

**Richard BEACHAM**

**Modern Dramatic Versions of the Classics: Using Roman Wall Painting and Virtual Reality as an Aid to Contemporary Staging of Ancient Plays.**

This presentation considers how the evidence of surviving examples of Roman wall painting may be used to suggest a) the physical organisation and scenic elements of ancient Roman stage settings and spaces of performance, b) the style of performance appropriate to such spaces and c) the basis for determining appropriate analogous spaces, styles (including modes of translation) and dramaturgies capable of successfully presenting ancient plays in modern performance. It will demonstrate how the use of Virtual Reality can assist theatre historians and designers to understand the spatial qualities of stages shown in ancient paintings, and to create suitably designed spaces for contemporary productions.

Roman wall paintings potentially tell us a good deal about the plausible physical formats, scenic elements, and spatial arrangement of the Roman temporary stages upon which Roman drama, including the surviving works of Plautus, Terence and possibly Seneca too, were first staged. Such information, if it can be adequately perceived and carefully analysed, offers uniquely valuable access to understanding the spatial qualities which quite literally shaped the ancient Roman plays' dramaturgical organisation and structure and their original enactment in performance. Many aspects of the spatial qualities of Roman performance and the manner in which texts can be reconstituted into and articulated through performance remain relatively foreign to what we think of as staging. These ought conscientiously to be considered (if only upon reflection to be discarded/adapted) when attempting modern stagings. The architecture of the play and scenic environment posited for its enactment, should find a sympathetic and compatible embodiment in the space in which our attempts at staging take place.

A large number of paintings convey information about physical layout; the manner in which the need (signalled by the texts) to have different elevations for some exchanges could be met; the potential for characters to be concealed from other characters, while yet visible (and audible) to the audience; the capacity to isolate or emphasise characters visually. They also offer a range of other clues for appropriate contemporary performance and may be analysed to consider how scenic and visual style can suggest a playing and speaking style (to assist in devising strategies for translation); patterns of movement; audience actor relationship; metatheatrical elements; and the playing potential between actors. Through study of the paintings, producers may identify analogues (e.g. lighting effects) able to support functions originally achieved architectonically and emblematically. Communication through the sophisticated manipulation of visual meaning was clearly of utmost importance to ancient artists and spectators. The paintings as artefacts viewed in conjunction with and complemented by the articulation of space signalled by the textual artefacts, give valuable evidence and assist us in achieving an equivalent or analogous dramaturgy for contemporary production.

VR realisations of the architecture depicted in wall paintings enable subtle spatial analysis. Paintings recently modelled and interpreted for such evidence include works

from the House of Augustus, the Villa of Oplontis, the Baths of Sarno, the Houses of the Cryptoporticus, Siricus, and others. These are discussed, together with examples of recent stagings informed by study of such wall paintings. For some related details and illustrations see:

[http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/Theatre\\_S/html/staff\\_beacham\\_biog.php](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/Theatre_S/html/staff_beacham_biog.php)

<http://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol5no1/beacham.html>

<http://www.warwick.ac.uk/3d/pompeii.html>