Audience Reactions to Greek and Shakespearean Tragedy

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In recent years an appetite for the kind of experimental work that is the staple of much social and cognitive psychology has been developing among literary critics. In collaborative work with neuroscientists and/or psychologists, critics have conducted tests on readers, especially of prose fiction, in which subjects read short pieces of text in a lab; their responses while reading are recorded with questionnaires or even monitored with eye-tracking equipment.

It is probably no accident that such tests are conducted less frequently on audience responses to drama. Drama may be more about people than most other art forms, but it is quite recalcitrant to study by experiment. Performances take place in theatres (thus denying us that controlled arena, the lab), each performance is subtly different (thus denying us that sine qua non of experimental work, repeatability), and audiences always respond to many layers at the same time: text, director, designer, actor, etc (good psychology experiments isolate single factors). Audiences themselves are not a monolithic entity: individual reactions can be affected by other individual reactions, creating a collective reaction.

One of the questions sometimes asked of the theatre-going devotee is: 'Why do you see so many productions of the same play?'. The answer is the theatrical equivalent of Heraclitus' river: it's never the same play. (This is most noticeable in the ways that different audiences laugh, or fail to laugh, at the same episodes.) But an experiment with live drama which we conducted in Oxford last year suggests that this received wisdom about the plasticity of plays may be too simple. It is the result of this experiment that we chronicle here.

The broad question we grappled with is how (and indeed whether) concepts and experimental techniques used in psychology can tell us anything about how audiences respond to dramatic characters. The experimental data we gathered confirmed and clarified various instinctive positions about how audiences respond both to certain specific characters and to dramatic character in general, but they also produced one strikingly unexpected result, which made us probe some fundamental assumptions about the effects of the director's and actors' choices on the audience.

I

We chose as our sample plays Sophocles' *Antigone* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, two very different works, but both canonical tragedies, and so, we hoped, affording points of comparison. In order to avoid having to provide context for the audiences, we decided to use the opening sequences: three scenes for *Antigone* (minus the choral odes), two for *Lear*.[1]

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[1] For *Antigone* we used the World's Classics edition, trans. H. D. F. Kitto (Oxford: OUP, 1998), lines 1-99, 155-331, 376-581. For *King Lear* we used the Arden 3 edition ed. R. A. Foakes (Walton on Thames: Nelson, 1997),

After each scene, we stopped and distributed a questionnaire in which spectators recorded their reaction to selected characters, both in brief narrative fashion and by scoring a series of given statements numerically on a seven-point Likert scale (where 1 = 'strongly disagree', 7 = 'strongly agree', and 4 is the middle ground of 'neither agree nor disagree'). In *King Lear* we asked about Lear, Cordelia and Goneril in I.1 and Edmund and Gloucester in I.2; in *Antigone* we asked about Antigone and Ismene in the first scene, Creon in the second, and Creon, Antigone and Ismene (all of them for the second time) in the third.

We used three measurable concepts, all well established in psychology: identification, moral approval and attribution. The questions were identical for each scene and each character, always soliciting responses in relation to those three concepts.[2]

The first concept is familiar to us all from its general, multipurpose (and overused) sense. Identification is putting yourself in someone else's shoes, seeing things from another's point of view: 'emotional and cognitive perspective taking'.[3] Statements for the audience to score included: 'I understood the events in the scene the way Antigone understood them'; 'I felt like Antigone felt'; 'I tend to understand why Antigone did what she did'. The imprecision and the subjective connotations of 'identification', as well as its ties with psychoanalysis, have rendered it suspect in current criticism (a suspicion also attached to character as a critical category), and our investment was not in this label as such.[4] Rather we were keen to adopt a set of questions that have a track record of producing meaningful results within psychology, and to see whether they would also produce meaningful results for us.

The second category, Moral Approval, is also familiar (although the related psychological term for it, affective disposition, may be less so).[5] In Dolf Zilmann's words: 'If the actions and motivations are perceived to be moral and good, individuals will form favorable attitudes toward the character. If, on the other hand, the actions and motivations are perceived to be immoral, the character will be disliked. Once people form affective dispositions [i.e. moral attitudes] toward characters, they begin to anticipate certain outcomes for the characters'.[6] The sole statement to be scored under this heading was 'I approve of X's behaviour.'

Act 1, scene 1 and scene 2 (1-133). We ended scene 2 after Edmund's soliloquy (1ine 133) simply to avoid having to cast an extra actor as Edgar.

[2] We reproduce the questions in full in the appendix.

[3] Nurit Tal-Or & Jonathan Cohen, 'Understanding audience involvement: conceptualizing and manipulating identification and transportation', *Poetics* 38 (2010): 402-418. Following Tal-Or & Cohen, our identification scale was adapted from J. Cohen, 'Defining identification: a theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters', *Mass Communication & Society* 4: 3 (2001): 245–264.

[4] Most recent work on this subject focuses on film. See, for instance, Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1995); Berys Gaut, 'Identification and emotion in narrative film' in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, eds. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999), pp. 200-216.

[5] For a discussion, see A.A. Raney, 'Expanding disposition theory: reconsidering character liking, moral evaluations, and enjoyment', *Communication Theory* 14: 4 (2004): 348-369.

[6] D. Zillmann, 'Basal morality in drama appreciation', in Ib Bondebjerg (ed.), *Moving Images, Culture, and the Mind* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2000), pp. 53–63. Paraphrased in K. M. Krakowiak & M. B. Oliver, 'When good characters do bad things: examining the effect of moral ambiguity on enjoyment', *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 117-135.

Our third category concerns the way people explain what characters are doing and what happens to them: Attribution Theory. 'Attribution theory, in its broadest sense, is concerned with the attempts of ordinary people to understand the causes and implications of the events they witness'.[7] At the highest level, attributions are of one of two kinds: external or dispositional (i.e. internal). If a driver damages his car, an observer may point either to factors external to the driver (poor visibility, other drivers' behaviour, the condition of the car, inadequate signage, etc) or to the driver's own disposition (his attitude, competence, carelessness, etc). External explanations in turn divide into external situational (poor visibility, etc) and external personal (other drivers' behaviour, etc.). Generally speaking, people observing behaviour tend to 'underestimate the impact of situational factors and to overestimate the role of dispositional factors in controlling behaviour.'[8] In other words, we are biased towards finding dispositional explanations simpler or more obvious.

One thing that makes attribution interesting to psychologists is a further bias, generally referred to as the 'self-serving bias'. In the example of the car incident: if our neighbour dents his car, we are more likely to attribute it to his habitual bad driving but when we dent a car it's nothing to do with us: the problem lies with the road, the traffic, the weather, other drivers. We give ourselves more benefit of the doubt than our neighbour; the explanation for our own bad luck isn't dispositional.[9]

Our audiences were first asked to offer narratives of their explanations. 'Edmund fools Gloucester into suspecting his other son is plotting against him. Why does Edmund act this way? Write down one major reason, in two or three sentences'. Once they had done that they had to score dispositional, external personal and external situational factors. 'The explanation for Edmund's behaviour is to do with: ___ Edmund himself, ___ the other characters, ___the situation (circumstances or chance).'[10]

In setting up an experiment about audience response with as many as three types of questions our aim was to come at the hugely complex phenomenon of dramatic character from different angles. We hoped to see if there are systematic relationships between the ways people respond to dramatic character on three levels. (For example, we wondered whether spectators' explanations for a character's behaviour correlate to the way they identify with that character: does identification amount to giving a character first-person privileges, cutting that character the same kind of exaggerated latitude we award ourselves when things go wrong, and vice versa overestimating dispositional factors when things go well?)

In order to be able to look at the whole gamut of responses – from alienation to maximal identification, from full endorsement to strong disapproval – we asked the directors to direct

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[7] L. Ross, 'The intuitive psychologist and his shortcomings: distortions in the attribution process', in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 10 (1977): 173-220 (p.174).

[8] Ross, p. 183. See also H. H. Kelley, 'The processes of causal attribution', *American Psychologist* 28: 2 (1973): 107-128.

[9] E.g., Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958).

[10] P. Kinderman, and R. P. Bentall, 'A new measure of causal locus: the internal, personal and situational attributions questionnaire', *Personality and Individual Differences* 20:2 (1996): 261-264.

each play twice in two very different ways. One version of Sophocles was to be pro-Creon and unsympathetic to Antigone, the other the reverse; one version of Shakespeare was to be pro-Lear and pro-Cordelia, the other the reverse. The directors (Matthew Perkins and Rafaella Marcus) were given carte blanche as to how they achieved this. We simply needed extreme positive and negative audience responses to analyse and it mattered little how these responses were achieved.[11]

The two versions of each play were strikingly divergent. Obviously the key, commissioned, difference in each was characterisation. In the pro-Lear version of *King Lear*, the married couples received the papers revealing their portion of the kingdom with alacrity, greedily eager to unroll the documents to see what they had won. For these same couples, the anti-Lear version emphasised not gain but failure: the failed attempts of Goneril and Regan to please their father. At the end of the love test scene both kicked off their shoes and Regan refilled her glass as the strain of the evening was released. The dialogue about Lear's behaviour was the recognizably painful confrontation of a postponed discussion – what to do about a father's erratic behaviour in his declining years? But the changes in characterisation were supported by a number of other techniques. In *Antigone* atmosphere was changed through subtle reattribution of props (the opening darkness of the pro-Antigone version was broken by her torch; in the negative version the torch was in the hands of authority, the watchman who caught her in the production's action replay of the burial) as well as body language (the handwringing of the sympathetic Creon, trapped in an impossible situation). The anti-Lear/Cordelia production was in modern dress, a cold clinical boardroom setting, in which a businesslike Cordelia used against her father tactics that she had learned from him (and he resented and admired her for her skill); the sympathetic version took place in a medieval "Très Riches Heures du Duc du Berry" warm-colour palette with an authority that was rendered harmless (hierarchies were observed before being set aside) and a ludic Lear whose love test was initially perceived as just another game. Each production was performed once, and each audience (of about 40 people) watched one paired version of *Antigone* and *King Lear*.

It is clear that changing the perspective on characters in each version is complex. For simplicity, we here summarise the directors' changes under six headings: gestures (characters offering each other covert tactile support in the anti-Lear *Lear*; Creon's hands to temples in the pro-Creon *Antigone*); action (the use of flashback in the pro-Antigone *Antigone*, violence in the anti-Lear *Lear*); costume (formal dress in the anti-Creon *Antigone*, modern versus period costume in the two *Lear*s); setting (this overlaps with costume); humour (the Chorus and the Guard were both very comic in the anti-Creon *Antigone*); and pace (the anti-Lear *Lear* was much slower – its characters were cautious, careful, nervous – than its partner version). So in evaluating what did not change in audience response to character, we need to acknowledge the complexity of what did change directorially.

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[11] In *King Lear*, the director divided the lesser characters broadly along lines of generational conflict: the pro-Lear and pro-Cordelia version was also sympathetic to Gloucester, and the anti-Lear and anti-Cordelia version was also anti-Gloucester and pro-Edmund, Goneril and Regan.

Responses varied, in interesting (and statistically significant) ways between different characters in the same scene, and for the same character from scene to scene. Some of these responses were just what one would expect, others unusual, but all of them made dramatic sense. The important general point here is that our three psychological concepts – 'identification', 'moral approval', 'attribution' – *worked.* They worked individually, and they worked as a group: the relationships between them proved worth thinking about (though our idea about identification as correlating with patterns of attribution turned out to be too simple).

Take the relationship between identification and approval. One thing that stands out from the data with great clarity is that to identify with a character is not always the same as to approve of the character. Yes, in many cases identification and approval are correlated, but there are a number of exceptions, and it is those exceptions that are interesting (fig. 1). While identification scores were at similar levels for all characters, with less than 25% separating the top from the bottom scorers, approval varied substantially: Antigone outstripped Creon by a factor of two, and the difference between Cordelia and Lear was even larger. Evidently, our audiences sometimes identified with characters even when they did not go along with their actions.
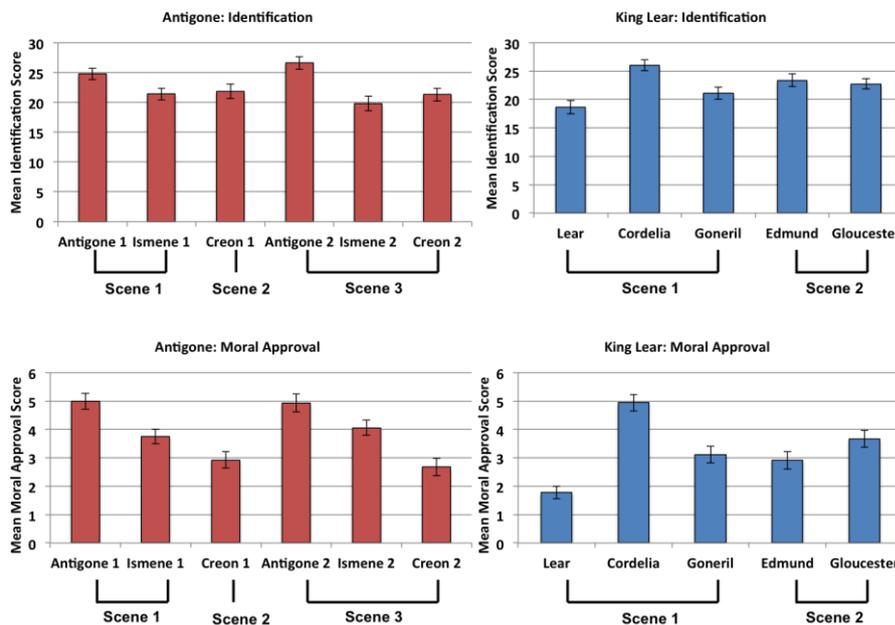

Fig. 1. Identification and moral approval in *King Lear* and *Antigone*. The vertical lines at the top of each bar indicate the margin of error around the estimate of the mean, given the sample size.

What's more, in one or two cases characters actually swapped places from one category to the other. Our audiences identified more with Edmund than with Gloucester or Goneril, but approved more of Gloucester and Goneril than of Edmund. And Creon and Ismene underwent the same kind of inversion.

These discrepancies come as no surprise. They support with hard numbers a commonplace about how fiction works. It is often said that literature can enable readers and audiences to identify not just with heroes but also with villains. Fiction provides a safe place for ontological experiment: what is it like to be a murderess, or Satan, or a malcontent? This was indeed the case for our audiences who could identify with Edmund and Creon even while disapproving of them morally. Nor is it surprising that it should be these two characters who prompted identification despite being perceived as morally dubious: Edmund is the only character in our scenes who is given a soliloquy – and thus a direct route to the audience even as he articulates a plot they may find morally repugnant. And Creon's first speech, while not formally a soliloquy, is a long set piece that allows him to present himself to the audience before having to share the stage on even terms in dialogue.

If for identification and approval we observed similarities across *Antigone* and *King Lear*, the patterning of the attribution data highlighted differences (fig. 2). For most characters in *Lear*, our audiences attributed behaviour primarily to dispositional factors. The external situation and other people were considerations too, but characters were pre-eminently perceived to act the way they act because they are the people they are. *Antigone* was different. Here too disposition scores were high throughout, but in contrast to *King Lear* situation scores were just as high or not much lower. Spectators felt that general circumstances bore heavily on the characters, and had as much influence on their actions as did their dispositions.
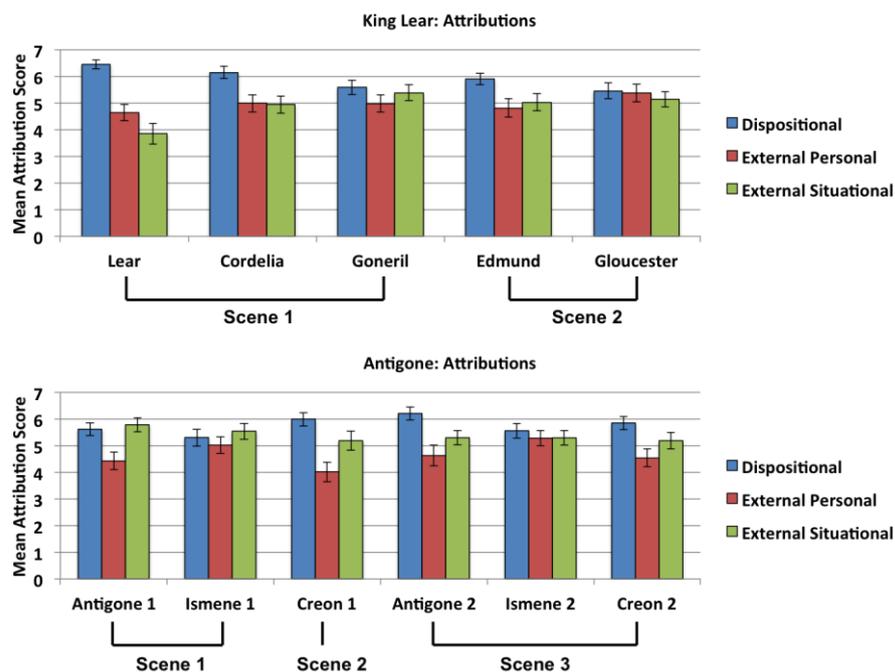

Fig. 2 Attribution in *King Lear* and *Antigone.*

This finding too is easy to make sense of. Sophocles' opening scenes give considerable prominence to the situation in which the characters find themselves, a situation moreover which is none of their doing: Antigone's brother, Polynices, has led an army against his own city and has been killed by her other brother Eteocles. Neither Antigone nor Creon wanted this to happen, but now that it has happened they have to respond. It's not that Shakespeare says nothing about the wider situation, but by comparison he says little. While the action of

Antigone is initiated by something that happened outside the city and involved none of the onstage characters, the decision to divide the kingdom, and to divide it now, has not been forced onto Lear. Since Shakespeare gives us so little situational explanation, it is no wonder that our audiences responded to the scene with high dispositional scores.

These and other findings show that quantitative experimental data can bolster and guide qualitative literary considerations. They provide numerical data for dramatic structures. The concepts and questions we used are well-established in experimental psychology, but not well-established in work on drama, some of them not even in work on any kind of fictional writing. It was not obvious that they would produce meaningful and interpretable results; yet produce them they did, in terms of identification, in terms of approval and in terms of attribution. For all the reservations that one may have about applying psychological categories based on real life to dramatic fiction, it is clear that in a very straightforward sense they worked for our audiences and our productions, and allowed us to compare different characters, different plays and different aspects of the audience's responses.

III

But this is not the end of the story. Against the backdrop of these results one unforeseen (non-)result becomes disturbingly conspicuous. We found very little statistically significant variation between the audiences' responses to the same character in the two performances. In other words, the massive and tangible changes we commissioned and observed in performance seemed to have almost no impact on the audience's response to the characters. Lear stayed Lear, Cordelia stayed Cordelia, Creon stayed Creon: the deep-embedded elements of character trumped the vagaries of performance and direction. The texts seemed director-proof. Can this be true?

In both versions, Cordelia tops identification and approval scores, while Lear comes bottom, and Antigone outstrips Creon and Ismene, despite the directors' and actors' best efforts. Patterns of attribution too change only little. Out of five measures (approval, identification and attribution x three) applied to eleven characters (Antigone, Ismene and Creon, each assessed in two scenes, and Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, Edmund and Gloucester) variation from performance to performance was significant in only two sets of cases.

The first concerns moral approval in *King Lear*. For *Antigone*, there was no (statistically significant) difference between approval scores recorded for each character in the two different performances. For *Lear*, too, the response to two characters does not change (fig. 3). Lear and Cordelia sit respectively at the bottom and the top of the scale in both performances. What does change is the response to the other three. In one performance (the cold, corporate *Lear*-world) audiences felt there was little to choose between them; in the other (the medieval version) they were rated quite distinctly (Edmund lowest, Gloucester highest, with Goneril in the middle). Our audiences were responding measurably to a deliberate dramatic effect here.

In the medieval version, authority was benign and so Edmund's villainous behaviour seemed a deliberate choice; in the modern-dress world of the tyrannical *Lear*, Goneril, Edmund and, to a lesser extent, Gloucester, had no option but to pursue the courses they did as a matter of survival. But the point is that the lesser characters turned out to be manipulable whereas the major characters didn't.
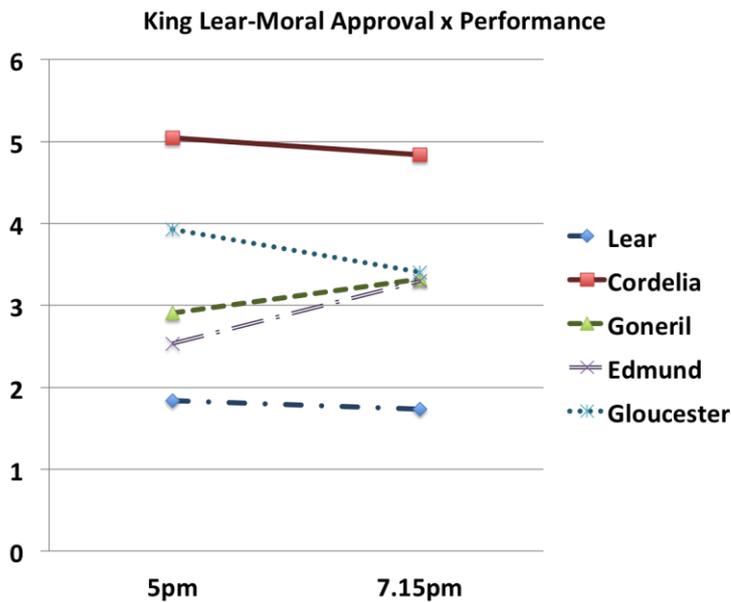

Fig. 3. Statistically significant variation in moral approval of the lesser characters in
King Lear

The difference is not a blunt opposition (major characters being authorially prescribed versus lesser ones being allowed an interpretive free will); but Shakespeare, it seems, was more prescriptive in delineating his main characters. The text propels the major characters in directions which resist manipulation while leaving the lesser characters (their actors or director) with more freedom of choice.

The (only) other area in which we found significant change from one performance to the other was dispositional attribution in *Antigone*. Here too, much stayed the same. The more audiences saw of Antigone, for example, the more they felt that it was her temperament that was driving her actions, and this is true for both performances: her disposition scores went up from scene 1 to scene 3, irrespective of whether the production was pro-Creon or pro-Antigone. But for Ismene, and especially for Creon, responses varied (fig. 4). In one performance, spectators' views of the contribution that Creon's disposition makes to his actions were constant in the two scenes in which he appears (the second and the third); in the other the responses reflect the director's aim of making him sympathetic by presenting him in the third scene as a man under pressure, a man who doesn't like doing what he has to do but has no choice – the actor's anguished hand-wringing signalling the character's helplessness. Our audiences placed less emphasis on internal factors in that later scene, less emphasis in fact than for Antigone or Ismene. This is of course what we expected. But what we didn't expect was that we would find no such crossing of lines for *King Lear*, nor for the other two attribution measures or for identification.
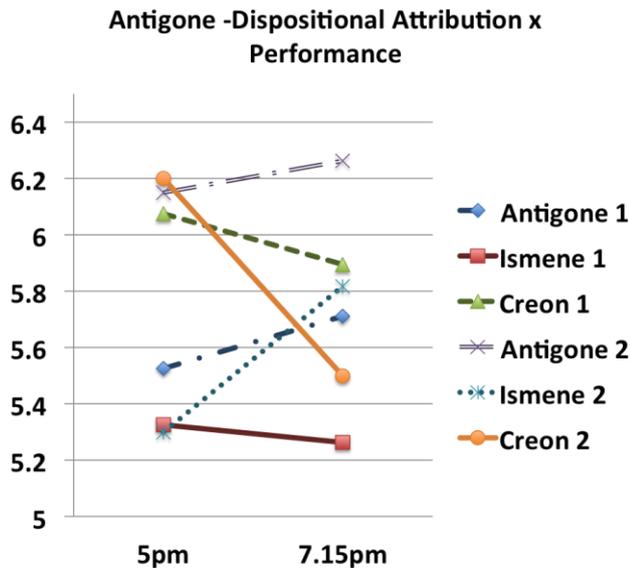
Fig. 4. Statistically significant variation in dispositional attribution scores in *Antigone*

We cited at the outset the uncontroversial view that every performance of a play is different. The above data suggest, however, that this view may not be altogether correct. In certain broad, character-related ways the plays we offered our audiences were more the same from production to production than they were different. (Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that in certain broad character-related *effects* the plays were more similar than different.)

The psychological concepts we used produced statistically significant results, with interesting and meaningful variation from character to character, from play to play and from concept to concept; and yet the variation from performance to performance was limited. This seemed to fly in the face of everything we believe about the freedom directors and actors have to make their imprint on characters. In our experiment text seemed to trump performance. Could this possibly be true?

Let us first consider two factors that might be thought to have influenced this counterintuitive result. The first is the high level of expertise among our spectators, many of them students and all of them interested in drama. Were they so knowledgeable that their prior views, formed by reading or by other productions, overrode any fresh response to the particular performance? It is difficult to rid oneself of this suspicion altogether, but there is nothing in the data to confirm it. The questionnaires identified those with prior exposure to each play (in both cases roughly three quarters of our spectators). Differences between the responses of those who did and those who did not know the play are not statistically significant.[12]

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[12] It is worth noting that the sample size for those with no prior familiarity was relatively low (21 for each – 13 and 8 for the two *King Lear* performances, 15 and 6 for the two *Antigones*), raising the possibility that larger numbers of unexposed viewers might show a different effect. This is not, however, suggested by our results for either play.

Nor is the audience's undeniable homogeneity enough to explain what is going on. Most of our spectators were university students interested in drama, and this will have affected their responses (an ancient Athenian or an Elizabethan audience would no doubt have reacted differently). But many audiences are homogenous, and in any case even a homogenous audience must be affected by what the directors and actors choose to do with the characters. So the obvious forms of interference do not (yet) force us to dismiss the results as aberrant. What we need to do is try to understand what the results suggest and what they don't suggest. What exactly is it that didn't change from performance to performance?

First, it is important to remember that we are only talking about character, and specific forms of response to character at that: identification, approval, attribution. There are many aspects of performance and audience response that we have not broached, all of them areas that productions can affect and change radically – mood, politics, degree of stylisation (to select but a few).

What's more, we are only talking about characters relative to one another. It goes without saying that it is easy to change the look and feel of the play as a whole, and this is in fact what we did. For *King Lear* we managed to shift external situational and external personal attribution *en bloc*, while failing to shift it relatively for individual characters. By radically varying the aesthetic and moral universe of the entire performance, the director of *King Lear* increased external attribution scores for most characters by a statistically significant margin (fig. 5).
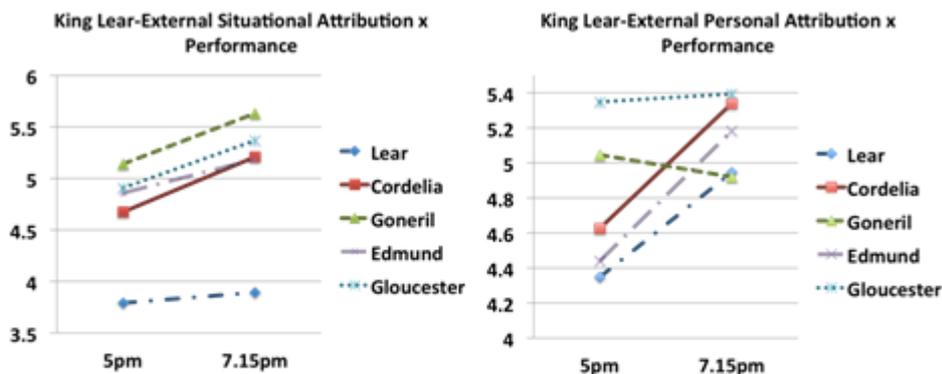

Fig. 5. In the case of *King Lear* external attribution increased for *all* characters in the second performance (but there was no relative differences between characters).

Second, our experiment and its results apply to the beginnings of plays, not to dramas in their entirety. Arguably plays (or these plays, anyway) make special efforts at the beginning to guide an audience in, to orient it; audiences are at this stage particularly directed to focus on the fundamentals and those fundamentals include character. Given that openings set things up, it may be that Greek tragedy and Shakespearean drama have an inbuilt resistance to manipulation. It is noticeable that adaptations of plays target endings more often than beginnings.

A third factor is that the plots of *Antigone* and *King Lear* concern hugely emotive issues, issues played out within families. Evolutionary psychologists have argued that our responses

to families and family structures are hard-wired. Certainly most of us have grown up in families by the time we confront *Lear* and *Antigone*. Thus, whether our audiences had previously read the plays or not, the two tragedies we chose to test were, in the most literal sense, 'familiar' to them; audiences were already cued to react to these familiar structures, lodged as deep in their psyches as they are in these plots, in particular ways. Both of these factors – beginnings of plays and family dynamics – deal with deep, fundamental structures. Audiences have, consciously or not, prior or incipient strong views.

Fourth, we need to underline that our audiences had only one viewing. Literary criticism and much performance criticism is produced after repeated exposure, allowing critics to grapple with minutiae, to nuance reactions and develop subtleties. Our audiences did not have that chance.

Finally, it is important to remember that we chose plays from particular periods: Elizabethan and Attic drama. There is a case to be made for Shakespeare (certainly) and Greek tragedy (probably) needing to be partly self-directing. We are thinking here of the work of Tiffany Stern on Elizabethan rehearsal (where actors rehearsed individually with an instructor and there was only one group technical run through) and of her collaborative work with Simon Palfrey on the cue-script – an Elizabethan actor received his part plus a one-to-three-word cue that preceded it. Far from depriving the actor, this lack of context, Palfrey and Stern argue, is theatrically advantageous. For example, repeated cues embedded in a speech are indirect instructions to other actors to come in on cue, prematurely – and hence to interrupt. Palfrey and Stern's analysis of cue scripts reveals that actors' parts had encoded within them how they were to be acted; in short, Shakespeare's plays are structured to direct themselves.[13]

The productions entered for the dramatic competitions at the Athenian City Dionysia were meticulously rehearsed over many months, with probably major directorial input from the playwright, but here too the production process had little in common with what we are used to in the professional theatre today. Martin Revermann has rightly stressed what he calls the modularity of ancient rehearsals, pointing among other things to the distinct treatment of the (amateur) chorus, who were recruited and rehearsed separately, and the ever-growing star status of the (professional) solo actors, who operated internationally.[14] Moreover, it is a well known feature of ancient plays that much of the stage action is inscribed in the dialogue ('Why are you bowing your head, Antigone?'), and it is tempting to think that in this as so many other respects the playwrights had one eye on future stagings, away from the well-resourced Athenian festivals and away from their steering hands.[15] This is also a feature of

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[13] Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: OUP, 2000); Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

[14] Martin Revermann, *Comic Business Theatricality, Dramatic Technique, and Performance Contexts of Aristophanic Comedy* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 87-94. The case for the directorial input is made strongly by Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: the Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: OUP, 1977) 12-16.

[15] The bibliography on re-performance of tragedies originally performed once is ever-increasing. A flavour of the different approaches taken recently can be gained from K. Bosher ed. *Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012).

Shakespeare's plays where stage directions in dialogue assume the function of the modern director.[16]

These self-directing tendencies of Shakespeare's and to a lesser degree also Sophocles' play may limit the extent to which a modern director can influence an interpretation. One can adjust focus, one can alter context, but one cannot turn a swan into a crow. When we say that the plays themselves may limit any directorial tendency to influence interpretation, we are talking about interpretation of *character* – which is what is regulated by a part-based system of acting. This may be one explanation of the data provided by our experiment.

These five considerations temper the surprise of finding that (in this experiment) performance made little difference to audience perception of character. Performance made little difference to certain aspects of certain sections of certain plays from certain periods under certain conditions. Our aim has not been to advance a theory of drama but to make sense of a specific set of experimental results, and we are conscious that more work and further experiments are needed to understand audience response better.

But neither has it been our aim to water down our results until they become indistinct and lose their power to startle. If nothing else, the experiment shows that the age-old binary of text and performance remains a source of perplexing fascination. And it is a reminder that the pendulum, which in recent decades has swung firmly to the performance side, is never still.[17]

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[16] See Ann Pasterrnak Slater, *Shakespeare the Director* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1982).

Appendix: Questionnaires.

The following questions were used identically for each character that we examined (see above p.2 for a list), with the exception of Q7, which was individually adjusted.

Q1-5 provided the identification score, Q6 the moral approval score, and Qs 8, 9 and 10 the attribution scores. Qs 8-10 were printed on a separate page; participants were asked to fill in Q1-7 before turning over.

Please use the following scale to give us your reactions to the character of **ANTIGONE**. Enter a number in the blank for each question.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree

1. ____ I think I understand Antigone well

2. ____ I understood the events in the scene the way Antigone understood them

3. ____ While viewing, I felt like Antigone felt

4. ____ While watching, I could really ''get inside'' Antigone's head

5. ____ I tend to understand why Antigone did what she did

6. ____ I approve of Antigone's behaviour

7. Antigone has decided to bury her brother, against the order of the ruler. Her sister Ismene takes a different view. Why does Antigone get so angry with her? Write down ONE MAJOR REASON, in two or three sentences:

Using the scale above, please indicate a score (1-7) for each of the following. The explanation for Antigone's behaviour is to do with:

8. ____ Antigone herself

9. ____ the other characters

10. ____ the situation (circumstances or chance)