

DAVID WILES: *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy. From Ancient Festival to Modern Experimentation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007. ISBN 978-0-521-86522-7 (hb). XII, 320 pp. GBP 50.

David Wiles' *Mask and performance in Greek Tragedy* is a significant work. It would be important even if its significance relied solely on the fact that it is the first full-length study of the Greek tragic mask, but in addition to this, Wiles has succeeded in crossing the boundaries of separate fields of study, such as classical philology, reception of Greek drama, anthropology, and theatre studies. These he has successfully intertwined with theory and practice of theatre, thus creating a work of both scholarly and art-theoretic value. Wiles' book is essential for any scholar writing about Greek tragedy in performance, but it is also useful for any theatre practitioner interested in Greek drama and masked performance.

Wiles poses two major questions he then seeks to find an answer to in his research: what made the mask an inseparable part of a fifth-century BC Athenian theatre performance, and relatively, why are we so reluctant to make use of masks in theatre today, why are they so alien to us? In his book, David Wiles engages in four major debates over Greek tragedy. The first concerns the "ownership" of Greek tragedy, namely, is a Greek play a text that happened to be performed or is the text a component in the historical performance event? The second issue is the question of the actor in Greek tragedy: are the actors in constant control of their craft or are they somehow possessed by their part? This is a relevant question in relation to Greek tragedy and its dual political and divine nature; it is especially essential when considering the meaning and use of masks. The third debate concerns the ritualistic nature of Greek tragedy. Wiles examines if the masks used in tragedy were essentially a manifestation of its Dionysiac nature, or whether they were just an artistic invention made for the purposes of theatre. The fourth issue discusses the meaning of the face, the eyes and gaze to ancient Greeks, and the difference between ancient and modern ideas of personal identity – is the face an image of a soul, or is it something one shows to the world, thus constituting one's identity? In a structuralist view, the Greek mask provides a way to escape from the domain of facial expression, but it does exclude expressing and viewing of actor's authentic feelings.

Wiles has examined the use of masks in New Comedy in his earlier work *Masks of Menander* (1991), but due to the different nature of the evidence used in *Mask and performance in Greek Tragedy* his methodology is different. In this work Wiles concentrates solely on tragedy, as the mask in Old Comedy would require a separate volume; hence, an essay *The poetics of the mask in Old Comedy* will be published in 2008. In the *Masks of Menander* Wiles relied in his analysis on a vast body of artefacts, and contemporary physiognomic treatises, his approach being semiotic and cognitive. Vase-paintings form the primary iconographic evidence in the case of fifth-century tragic masks as well, but the material is more complicated, and requires a more phenomenological approach than the material of New Comedy, where materialist philosophy provides a secure basis for analysis. However, in depictions of tragedy, the mask is never an isolated object, but a function of relationships. In the case of tragedy, gods have a defining role, and so in examining the tragic mask one has to explore the relationship between masking and a sense of the divine.

In chapters 2 and 3 Wiles deals with the iconographic evidence, vase-paintings and sculpture. He adopts a new and fresh approach, using the French research on Greek gaze

inspired by the intellectual tradition of Lacan and Sartre. He considers the function of the vase as a whole, and looks at the masks portrayed in the vases as agents engaged in a set of transactions communicating in a process of transition, asking why the painter chose to portray masking. Wiles notes the "failure" of fifth-century vase-painting in supplying us with scientific data of the tragic mask as something not to be lamented, since the evidence of vases offers us instead a rich source on what masks meant: that they were agents of transformation, turning the actor into something else such as a maenad; tools for achieving presence, not distance (p. 41–2).

After this carefully detailed analysis of iconographic evidence, Wiles shifts the focus from antiquity to the present and employs another methodological point of view: in chapters from 4 to 7 he examines the use of mask in twentieth-century theatre practice. Wiles emphasises the otherness of the Greek past in his discussion of the reception of masks in twentieth-century performances. As theatre research stresses the importance of the converging of theory and practice, Wiles uses in his approach also the methodology of a practice-based research, seeking to demonstrate what can be done with masks, and what masks can do to us. Wiles starts by investigating modernist views, discussing the ideas of, for example, Goethe, Nietzsche, Stanislavski and other influential theatre theorists about Greek tragedy and the mask. Wiles also examines remarkable modernist productions of Greek tragedy, like Eva Palmer-Sikelianos' and Angelos Sikelianos' *Prometheus* in Delphi in 1927, and Sartre's *Les Mouches* in Paris in 1943. From modernism Wiles turns to the twentieth-century actor and the experience of the mask. He concentrates in chapter 5 on Jacques Copeau's understanding of the mask as a tool for actors' training, and significantly, on Roland Barthes' view of Barrault's *Oresteia*, and on the division between these two schools of acting. Chapter 6 deals in detail with Peter Hall's *Oresteia* of 1981, paying much attention to Jocelyn Herberts' impressive technique in creating masks for the production. In chapter 7 Wiles continues to examine closely the technique of creating a mask, concentrating on the art of Michael Chase and Thanos Vovolis, and their use of the mask almost as a musical instrument.

In chapter 8 Wiles returns to the mask in antiquity, beginning with the conception of the mask and polytheism. The first two parts of this book are remarkable, but especially in these last chapters from 8 to 11 Wiles' scholarly expertise make the reading truly enjoyable. Wiles' arguments are sharp and carefully considered, he makes his points clearly, leaving the reader with an impression of his thorough insight on the matter, linking his discussion widely with earlier studies. Wiles' approach to tragedy and the mask as an ancient phenomenon is broadly anthropological. In an unbiased way, he uses parallels from Nigerian Yoruba, Balinese Topeng and Japanese Noh traditions in explaining the polytheistic nature of Greek tragedy. Wiles notes, that research on masks is still in an in-between-state within mainstream Classics, as it belongs neither to the field of literary criticism nor to the study of religion (p. 9). Either scholars have accepted a view that masks had "nothing to do with Dionysos", or that masks were a mimetic way of distancing the play from the ritual enactment. As Wiles points out, these accounts are based on a distinction between theatrical mimesis and authentic ritual (p. 10). However, recently scholars have made an important recognition that tragedy often provides an aetiology for a cult, but despite this there still is a certain reluctance to admit the relationship between tragedy and the divine. Wiles to some extent criticises the post-modern need to "demystify" Greek tragedy. He recognises as his stance two related

coinages; post-secular and post-dramatic. In Wiles' words, "the mask made someone happen" (p. 12) – he argues that masking added another dimension to the experience of performance and it is this dimension that he attempts to clarify in his work.

In chapter 9 Wiles argues convincingly for theatrical "epiphany", of tragedy as *theoric* activity, "a rite of viewing", a Greek encounter with the god Dionysus (p. 205, 227). When an actor put on his mask, he was catching a glimpse of the other world of the gods, and at the same time making this possible for the spectator as well. In the last two chapters Wiles examines the masked nature of tragedy, how certain drama texts like Sophocles' *Ajax* are composed in such a way that they flourish when performed with a mask and its intense gaze, as well as tragedy's nature as something to be seen, an essentially visual performance. The Greek sense of self was completely different from our individualistic thinking; an Ancient Greek formed his/her identity by the way he/she was seen by others. In the light of this, the nature of the mask as something which saw the god and the other world and formed a connection between them and the spectator is understandable. Equally understandable are the outward features of the mask, namely, the piercing eyes.

In his work Wiles has rejected linear historiography, as he stresses the notion that we understand the past only through the present. Through ancient material evidence and modern and post-modern theatre practise he guides the reader to ancient ritualistic and ideological thinking, as well as to tragedy as a performance and text, and firmly convinces the reader of his answer to the question: what made the mask an inseparable part of a fifth-century BC Athenian theatre performance? And finally, while reading the epilogue, the reader gets the second question answered as well: why are we so reluctant to use masks in theatre today, why are they so alien to us? Precisely because they are alien, other and ancient. We do not see the world as an ancient Greek did, and that is what Wiles is pointing to throughout this work. In studying the mask, it is essential to understand this feature. Maybe because I lack the masked experience, it took me some time to see this – I was not able to see the mask clearly, but instead kept theorizing about it, trying desperately to understand it from my own modern point of view. But it does not work like that with the ancient, tragic mask!

*Sanna-Ilaria Kittelä*

*XII Congressus Internationalis Epigraphiae Graecae et Latinae: Provinciae Imperii Romani inscriptionibus descriptae: Barcelona, 3–8 Septembris 2002.* Ediderunt Marc Mayer i Olivé, Giulia Baratta, Alejandra Guzmán Almagro. Monografies de la Secció Històrico-Arqueològica 10. Institut d'Estudis Catalans; Universitat de Barcelona; Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona 2007. ISBN: 978-84-7283-921-2. 800 pp. EUR 120.

Tomis duobus ponderosis continentur Acta XII congressus internationalis epigraphices Graecae et Latinae mense Septembris a. MMII Barcinone habiti. Libellorum auctores auctricesve ex omnibus fere orbis terrarum oriundi, plurimi ex Hispania Lisitaniaque, multi non solum ex aliis civitatibus quae pars erant Imperii Romani, sed etiam ex Europa septentrionali orientaliqque, Asia, Africa, America, Australia in urbem Barcinonensem convenerunt, ut cum aliis rerum epigraphicarum cultoribus dissererent, ab iis novas res discerent rursusque iis sapientiam suam partirentur, et simul ut eodem tempore magnifico