

dismissed, but the students' lawyers have filed a notice of appeal.

Protests on 2 Campuses Prompt Negotiations

Students at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque continued a sit-in at the administration building last week to protest a tuition hike. Meanwhile, students at Wayne State University occupied the student center to seek more resources for black studies.

About 50 students at the Albuquerque campus have been occupying sections of the administration building since April 11, when the university's regents approved a 7.9-per-cent tuition hike. Administrators have continued to work in the building.

The students demanded a special meeting of the regents to reconsider the tuition increase, and the regents agreed.

At Wayne State, about 120 black students occupied the student center starting April 12. The building has been closed since the sit-in began. Negotiations between the students and the administration continued last week, with no word on their progress. The protesters' demands involve the curriculum, financing, and faculty members for the university's black-studies center.

Non-Traditional Students Are Becoming Teachers

Programs that prepare non-traditional students to become teachers now provide about 10 per cent of new science and mathematics teachers, a report by the Rand Corporation says.

The programs were developed to put college graduates, homemakers, retirees, and others into elementary and secondary schools quickly. About 85 per cent of their graduates enter the profession immediately after graduation, says the report. About 75 per cent of these teachers stay in the classroom at least two years.

Both percentages are comparable to those for graduates of traditional college programs, says the report. "Redesigning Teacher Education: Opening the Door for New Recruits to Science and Mathematics Teaching."

It is based on a 1986-87 survey of 64 special programs enrolling 2,000 non-traditional students. It is part of an 18-month study sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

The report is available for \$10 from the Center for the Study of the Teaching Profession, Rand Corporation, 1700 Main Street, Santa Monica, Cal. 90406.

Correction

Colleges and universities that want equipment instead of cash in International Business Machines Corporation's new matching-grant program (*The Chronicle*, April 12) must have more than \$5,000 in donations from I.B.M. employees in a 12-month period. Donations may be aggregated over two years only to increase the amount of equipment, not to reach the \$5,000 figure.

PORTRAIT

British Actors Bring 'Agamemnon,' in All Its Complexity, to U.S. Colleges

By LAWRENCE BIEMILLER
DAVIDSON, N.C.

Over grilled-cheese sandwiches and home fries in Davidson College's coffee shop, six young British actors are debating what a 2,500-year-old Greek play—Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*—should mean to a modern audience.

"The thing that's vastly overstated about ancient drama is its relevance to today," says Martin Dirkin, who is both an elder in the play's chorus and the assistant director. "I don't think *Agamemnon* is directly relevant to our society—you're talking about gods and sacrifices. It's a completely alien society with a lot of alien notions."

"One problem with modern translations is they give away too much—we immediately think of our own experience," Mr. Dirkin says. A play from the fifth century B.C. should be presented in a way that "evokes an alien culture and makes it meaningful," he adds.

James Miller, also a member of the chorus, protests that many of *Agamemnon*'s themes are timeless. "You're talking about a mother losing her daughter," he says.

"The major human emotions are all there," adds Michael Caine, another of the four elders. "Power, love, lust, greed."

Mr. Dirkin is not persuaded. "You can't shove the round peg of antiquity into—"

"Then why have we taken *Agamemnon* out of ancient dress?" demands Tim Colwell, another elder.

Mr. Dirkin is quick to respond. "Another problem with Greek drama is that it's become ossified. It needs to be shaken up."

'Power of Emotion'

The actors, who are all students or recent graduates of the Greek department of London's University College, unexpectedly agree on one point—that "most of the audience probably won't understand what's going on," as Adam Warner puts it. Mr. Warner plays both a herald and Aegisthos.

"When I first read this play, I only understood about 20 per cent of it," Mr. Caine says. ("Philistine!" hisses Mr. Dirkin, grinning.) "The best we can hope to convey is the power of emotion."

But no one seems worried. Mr. Caine explains: "A *Medea* presented in Japanese was incredibly successful in London last year."

Actually, the plot of *Agamemnon* isn't difficult. *Agamemnon* returns



Peter Meineck (left), with Martin Dirkin and masked actors of the *Slaves of Dionysos* Production Company: "We're not doing museum plays—these are pieces of living theater."

victorious from the Trojan War with his mistress, Cassandra. Both are promptly murdered by Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra. She resents his decision, early in the war, to sacrifice their daughter Iphigenia in return for favorable winds.

But how do you stage—in contemporary English—a Greek play written in 458 B.C. that has survived in a single 11th-century Florentine copy? The play has no stage directions, not even entrances and exits, and it presupposes a familiarity with ancient history and classical myth that no modern audience has.

Indeed, *Agamemnon* is one of the earliest plays known. When it was written, what we think of as theater had just evolved out of choral rituals that honored the god Dionysus. The protagonist, at first merely a person to whom the chorus responded, had recently begun taking on primitive dramatic personae, each distinguished by masks. Aeschylus is credited as the first playwright to involve a second actor—in his later plays he used several—and the first to give his characters depth.

He was not, however, a master of dramatic action—what action there is to *Agamemnon* occurs between scenes and is afterwards recounted on stage. Enlivening the production was part of the challenge that confronted the actors around the table

in the coffee shop here. "I am *not* a Philistine, by the way," sniffs Mr. Caine, pretending indignation.

"What do chips taste like here?" someone asks, meaning the home fries.

'We're Hellenists'

The troupe is known, formally, as the *Slaves of Dionysos* Production Company—"with an 'os'—we're Hellenists," says the company's producer, Peter Meineck. Davidson is the last stop on the company's seven-campus American tour, which has taken them as far north as Yale University and as far south as the University of Florida.

Mr. Meineck says the company grew out of a series of Greek plays University College has presented at the Bloomsbury Theater. "Kings College has been doing really boring plays in Greek for about 50 years," he says. "Three years ago we did our first *Agamemnon*—in English, which made it much more accessible—and it sold out."

"Last year, we did *Medea*. This year, we've done Aristophanes's *Thesmophoriazusae* and a new *Agamemnon*," says Mr. Meineck. "We're not doing museum plays—these are pieces of living theater."

He admits that the plays' challenges are considerable. "We really don't know much about what Greek staging conventions were," he says. It is known that the actors wore all masks, and that they wore masks for all their roles. And the ruins of Greek theaters offer some hints about staging. Otherwise, Mr. Meineck says, much of what is accepted as fact about Greek theater is no more than conjecture—conjecture by historians from Roman times to the 19th century.

"We're trying to shatter the British-Empire view of Greek culture," Mr. Meineck says. "The best thing you can do is clear your mind of all that and go to the text."

Producing the plays, he adds, "is our way of bringing the subject alive."

"You can sit in an office and pore over texts for 20 years and never

learn a thing about putting on a play—about the Greeks' dramatic conventions, about how masks work, about how little space the plays need." The London productions, he says, have employed masks and other confirmed Greek conventions.

The touring *Agamemnon* is more modern, but at each stop Mr. Meineck and the troupe present workshops on Greek theater that include performances with masks. The *Agamemnon* does have percussion accompaniment that hurries it along and helps set the tone of various scenes.

When the lights come up on the play's opening speech, *Agamemnon* seems more post-industrial than alien. Its set consists of two tall stepladders hung with shreds of cloth. The costumes represent no particular century; the elders of the chorus, in fact, wear drab, tattered clothes that give them the look of homeless people. All the actors wear white makeup on their faces—makeup that suggests masks.

Murders in Silhouette

The production is, as promised, faithful to Robert Fagles's translation of the text. But it is inventive as well. The lines the text gives to the chorus, for instance, are split up among individual elders, creating a vigorous dialogue; it is supplemented by well-choreographed movements that resolve into handsome tableaux. The twin murders are shown in a silent silhouette, illuminated in red.

Much of the language is still difficult, the more so because of unfamiliar accents and an echoing theater. But both plot and emotion come through clearly—particularly when Julia Hagan, as Cassandra, foretells Agamemnon's death and her own. By the time the play ends, the quality of the company's acting has more than compensated for whatever subtleties the audience has missed. Whether *Agamemnon* is relevant to a modern audience remains an open question, but whether it enriches one does not.



Martin Dirkin (right), with James Miller in "Agamemnon": "It's a completely alien society with a lot of alien notions."