

The Journal for Ancient Performance



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

DIDASKALIA

Volume 13 (2016–2017)

<http://didaskalia.net>

ISSN 1321-485

About Didaskalia

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

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

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

2016–2017 Staff

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

Advisory Board

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

Editorial Board

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

Copyright

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

Website design © *Didaskalia*.

Didaskalia is published at Randolph College.

DIDASKALIA
VOLUME 13 (2016–2017)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

13.01	Review - Apollonius' <i>Argonautika</i> at Gustavus Adolphus College Eric Dugdale and William Riihiluoma	1
13.02	Review - Sophocles' <i>Philoctetes</i> at Aquila Theatre Tony Tambasco	10
13.03	Review - <i>Trachiniae</i> at Minor Latham Playhouse, New York Claire Catenaccio	14
13.04	Review - <i>Rhesus</i> at Aristotle's Lyceum Scott Andrew Cally	18
13.05	Review - 52nd Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Sophocles' <i>Electra</i>, Euripides' <i>Alcestis</i> Caterina Barone	20
13.06	Conversation – A Conversation about <i>Deus Ex Machina</i> at the Long Center for Performing Arts, Austin, Texas Liz Fisher, Robert Matney, Paul Woodruff, Lucia Woodruff	24
13.07	Gamel Panel - Performance, Politics, Pedagogy: a Tribute to Mary-Kay Gamel C.W. Marshall	31
13.08	Gamel Panel - Raising the Stakes: Mary-Kay Gamel and the Academic Stage Amy R. Cohen	34
13.09	Gamel Panel - Navigating Tricky Topics: The Benefits of Performance Pedagogy Christopher Bungard	39
13.10	Gamel Panel - Sophocles after Ferguson: <i>Antigone</i> in St. Louis, 2014 Timothy Moore	49
13.11	Gamel Panel - The Authenticity of Mary-Kay Gamel Ruby Blondell	69
13.12	Review - Two Tragic Worlds of Soldiers: Not Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble's <i>Ajax in Iraq</i> Yuko Kurahashi	74
13.13	Imperial Pantomime and Satoshi Miyagi's <i>Medea</i> William A. Johnson	76
13.14	Review - Sophocles' <i>Electra</i> at the Dallas Theater Center Thomas E. Jenkins	91
13.15	Valedictory from the Editor Amy R. Cohen	93

Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 13 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

Two Tragic Worlds of Soldiers: Not Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble's *Ajax in Iraq*

Ellen McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq*

Produced by Jason Bruffy, in association with the Greenway Arts Alliance

Directed and choreographed by John Farmanesh-Bocca

July and August 2016

Not Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble

Greenway Court Theatre, Los Angeles

Reviewed by **Yuko Kurahashi**

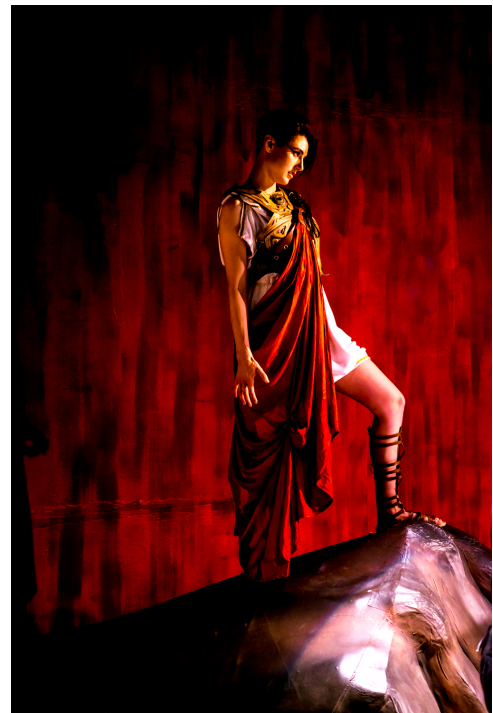
Kent State University

Founded in 2004 in San Francisco, Not Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble has staged adaptations of Ancient Greek and Roman plays as well as Shakespeare, including *Pericles Redux*, *Titus Redux*, *Hercules Furens*, and *Lysistrata Unbound*. Bringing dance and theatre together, the ensemble has created innovative theatrical events and is one of the leading physical theatre companies in the United States.

For their production of *Ajax in Iraq*, produced in 2014, McLaughlin and Farmanesh-Bocca collaboratively tailored the script for the NMA's movement-focused presentation. The 2016 production of *Ajax in Iraq* was the result of additional revisions done by McLaughlin and NMA to further highlight unique features of the company.

Ajax in War juxtaposes the legendary Greek hero from Sophocles's *Ajax* with a contemporary story about the war in Iraq and the sexual battery of women soldiers fighting there. Ajax (Aaron Hendry) is a Greek warrior who succumbs to his hubris after losing the contest for the armor of the fallen hero Achilles to Odysseus. McLaughlin invents the character of AJ (Courtney Munch) as the counterpart to Ajax. Like her ancient Greek counterpart, AJ is a soldier known for her acts of valor.

McLaughlin's dramaturgy merges these two worlds, universalizing the trauma and tragedy of war by treating Ajax's breakdown as an example of PTSD. In the contemporary story, both AJ (Courtney Munch) and Ajax (Aaron Hendry) perform together on the stage in choreographed movement sequences. AJ's breakdown is a response to sexual battery by her superior officer (James Bane). The use of sexual assault in the play reflects increasing concerns about the incidence of sexual harassment and assault in the US military, while PTSD illustrates the condition of soldiers. The interplay between sexual harassment and sexual assault is complex because in the military, "the level of coercion that can be facilitated through the use of rank and authority can be just as serious as the threat or



Joanna Rose Bateman as Athena
(photo: Sean Deckert)



Aaron Hendry as Ajax
(photo: Sean Deckert)

use of physical force.”¹ The routine of AJ’s superior’s verbal threats escalates into physical assaults. AJ’s trauma exemplifies the seriousness of sexual victimization in the military, which still needs to be addressed.

Through the figures of Ajax, AJ, and their fellow soldiers, McLaughlin asks the fundamental question of why we fight. The public would say we fight for freedom and democracy, but in reality soldiers fight for daily survival and, most importantly, from ancient times to the present, for the other soldiers on either side.

Joanna Rose Bateman, who plays the Greek Goddess Athena, serves as narrator of the play. Her sardonic delivery adds an edge, provoking the audience. Hendry’s Ajax, with exaggerated makeup and a macho strut, portrays a war hero possessed by demons. Munch’s AJ is a strong but vulnerable loner. She expresses her psychological state through dance, movement, and facial expressions. The well-trained ensemble plays multiple roles. The well-trained ensemble plays multiple roles. Their synchronized movement/dance, choreographed by Farmanesh-Bocca and Jones Welsh, to the upbeat music in the first scene, designed by Farmanesh-Bocca and Adam Phalen, sets the tone.

The stage is simple but metaphorical with a red backdrop, abstract sculptures, helmets, and a gigantic right hand pointing at a floor map of the Middle East painted by Courtney Jordan Bindel. Army trunks and cots are used to supplement the stage. Lighting designer Joey Guthman changes tones and intensity of lighting throughout the performance, creating different ambiances for the ancient and contemporary worlds. The ensemble, as soldiers, wears camouflage pants and t-shirts with knee pads. When they become a Greek chorus, they simply wear white masks. Ajax wears a black crossed-leather belt, modified “foustanella” (a skirt-like garment), and greaves. Bateman’s Athena is dressed in a stark-white tunic with a bright-red shawl over it. These archetypal costumes and accessories, designed by Stephanie Dunbar (Catherine Baumgardner, wardrobe designer), serve as a visual reminder of the symbioses between Greek tragedies and contemporary war.

McLaughlin has adapted other Greek tragedies, including *The Persians* (National Actors’ Theatre, New York), *Helen* (Public Theater, New York), and *Iphigenia and Other Daughters* (Classic Stage, New York). McLaughlin states that when she went into the collaboration process with the class of 2009 at the Art/MXAT Institute for Advanced Theater Training, she did not intend to write another Greek adaptation: “All I knew was that I wanted to write about the Iraq War, which I felt compelled to address as we entered its bloodiest year and there seemed no end in sight.”² During the creative process, McLaughlin strongly felt that her generation was “essentially sending their generation to fight its battle.”³

The 2009 collaborative processes were imbued with the younger generation’s efforts to know more about war and its effects on people in the past and present. The graduate students conducted research on the mythology and history of war through books, articles, and YouTube videos. Some interviewed their grandparents and relatives, and some talked to homeless Vietnam veterans and returning soldiers. In order to find a strong structure for these diverse devising-theatre materials, McLaughlin turned to the Greeks.

The NMA’s interpretation and staging of McLaughlin’s *Ajax in War* is an invaluable vehicle for raising awareness of the tragedies in war in the year 2016, 13 years after the US invasion of Iraq.

notes

¹ Valerie A. Sander and Cynthia J. Thomsen, “Sexual Harassment and Assault in the U. S Military: A Review of Policy and Research Trends,” *Military Medicine* 181 (2016): 21.

² Ellen McLaughlin, “On Finding Ajax in Iraq,” *PMLA* 129. 4 (2014), 835.

³ *Ibid.*