

# Making Theatre out of Fragments

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Tragic fragments are experiencing a renaissance. Until recently scholarship on fragmentary tragedies was largely confined to textual work or attempts to reconstruct the plots of lost plays.<sup>1</sup> The situation is very different from Greek lyric poetry, where even tiny fragments are analysed for literary and artistic significance. The difference of course is that for most of the lyric poets, there is no choice but to use fragments, and so scholars or students wanting to better understand Sappho or Simonides must grapple to extract meaning from a few tattered lines or words. Readers of tragedy interested in literary questions enjoy the luxury of thirty-two complete plays, so have paid little attention to how fragments might augment our knowledge of (say) the style of Euripides, or tragedy's depiction of gender roles. In recent years, however, there has been a growth of interest among tragedy specialists in the fragmentary plays, with several new editions and introductions.<sup>2</sup> These publications are by traditionally-trained Classicists whose motivation is to make the fragmentary plays accessible to a Greekless audience, and presuppose a readership who is interested in tragedy, though with little knowledge of texts that did not survive complete. At the same time, more interest is being paid to what fragmentary texts can tell scholars about the tragic genre, and how readers can approach them as literature, rather than purely pieces in a textual jigsaw puzzle.<sup>3</sup> Yet tragic fragments are not just texts but remnants of drama, meant for performance in front of an audience.<sup>4</sup> Fragmentation of text has been a strategy in what has been broadly termed the 'postdramatic', but these are plays fragmented through chance rather than by artistic choice. What, then, are the implications of approaching Greek tragedy – often claimed as the foundation of Western playwriting – through the performance of fragmentary remains rather than whole texts?<sup>5</sup> What can modern theatre practice teach us about how scholars can and should approach fragmented texts? How does performing fragmentary tragedies pull apart our certainties about Greek drama and its legacy in theatre history, by inviting us to reflect on what is canonical and why? This chapter will discuss my eight-year (and counting) collaboration with theatre-makers, which seeks to answer these questions.

My own academic trajectory began in Greek tragedy before I moved to work on fragmentary lyric poetry. Re-entering tragedy studies from a sub-discipline where entire articles are devoted to a single surviving line, I was struck by the unmined riches in the so-called 'lost plays', and how they have the potential to make both audiences and scholars rethink what we know about the most familiar of ancient genres.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, these texts highlight the

<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of Greek tragedies do not survive in complete form. They are often referred to as 'lost plays', though sometimes small parts (fragments) are preserved, either through quotes in other authors or fragments of papyrus. Ancient plot summaries ('hypotheseis') sometimes allow us to understand the broad outline.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Wright (2016), Wright (2018), Cropp (2005), Cropp and Collard (2008), Cropp (2019), Cropp (2021).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Finglass and Coe (2020). The first example of a substantial literary study of fragments is McHardy, Robson and Harvey (2005)

<sup>4</sup> Much Greek literature was meant for performance rather than private reading, though tragedy remains unusual in still being consumed today largely through performance. On the importance of performance to Classical Reception see Hall (2004), though many performance theorists deny the validity of distinguishing between media and forms in this fashion: see Montgomery Griffiths (2022) 192-204.

<sup>5</sup> On the relationship of classical drama to the postdramatic, see Cole (2019)

<sup>6</sup> The fragments are collected in *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta (TrGF)* and constitute five volumes (the latter in two parts). Many have been rarely studied: some have not even been translated.

evocative power of the fragment, familiar to anyone who has fallen in love with the poems of Sappho.<sup>7</sup> Interest in Classical fragments can be connected to wider historical and cultural moments: for example, the liking for Classical ruins in the Romantic period,<sup>8</sup> or the coincidence of the thousands of papyri discovered in Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century with the growth of literary and artistic fragmentation in the modernist movement.<sup>9</sup> Yet the power fragments hold over the human mind long predates this, and does not appear to be culturally or temporally specific. For example, John Chapman's work on archaeological Fragmentation Theory suggests that interest in fragmentation is evident even in prehistoric times and recognises the role that incomplete objects play in creating social relationships and exploring our place in the world.<sup>10</sup> The appreciation of fragments, then, can be understood not as niche and technical, but rather as profoundly connected to our personhood and identity as human beings. Our project, titled *Fragments*, sought to explore Greek tragic fragments as drama, and to engage with the idea of fragmentation: its role in our lives, and why fragmenting information makes it so compelling.

### Early ideas

*Fragments* began life as a trial funded by the Being Human Festival and the AHRC, under a scheme entitled *Communicating Ancient Greece and Rome*. From its outset I have worked with Potential Difference, a theatre company that tells stories inspired by science, philosophy, and technology. The project has involved artists from a range of practices: deviser-performers, visual designers, puppeteers, a sound designer/composer, and a dramaturg and lyricist. The process has been a series of small performances and workshops, each building on the last and testing the underpinning of ideas from new perspectives. The first showing (then titled *Ancient Fragments*) was a kaleidoscope of ideas inspired by fragmentation, put together after two weeks of workshops, and performed at Rich Mix in East London as part of the inaugural Being Human Festival in 2014. From that starting point the process was iterative: we devised, wrote, then tested what was written and tried new ways of devising around it. My role was not an academic consultant but an equal co-creator; similarly, the artists involved should be understood as co-researchers of the academic ideas. A more cohesive 'work in progress' show was performed at Ovalhouse in London and the Old Fire Station, Oxford in 2017. The ideas formulated were further developed through workshops in 2018, and crystallised towards a full production (originally due to take place in March 2020, but whose final development was delayed to April 2023 due to the pandemic). Each of these iterations had significant differences in tone, structure, and content, yet each built from surviving tragic fragments and the different ways people experience fragmentation.

As the project developed, we agreed on ground rules to underpin how we approached the concepts and texts. One was that the work should engage at a fundamental level with the experience of fragmentation. This placed practical limitations on how we dealt with the ancient text: the experience of being confronted with gaps was central, and we did not want

<sup>7</sup> As expressed in Rainer Maria Rilke's poem *Archaischer Torso Apollos* (1908), whose theme is the artistic power of a broken statue.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* (revised as *The Revolt of Islam*), where the Greek hero Laon interprets 'the broken tombs and columns riven' as 'dwellings of a race of mightier men' (754-9), and sees in them the potential of contemporary Greeks to liberate themselves from Ottoman rule: 'Such man has been, and such may yet become! / Ay wiser, greater, gentler, even than they' (766-7).

<sup>9</sup> Discussed in Goldschmidt (2019) and in more detail Goldschmidt (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> Chapman (2000).

to write faux-tragic dialogue to fill them. In particular, we set ourselves the rule that we would not invent new lines for characters who existed in the Euripidean play, though we were willing to rearrange Euripidean fragments to create new combinations, whether or not these seemed a plausible way to reconstruct the original text, if this served our dramatic aims. We were also happy to invent new characters whose dialogue need not be limited to original fragments. In order to guide the audience as to which parts of the text were Euripidean, the register of text written for new characters was colloquial, while the translations of the original retained a higher and more archaising tone, using heightened language and poetic phrasing and vocabulary (in the draft scripts, original fragments were in a different font, to help performers retain this distinction).

Early in the process, artists were invited to share ideas about what role fragmentation played in their daily lives. Their answers included visual fragmentation ('seeing snapshots from a train', 'seeing part of a room through a window'), auditory ('hearing one side of a telephone conversation'), fragments as physical artefacts ('finding old letters or documents out of context'), but also the inherent fragmentation of human thought and memory ('partial memories of an event').<sup>11</sup> These 'common sense' experiences about fragmentation led to devised moments where fragmented image, sound, or dialogue was required. One outcome was a way of showing the curiosity fragments provoke. We discovered how unexpectedly compelling a mundane action becomes (washing hair, signing a letter, gesturing to someone) if staged such that only a small portion of the actor's body is visible. Just as the reader of a textual fragment is required to focus on the few details that survive, but cannot avoid the temptation to extrapolate about context, so too, these decontextualised fragments of action draw the spectator's attention to aspects of physicality that might otherwise be overlooked, and provoke curiosity about the broader picture.

We initially experimented with different plays, but by the 2017 workshops we settled on Euripides' *Cresphontes*. This was particularly suitable for two reasons. First, the surviving fragments are a good mixture of type and style. The play has several papyrus fragments, including a lengthy extract preserved on two overlapping papyri held in different collections (giving rise to discussions about how far to interrogate dramatically where fragments disagree). There are also smaller and more damaged papyri fragments, and a good number of 'book quotes' (lines preserved as quotations in the works of other authors), which are well preserved but devoid of context. Thus in formal terms the play lent itself to varied approaches to ancient fragmentation. But just as importantly, its themes and plot spoke to the core ideas we aimed to explore.

*Cresphontes* is set in Messenia, the region of the Peloponnese which by Euripides' day was long enslaved by Sparta. The rough plot can be reconstructed by comparing it with the myth in Hyginus (*Fab.* 184b). It is a revenge play, which follows the youthful Cresphontes' return to his rightful kingdom from exile, as he seeks vengeance on his uncle Polyphontes, who murdered his father and older brothers and married his mother, Merope.<sup>12</sup> It is a play about misunderstanding, and the dangers of coming to conclusions based on imperfect knowledge. Polyphontes has put a bounty on Cresphontes' head, and the young man gains entry to the

<sup>11</sup> Quotations are based on notes taken in workshops in 2014 and 2017.

<sup>12</sup> The name of the murdered father was also Cresphontes, and references to him are preserved in the surviving fragments (the son is not named in what survives, but the title of the play indicates he was named after his father). To avoid confusion, we changed the name of the avenging son in our play to Aeyptus, a name attested in other versions of the myth.

palace by pretending that he has killed the long-lost prince and has come to claim his reward. In the central scene, Merope attempts to kill Cresphontes in his sleep, believing him to be her son's murderer. It was reperformed regularly in antiquity and must have been a canonical text. Aristotle refers to it in his discussion of the 'best' tragic plot types (*Poetics* 1454a) and Plutarch discusses Merope's attempt to kill her son in terms which suggest his 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE audience were familiar with the play in performance (*Mor.* 998e). Despite its fame, however, it was not included in the 'selection' that determined which tragic texts would survive into the modern era.<sup>13</sup> The plot has connections not only with the myth of the *Oresteia*, but also with other iconic non-classical legends (from *Hamlet* to Disney's *The Lion King*). This not only makes it accessible to a modern audience unfamiliar with Euripides (let alone his fragments), but also encourages them to reflect on story patterns and how we interpret the stories we tell through the lens of what we know and expect.

### **Piecing the world together**

To investigate the appeal of fragments, we turned to ideas derived from cognitive neuroscience, and the 2017 workshops were enriched through a collaboration with Professor Mark Stokes of Oxford University.<sup>14</sup> These sessions focused on how fragmentation is part of the human cognitive experience, and how the typical perception of a rich and detailed world is an illusion created by the brain's ability to fill in the gaps in sensory input based on what a person expects to be there. In fact, human brains are adept at converting a stream of (often low quality) fragments into what seems a coherent narrative. Thus it transpires that perception is deeply connected to memory, since it is through our memories and experiences of what the world 'should' be like that we put together our perceptions of what it is like.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, there are limitations to this ability, which psychologists demonstrate to their students through various tricks or illusions. Once a pattern or expectation is established, it is difficult to 'unsee' what you have already seen. Well-known examples are change blindness or inattention blindness, phenomena that lead observers to overlook important aspects of the world around them, or to be unable to notice changes in what they are looking at. For example, in the famous 'Harvard Basketball Experiment', viewers of a video are asked to count the passes made by one team, and while doing so, frequently fail to notice a person in a gorilla suit walking in and out of the match.<sup>16</sup> This reveals the brain's focus on certain aspects of sensory input and its inability to notice changes or details that do not fit with the desired narrative. During this section of the project we also discussed the brain's dependence

<sup>13</sup> All the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles (seven of each, including the probably inauthentic *Prometheus Bound*) and ten of the plays of Euripides survive through a process of canonisation which sought to identify the 'best' or 'most typical' work. The remaining eight Euripides tragedies (as well as his satyr play *Cyclops*) were preserved by the chance survival of part of a manuscript containing his works in alphabetical order (the surviving plays have titles beginning with letters epsilon-kappa in the Greek alphabet). It is no coincidence that these eight plays (the 'non-select') are more diverse in style and tone, and contain more 'non-tragic' elements such as patriotic celebration of Athens or romantic/humorous plots.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Stokes passed away in January 2023 and we would like to acknowledge our great debt to him and appreciation for his generous insights. We are also grateful to the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account for funding this element of the project.

<sup>15</sup> For experimental science on how a subject's expectations or memory can influence perception, see e.g. Goldstone and Hinrichs (1985), Kang, Hong, Blake and Woodman (2011); on how context influences perception see Bar (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Simons and Chabris (1999).

on occluders to create a ‘logical’ reason for fragmentation, and its desire to make sense of fragments by working them into a cohesive whole.<sup>17</sup>

There are clear methodological similarities between how we deal with fragmented information in our sensory perception, and how Classicists (or theatre-makers) handle a fragmented source. When an editor deals with a lacunose text, their responses take place on a more deliberative level than the unconscious alterations and assumptions a brain makes to fill in its surroundings. Nevertheless, approaching the issues as connected allows us to reflect more consciously on what it means to work with fragments, and the risks and benefits of the choices we might make. How far, for example, should an editor go down the path of filling in the gaps in order to make sense of the text? When should they choose to print a conjecture, either in the main text or in an apparatus criticus? How far is it possible to resist the pull of a particular interpretation once it has been suggested or made visible? How should the balance of responsibilities lie in terms of guiding the reader to understand, versus potentially leading them such that they struggle to ‘unsee’ the editor’s personal interpretation? While editorial technique makes use of sigla such as square or angled brackets to make clear where text has been supplemented or removed by the editor, or dots to show which letters are uncertain, the unconscious impulse to create sense out of fragmentation gives great power to the act of putting something in print, regardless of how clearly it is marked as a modern editor’s work. Moreover, the reader (or performer’s) desire to read the work as complete creates a willingness to overlook traces of fragmentation even when they are put before them.

Once we accept the power a scholar’s choices has over the unconscious assumptions of her later readers, we must also confront how these are rooted in individual personalities and experiences. Classics, like most traditional Humanities disciplines, has a discomfort with the personal voice, especially in sub-disciplines like philology or textual criticism, where it is felt that an argument should be universalisable and objectively valid.<sup>18</sup> Yet which reading one is drawn to is subjective, and editors’ personalities define the choices they make (the conservative who sticks to the barest of facts; the cynic who constantly seeks to excise; the show-off keen to demonstrate their skill at verse composition). In a creative process, the academic and the personal cannot be separated, but our team’s work on the text, combined with our growing interest in the neuroscience of fragments, brought me to reflect how far academic judgement depends not only on analytical rigour but on personal experience and mindset.<sup>19</sup>

During our workshops I found myself confronted with my own propensity to fill in gaps and construct a narrative beyond the evidence.<sup>20</sup> The longest surviving passage of *Cresphontes* is a section from the prologue (fr. 448a Kannicht), where the young hero in disguise asks another character questions about the royal house.<sup>21</sup> Eighteen lines of virtually complete dialogue survive, before the text becomes patchy. Like most tragic prologues, the purpose is

<sup>17</sup> The “Bregman-Kanizsa illusion” demonstrates how it is easier to interpret fragments if an occluder is superimposed which makes sense of the missing parts, by depicting a group of fragmented letter “B”s and then the same series with an ink blot covering the gaps: Bregman (1981), Kanizsa (1979), Nakayama, Shimojo and Silverman (1989), Johnson and Olshausen (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Personal voice theory in Classics was explored in the essays in Hallett and Van Nortwick (1996). Little further work has been done, though for a recent study see Goldhill (2022). The situation is quite different in the discipline of theatre studies, where the personal voice is encouraged as a method of academic insight.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ford Wiltshire (1996) 171: ‘My hunch, however, is that finally all of us – historians, scientists, social scientists, humanists alike – write out of who we are.’

<sup>20</sup> For similar reflections on working with a classical text see Rabinowitz and Bullen (2022).

largely to fill in the backstory for the audience, important for a myth that would be little known to Athenians.<sup>22</sup> The surviving Greek gives no indication as to the identity of Cresphontes' interlocutor (Character B). In what precedes the surviving lines, he or she must have said or done something to prompt Cresphontes' first line, which is to object to the master of the palace's attitude to strangers. Character B responds by contrasting him to the previous master (... 'the one who is no longer alive was most hospitable to all', 41).<sup>23</sup> This allows Cresphontes to ask questions about the dead king and his family.

Relatively far into our workshopping process, I realised that my interpretation of the scene was influenced by its similarities to the 'portress' scene in Euripides' *Helen* (437-82).<sup>24</sup> Here, Menelaus is shipwrecked in Egypt and refused entry to the palace by a (female) gatekeeper because of the master of the house's hatred of Greeks. While there are differences between the scenes (the *Helen* passage is laced with comic moments, while the *Cresphontes* seems serious; Menelaus really is a confused stranger while Cresphontes is dissembling), the thematic similarities are also clear (denial of hospitality, kingdom ruled by a suspicious tyrant, high-born visitor whose status is not obvious), and these led me to unconsciously assume that Cresphontes too was being refused entry to the palace by Character B. In fact, nothing proves that this is what prompts Cresphontes' question: he could, for example, be responding to a well-intentioned warning. Whereas the old woman in *Helen* aligns herself to her master Theoclymenus, and her attitude to Menelaus is hostile, Character B appears unsympathetic to Polyphontes, telling Cresphontes that 'he plotted in violence, so that he might rule the land' (49).<sup>25</sup> Rather than guarding access to the palace, Character B could be occupying quite a different role (for example, a maid loyal to Merope) and be drawn into conversation with Cresphontes while passing by.<sup>26</sup> The resulting discussion around this character and how much we can infer from the text and from tragic convention led us to develop a scene where Character B is repeatedly reinterpreted with different identities and attitudes, which become increasingly less Euripidean: we see the character as a gruff male gatekeeper, then in two rival incarnations of a maidservant, first terrified then confident, and finally as a drunk weeping into his pint over the fate of Cresphontes' brothers. As the scene progresses, the changing identity of Character B also allows different 'logical' explanations for the increasing fragmentation of the dialogue (loud music in a bar, people going in and out of a door).

Putting this scene together led us to reflect on the role of parallels in Classical scholarship to elucidate fragmentary texts. It is conventional when suggesting or critiquing a supplement,

<sup>21</sup> P. Oxy. 2458 (ed. Turner 1962) is a 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE papyrus containing lines 1-116 of the fragment; P. Mich. Inv. 6973 (edited by Bonnycastle and Koenen in the 1980s but finally published as Hsu (2014a)) is a 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE papyrus which gives the text of lines 82-128. Line numberings are as in Collard, Cropp and Lee (1995).

<sup>22</sup> There is no evidence for the myth before Euripides and none of the principal characters are found in independent sources. Euripides may have known a Messenian myth which does not otherwise find its way into the record. After Euripides we find references to the Cresphontes-myth in prose authors, who adapt it to suit the contemporary political context (conflict between Messenia and Sparta): e.g. Isoc. 6.22-3, 6.31, Pl. *Laws* 692b, Ephorus *FGrH* 70 F 116, Paus. 4.3.6-8. See Harder (1985) 8-12.

<sup>23</sup> ὁ δ' οὐκ ὦν πᾶσι προσφιλέστατος.

<sup>24</sup> The similarities are noted by Hsu (2014b).

<sup>25</sup> βίαι δολώσας, ὡς τυραννεύοι χθονός.

<sup>26</sup> This is suggested by Hsu (2014b). In terms of how assumptions are built upon, it is notable that she first identifies the character as a maid tentatively and merely as a hypothetical (31), but the fact that the character is then referred to as 'the maid' for the rest of the article gives this identification greater weight in the mind of the reader.

for example, to offer a parallel for the word's usage in that author, genre, or period. A lack of parallels is problematic; it means we have no assurance that this particular grammatical usage or meaning could be correct. On the other hand, the Greek that survives to generate parallels is a tiny fraction of the original evidence, so to insist too rigidly becomes reductive. In the case of tragic fragments, a search for parallels goes beyond word choices into broader questions of how we reconstruct action and characters (as with the prologue of *Cresphontes*, where *Helen* provides a parallel, whether useful or not). Scholars have a detailed knowledge of what is conventional in tragedy, and often use this to extrapolate what 'must' have happened in portions of a play they do not have. For example, we know tragic action is commonly set outside a palace and takes place within a single day. We know that violence and death take place off-stage and are described by a Messenger, that the gods may appear at the end of a play *ex machina* to offer resolution, and we know the plot types popular in tragic reworking of myths. Yet we also know that tragedy was a competitive genre, and so thrived on innovation and the overturning of expectations. Moreover, the selection process that determined which tragedies survived was not random but determined by pre-existing views as to what tragedy 'should' be.<sup>27</sup> Yet it is from the plays we have that we can conclude what is common, and our view on what is innovative depend only on it being rare in our small sample. If a different selection survived, we might claim that tragedy was 'always' set in one place, or that the Chorus 'always' remained on-stage once they had entered. As it is, scholars of tragedy assume that switching locations (as in *Eumenides* or *Ajax*) is possible but rare: if a further five plays with a scene change survived, one might conclude that it is a standard technique. Even for plays we have access to, our interpretation is based on assumptions about what is 'conventional', a narrowing of the genre which began with the literary criticism of Aristophanes and Aristotle in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE and their statements about what is characteristic. For example, in assessing the staging of Ajax's death in Sophocles' play, scholars who argue for the death taking place behind the *skēnē* strengthen their position by observing that there is no parallel for direct depiction of violence.<sup>28</sup> In *Cresphontes* itself, Collard, Cropp and Lee argue that Merope's attempt to kill the sleeping Cresphontes takes place off-stage (despite Plutarch's account of the fear it stirred in the audience) justifying their interpretation on the basis of parallels from Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Euripides' *Orestes*.<sup>29</sup> What then is the appropriate balance between creativity and rigour? How can we make evidence-based suggestions about a lost play without forcing ourselves into the position where (as a character in our 2017 script says) 'we just have to re-create the plays we already have, make everything exactly the same'?

### **Making sense of the gaps**

Working with fragments, then, can be understood as speaking to a human experience which reaches far beyond the study of Classical texts. A key question was how we could represent fragmentation theatrically, celebrating the gaps rather than filling them. One strategy was to depict scenes as interrupted or inaccessible. For example, the central scene in *Cresphontes*, now lost, consists of a meeting where Cresphontes convinces Polyphontes (and accidentally also his mother) that he has killed the missing prince and has come to claim the bounty. We

<sup>27</sup> Not least the views of Aristotle (*Poetics* 1452a-1453a).

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Finglass (2011) 377 'There is no precedent for a violent death, or even severe wound, being inflicted on the fifth-century tragic (or even comic) stage'. See similarly Scullion (1994) 96-7, Sommerstein (2004) 45-55.

<sup>29</sup> Collard, Cropp and Lee (1995) 146, though Harder (1985) 114-17 argues that the audience must have directly experienced the scene.

experimented with staging this off-stage, visible only momentarily through a closing door, with the occasional word audible to an eavesdropper. Subsequently, the conflicting behaviour and memories of the characters depict their differing understanding of what took place in that room. Our 'rule' of not inventing new lines for Euripidean characters led to devising scenes where characters could not speak freely (for example fearing being overheard), and so conveyed meaning through body language and the occasional broken line. The consequence was that the 'main characters' became to an extent de-centered within their own narrative, with the audience's focus drawn increasingly to the marginalised (and invented) voices within the palace, a move which reflects a similar shift in the way scholars are now approaching the ancient world. We also experimented with visual and sound effects which create an experience of fragmentation, such as the use of 'phantom words' (a sequence of sounds that the listener can interpret as multiple different words),<sup>30</sup> or 'phonemic restoration' (snippets of sound that are meaningless until the silence is filled with white noise, which allows us to decode it).<sup>31</sup>

The final important strand was puppetry, which in its essence imposes meaning onto a fragmented piece of information. Puppetry capitalises on our brain's ability to load inanimate objects, including the simplest shapes, with stories and symbolism, if they are moved in a way that indicates they have a relationship with each other.<sup>32</sup> It also de-centers the body of the actor as the locus of meaning, and undermines the dominance of aesthetic realism which became central to twentieth- (and remains only less slightly central in twenty-first) century theatre. Shadow puppetry also allowed us to engage with the physical form of textual fragmentation: the papyrus scrap. The creative team visited the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus Collection in Oxford and the British Museum's conservation labs, in order to understand the process of curating and conserving papyri, and the techniques used to handle them. On stage, overhead projectors were repurposed to resemble the lightboxes used to examine papyri, which allowed the projection of shadow images onto the wall behind. As well as realistic images (such as measuring, brushing, or unfolding papyrus), the movement of papyrus on the OHP allowed us to build up images in pieces, for example moving papyrus scraps in such a way as to suggest a figure or scene, which gives the audience the experience of their brains filling in gaps to create a narrative.

## **Conclusion**

What place, then, can fragmentary drama hold in the ecology of theatre or the practice of Classical studies? For a start, the experience of working with fragments is a democratic one, which challenges deeply-held assumptions about Classics, academia, and Greek theatre. From my perspective, working in a process that broke down traditional barriers between 'academic expert' and 'practitioner' allowed me to revisit assumptions about how expertise is created and shared, and what constitutes original research. More broadly, working on a 'lost' play forces us to reflect upon which literature is prized and which is discarded, and what lies behind those choices. As well as inviting us to confront assumptions about what makes 'great

<sup>30</sup> See Deutsch (2019), or for demonstrations of the technique her website at <http://deutsch.ucsd.edu/psychology/pages.php?i=211>.

<sup>31</sup> See Samuel (1996).

<sup>32</sup> Heider and Simmel (1944) is a classic psychology experiment which demonstrates this. Participants were asked to watch a shadow display involving simple shapes (triangles and squares). Almost all interpreted it in terms of a narrative involving human beings.

literature', it allows us to consider the alternative canons that could have shaped the tragic tradition if different choices had been made.

But a separate democratising force lay in the nature of fragments themselves. The strength of our impulse to fill in the gaps and piece fragments together was a constant challenge, due to an unresolvable tension between our choice to represent the experience of fragmentation, and the pressure to create coherence. Yet working with fragments offered great opportunities. Whereas fragmentary texts are usually seen as abstruse and difficult, beyond even the reach of most undergraduate Classicists, their ability to speak to artists with no subject-specific knowledge suggests that fragmenting a text opens it up, by allowing a gap in which creativity can flourish. Finally, working on fragments allowed us to break down traditional barriers between Humanities and Science disciplines, by seeing the experience of dealing with fragmented information something rooted in a shared humanity.

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