

THE EXPERIENTIAL TURN: SHIFTING METHODOLOGIES IN THE STUDY OF GREEK  
DRAMA

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*... I have come to see that the performances can have hermeneutic and heuristic value for understanding and appreciation, whether you happen to like them or not ...* (Taplin 2002)

Over the last twenty years, Reception Studies has increasingly demonstrated the scholarly value of Greek drama in performance as an historicist indicator: a snapshot of temporal values and social mores. Successive generations have adapted and appropriated classical sources, moulding and manipulating the material to create their own culturally specific hybrids. What we find in each production and in each adaptation is the result of centuries of encrustation; a new shell covering ancient innards, recreated in an ever-renewable form. As the work of Hall, Macintosh, Hardwick et al. has demonstrated so significantly, modern performance of Greek drama can hold up a mirror both to nature and to the culture of its production, reflecting the politics and preoccupations of its age.

In the variety and wealth of research into the reception and theatre history of performances of Greek drama, there is, however, one notably absent area of substantial investigation: that of the *experiential* of Greek drama. How does one quantify, how does one *qualify* the *affect* of theatrical performance? How does one document the processes of creation and interpretation as they shift over the centuries and decades? This is, in effect, an issue of hermeneutics and phenomenology. To study the affect of Greek drama in performance is to investigate not only the context of reception, but also the sensory mechanism of reception. It is to validate an emotional response to the theatrical event; a subjective positioning of the performer, spectator and critic that values somatic sensation as much as cerebral reasoning.

This is a crucial area, and one that has been subject to ongoing examination in performance studies.<sup>1</sup> Its omission in much of the classicist discourse on performance practice is, however, telling: indicative, perhaps, of a methodological uncertainty within the discipline as to what the parameters of the field should be. The boundaries are forever shifting, and, with each extension or contraction of what seems to be the remit of Reception Studies, the discourse within Classical Studies is forced to adapt and realign itself. If this has been the case in the extension of traditional *Nachleben* scholarship, how much more so in the area of Performance Reception.

In her excellent exposition of, and argument for, a theory of Performance Reception, Edith Hall (Hall 2004a) has delineated the territory extensively. The ephemerality of the theatrical event, the peculiarity of the mimetic and sensual force of the actor's aura, and the pervasive suspicion in some sections of academia of the implicit subjectivity in performance have all led to a degree of uncertainty about the scholarly credibility (and, indeed, desirability) of theatrical performance as a valid subject of Reception Studies. Hall ably counters these suspicions by engaging with a broad range of different theoretical models; but the very fact that these fears exist to be countered is significant. It demonstrates the lack of a secure point of reference for the methods and aims of Performance Reception, both in how they are perceived and in how they are realized. It suggests that in the broader area of Classical Studies there is widespread confusion, and, in some cases, ignorance, about the *possibilities* of Performance Reception: that it can be done through multiple frames; that there is a huge variety of theory and

methodology that can be employed to analyse the theatrical event; that examination of performance can have emancipatory potential as a new way of studying both the receiving culture and period and, significantly, the ancient source. The difficulty of analysing performance within Reception Studies of the Classics is actually one of methodology and voice: a case that there is little consensus about the means through which such a study can be undertaken, and even less about the ends to which such a study can be put.

When there is a methodological and theoretical framework, the results can be revelatory. Hall, Macintosh et al.<sup>2</sup> have comprehensively demonstrated the scholarly worth of what could broadly be termed a New Historicist approach to the social context of Greek tragedy in its post-Renaissance afterlife. Similarly Hardwick and her colleagues have shown the value of investigating the *means* of reception, as well as its context, within an analytical framework that is deliberately open, inclusive, and questioning.<sup>3</sup> As these different methodological strands nudge towards finding a unifying theoretical foundation, it becomes increasingly clear that consensus with traditional Classical Studies about the worth of Greek drama in performance will only come through a recognition of the very theoretical multiplicity that has already been so productively embraced in this nascent area of Performance Reception.

In this article,<sup>4</sup> I aim to suggest that Performance Reception can contribute to the discourse of Classical Studies not only through the insights it provides on the receiving culture and source text, but also through the challenges it throws down to the methodological certainties of the traditional discipline. It offers new definitions to the accepted parameters of classical scholarship. It necessitates an engagement with the subjectivity of interpretation. It forces a reappraisal of the hermeneutics of meaning construction, from both the literary script and the enacted script. By making the scholar engage with the multiplicity of interpretational possibilities, Performance Reception can activate an openness to interpretational polyvalence. This is akin to what Easterling (2004) has called, in her lovely phrase: 'a more joined up way of thinking about the reception process'; something that can openly celebrate and acknowledge the complementarity of different media, cultural contexts and individual interpretations, and something that 'can only be good for us in the long run' (ibid. 2004).

Of course, to propose an argument for polyvalent interpretation is well beyond the remit of a journal article such as this and, therefore, this article's sole intention is to propose that Performance Reception, in its inherent multiplicity, allows and validates new and avowedly personal explorations of the afterlife of Greek drama. It permits an embrace of the experiential voice; something from which traditional classical scholarship has generally shied. To this aim, the article will briefly summarize the issues connected with the 'academic voice', touching on first-person scholarly writing; it will then make a selective analysis of the experientially based accounts of performance practice by two academics, Michael Ewans and Mary-Kay Gamel, who have both used personal experiential insight, although in vastly different ways, in an attempt to bridge the gap between Classical Studies and Theatre Studies, and between theory and practice.

That both scholars engage in practice as research is not, in itself, indicative of the significance of their work to Performance Reception; nor are, necessarily, the ways in which they describe their practice. The manner of their conclusions, however, is. The fact that both have used their production experience to frame their academic scholarship and to argue for the relevance of theatrical practice to Classical Studies demonstrates that the potential of Performance Reception is not limited to research on audiences or productions: it can also connect to investigation of the methodological and ideological situation of the critic and scholar. By examining their seemingly oppositional conclusions about the implications of practice as research, I shall argue that the contrast between their theoretical bases, methodologies and intentions demonstrates how delicate the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity is when

academia and performance practice join. The differences in these scholars' analyses are interesting, pointing both to the lack of obvious methodological agreement in the use of the experiential voice, and to the *potential* for its use. This potential is perhaps under recognized and only starting to be examined. At its core is the possibility that reflection on the experiential can provide a new frame for meaning construction: one that, through an embrace of the plurality of voice', can reflect the polyvalence of the theatrical event much more than a dualistic hermeneutic that sees objectivity and subjectivity as polarized binaries.

#### PRACTISING THEORY

Superficially, there is a methodological fissure between the practice-based explorations of the text that occur in performance, and the historical and literary investigations that occur in scholarly philological exegesis and archival research. It is important to clarify here that this fissure is not based on the old, and now rather tired, concept of an implicit antagonism between academia and the theatre: the sort of prejudice Foley (2000) notes when she writes of an eminent colleague who cannot see the point of seeing a production of the *Bacchae* when he knows all there is to know about the play by reading it<sup>5</sup>. Rather, the division comes from the deep-seated difference, and seeming incompatibility, between the motivation for and the media of exploration. This difference is both 'hermeneutic and heuristic' (*pace* Taplin 2002): seemingly, the performance practitioner and the scholar engage with the text—and even the notion of the theatrical event—from such different perspectives that neither approach can sit comfortably with the other. They stand at opposite sides of the circle, tracing the same subject but, because of the glaringly different methods of exploration, rarely able to let their paths intersect.

Although several scholars have written on modern performance as an important element in the study of ancient drama,<sup>6</sup> there is little consensus about how the insights of theatrical practice and academic scholarship can be successfully integrated. There is no shared voice through which this mutual engagement can be articulated. Some commentators insist on the desirability of third-person objectivity; some on the validity of first-person subjectivity<sup>7</sup>. The challenge is left to individual practitioners and scholars, and the results often show a deeply ingrained ideological commitment to certain methodologies or epistemes. To find a cogent methodological direction for Performance Reception, it is, however, crucial that the discipline develop an appropriate voice through which the interrelationship of theory and practice can be described: a challenge that is no easy thing.

The issue of voice in academic discourse is far from unproblematic. As Bowden (1995) points out, voice contains not only the grammatical implications of the subject who activates the verb, but has also taken on a pedagogical and ideological currency as a metaphor within academia. A tussle has developed between the Establishment voice of the disengaged and scholarly third-person, and the activist and personally committed voice of the first-person. Ironically, for a situation in which there is the potential for many different types of voice, this fight for supremacy has done little to encourage heteroglossia (Ramanathan and Atkinson 1999) in academic discourse. Rather, the ideological gap between first- and third-person voice has set up an antagonistic stand-off in the academy between what Bowden (1995) describes as the progressive constructivist view of learning, implied by the emancipatory episteme of the subjective voice, and the formalist attitude that favours the objectivist detachment of third-person scholarship. In this divide, the first-person voice belongs with the personal, the experiential, and the liberating. It is the voice of reflection and experiential learning; it makes claims to authority and authenticity through its unabashed proclamation of subjective honesty. Bowden (1995) points out, however, that this use of the first-person voice to authorize academic discourse is no less of a construct than the slightly specious attempts of third-person scholarship to authorize objective analytical disengagement. The ideological and

methodological divisions between first- and third-person voice in fact obscure the true nature of the hermeneutic activity of interpretation: that it is necessarily a combination of first- and third-person subjectivity and objectivity; that meaning is constructed in the meeting—indeed, in the braiding together—of the personally engaged and the analytically detached.

In Classics, the use of first- and third-person voice has been an issue of some controversy, and the subjective voice has taken little ground in the disciplinary discourse. Classics is still heavily dependent upon a pursuit of knowledge that can: 'distinguish error from truth, and the opinion of the passing day from that true knowledge which lasts for ever, that is ... "perennial"' (Pfeiffer 1968: viii). There is clearly an uncomfortable relationship between claims for the academic validity of subjective experiential insight and entrenched beliefs in scholarly objectivity as a means of finding 'perennial' truth. The idea that an 'emancipatory hermeneutic' (Habermas 1971), based on acknowledgement of personal engagement, could further the interpretational powers of the learner is seemingly contrary to academia's hermeneutic, that equates 'unremitting truth and honesty' (Pfeiffer 1968, viii) not with personal soul searching but with detached scholarly distance.

Claims for critical objectivity are, however, subject to serious questioning. The situated readership of the critic challenges scholarly detachment: however disengaged the critic tries to be from the personal and subjective nature of his or her response, he or she is still subject to the unique influences of personal historicity and cultural positioning (as my rather inelegant use of the gendered possessive and pronoun has just demonstrated). This, in effect, makes the process of reading and interpreting the text every bit as creative an activity as the theatrical realization and embodiment of the play text by the director and actor—although clearly within a different performative context. Kemp puts this well in her analysis of the hermeneutics of reading as performance.<sup>8</sup> Fighting against the 'whiff of failure' that scholarly criticism attaches to the subjective voice, she says:

The problem of criticism is this: if the meaning of a work is brought into being in the process of interpretation itself, then it depends on a kind of *collusion* between performer and audience. How is a critical reading, with its implication of detachment, measurement, a consideration of this performance against real and imaginary others, now possible? Where does the scent of 'failure' come from? Do the terms of interpretative engagement not rule out the possibility of critical disengagement? If, however, reading is itself a performance, then the terms of the question are changed ... To perform ... is to frame what one is doing with a particular kind of self-consciousness, a certain kind of form-consciousness which enables both performers and their audiences to assess what is happening, to decode whether it works or not.

(Kemp 1996: 156)

This 'self-consciousness' that Kemp articulates is something that has been taken up and celebrated in the few but significant examples of personal voice writing in Classics. At the vanguard of this movement have been the collections of essays on feminist approaches to the Classics by Rabinowitz and Richlin eds. (1993) and on personal voice criticism by Hallett and Van Nortwick eds. (1997); and Hallett (2001). These volumes have demonstrated both the riskiness and the potential of acknowledging the personal in scholarship. For Rabinowitz, feminism's validation of the subjectivity of the reader/writer challenges the very foundations of philological scholarship:

[F]eminist theory obviously challenges the discipline's claim of philological objectivity. As reader-oriented critics have noted, the text is a meeting place of author and reader, or author/editor and reader; this is particularly true in the case of ancient texts that have suffered literal 'deconstruction' at the hands of time before coming into the hands of the critics. In order to restore the text, the editor must have some idea of what an author might have meant, an idea in turn grounded in the editor's assumptions as to what makes sense, assumptions that are in turn grounded in cultural norms.

(Rabinowitz 1993: 7)

Hallett, while acknowledging the epistemological politics lying beneath much personal voice criticism, sees it as a way of owning, and indeed celebrating, the individuality of each interpretation:

To write or speak about one's research from a personal and autobiographical standpoint acknowledges and explores the unique relationship between the distinctive background of the researcher on the one hand, and the questions which she or he poses and privileges in the course of scholarly investing on the other.

(Hallett and Van Nortwick eds. 1997: 1)

Perhaps less sanguine about the future of personal voice scholarship is Braund, however, who asks the salient question:

Is personal voice scholarship a reaction against theory or a case of theory run riot? The central issue here is why anyone should want to bother with the non-traditional academic voice.'

(Braund 1997: 39)

Braund's point is important, since it articulates the possible pitfalls of incorporating the personal voice into scholarly writing: it can be an exercise in faddishness; a substitution of one dominant academic ideology for another (as Bowden agrees); a deliberate courting of criticism and even ridicule,<sup>9</sup> and can lack the authority implicit in the 'traditional' academic voice. Nonetheless, the selective use of the personal voice in academic analysis can also be highly persuasive. This is particularly so in an area of research such as the relationship between text and performance in Classical Studies which is still developing its methodological framework. As the parameters of the field are slowly worked out, it is important to acknowledge the potential benefits of incorporating into the discourse the different forms of critical engagement that personal voice criticism offers.<sup>10</sup>

The first-person voice can provide highly specific and highly individual interpretative mechanisms for the methodologies that are developing in Classical Studies to investigate performance. It can propose unexpected and illuminating connections that override distinctions between the rational and the emotional. It can, most importantly, help to eliminate the reductive polarization of the subjective and the objective. As Stewart points out:

The development of an authentic *voice* is a natural consequence of self-discovery. As you begin to find out who you are and what you think and to be comfortable with the person you are, you learn to trust your own voice in your writing ... Very simply, authorial voice is that manner of telling a story which differentiates one writer from another.

(Stewart 1972: 2)

This is important for classical Performance Reception as it finds a pathway through the labyrinthine possibilities of performance analysis, theatre history and literary criticism. As the discipline explores further this area of study, it needs to develop 'an authentic *voice*' that can be 'comfortable' with the multiplicity inherent in the subject matter.

Developing such a voice necessarily admits both the first- and the third-person, at least into the discipline's consciousness if not into its vocabulary; creating a braided<sup>11</sup> academic narrative, that is open to the importance of the *experience*, as much as to the product, of interpretation. Bowden points out that an awareness of the possibilities of a braided voice in academic narrative facilitates the difficult process of articulating 'intangibles':

Voice helps writers conceptualize some of the intangibles in writing, helping to make concrete such abstractions as meaning, power, liveliness, honesty.

(Bowden 1995: 186)

When addressing the phenomenological peculiarity of the interrelationship between text and performance, such help is welcome. The first-person voice of experiential insight can be very important for grasping these intangibles. It can act as a springboard for further scholarly analysis, providing a personal and situated entry point for the more detached voice of third-person discourse to continue an investigation into such slippery metaphysical and phenomenological entities. Braiding first- and third-person voices can simultaneously acknowledge the emotional and intellectual creativity of interpretation, and also recognize the need for further detached reflection on that process.

#### THEORIZING PRACTICE

Within this context of reflection on personal experience, I now intend to examine the experiential analysis that can be found in the writings of Ewans and Gamel. At this stage, it is important to state that my aim is neither to critique the theatrical practice of either scholar,<sup>12</sup> nor to comment on their literary criticism of their ancient source texts. Rather, my intention is to explore how their experiences have moulded their written research; something which in turn has methodological implications for the potential of the experiential voice. Gamel and Ewans are unusual as academics/theatre-practitioners, since, unlike other scholars who also direct and act in productions of Greek drama, they have written about their processes and drawn methodological conclusions from their experience. In their publications, their performance practice has, from very different perspectives, formed both the subject of and the prompt for further analysis. Their style and conclusions differ significantly from each other; and, in this divergence, their analyses demonstrate both the possibilities and problems of such discourse braiding.

Ewans, in his translation work on Greek tragedy, has developed a 'practicum'<sup>13</sup> model for his practice. Seeing Greek tragedies as 'the prisoners of their eloquence', trapped, through their

literary merits, in a gilded cage of 'philological and cultural approaches' (1995: xv), Ewans argues that there has been little recognition in translation of the interrelationship between performance and literary criticism. Translations are still, by and large, written for an educated literary readership (ibid: v), which fails to appreciate the theatrical dynamic of the text. Theatrical practitioners, meanwhile, misunderstand the form through a combination of misplaced reverence or inappropriate arrogance. Reacting to such an esoteric translational culture, practitioners who attempt Greek drama become victims of the seeming inaccessibility of the genre, or fall prey to their own ignorance and misapprehension:

Professional companies, when they attempt a production, pay little or no attention to the nature of the original presentation. All too often the imposition of a preconceived style or idea takes priority over an attempt to re-create for a modern audience the effect created by the ways in which the dramas were originally performed. (xv)

This leads to the mausoleum approach of deadly theatre where:

the text is treated with almost religious reverence, declaimed in a sombre, static production style which owes more to neo-classicism than to the real ethos of Greek tragedy. (xv)

Alternatively, if the play escapes 'neo-classicism', it tends to be mired in modernist/postmodern eclecticism that destroys 'the splendour of the language' in 'a quest for some fundamental "mythic" truth which is wrongly supposed to lie behind and apart from the words' (xv).

Ewans' solution to this literary/theatrical divide is a model of performance practice as research that attempts to recreate the spatial dynamics of the ancient theatre in the belief that this will provide playing 'answers':

If the dramas are workshopped and performed in a replica of the Greek theatre shape, in a style faithful in the relevant aspects to what is known of Athenian dramatic conventions and theatre practice, we can recover some sense of how these dramas communicated with their original audience. (xvi)

Such fidelity to 'original' and 'authentic' practice conditions will, Ewans concludes, often provide clues as to the optimum way of staging the play:

Though many possible movement patterns can be imagined by the armchair theorist, practical work with and from the script often yields only one overall blocking which is effective. This is because Aeschylus knew only one theatre shape ... (xvi)

Perhaps what is most interesting about Ewans' work is not his conclusions, but the methods and assumptions underpinning them. For Ewans, the use of the voice of first-person experience

is not part of Braund's 'theory gone mad'. Rather, he sees it as a valid means of contributing to a traditional discourse in Classics, more often associated with the third-person voice. While acknowledging the specificity of his productions and methods, he nonetheless sees in his conclusions evidence of universal answers; something that has more in common with the hermeneutic certainty of formalist literary studies<sup>14</sup> than the open vulnerability of personal voice theory. He openly acknowledges the ideological battle between the voices of 'subjective' and 'objective' analysis, and feels that he has fallen foul of its proponents through their misunderstanding of the intrinsic subjectivity of the literary critic's 'assumptions about the nature of theatrical performance' (Ewans 2002: 58). Complaining of an editor's suggested emendations to a journal article he had submitted, he notes:

The editor's response was that the paper would need complete rewriting; he felt that it was essential to distinguish between 'objective' insights gained from my scrutiny as a scholar of the ancient evidence and the 'subjective' insight I had gained as a practitioner from directing a modern production. (58)

For Ewans, however, the experiential insight of performance workshopping carries greater weight of evidence than 'the armchair theorist' can bring to bear. He is defiantly assured about the analytical credibility of his findings:

[A] research production which does conform in relevant respects with Athenian conventions may provide insights which are more reliable—perhaps even more 'objective'—than deductions made, without benefit of modern performance, from the ancient evidence. (59)

This suggestion of 'reliability' and 'objectivity' is a surprise in a paper that looks at the relationship between contemporary and ancient performance practices, and uses the blocking from a modern production (of, in this case, *Aias*) to draw conclusions about Sophocles' stagecraft. Such certainty is rare in Performance Studies. It is equally rare in those reception theorists in Classics who interrogate the relationship between ancient texts and the cultural *zeitgeists* of their transmission and appropriation. Despite his avowed belief in the power of experiential insight to elicit new understandings of ancient texts,<sup>15</sup> Ewans, nonetheless, uses a vocabulary that retains a dualistic distinction between the desirability of objectivity over the uncertainties of subjectivity. This has the danger of ignoring the plurality of the performance event and the performer's experience. In moving from the subjectivity implicit in the performance workshop to claims for objectivity in the discovery of 'one overall [effective] blocking', Ewans fails to embrace experiential insight's most exciting potential: its validation of multiplicity and interpretational openness; the sense that acknowledging the experiential can put us *beside* duality and *beside* difference, in a place where history blurs and affect can conflate language, culture and chronology in boundless possibility. This notion of '*besideness*' is one of the key features in Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2003) approach to affect as a liberation from the constraints of binary thought.

In contrast, this sense of *besideness* is implicit, though not stated, in Gamel's use of personal reflection. Working from a very different perspective, Gamel eschews claims for objective findings. For her, performance necessarily carries with it multiplicity and iterability:



No performance of a script is ever definitively the last or the best. Because of its provisional nature, a particular production may be effective or ineffective, polished or awkward, predictable or idiosyncratic; a particular choice may be 'right' or 'wrong' not in any absolute sense, but only for the particular circumstances.

(Gamel 2001: 157)

Her understanding of the cultural and contextual specificity of each production leads her to propose a dialectical frame for performance:

Performance is always a dialectic: between formal elements and historical context, between constraint and spontaneity, between the established script, the actor's freedom, and the audience's unpredictable reaction. Hence, another important method for understanding ancient drama is to study and create actual performances.

(Gamel 2000: 100)

But her appreciation of the affective mechanisms of interpretation, representation and performance tends to belie the polarization implicit in such a dialectical view. As she writes about her students' dealing with themes of rape, rage and loss in the *Ion* (Gamel 2001), she conveys the experiential force that occurs in the gaps between the dialectic, where, for the performer and the spectator, intellect and emotion oscillate and, in their alternating vibrations, create endlessly new and complementary meanings for the play.

In this recognition, there is openness about the cultural and contextual uniqueness, yet renewability, of each arena for production and reception. This actively attempts to engage both the multiple possibilities of performance and also the different potential methodologies of investigation within Classics. Gamel treads carefully between awareness of the interdisciplinary developments in scholarly interest in ancient performance practices (Gamel 2000), and awareness of the potential 'otherness' of Greek drama as a form in its twentieth- and twenty-first-century manifestations. While being critical of the anti-theatrical prejudice of some scholars (Gamel 2001: 154), she is also aware of how Classics has begun to move in its methodologies towards a more inclusive interdisciplinarity. This has created 'a panoply of approaches to ancient theatrical performance' (Gamel 2000: 100) which has tried to bridge the gap between the classical scholar's understanding of the world, and the 'new field' of Performance Studies, 'whose methodologies are varied and still inchoate, yet rich and promising' (ibid. 99).

Within this interdisciplinarity, however, Gamel sees a dearth of accounts of experiential insight. Whereas: 'Classicists who have involved themselves in the staging of Ancient dramas have gained important insights' (ibid. 100), few have addressed the issue of their own practice in that engagement:

[S]tudies that view ... productions from the perspective of practitioners (translators, directors, actors) are still rare. Even those few classics scholars who are also theater practitioners, such as Michael Ewans, Rush Rehm, J. Michael Walton, and David Wiles rarely discuss their own productions. There are good reasons for this. Creators may not have sufficient perspective on their own work; at best, their comments may be more descriptive than analytical, at worst, self-serving. Also, a theatrical production communicates its meaning in performance and does not (or should not) need another medium to do so.

(Gamel 2002: 465)

Gamel's response to this absence is to document her own performances through a combination of descriptive analysis and experiential reflection. Aware of Jameson's conflict between Identity and Difference (Jameson 1988), her analyses of her own practice cross between expressions of the otherness of the medium and message of the plays she tackles (whether that be *Ion* or *Thesmophoriazousai*), and reflection on the attachment and subjectivity of her own and her actors' personal engagements with the text. Citing her past experiences, she justifies practice as research through a specific articulation of her own subjective positioning:

My experiences in producing other ancient dramas had convinced me that performing these scripts provides insights that are not available to scholars studying only the text, and that women often approach these dramas from a different angle ... A production experiment could test whether and what meaning this play could hold for a twenty-first century audience.

(Gamel 2002: 466)

In contrast to Ewans' attempts to find the only 'effective' way to stage a play, this is a practicum model that acknowledges and celebrates the uniqueness of each production (and reception) context, yet sees that discoveries made in this highly specific environment can have further hermeneutic application. As such, Gamel's methodology—both in rehearsal and in writing up her process—is a blending of the first- and third-person voice in a way that sees the subjective and objective positioning of critic and performer as complementary and mutually enriching. She understands that in performance practice, the voices of 'personal' and 'professional' (Gamel 2001: 156) are braided together: a weave that, by implication, practically and effectively *enacts* the dialectic between Identity and Difference (ibid. 159). Given the multiplicity of the subject, the polyvalence of the nature of interpretation and the subjectivity of the practitioner, this is a dialectic to be celebrated, not feared:

This dialectic between Identity and Difference is not a problem to be solved but a dynamic to be explored. Studying and performing ancient drama, which requires engagement with a wide range of cultural values both past and present, is an especially rich way to explore this dynamic.

(Gamel 2000: 102)

#### REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCE

In their very different ways, Ewans and Gamel both demonstrate the potential uses of experiential reflection when applied to ancient drama. The one looks to deduce ancient practices from modern ones; the other acknowledges and validates the specificity of her contemporary context of production. Despite differing so widely in their aims, both, however, prove that recognizing the *experience* of engaging with a text—be that as a translator, a director, an actor or a scholar—can provoke challenging questions about the hermeneutic practice of interpretation, and the theatrical practice of performance. Their performance practice and their analysis of their process might tell us little about Aristophanes or the tragedians; but it can tell us a great deal about how modern performances can inform, through our situated

reception of them, our further understandings of these plays. Reading their accounts, we are forced to question the ideologies underpinning individual definitions and claims for objectivity and subjectivity. We are prompted to consider the applicability of performance practice insight to our understanding of the literary and historical positioning of the source text in both ancient and modern receiving cultures. In the gap between their different views, we can look from a tangential perspective (a *besideness*) to perceive the interplay of individual voice and experiential reflection within the wider methodological field of Performance Reception.

Potentially, this could open up to Performance Reception new ways of judging personal responses and the experiential uniqueness of each performance event; something which, as an experientially based methodology, has substantial similarities to Reflective Practice. This is an area of experiential assessment that has generally been restricted to fields of professional training, but, I would argue, it has important potential as a methodology for analysing performance. It is in reflective practice that Classics, Theatre Studies, and theatrical enactment can find a useful analytical paradigm that combines the experiential with the theoretical, and the first-person voice with the third. Indeed, recognition of the value of entwining these two voices is one of the few consistent principles behind the many and varied theories underpinning reflective practice. As Moon (1999) points out, reflective practice is riven with conflicting definitions,<sup>16</sup> both as to its methodological parameters and also, more importantly, as to its understanding of the terms reflective practice and experience. Moon's definition tries to bring together the disparate strands of the discourse:

[R]eflection is itself a mental process with purpose and/or outcome. It is applied in situations where material is ill-structured or uncertain in that it has no obvious solutions, a mental process that seems to be related to thinking and to learning.

(Moon 1999: 5)

As such, reflection is different from autobiography and anecdotal first-person narrative, although it might well contain elements of each or all of them. Reflection on practice necessitates an understanding of both the emotionally subjective and empirically objective elements of the experience. It allows the reflector to think about her processes, her motivations and the effects of her actions. It allows her to develop further cognitive strands or hermeneutic capabilities through an appreciation of how the individuality of her personality, situation and activity have blended together to form her behaviour and her assessment of her behaviour. Moon states that, despite such broad definitions, it is possible to see reflective practice and experiential learning as intimately linked, in a hermeneutic conversation with self and society about the multiple possibilities inherent in problem solving. As she says:

[T]he subject can acknowledge that there is no 'right answer' and can accept that experts may disagree as to the 'best solution' of a dilemma.

(Moon 1999: 5)

That multiplicity—just like Gamel's dialectic of Identity and Difference—is something to be embraced as a way of advancing the learner's understanding and knowledge.

This has relevance to Classics and performance equally. Both the scholar and the performance practitioner who reflect on their creative and interpretative processes engage in hermeneutic acts that potentially emancipate not just themselves, but also their disciplines, from

restrictive and exclusive methodological prescriptions. To reflect on the processes that go on beneath the practice of interpretation is a way of opening up—indeed, emancipating—the one who is engaged in that reflection. It frees up their ideas of what constitutes the parameters of their learning, and what creates the environment of their discourse. For classicists engaged in the delicate dance of methodologies, as they negotiate ways of looking at texts in performance, such a liberation is useful, and, indeed, probably necessary. To validate experiential reflection as a means of documenting the processes of performance and interpretation is also to validate the *permeability* of traditionally discipline-discreet borders. This can be nothing but beneficial to Performance Reception: introducing further methodologies and further possibilities to the discourse. Weaving together these different strands of subjectivity and voice creates the vocabulary to contextualize past events with current understandings, and to conceptualize the topic of performance in a manner that contains at least some element of the openness of performance itself. It is too early to assess the full application of such processes; much more work needs to be done; but it is at least a start towards Easterling's 'more joined up way of thinking'.

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<sup>1</sup> For affect in relation to performance, see Diamond (1997); Massumi (2002); Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003); Hemmings (2005); Varney (2006).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Hall (1999); Hall, Macintosh & Taplin (2000); Hall, Macintosh & Wrigley (2004); Hall & Macintosh (2005). The productivity and eclecticism of the material published through the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama is indicative of the huge range of subject matter that can fall within the remit of Performance Reception.

<sup>3</sup> See Hardwick (1999; 2000a & b; 2003; 2004); Burke (2003); Burke & Innes (2004).

<sup>4</sup> I am most grateful to Lorna Hardwick who, as my external PhD supervisor, suggested to me the possible relevance of 'braided narratives' and pointed me in the direction of reflective practice.



<sup>5</sup> See Golder (1996; 1998) for a less antiquated version of this anti-theatrical prejudice; Taplin (1998) for a reply to Golder; and Walton (2001) for a reply to Foley.

<sup>6</sup> To name but a few, see Foley (1999); Patsalidis & Sakellariou (1999); Wiles (2000); Walton & McDonald (2002); Taplin (2002) Rehm (2003).

<sup>7</sup> This is clear from the conference proceedings to *Sophocles' Electra in Performance* (Dunn 1996), in which the division between practitioners and academics seems almost insurmountable.

<sup>8</sup> This is notably different from Hall's 'commonsense' definition of performance that excludes readings: '[T]o say that something from ancient Greece or Rome has been performed implies an aesthetic phenomenon in which humans have realized an archetypal text, narrative or idea by acting, puppet manipulation, dance, recital, or song; the category Performance Reception therefore excludes individuals reading a text to themselves, or the visual arts (except, hypothetically, when they are of a type requiring the label performance art)' (Hall, 2004b: 51).

<sup>9</sup> Something convincingly noted by Van Nortwick (1997). See Casanave & Vandrick (eds) (2003) for further discussion, especially Blanton's chapter (147–57): 'I know the article had transgressed into a reflective format, where I attempted to instruct through telling my own classroom story ... And I knew the article left me feeling vulnerable' (153).

<sup>10</sup> These 'benefits' have already been substantially noted in feminist and queer theory. See Miller (1991); Sinfield (1994); both authors cited, interestingly, in the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* critique of *Compromising Traditions* (Nisbet 1997).

<sup>11</sup> For 'braided' discourse, see Barthes (1974: 160): 'The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (*text, fabric, braid*: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice; these braided—or braiding—voices form the writing.'

<sup>12</sup> Since I have only seen their work on video or in workshop settings as 'work-in-progress', both very different contexts and frames from a finished production, it would be invidious to judge the theatrical results of their methods.

<sup>13</sup> For practicum models in reflective practice, see Schön (1983; 1987).

<sup>14</sup> There are also interesting similarities here with the early translational theories of the 'gestic subtext' once proposed and then discarded by Susan Bassnett; something particularly interesting given Ewans' role as both translator and director. For these issues of translation and transcodification on stage, see Bassnett (1978; etc.); Lefevre (1992); Heylen (1993); Upton (2000). See Bassnett (1978) for her initial proposition of a 'gestic subtext' that survives translation and can be decoded by the actor (in the Stanislavskian tradition); (1985) for its repudiation in favour of collaborative translation; (1991) for her critique of 'performability' as an historical construct of theatrical hierarchy; (1998: 90) for her summation of her investigations as '... a long, tortuous journey ... [for which] the image of the labyrinth is an apt one ...' (2000) for her summary of translation theory with regard to theatre and opera. For discussion of Bassnett, see Espasa (2000) and Marinetti (2005). For the relevance of translation theory to Greek drama, see Carson (1996); Barsby (2002); Hardwick (2001); Wiles (2000: 196–208); Garland (2004: 119–45); Walton (2006).

<sup>15</sup> e.g. Ewans (2002: 75–6): '... why should we privilege a scholar's reading over an actor's? ... Can classical scholars really claim, simply by virtue of their studies, a direct link to Sophocles' mind, which negates any insight achieved by a modern performer, however gifted, who has less knowledge of the ancient world? ... After all, the gap between the modern scholar and the ancient *protagonistes* is just as great as that which separates a modern actress playing Elektra

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from Sophokles; but the actress possesses one great advantage—her personal experience of creating the role in rehearsal and live performance.’

<sup>16</sup> The lack of definition can prove frustrating and theoretically contentious. Schön (1983; 1987) is an interesting case in point as one of the foremost proponents of reflective practice. He proposes a practicum model as a way of allowing professionals to adapt and learn from their mistakes through ‘reflection-in-action’. Schön, however, fails to define adequately either the term ‘reflection-in-action’ or the parameters of his ‘practicum’ model. As such, his theories have interesting potential application to the rehearsal room as ‘practicum’, but have usefulness more as inspiration than a blueprint. For criticism of Schön, see Eraut (1994) and Moon (1999).