol*).

⁴⁰ Rosenbecker, p. 43.

⁴¹ Rosenbecker, p. 27.

⁴² Plut. 695–706. Here Aristophanes alludes to the practice among ancient physicians of tasting a patient’s urine and feces as a diagnostic technique.

⁴³ Rosenbecker, p. 22.

⁴⁴ Plut. 545–549.

⁴⁵ See note 38.

⁴⁶ In *Wealth*, This scene between Cario and Hermes also relies on a series of aural puns. For example, Hermes bemoans the ham (κῶλης) he used to receive from his worshipers, and Cario responds that he can “ham it up all he likes” (ἄσκωλίαζ’) but he is not getting any (1128–1129).

⁴⁷ Rosenbecker, pp. 41–42. For the referenced passage in the original, see lines 1125–1133.

⁴⁸ Full song available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GiQFveaqHo>.

⁴⁹ See note 31.

⁵⁰ This brief overview of the various productions and their timing suggests a growing awareness of the

socioeconomic relevance of the play and its appeal to modern audiences. Wealth has received several recent productions, with most of them being staged in Greece. During Wall Street's bear market of 1994, the National Theatre of Greece produced the show. As Greece suffered its own economic crises, Wealth enjoyed a sharp uptick in frequency of productions. In 2004, to spoof the "global recovery" from 9/11, the Medieval Moat Theatre in Rhodes staged Wealth. In 2010, Diagoras Chronopoulos, director of Karolos Koun Theatro Technis, remounted his 2000 production of the Ploutus to highlight socially inequitable distribution of wealth in Athens. In 2011, Yannis Rigas and Grigoris Karantinakis recomposed Ploutus in the National Theatre of Northern Greece's production at the acoustically perfect Epidaurus. Here in the U.S., productions of Wealth are on the rise as well. The Curious Frog Theatre Company, based in Queens, presented Wealth (Profit) in 2009 (www.curiousfrog.org/archive.php); Magis Theater of New York presented an adaptation entitled Occupy Olympus in August 2013 (www.occupyolympus.com); the Classics Department at Boston University presented a staged reading, titled Wealth, in April 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMaDp56J9m4>).

Agamemnon

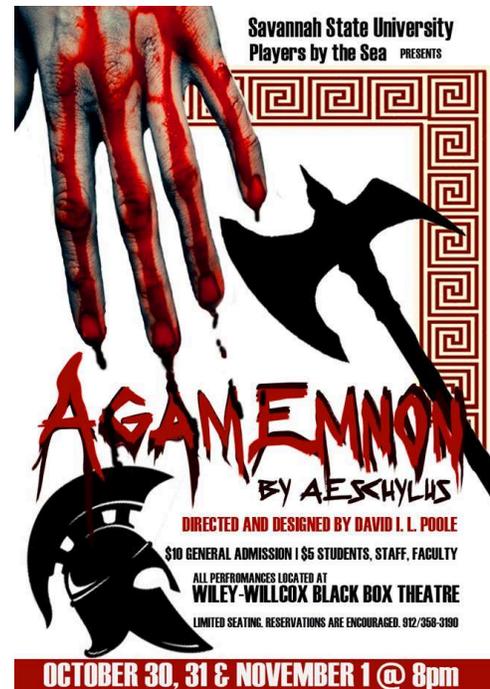
Directed and Designed by David L. Poole
 October 30-31 and November 1, 2014
 The Wiley-Wilcox Black Box Theatre
 Savannah State University

Reviewed by **Ruth Scodel**
The University of Michigan

Until I saw the poster for this production, I had never considered *Agamemnon* as a Halloween entertainment, but it has almost enough blood for a slasher movie and is a ghost story besides. Also, I would probably not have selected a tiny black box theater as the ideal venue, thinking of the vast spaces that the play evokes. But a small, dark theatre has advantages. Insofar as the chorus represents the city, the city itself seems an extension of the house. While I found Cassandra was a little overplayed when she threw herself against the walls, in memory the effect feels right—she is trapped, and the audience experiences some of that same claustrophobia.

The chorus, though, was not a straightforward group of Argive elders. They were masked—the rest of the cast were not. The masks were convenient, enabling the chorus members to take other roles. The masking was especially effective when, during the parodos, one chorus member removed his mask and became Calchas—the switch broke up the long narrative and powerfully conveyed the slippage between past and present. These masks, though, also made the chorus uncanny: they were not flexible or naturalistic, but were hard and distinctly creepy, with long beards. Sometimes the chorus members were a group of Argive elders, especially in their final confrontation with Aegisthus, but sometimes something else, hard to define: spirits of the lingering past, perhaps, or articulate zombies.

This production had a mostly student cast, and Savannah State University is a historically black institution. It does not offer Greek or Latin, it is not a wealthy college, and 90% of its students receive financial aid. Yet Aeschylus was hard to understand even for audiences in the late fifth century BCE, and for a modern audience—people who don't know the history of the Pelopids, the system of Greek orrithomancy, or the problems of theodicy with which the choral songs grapple—he is harder still. Using Ted Hughes's adaptation helped; his version unpacks Aeschylus' dense language. I would never use his translation for teaching, because too often his elaborations distort. In the theatre, though, an audience cannot stop to puzzle through ambiguities, and Hughes's version conveys enough meaning and is real poetry. Cutting also helped, since this production omitted, for example, some choral song and the herald's account of the storm and Menelaus' disappearance. During the parodos, chorus members displayed the eagles on sticks along with the hare; it felt cheesy to me, but was probably helpful for audience members who didn't know the play. On the other hand, a few moments earlier, when they waved a piece of fabric to represent Aulis and the shadow of birds appeared through it, the effect was



Poster for Savannah State University's production of *Agamemnon*. Photo courtesy SSU Players by the Sea Box Office's Facebook.

truly mysterious and numinous; the gods were communicating, but their message was predictably unsure.

This production was almost a lesson in how effective and useful stage resources can be, both those available to the ancients and those not. Agamemnon, wearing armor, entered on a single chariot, with Cassandra huddled in it and no other booty displayed. The oversized chariot by itself announced what the Agamemnon of this production was. In the carpet scene, I did not feel that this Agamemnon felt any real fear of offending the gods or exceeding human limits. He resisted because he would automatically resist Clytemnestra, and at the moment when he agreed that she had "won," he turned and violently kissed Cassandra before descending from the chariot, as if to declare that Clytemnestra's small victory was irrelevant. This bit of stage business was brilliantly shocking.

The main set had a short flight of stairs leading to the palace facade. The chorus was at the level of the front row of audience seating, while Clytemnestra could stand on the stage at the top of the stairs, above the chorus without being completely cut off from them. After the murders, though, the stairs were pushed to the side so that there was a narrow raised stage at house left with no direct access from the choral space. Clytemnestra came out standing over the corpses in a shallow, square basin—it was, in effect, an *eccyclema*. Aegisthus then spoke down to the chorus from the side stage, so that the staging reinforced his lack of involvement in the earlier action and his failure to engage the chorus. Aegisthus wore an orientaling costume with a fez that made me think of a toy monkey with cymbals, an image that fits the character pretty well.

I have often wondered what could make Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, although she must need a male figurehead, accept this weakling. This production did not bring out quite sharply enough how his arrival interrupts her attempt to make a bargain with the evil spirit of the family—that she will take only a little of the wealth if it will leave the house in peace (1575–6). This is probably not a workable bargain anyway, but Aegisthus, who wants all the wealth and power, has no interest in it. However, seeing the play performed by an African-American cast gave this aspect a new resonance, one I have not yet been able to think through. Agamemnon is a *miles gloriosus*, though not at all an amusing version of the type, while Aegisthus is a nasty little tyrant, almost but not quite a complete puppet—he will let Clytemnestra mostly control him as long as he can push around others.

These are the men between whom Clytemnestra can choose, and seeing this production invited me to wonder what this matriarch could have been like if she had ever had a man worth having. The family curse expresses itself not just in her need for revenge, but in the men's greed for wealth and power. That greed is eternal, so that the play can work even without many of its great meditations on the causes of human ruin. The house is haunted, but the ghosts would not come out if we didn't invite them.

Philoctetes as a Health Educator

Robert Hackey

Providence College

Ancient Greek drama offers health educators a powerful tool for raising public awareness of difficult health-policy issues. A reader's-theater production of *Philoctetes* at Providence College in 2008 sought to foster a sense of empathetic understanding of patients' experience with chronic disease. This production drew its inspiration from the work of the Theatre of War Project, which introduced audiences to "timeless social issues through ancient Greek and Roman plays."¹ Performances and the lively post-play reflections that followed brought audiences face-to-face with the struggles—and persistent, gnawing pain—that often accompanies chronic disease. Staging *Philoctetes* offers a rich and challenging experience for predominantly young and healthy undergraduate audiences to reflect on the meaning of illness and to explore how we treat the sick in our midst.

Theater creates openings for much-needed, often-difficult conversations among patients, families, and caregivers by bringing audiences face to face with the raw, emotional ordeal of persons living with chronic pain. Building public awareness of chronic disease is vital today, as more than 100 million American adults—40% of the U.S. population—suffer from chronic pain.² As the Institute of Medicine's landmark report on *Relieving Pain in America* noted, although "pain is a universal experience" many health professionals, patients, and the larger society must be educated about "how to better understand pain."³ Too often, the struggles of patients living with chronic pain remain hidden. Millions of Americans continue to live with pain that is poorly managed and not well understood by their families, friends, and health providers. *Philoctetes* offers a vehicle for audiences to explore the experience of living with pain, and also illuminates the ethical and professional challenges facing caregivers who tend to the chronically ill.

First produced in 409 BCE, Sophocles' tragedy *Philoctetes* provides 21st-century audiences with fresh insights on the experience of illness. Struggling to cope with constant pain from his wounded foot, Philoctetes alienates and verbally abuses those who offer to help him. Banished to the desolate island of Lemnos for the good of his community, he's a burden to his fellow warriors and difficult, if not impossible, to live with. As Odysseus recalls in the opening scene of the play, "I can still hear the howling, the gnashing of teeth, that kept us from pouring libations, the screams that pierced the stillness before the sacrifice."⁴ The social isolation faced by many chronically ill patients is evident as the chorus describes his hardscrabble existence on the rocky shores of Lemnos:

Poor man. I pity him:
isolated and alone,
no one to nurse him,
he talks to himself,
sharing his body
with a brutal disease.
How does he do it?
The gods work well
when men suffer
endlessly and die.⁵

This unmitigated experience of pain and suffering defines the play and provides a powerful touchstone for contemporary audience members who either live with pain or care for those who do. Sophocles captures Philoctetes' infection—the source of his chronic pain—in "gruesome detail: it oozes, it drips, it

smells, the blood which comes out of it is noxious and black.”⁶ The chorus paints a vivid picture of Philoctetes suffering in isolation, with no one to care for him or treat his wound; even before he appears on stage, the chorus announces his presence by describing

A noise, the kind a man
 makes clenching his teeth
 in agony, over here, now
 over there, it sounds just like
 an animal, crawling on all fours.
 There, I hear it clearly again,
 a body in pain, a man in great
 distress, reduced to howling.⁷

Millions of Americans endure chronic pain, but the medical profession has been slow to respond to the need for palliative care, even though such therapies can improve patients’ quality of life and control costs.⁸ Indeed, the medical profession long expressed skepticism about conditions such as fibromyalgia and “dismissed it—along with chronic fatigue and irritable bowel—as a ‘wastebasket’ syndrome, meaning it does not fit into established categories of physical disease. The message implicit in such a term is that the patient’s symptoms are clinically insignificant, a hodgepodge of complaints without physical explanation.”⁹ In many cases, providers attributed patients’ reports of chronic pain to psychological problems rather than physical ones, and often “labeled” them as problem patients. Unlike Philoctetes, whose festering foot was all too obvious to those around him, many patients today have to struggle to convince their caregivers and physicians that they are, in fact, sick. As Jerome Groopman observed, “‘fibromyalgia’ did not formally enter the medical lexicon until 1990.” Today, millions of Americans live with this condition, which includes “persistent muscle pain throughout the body, pain that is often accompanied by severe fatigue, insomnia, diarrhea and abdominal bloating, bladder irritation, and headache.”¹⁰ Although the number of patients suffering from fibromyalgia is hard to measure because of under-reporting, estimates suggest that it may be greater than the number who will develop cancer each year, and six times higher than the number of Americans living with H.I.V.¹¹ In a similar fashion, many veterans returning from the Gulf War and individuals suffering from chronic fatigue often faced skeptical physicians who attributed their symptoms to psychological conditions.

Throughout human history, societies often isolated and shunned the sick. Lepers lived at the margins of society, barred by religious edicts in the book of Leviticus from interacting with others. During the middle ages, plague victims and their families were socially ostracized or consigned to mass graves, as traditional explanations of illness often identified moral failings or sin as the cause of disease. Alas, the stigmatization of illness is not simply a historical artifact. In the 1980s, individuals living with HIV and AIDS also faced widespread social stigma.¹² Most recently, the outbreak of Ebola in Africa in 2014—followed by the first confirmed cases in the United States—led many states to impose strict quarantine policies for potentially infected individuals, while African nations limited travel and imposed strict isolation policies for patients and their families.¹³

In contemporary America, Meghan O’Rourke writes that “one of the hardest things about being chronically ill is that most people find what you’re going through to be incomprehensible—if they believe you *are* going through it. In your loneliness, your preoccupation with an enduring new reality, you want to be understood in a way that you can’t be.”¹⁴ Too many Americans find themselves invisible—marginalized and socially ostracized—while they struggle to cope with debilitating illness. For decades, palliative care—the management of pain—has occupied a back seat in medical education. Curative treatments and therapies, not palliation, dominate the research and teaching agenda for doctors. One of the most powerful indictments of our current approach to end-of-life care, for example, is the fact that

more than one in five patients endure untreated or undertreated pain in their last months. Physicians—who are responsible for ordering pharmaceutical treatments—often discount the complaints of patients with chronic pain. Furthermore, many patients with chronic conditions often experience a sense of isolation when seeking care, as physicians regard their inability to help such patients as a personal and professional failure.¹⁵ In this context, ancient Greek dramas such as *Philoctetes* can encourage audiences to look at illness in a new light, as the raw, emotional ordeal of the characters on stage exposes the isolation and social ostracism facing those living with pain.

Beginning in the 1960s, productions of ancient Greek tragedies responded to a variety of significant public issues, from the Vietnam War to the role of women in American society.¹⁶ Over the past decade, Bryan Doerries' Theater of War (ToW) Project has demonstrated that Sophocles' message still resonates with contemporary medical students who recognize their own patients from medical rounds at Veterans Administration hospitals in the characters onstage.¹⁷ Reflecting on the early work of the *Philoctetes* Project in New York City, Doerries argued that "my production of *Philoctetes* has helped physicians, psychiatrists, medical students, and others address tough questions about doctor-patient relationships, medical ethics, and debilitating, long-term illness."¹⁸ Subsequent ToW productions staged performances of *Philoctetes* and *Ajax* on military bases and medical schools around the U.S. These productions created a unique space for audiences, for "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."¹⁹ Theater of War presented a stripped-down reading of *Philoctetes* by professional actors without special lighting, makeup, or costumes, followed by a panel discussion by veterans, family members, and health providers. Afterwards, audience members shared their own experiences and responses to the panelists and the performance.²⁰ The themes raised in the play afforded an opportunity to explore both patients' personal experiences with illness and the challenges facing caregivers who work with "difficult patients" living with chronic pain or other conditions.

After reading about Doerries' work in 2008, I decided to explore the possibility of producing *Philoctetes* at Providence College. As a faculty member in an interdisciplinary health-policy and management program, I hoped that staging the play would engage students in a deeper conversation about the challenges of caring for patients with chronic disease. Much work remains to be done on this front, for "the person suffering from chronic illness faces a difficult balancing act. You have to be an advocate for yourself in the face of medical ignorance, indifference, arrogance, and a lack of training."²¹ I hoped our production would create opportunities for current undergraduates to engage in a lively discussion with local health providers and patients.

In the spring of 2008, I reached out to Mary Farrell, a colleague in the Theater, Dance and Film Department at Providence College, to inquire about the prospects of jointly producing the play. After an enthusiastic response to my initial inquiry, we met to discuss the logistics of hosting a performance and to review potential scripts. We considered a variety of options, including Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* and several translations in the public domain, but ultimately decided to ask Bryan Doerries about the possibility of using his contemporary translation of the play for an undergraduate production.

Beginning in 2006, Providence College sponsored an annual Health Policy Forum to stimulate an ongoing conversation about the ethical, organizational, and political challenges facing healthcare providers and decision makers in Rhode Island. By using *Philoctetes* as the focal point of our Health Policy Forum we sought to educate clinicians, patients, and undergraduate students about the importance of caring for chronically ill patients with empathy and compassion. In addition, staging an ancient Greek play offered a unique professional-development opportunity that underscored the power of theater to provide a fresh perspective on living with illness. Unlike the wounded veterans and clinicians who attended most Theater of War performances, the target audience for our production consisted primarily of traditionally

aged (18–22 years old) college students, far removed from the trauma of battle and the daily experience of caring for the sick.

As an undergraduate liberal-arts college, Providence College offered a particularly fertile setting for a dialogue about health and illness using ancient Greek drama. Since 1971, all undergraduates have been required to complete a two-year interdisciplinary Development of Western Civilization program (DWC) as the cornerstone of the College's core curriculum.²² All first-semester DWC students read Greek dramas, so staging *Philoctetes* offered students an opportunity to see firsthand how ancient plays could be adapted for contemporary audiences. I offered to visit DWC classes for a guest lecture on significant themes in the play such as caring for the chronically ill, the need for palliative care to manage pain and suffering, and the challenges of managing chronic illness. One section with roughly 180 students accepted our invitation; we visited each section of the team's large (85–90 students) lectures roughly six weeks before our production to place the themes of the play in a contemporary context and build student interest. Before our visits, DWC faculty introduced students to traditional themes in Greek drama such as piety, loyalty, and ethics. Since all students in the class read the play as an assigned text, guest lectures focused on relating the struggles of Philoctetes to the needs of patients in the present American healthcare system. We challenged students to think beyond the play's immediate setting—a desolate Greek island—to consider how contemporary society regards individuals in our midst who are “prisoners” of diseases such as AIDS, cancer, fibromyalgia, and post-traumatic stress.

Since our production targeted undergraduate students, our director, Mary Farrell, opted to present a reader's-theater version of *Philoctetes*. Readers' theater offers a number of advantages in settings where it is difficult to recruit and pay professional actors.²³ In readers' theater, “actors read from their scripts, but their acting is not purely vocal. They often turn to the character whom they are addressing, and eye contact and facial expressions are important to audiences and actors alike.”²⁴ This format added dramatic interest to the production without requiring extensive sets or props; as Hawkins observed, the lack of extensive sets, lighting, and sound effects does not detract from the power of the performance. In Pennsylvania State University's Hershey Medical Center medical-theater program, for example, “gestures and physical contact between actors were used sparingly and thus became very powerful. Indeed, these stripped-down performances proved, once again, that in the theater less is often more.”²⁵

Two performances of the play were staged in the College's black-box theater in December 2008. This setting offered flexible seating arrangements and an intimate performance space (seating was limited to roughly 100 persons). Beginning in late October, the cast held six rehearsals to prepare for the production in early December. Each student actor committed more than 20 hours to the performance. In addition to three undergraduates (Billy Allen, Ryan Desaulniers and Kevin White), the cast included a recent graduate of the college (Katie Hughes), a faculty member (Bob Hackey), and an accomplished local actor who has had recurring roles in *The Brotherhood* and other local theatrical productions (Anthony Paolucci). The production included several modern touches to update ancient Greek drama for a predominantly undergraduate audience. First, several cast members were clad in modern military attire: as Greek soldiers, Odysseus and Neoptolemus donned fatigues and combat boots, while Philoctetes wore a tattered t-shirt and cargo pants. Lighting in the black-box theater focused the audience's attention on each speaker, and a commissioned soundscape established a sense of suspense and pathos as the play opened. The performance also added a contemporary dimension to *Philoctetes* by featuring a percussion soundscape and lighting design created by Providence College undergraduates (Paul Perry and Peter Hurvitz, respectively). Sound effects were limited during the production, but reinforced the dialogue read by the actors (e.g., the sound of helicopters overhead was audible as Odysseus and Neoptolemus searched for Philoctetes' hiding place). At the end of the play, Heracles appeared in the form of a “talking head” on a large-screen TV (truly a *deus ex machina*). This technique simulated the setting of a contemporary press conference or policy briefing broadcast over the airwaves.

Following Bryan Doerries' example, each performance featured an interactive panel discussion to help our largely undergraduate audience draw connections between the events described by Sophocles and the experiences of patients in 21st-century America. The organizing principle for these discussions reflected Doug Paterson's observation that "progressive theater work must be a dialogue, not a monologue."²⁶ In the end, we wanted our audience not only to attend the play, but to reflect on its meaning and draw connections to their own lives.

Many professional conferences and lectures gather immediate feedback from attendees using short-answer (e.g., multiple choice, numerical ratings) survey forms, but we wanted to dig deeper. Students needed time to reflect upon and process what they'd seen and heard during our performance. To assess how attending performances of *Philoctetes* and participating in the post-play discussions shaped students' views of patients living with pain, we offered students enrolled in introductory-and upper-level courses in health policy and management an opportunity to submit a written extra-credit reflection (1–2 pages) during the week following the performances. These student responses were thoughtful, and often incorporated deeply personal connections to the play, providing us with a much clearer sense of how the audience had engaged with the themes presented onstage and in our discussion.

Post-play conversations with the audience began by considering the timeless challenge of caring for "difficult" patients such as Philoctetes. Before our performances, we expected that many if not most students would have difficulty relating to the visceral portrayal of suffering onstage. Indeed, Philoctetes insists that Neoptolemus cannot possibly understand the experience of living with such excruciating pain since he has not directly experienced it himself. Philoctetes' pain is so intense that it defines his existence, as illustrated by his exchange with Neoptolemus:

NEOPTOLEMUS

What's that matter?
Why won't you tell me?
You seem like you're in trouble.

PHILOCTETES

I wanted to keep the pain
to myself, son, but now
it cuts straight through me.
Do you understand?
It cuts straight through me.
I am being eaten alive.
There is no I, only it.
If you have a sword,
chop here. Take my foot.
I want it off, I want it off.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What is this pain
that all of a sudden
strikes so quickly?

PHILOCTETES

You know, my boy.

NEOPTOLEMUS

No. What is it?

PHILOCTETES

How could you know?
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

NEOPTOLEMUS

I can't bear to look
at your condition.

PHILOCTETES

I know. It's terrible.
It is beyond words.
Please, take pity on me.²⁷

When we asked audiences to envision what it's like to be a patient whose life is framed by chronic pain, we didn't realize how the play would touch students' own lives. Producing the play opened our eyes to how many college students personally experienced the burden of chronic illness. One senior underscored Bryan Doerries' observation that the message of Sophocles' play is "timeless," noting that "we can all relate in some way to the struggle and sense of abandonment shown by Philoctetes." For others, the play brought back painful memories. As one junior recalled, "My grandfather was placed into a rehabilitation center after having a stroke. He was completely conscious but had dementia and was unable to form any words. After visiting the first few times, I even found myself having difficulty remembering his calm and caring nature because those memories were overshadowed by his screams and ill temper." For many chronically ill patients, pain pushes all other feelings and senses out. Philoctetes is overcome by all-consuming pain that drowns out all other senses, and though he tries to describe the sensation to Neoptolemus, words fail him.

PHILOCTETES

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh....
as we speak, blood
is oozing from the sore,
a dark red sign of evil
things to come. The pain
swells underneath my foot.
I feel it moving upward,
tightening my chest.
OH I AM WRETCHED!
Don't go. Please. Don't go.
You understand. You know.
Ahhhhhhhhhh. Stay with me.
I wish they could feel this,
Odysseus and the generals.
DEATH! DEATH! DEATH!
Where are you? Why, after
all these years of calling,
have you not appeared? Son,
my noble son, take my body,
scorch it on a raging fire,
as I once burned the owner
of the bow that you now hold. ²⁸

Students connected the characters' experiences to contemporary healthcare cases. As one student wrote,

“in both watching the play and listening to the engaging follow-up discussion . . . I was able to visualize a patient, suffering perhaps from cancer, longing for help, human contact, and relief from his pain.” Watching *Philoctetes*, students gained a new appreciation for the physical and emotional burden of sickness. Another student described the performance as “an eye-opener to what the world is really like and how many people are suffering from chronic diseases.” She wrote that the play “gave me a very different outlook on health policy. During the scenes I was trying to relate them to health policy, and was noticing the pain and suffering that Philoctetes was going through. I don’t think I realized how many people today are actually experiencing the same thing. When Neoptolemus was ignoring Philoctetes and shaking him off, it made me realize that chronically ill patients are also treated in this way today.” Others also echoed this sentiment, noting that “as interesting as I found the play to be, the discussion was most fascinating . . . [it] helped to clarify some aspects of the play, but I also found it to be a captivating conversation concerning problems that [chronically ill] people face daily.”

Students also reflected on the profound sense of isolation that accompanied chronic pain. Although Philoctetes wants others to understand what he’s going through, how can we? We’re not experiencing *his* pain. This becomes a major challenge for patients who require palliative care. As one student wrote, Philoctetes’ pain “drives others away. Sick people are often isolated and transformed by chronic disease. This initiates a dread of being alone and forgotten that can surpass the dread of pain or even death.” For another student, “the idea that care takers, both professionals and family members, can become fatigued by their relationship with the sick is heartbreaking. Like Philoctetes, those with chronic conditions are most in need of compassionate care, yet their attitudes—frequently depressed and dejected—cause others not to want to be around them. In consequence, they are avoided or ignored, which only serves to perpetuate their hopelessness.”

In the absence of a cure, the sick seek companionship and compassion—someone who will support them on their journey. Caring for the chronically ill, however, also takes a toll on family members, friends, and other informal caregivers who provide most long-term care. We see this effect in the play, as Neoptolemus appears awkward and ill at ease when forced to confront Philoctetes’ suffering firsthand, declaring that “Your pain is painful to observe.” Despite his obvious discomfort, Neoptolemus demonstrates an essential characteristic of compassionate caregiving by simply being present in the moment of Philoctetes’ suffering. The all-consuming experience of suffering for the chronically ill raises fundamental questions of how society views the sick. One of the most important things we can do is to simply be present, to care, in their darkest moments. Philoctetes expresses the significance of this simple act of caring when he awakens from his painful stupor to find Neoptolemus by his side.

PHILOCTETES

Never, my dear son,
did I imagine waking
to find you still here
patiently waiting for
the suffering to end.
The light is beautiful
after sleep, especially
when friends are near . . .

You remained
in spite of the smell
and the loud groaning.²⁹

In 21st-century America, chronically ill patients are not snake-bitten war veterans in exile, physically

isolated on craggy, desolate islands. Instead, the sick suffer among us, often invisible or shunned. As a result, in many respects, patients like Philoctetes face an even more painful existence in contemporary America, for they experience a profound sense of both physical *and* social isolation. As one junior health-policy and management major wrote, the “performance made the experience of Philoctetes very relatable . . . to today and how people with fibromyalgia [and] post-traumatic stress . . . are treated like the plague and avoided at all costs.” Because the chronically ill “tend to be unpleasant or difficult to deal with,” one student noted that it is “therefore easy to disenfranchise or just ignore them.” Another observed that “it was interesting how the play depicted the feeling of the general public that . . . we cannot do much to help them, therefore why not place them in an institution?” Although this student noted that “Philoctetes was banished to an island,” she argued that “there’s not much difference between a long-term care facility and such an island.” In the end, she felt the performance offered “a great interpretation of our nation’s long-term care system.”

Unlike other industrialized nations, the United States still does not offer its citizens universal access to health care; even after the passage of the Affordable Care Act (“ObamaCare”) more than 40 million Americans in the US remain uninsured.³⁰ Surveys reveal that uninsured Americans are less likely to seek care for non-emergency conditions, often defer visits to doctors and hospitals because of cost concerns, and frequently do not have a regular source of care.³¹ As a result, millions continue suffer in isolation. *Philoctetes* enabled students to see, in a personal way, the impact of untreated conditions on patients’ daily lives. As one student noted, “many Americans suffer from chronic illnesses that health-insurance companies will not cover, leaving them uninsured. This is not a good prospect for a doctor who would treat such patients.”

Staging *Philoctetes* challenges audiences to confront the stigmatization of the sick. Compassionate care requires not only health providers, but also families, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to develop a sense of empathy and compassion for patients like Philoctetes who live among us. Oftentimes, patients with chronic illness face skepticism from family, friends and providers, adding a powerful sense of social isolation to their daily experience of coping with the physical manifestations of their condition. Students shared deeply personal examples of how they had viewed the chronically ill. For one senior, watching the play “encouraged me to reflect on my own personal experiences. As a child, I had always known [that] my uncle had multiple sclerosis. However, the illness had never been explained to me, leading me to the ignorant belief that he was the ‘weird uncle’ because he couldn’t play games with the rest of the family . . . The stigma that is attached to those with illnesses, especially those that are visible or potentially communicable, could almost be considered worse than the actual diagnosis.” Another student related a similar story, recalling that “my uncle had suffered from diabetes from the age of 8 until the age of 48. His diabetes was so bad that he would have to go to dialysis three times a week; eventually he had both of his legs amputated and [he lost] three of his fingers. Every day he was in such pain from having his legs amputated. They never completely healed and would bleed constantly. He would never do a day without being in pain. At the time, it was extremely hard to understand why my uncle was in such a bad mood whenever I saw him, or why he’d be moaning and hunched over. After seeing the play, I know it must be brutal for an individual who can never be better and who will never be able to live a fully normal life.” Neoptolemus’ decision to stay with Philoctetes marked a turning point, for he not only validated his suffering, but shared in his struggle.

Performances also helped students to connect the dots between the characters on stage and “real world” medical decision-making. In the midst of his suffering Philoctetes pleads with Neoptolemus to “Release me. Release me. Just release me.” Overcome with pain, he implores the Earth to “swallow this body whole, receive me just as I am, for I can’t stand it any longer.”³² As one senior wrote, “what was really important for Philoctetes throughout the entire situation . . . was his control over his own destiny.” As a result, the play highlighted the complexities of end-of-life care, “manifested in Philoctetes’ desire to

simply die on his own terms. The promised cure [at Troy] enraged him further since [it meant] subjecting himself once again to the will of others. A cure was not in the forefront of Philoctetes' mind—rather it was his constant pleas to 'go home,' the flight away from the rocky prison he'd been subjected to that mattered to him more than mere survival. One need not be a larger-than-life Greek tragic figure in order to have that kind of stubbornness to irrationally sacrifice one's own prospects for survival simply for the sake of having (or gaining back) personal freedom. One of the major criticisms of the American healthcare system is the extent to which is institutionalized." In the contemporary American healthcare system, doctors, nursing homes, and other providers—along with third-party health insurers—define the caregiving options for patients and their families. As this student noted, autonomy is a critical issue in contemporary health-policy debates. "Indeed, the detached presence of some of the figures in the play (e.g., Heracles) was also particularly relevant because patients are often all too well aware of the invisible actors in the healthcare field that exercise significant influence over their fate." *Philoctetes*, in short, reminds audiences of the need for patients to take charge of their healthcare decision-making, and for providers to respect their desires.

Since an effective healthcare system not only provides services to patients, but care in the hour of our need, performances of *Philoctetes* afford audiences an opportunity to consider what kind of healthcare system we want. A common theme in student responses to the play was the need for compassionate, empathetic relationships between patients, providers, and other caregivers. Too often, however, caring for the chronically ill is a challenging—if not frustrating— ordeal for family members and friends who cannot fully fathom their experience of illness. The challenges of caregiving are evident in the play as Neoptolemus, exasperated by repeated attempts to persuade Philoctetes to seek the promised cure at Troy, finally declares: "I give up. You are impossible. It's time for me to stop talking. You can go on living this way."³³

"Compassion," as one student who worked in the healthcare system recalled, "is easy when the patient is good natured and sweet, but angry, bitter people are not likely to stir up many warm emotions . . . The character of Philoctetes hits particularly close to home for me, as I was recently attacked by an angry patient at the hospital where I work. The patient was elderly, terminally ill, and in extreme pain. He had never been violent before, but the severity of his pain and the frustration and desperation of being terminally ill caused him to lose control. After his outburst, I witnessed the care he received decrease enormously. He was confined to his bed, and many diagnostic tests were cancelled because technicians did not want to enter his room. The nurses were much slower to answer his call light and reluctant to give him any type of comfort. Eventually during the day he was heavily sedated for the purpose of quieting him. This could all have been avoided had the man been treated with compassion prior to this. He became violent after his requests for pain medication were dismissed needlessly and his appeals to be left alone ignored. He grew tired of being treated with disrespect and indifference. While his reaction was extreme, many patients feel that healthcare providers treat them dismissively and do not listen to their needs." As this student's reflection illustrated, theater not only introduces audiences to important social issues, but fuses individuals' life experiences with the characters and stories playing out on stage.

The stories we tell on stage, and the characters who tell them, can open our minds to new ways of looking at important social issues. As one health-policy and management major recalled, "when I sat down in the theater to watch *Philoctetes*, I was unsure of how it was going to connect to [my major]. The Greek play, army uniforms, and health policy and management all in one production didn't seem to fit at first." By the end of the performance and the post-play discussion, however, she felt our production "was a great way to not only entertain us, but [to] stimulate connections I would not have made before." Another student, a junior, noted that "while the play was interesting the conversation following was perhaps more so. It was nice to have an eclectic group on stage discussing the prevalent issues from the play . . . It was clear that there is a divergence of opinions about how people from different perspectives view health

care, and more specifically, palliative care.” Still others felt the performance “opened my eyes to the challenges a provider or caregiver faces when dealing with the chronically ill. It’s hard to relate to someone in so much pain so it’s hard to know how to be sympathetic and care for them.”

Theatre is particularly well suited to educate communities of providers, patients and other caregivers about the human face of illness. “Medicine,” as Hawkins observed, “is inherently and essentially dramatic. Death and dying have been central to drama from antiquity: a play that deals with such a subject speaks to all who must confront the death of patients, the death of loved ones, and their own eventual death—it speaks, in other words, to everyone.”³⁴ Performances of *Philoctetes* provided students with a chance to confront timeless health-policy challenges: grief, loss, and pain. By putting a human face on chronic illness, the production also encouraged students to explore their own views of the sick, and to reflect upon the importance of compassionate, patient-centered care.

notes

¹ Key Reporter 2008.

² Institute of Medicine 2011. This groundbreaking report provided a comprehensive overview of the incidence of pain in America and presented a disturbing picture of the state of palliative care in America, as millions of patients live with untreated or poorly managed pain.

³ Institute of Medicine 2011: 2.

⁴ Doerries 2008: 2.

⁵ Doerries 2008: 11.

⁶ Goetsch 1994.

⁷ Doerries 2008: 12.

⁸ Rockoff 2014.

⁹ Groopman 2000: 81.

¹⁰ Groopman 2000: 78.

¹¹ Groopman 2000: 78.

¹² Gonsalves and Staley 2015: 2348.

¹³ Gonsalves and Staley 2015 provide a detailed account of state-level quarantine policies to restrict contact between patients suspected of carrying Ebola—in most cases without any documented evidence; Mogelson 2015 describes the implementation of strict quarantine policies used in Liberia and elsewhere in West Africa in a mad scramble to bring the raging epidemic under control.

¹⁴ O’Rourke 2013.

¹⁵ Groopman 2007.

¹⁶ Cf. Foley 2012.

¹⁷ Zuger 2007.

¹⁸ Key Reporter 2008.

¹⁹ Rogers 2011.

²⁰ Rogers 2011.

²¹ O'Rourke 2013.

²² For more information about the Development of Western Civilization program, please refer to the Providence College catalog:
http://catalog.providence.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=6&poid=325&returnto=211.

²³ Case and Micco 2006; Hawkins et al. 1995.

²⁴ Hawkins et al. 1995: 16–17.

²⁵ Hawkins et al. 1995, 17.

²⁶ Paterson 2001: 65.

²⁷ Doerries 2008: 34.

²⁸ Doerries 2008: 36.

²⁹ Doerries 2008: 39.

³⁰ Tavernise 2014.

³¹ Collins 2014.

³² Doerries 2008: 38.

³³ Doerries 2008: 64.

³⁴ Hawkins 1995: 18.

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