

The Classics Drama Group at Trent University (Ontario) has been performing an annual Greek play in translation since 1994, both within our institution and in a wider area before school and other university audiences, and even dinner theatre in a local Greek restaurant. In our presentation we propose to share our experiences, both in the technical matters that we had to address, but especially in how the experience of the play related to the actual courses and contributed to the Department as a whole.

On the technical side we would address first the two very different playing spaces: (from 1994 through 2003) in a sunken common room, known as “The Pit”, where spectators and players enjoyed an intimate relationship, and (since 2004) in a newly constructed and technically rich playing space, whose aboriginal name translates as “Cave of the She-Bear”. Issues would include:

- the use of masks (used in our very first production, but not thereafter);
- handling a chorus in a modern production;
- cutting and trimming speeches and scenes for the comfort and reception of the audience;
- the very great difference between staging tragedy and staging comedy;
- maintaining the significance of the entrances/exits;
- costumes that might be considered “faithful” to the classical tradition (as in 2003-07) as compared a more modern and “relevant” style (as in 1995, 1999, 2002, 2008);
- the use of live v. pre-recorded music.

Pedagogically these productions have been connected to the first-year drama-in-translation course (two semesters in length). Students in that course are not compelled to take part in the play, but strongly encouraged to do so. Indeed the lead role is very often taken by a first-year student. All students in the course must attend a performance and write a 4-6 page review as part of their course work – those taking part in the production write about their particular experience (e.g., how did being in the chorus affect their appreciation of the ancient plays?). A third-year course in theatre is offered every three years, in which the workshops are held in the production space, where the students and instructor can tackle problems in a hands-on manner, with special attention given to that year’s play. Here instructor and students come to grips with the pillars of performance criticism: Taplin’s ground-breaking study, the theatrical experience of Rehm and Ewans, and the important studies of Ley and Wiles. Finally a special-topic course is being planned for 2009/10 on Greek & Roman costume, which will use both literary and visual evidence, and whose course-work will be directed toward the actual production of that year.

We shall illustrate our presentation with some plans of the theatrical spaces, some still photographs, and video clips from certain of the productions.