

S K E N È

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

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Memory and Performance.
Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals

Edited by Francesca Bortoletti, Giovanna Di Martino,
and Eugenio Refini

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Founded by Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Alessandro Serpieri

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Preface

The essays featured in this double issue stem from the conference ‘Memory and Performance: Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals’, organised jointly by the University of Parma (Parma, October 13-14, 2022) and University College London (London, February 23-24, 2023), as part of the WIDE Program (Widening International Didactics and Education) of UNIPR and in collaboration with the Centre for Early Modern Exchanges at UCL.¹ The conference’s rationale goes back to a meeting held at Oxford University’s Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, a pioneering research centre that is concerned with recording, documenting, archiving and writing about the performance of ancient texts from Greek tragedy to Roman epic, in any medium and any period, from stage to screen, from antiquity to the present day. Central to this meeting was the inquiry into whether the ‘festival’, viewed through an expansive temporal lens, serves as a privileged conduit for

¹ The conference was supported by the Units of Arts, Italian Studies, and Classics at the University of Parma (UNIPR), the Centro per le Attività e le Professioni delle Arti e dello Spettacolo (CAPAS, UNIPR), the A.G. Leventis Foundation (UCL), the Institute of Classical Studies (UCL), the Classical Association, the Gilbert Murray Trust, and the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (Oxford). The project was in co-partnership with the Centro Interateneo, Memoria delle Arti Performative (MAP), the Centro Interuniversitario di ricerca di Studi sulla Tradizione (Bari), the Laboratorio Dionysos (Trento), the Society for European Festivals Research (SEFR), the Warburg Institute (London), and the Institute of Advanced Studies. This conference was part of a wider project organised jointly by UNIPR and UCL that has since led to the organisation of two further events related to classical reception in the performing arts: the International Fall School *Memory and Performance* (Parma, October 2023) directed by Bortoletti and Di Martino, featuring a performance workshop on Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, directed by Marco Martinelli - Teatro delle Albe, Ravenna, and Di Martino as dramaturg, in collaboration with 7 EU Universities (as part of the BIP Erasmus+ Program); the project *Aristophanes at Chickenshed* (London, October 2024), featuring a six-day performance workshop on Aristophanes’ *Peace*, directed by Marco Martinelli, and Di Martino as dramaturg, and in partnership with Chickenshed Theatre, the University of Bristol and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in London.

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the transmission and reimagining of Greco-Roman textual and non-textual sources within written and performative cultural practices. These sources constitute a veritable reservoir of memory, a fertile repository of themes and tropes – imaginary, material, and immaterial alike – that often evolve into collective memory.

To trace these memories through the reinterpretation of the classical tradition in early modern European and colonial American festivals, the four-day conference (two in Parma and two in London) convened international scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, alongside archivists and performers. Three days of theatrical workshops, led by playwright and director Marco Martinelli (Teatro delle Albe) and Giovanna Di Martino (UCL) as dramaturg, preceded the conferences. A group of ten students from UNIPR and UCL collaborated with school students from a number of state-funded schools in Parma (the Liceo Classico Romagnosi and Liceo Artistico Toschi) and London (St Olave's, the Jewish Community Secondary School, Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, and La Sainte Union, Camden). They worked on scenes selected from early modern translations of Aristophanes' *Plutus*. The workshops aimed to explore the performability and intricate web of references embedded in these early modern works, employing Martinelli's 'non-school' approach, which locates the political essence of his work in the festive inversion akin to the Dionysian carnival – a revitalisation of the ancient chorus within the contemporary *polis*.²

The culmination of the workshops was a script composed during the Parma and London sessions – a mosaic of text fragments drawn from *Plutus* through three distinct modern translations of the ancient Greek comedy, each tied to

² Since 1991, Martinelli has been conducting a practice and methodology named 'non-school' in Italian schools and around the world. The name 'non-school' emphasises a non-prescriptive way of engaging with texts that may be studied in the classroom but need to be deconstructed and brought to life on the stage; see Martinelli 2016 and 2020. The reactivation (or as Marco Martinelli would say, "bringing to life") of the chorus, understood as a fundamental and characteristic element of Greek tragedy, will be the focus of some of the essays included in the second instalment of this special issue. For a history of the chorus in contemporary theatre, an excellent reference remains the pioneering study by Mario Apollonio (1956). More recent are two notable volumes published in German: Flashar 1991 (which concentrates on the differences vis-à-vis the ancient model) and Baur 1999 (although linked to a text-centred reflection on the chorus, it revisits theoretical and practical insights that originated in the 1990s around new modes of choral performance). See, more recently, Macintosh 2012 and Billings, Budelmann and Macintosh 2013. The APGRD webpage 'Publications' offers most recent and up-to-date volumes on the reception histories of the chorus on the stage across continents, time and media (<http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/about/publications>; last accessed: 10 June 2024).

celebratory occasions or periods of intense political unrest.³ The workshops kicked off the conferences by engaging speakers and local communities through public performances at the Abbazia di Valserena, Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione (CSAC, UNIPR) in Parma and St George's Church Bloomsbury in London, respectively. Both conferences concluded with roundtable discussions among scholars and archivists on performing arts archives.⁴

Over the course of two weeks, a diverse network with global aspirations, deeply rooted in the Parma and London communities, emerged. It involved various institutions, theatres, archives, and high schools, with high school and university students not merely as recipients but as active participants in the reinterpretation and preservation of cultural and performative heritage inspired by classical models. The format we devised – an amalgamation of international and local initiatives, at the crossroads of different disciplines between theory and practice – stems from the imperative to create tangible platforms for sharing methodologies and theories concerned with the study of classical antiquity in the performing arts. More specifically, building upon our mutual interest in the significance of classical texts in the performing arts across different societies and epochs, we concentrated on a pivotal area of inquiry for early modernity: the festival. The overarching goal of our project, as reflected in this double issue, is to operate on multiple levels – both theoretical and practical – in an experimental dialogue that, starting from the tradition of classical drama, extends through the lens of Renaissance festivals to analyse the diverse forms and languages of early modern spectacles, with an eye toward their contemporary relevance.

³ The three translations are Eufrosino Bonini's *Commedia di Iustitia* (1513); Thomas Randolph's *Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery* (1651); and *The World's Idol, Plutus a Comedy* (1659) by a certain H.H.B. Aristophanes' comedies have become one of Martinelli's favourite texts to 'play with' students in workshops: see Di Martino's blogpost on the workshops: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/classics/news/2023/mar/performing-aristophanes-early-modern-translations> (Accessed 22 May 2024). Contributions in the second volume of this double special issue by Bortoletti, Di Martino, and Martinelli focus on the workshops, script and final results.

⁴ The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) presented by Oliver Taplin (Oxford), Fiona Macintosh (Oxford), and Giovanna Di Martino (UCL); The HERLA-Project presented by Simona Brunetti (UNIVE/Fondazione Umberto Artioli); The Mnemosyne Atlas presented by Eckart Marchand and Steffen Haug (Warburg Institute/Bilderfahrzeuge); The Festivals in Renaissance Italy: Digital Atlas-FRIDA presented by Francesca Bortoletti (UNIPR); The DSPace-Muthea-Project presented by Paolo Russo (UNIPR); The Festivals Book Digitization Project (University of Warwick; British Library) presented by Margaret Shewring (Warwick); The Renaissance Cultural Crossroads Catalogue presented by Brenda Hosington (Warwick-Montreal); The Teatro Regio Historical Archive presented by Cristina Gnudi (Casa della Musica-Parma); The Laboratorio Dionysos (Trento) presented by Gaia Benamati (Bari).

