

READING MINDS IN GREEK TRAGEDY*

A notable intellectual development of the past decade or two has been the ever-growing interest in human consciousness and the workings of the mind. Sometimes grouped under the umbrella term ‘cognitive sciences’, diverse disciplines such as neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, computer science, and linguistics have all made major contributions to our understanding of the human mind and brain; and the large number of popular science books published in this area show that this can be an engrossing topic for the layperson as much as for experts.¹ In this article we want to explore, at a rather general and non-technical level, how this focus on matters of cognition can help us think about an aspect of Greek tragedy.

The aspect that we have chosen for discussion is the spectators’ or readers’ engagement with the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the *dramatis personae*. Traditionally, a central term in this context has been ‘character’. The representation of character has been a major theme in criticism on Greek tragedy for a long time and has prompted considerable debate, not least in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Critics have discussed such matters as: the particularities of character portrayal in Greek tragedy compared to, say, late-nineteenth-century psychological drama; the Greek notions of character, self, and personality that inform Greek tragedy and the ways in which they differ from comparable ideas in cultures today; the consistency or otherwise of character portrayal across a whole play; and the constructedness of fictional character.²

*This article arises out of conversations on earlier work done independently: P. Easterling, ‘Ancient Plays for Modern Minds’, Housman Lecture, University College, London, 2005; and F. Budelmann, ‘Bringing Together Nature and Culture: On the Uses and Limits of Cognitive Science for the Study of Performance Reception’, in E. Hall and S. Harrop (eds.), *Theorising Performance. Greek Drama, Cultural History and Critical Practice* (London, 2010), ch. 9.

¹ See for instance S. Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (London, 1997); G. Fauconnier and M. Turner, *The Way We Think. Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York, 2002); D. Rees and S. Rose (eds.), *The New Brain Sciences. Perils and Prospects* (Cambridge, 2004); S. Rose, *The 21st-century Brain. Explaining, Mending and Manipulating the Mind* (London, 2005); V.S. Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind. The Reith Lectures 2003* (London, 2005).

² For a range of different approaches, see J. Gould, ‘Dramatic character and “human intelligibility” in Greek tragedy’, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* n.s. 24 (1978), 43–67, reprinted in *Myth, Ritual, Memory, and Exchange. Essays in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2001), 78–111; P. E. Easterling, ‘Constructing Character in Greek Tragedy’, in C. Pelling

Increasingly, these discussions have shown that ‘character’ is no longer the intuitively obvious word for talking about Greek tragedy that it once was. It does not sit easily in current debates, and some of the best criticism has come to avoid or even attack the term. Mark Griffith, for instance, reflects this unease in the introduction to his *Antigone* commentary:

Distinctively drawn though each of these figures is, we should acknowledge none the less that their internal psychological states and personalities, i.e. their true ‘characters’ as such behind their dramatic masks, remain largely unformulated by the text and thus beyond our consideration. Rather, we may say that Ant. and Kreon embody the most typical and generalized *characteristics* of their precisely defined social roles – Ant. as the devoted sister and unmarried daughter, Kreon as the stern soldier-ruler and father, each of them fiercely determined to resist any threat to the integrity of these roles. This is not to say that they are not convincing, even memorable, dramatic ‘characters’; rather that we are not encouraged by the text to ponder the inner workings of their minds. The meaning of the play lies for the most part elsewhere.³

Without detracting from the important insights prompted by discussions of tragic character, we suggest that certain features of the plays may today be captured more convincingly by a change in critical perspective and language. We want to investigate the benefits of looking at the plays not as presenting us with characters but as modelling the dynamics of what we shall call ‘reading minds’: the dynamics of engagement with other people, their feelings, thoughts, and intentions.

We take our cue from a large body of recent work in the cognitive sciences that investigates the human capacity for making – conscious or unconscious – inferences about other people’s minds. This capacity, described variously as ‘theory of mind’, ‘mentalizing’, or indeed ‘mind-reading’, has in the past two or three decades been looked at in much detail and from many perspectives by, among others, philosophers of

(ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1990), 83–99; S. Goldhill, ‘Character and Action, Representation and Reading: Greek Tragedy and its Critics’, *ibid.*, 100–27; B. Seidensticker, ‘Beobachtungen zur Sophokleischen Kunst der Charakterisierung’, in A. Bierl and P. von Möllendorff (eds.), *Orchestra. Drama, Mythos, Bühne* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1994), 276–88; C. Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy and Philosophy. The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford, 1996); R. Grisolia and G. M. Rispoli (eds.), *Il personaggio e la maschera. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi – Napoli – Santa Maria Capua Vetere Ercolano, 19–21 giugno 2003* (Naples, 2005); D. Wiles, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy. From Ancient Festival to Modern Experimentation* (Cambridge, 2007), ch. 11; C. Thumiger, *Hidden Paths. Self and Characterization in Greek Tragedy and Euripides’ Bacchae* (London, 2007), with a helpful overview of some earlier discussions on pp. 18–26.

³ M. Griffith, *Sophocles. Antigone* (Cambridge, 1999), 37–8 (but see his n. 112, which points in similar directions to our discussion here).

mind, developmental psychologists, primatologists, and particularly neuroscientists, whose research into ‘mirror neurons’ has been an important step towards understanding the brain processes involved.⁴ Underlying all this research is the sense that the ability to read minds is central to understanding what it is to be human. It has been called ‘no less fundamental than the faculty of language’, ‘crucial for many of those phenomena that are most characteristic of our humanity’, and ‘our natural way of understanding the social environment’.⁵

The notion of reading minds has much to offer to discussions of Greek tragedy. Most immediately, it gives us a language that resonates with broader current discourses. This is a language, moreover, that does not carry the same baggage as the language of ‘character’. For instance, a focus on reading minds allows us to sidestep questions of consistency and development, since ‘mind’, unlike ‘character’, does not come with assumptions of permanence. Most important, perhaps, the concept of mind-reading is in keeping with the observation that, as Griffith puts it in the passage quoted above, the ‘internal psychological states and personalities [of the dramatis personae], i.e. their true “characters” as such behind their dramatic masks, remain largely unformulated by the text’. Much research in the cognitive sciences into reading minds could fairly be called constructionist, in the sense that it investigates the human ability to construct other people’s consciousness.

The thing to note here is that it usually does so without undue anxiety. Just as spectators in the theatre find it easy, both to accept that the dramatis personae do not really have a mental life beyond the text, and at the same time to engage with them imaginatively as though they were human beings, so cognitive science puts the emphasis not on the constructed nature of reality but on the human instinct to read the minds of others from whatever poor or rich clues they have. In other words, fundamental to the functioning of drama

⁴ See S. Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness. An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); P. Carruthers and P. K. Smith (eds.), *Theories of Theories of Mind* (Cambridge, 1996); D. Sperber (ed.), *Metarepresentations. A Multidisciplinary Perspective* (Oxford, 2000); S. Gallagher, ‘The Practice of Mind: Theory, Simulation or Primary Interaction?’, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8 (2001), 83–108; and, on mirror neurons, G. Rizzolatti and C. Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain. How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions* (Oxford, 2008).

⁵ Quotations from: Sperber (n. 4), 6–7 (writing about the capacity for ‘metarepresentation’, under which he subsumes reading other people’s minds); R. Dunbar, ‘On the Origins of the Human Mind’, in P. Carruthers and A. Chamberlain (eds.), *Evolution and the Human Mind. Modularity, Language and Meta-cognition* (Cambridge, 2000), 242; Baron-Cohen (n. 4), 4.

(and indeed literature more widely)⁶ is its constant manipulation of the same mind-reading skills that spectators and readers also use all the time in real life. This is not to say that theatre is the same as reality – theatre-goers do not rush on stage to save Medea's children, nor are they troubled by the need to enter into dialogue with Medea or any other of the stage figures – but what is the same is the underlying dynamic: theatre plays with the spectators' propensity to read minds.

In what follows we shall look at two examples, drawn from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Sophocles' *Antigone*, to suggest that, characteristically, Greek tragedy compresses and intensifies the kind of mind-reading that takes place in real life, prompting spectators at the same time to read the feelings, thoughts, or intentions of the dramatis personae and to reflect upon the successes and shortcomings of the mind-reading process – their own as well as that of the figures on stage. As in so many respects, Greek tragedy can engage at two levels simultaneously: it draws spectators in by making them *both* fill in the gaps in the text *and* think about what they are doing. These plays have demonstrated their staying power as canonical texts with a strong appeal to actors and audiences of all kinds at many different periods; in both there are clear signals that the mind-reading process matters.

The Cassandra scene (*Agamemnon* 1072–1177)

The Cassandra scene has been much admired and discussed.⁷ Even though it does little to move on the plot of the play it is woven tightly into its texture. It extends earlier narratives of both past and future events and develops themes significant for the trilogy as a whole, prominently including those of troubled communication, powerful

⁶ Mind-reading as an important aspect of engagement with fiction is discussed by A. Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln, NE, 2004) and especially L. Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction. Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus, OH, 2006). 'Theory of mind' is applied to issues of drama and performance in B. A. McConachie and F. E. Hart (eds.), *Performance and Cognition. Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (London, 2006) (see index, s.v.) and, specifically for Greek texts, in I. Ruffell, 'Audience and Emotion in the Reception of Greek Drama', in M. Revermann and P. Wilson (eds.), *Performance, Iconography, Reception. Studies in Honour of Oliver Taplin* (Oxford, 2008), 37–58.

⁷ See especially: the discussions ad loc. by Fraenkel and Denniston–Page; O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus. The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1977), 317–22; S. L. Schein, 'The Cassandra Scene in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*', *Greece & Rome* 29 (1982), 11–16; B. Goward, *Telling Tragedy. Narrative Technique in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides* (London, 1999), 74–8; S. Mazzoldi, *Cassandra, la vergine e l'indovina. Identità di un personaggio da Omero all'Ellenismo* (Pisa and Rome, 2001), 180–218.

females, and corrupted weddings. Antiquity saw it as an example of Aeschylus' ability to cause *ekplēxis* (terror/amazement), and modern audiences often find Cassandra one of the few truly sympathetic figures in the trilogy.⁸ Here we shall discuss some of the varied ways in which the scene both invites spectators to read the characters' minds and dramatizes the characters' own efforts as mind-readers.

Cassandra is a prophetess, and one of her chief functions in the economy of the play is to add to the sense of foreboding by foretelling Agamemnon's and her own death. At 1280–5 she even goes so far as to sketch the events to follow in the rest of the trilogy – the avenger's return to kill his mother and 'place the coping stone on these troubles'. But she is not only a conveyor of crucial information: the Cassandra scene owes much of its extraordinary power to Aeschylus' decision to build up and sustain throughout an intense interest in her mind.

The build-up starts in the previous scene, with Cassandra's prolonged silence in response to Clytemnestra's attempts to get her to enter the house (1035 ff.), prompting speculation about her ability to understand Greek and more importantly about her state of mind (1059–67):⁹

- Clyt. And you, if you have a mind to obey any of my orders, make no delay; but if you lack understanding and do not take in my words, then instead of speech make indication with barbarian hand.
- Ch. The stranger seems to need a clear interpreter; and her manner is that of a newly captured beast.
- Clyt. Indeed she is crazy and obeys the prompting of a mischievous mind,¹⁰ she who has come leaving a city newly conquered and does not know how to bear the bridle till she has spent her strength in bloody foam.

As Barbara Goward points out,¹¹ the spectators are never told why exactly it is that Cassandra does not speak until Clytemnestra has left. Interest in her mind is thus kindled early on.

⁸ For ancient reception, see P. E. Easterling, 'Agamemnon for the Ancients', in F. Macintosh, et al. (eds.), *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to AD 2004* (Oxford, 2005), 22–36. Aspects of modern reception are discussed in Y. Prins, 'OTOTOTOI: Virginia Woolf and "The Naked Cry" of Cassandra', *ibid.*, 163–85; and R. Rehm, 'Cassandra: The Prophet Unveiled', *ibid.*, 343–58.

⁹ All *Agamemnon* translations are taken from H. Lloyd-Jones, *Agamemnon by Aeschylus* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1970), occasionally adapted slightly.

¹⁰ 'Mind'-words (*phrên*, *phron-*, etc.) also occur at 1039, 1052, 1084, 1140, 1174, 1183, 1302, 1308.

¹¹ Goward (n. 7), 74.

When Cassandra at last breaks her silence she soon focuses on the terrors of the literal and metaphorical house of the Atridae, calling it a place of kindred murder (1089–92) and explaining why she says so (1095–7):

Yes, for here are the witnesses that I believe.
 These are children weeping for their slaughter,
 and for the roasted flesh their father ate.

Cassandra gives us not just a prophecy but, quite literally, a vision, and not only a vision but also her response to it: not ‘I see’ but ‘this is what makes me realize this is a house of murder’.

The same pattern recurs throughout as Aeschylus portrays Cassandra grappling with her visions. The ‘net’, for instance, appears as follows (1114–17):

Ah, ah! Alas, alas, what is this that comes into view?
 Indeed it is some net of Hades.
 But it is the net that shares his bed, that shares the guilt
 of murder.

Cassandra describes the vision as it makes itself manifest, and then struggles to make it concrete. The sense of real-time realization is less strong as she moves from lyric to trimeters at v. 1178, but it does not disappear (1214–36):

Ah, ah! O misery!
 Once more the dread pain of true prophecy whirls me round,
 troubling me with sinister preludes.
 Do you see here sitting near the house
 these young ones, like to the shape we see in dreams?
 ...
 For these, so I declare, there is one who plots revenge
 a cowardly lion, tumbling in the bed,
 watching at home, alas, for the master on his return,
 ...
 Such is her daring; the female is the murderer of the male.
 She is – what is the proper name for me to give
 the hateful monster? – an amphisbaena, or a Scylla
 living in the rocks, a bane to sailors,
 a raging hell-mother, breathing truceless war
 against her own!

Cassandra's utterances blend descriptions of the visions streaming in with her interpretations and responses, inviting constructions of her state of mind.

Because the scene is so successful it is easy to forget that such invitations are by no means inevitable in the portrayal of a prophet. Cassandra is possessed, transported, maddened, not a state of mind within ordinary experience. Yet the scene takes much of its power from the fact that she is not simply incomprehensible, alien, or 'other'. Rather, Aeschylus gives audiences the unusual experience of imagining what it might be like to be a prophet in the very process of receiving visions.

Further interest in Cassandra's consciousness derives from the fact that she is not a generic kind of prophet. She is a prophet who is never believed, because she betrayed Apollo, and she is also the beautiful daughter of the king of Troy, who has become a captive and is about to die. The glimpses of her mind are correspondingly multifaceted. She laments her plight (e.g. 1136: 'oh, oh! The unhappy fate of me in my misery'); reminisces about a happier past (e.g. 1157–9: 'O my native stream of Scamander!'); tries to understand her fate (e.g. 1138: 'Where have you brought me...? For nothing but to share your death? Why else?'); wants to be believed, though she is uncertain of her powers (e.g. 1194–5: 'Have I missed the mark, or do I like an archer make a hit? / Or am I a false prophet who knocks at doors, a babbler?'); is desperate and frustrated about her status as seer (e.g. 1264–5: 'Why do I preserve these things to mock myself, / this staff and these fillets of prophecy about my neck?'); envisages her death (e.g. 1292–4: 'I pray I may receive a mortal stroke, / that without a struggle my blood may gush forth in easy death'); and hopes for vengeance (e.g. 1323–5: 'I pray to the sun's last light / that to my avengers / my enemies/ may pay for my murder also'¹²). If the Chorus were edited out, the scene would approach what, in more recent literature, we have come to call stream of consciousness.

However, the Chorus are there – prominently – from beginning to end, and must not be left out of the discussion. As has often been noted, they are slow to understand Cassandra's visions, much slower than most spectators, and the scene has plausibly been analysed as demonstrating unsuccessful communication. For stretches of the scene the Chorus and Cassandra do not even talk to one another using

¹² Text uncertain.

second-person pronouns. Altogether there is much here that ‘invites... the parody of a Housman’, as R. P. Winnington-Ingram remarked, citing 1130–1: ‘I would not boast of being a master judge of oracles, / but this seems to me like some evil thing’.¹³

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss the Chorus as simply laughable or inadequate. They make a constant effort to read Cassandra’s mind, with varying success. In this way they serve as an example of the deep-seated human habit of trying to understand the minds of others, as well as the limited, multifaceted, and complex nature of their constant attempts.

They try a range of different approaches. They ask questions (e.g. 1074: ‘Why do you utter cries of woe, invoking Loxias?’), in response to her opening words); speculate (e.g. 1083–4: ‘it seems she will prophesy about her own sorrows; the god’s gift remains in her mind, even in servitude’); and reach for comparisons with something more familiar (e.g. 1140–5: ‘your wits are crazed and a god carries you away, / and over yourself you chant / a song unmusical, like that tawny one, / who, never tired of crying, cries, alas, with sad heart / lamenting for Itys, for Itys throughout a life / with sorrow beset on both sides, a nightingale’). The Chorus’ difficulty in understanding Cassandra is palpable, but so is their genuine attempt to engage with her.

Interestingly, they get furthest when they go beyond trying to decode what they perceive as riddles (1112) and respond to Cassandra emotionally. After several statements of incomprehension, they first approach anything remotely resembling understanding when they reply to Cassandra’s stanza about the net (1114–18, quoted above), as follows (1119–24):

What Erinys do you bid raise her cry
over the house? Your words give me no joy.
And to my heart runs a drop of saffron dye,
the drop that for men who fall by the spear
accompanies the rays of life’s sun as it sets;
and swiftly comes destruction.

The Chorus do not understand what Cassandra means, but her words instil fear in them, and that fear is of course justified. Without knowing what exactly they are afraid of, it is in the form of premonition that

¹³ R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1983), 213.

they grasp at least the tone of Cassandra's statement.¹⁴ Dread and distress stay with them until the end of the scene (1133–5, 1164–6, 1242–5) and ensure at least a minimum connection between Cassandra's prophecies and the Chorus' responses. In the case of their encounter with Cassandra, emotions do not so much detract from rational understanding as support it.¹⁵

Moreover, the Chorus' emotional response is not confined to fear. As soon as Clytemnestra has left they express their pity, 'But I will not be angry, for I pity her. Come, unhappy one...'. (1069–70), and then voice their feelings for Cassandra repeatedly until their farewell to her: 'Poor lady, I pity you for the end you have foretold' (1321). In the same spirit of empathy, they ask her about the nature and origin of her prophetic gifts. Their first inquiries (1150–5) meet with a rather indirect response, but they take up the topic again later on (1199–1201, 'But I marvel at you, that though bred beyond the seas you speak truly of a foreign city, as though you had been present') and this time a dialogue ensues, in the course of which Cassandra talks about her encounter with Apollo and her fate of never being believed.¹⁶

The Chorus' interest in Cassandra the person does not help them in coming to terms with her visions, but it is important for two reasons. First, it broadens the spectators' perspective on Cassandra and her state of mind, and guides them away from a response to the scene that focuses entirely on the prophecies. Secondly, it lets the Chorus recover some of their authority. Near the end of the scene we find them doing what choruses do so often: giving advice and consolation from the perspective of tradition and experience (1295–1304):

- Ch. Woman much to be pitied and very wise,
 your speech has been long. But if truly
 you know your fate, why like a cow whom the god
 impels, do you go fearlessly to the altar?
- Cass. There is no escape, strangers, for any further length of time.
- Ch. But the last of one's time is valued most.
- Cass. This day is come; little shall I gain by flight.
- Ch. Well, know that your endurance comes from a valiant heart.

¹⁴ The Chorus have already had premonitions earlier in the play: e.g. 248–57, 456–74, 975–83.

¹⁵ This dovetails with recent research in neuroscience and psychology stressing that the emotions are an important aspect of human cognition and that emotions and reason depend on one another rather than standing in a simple relationship of opposition: see especially A. Damasio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York, 1994).

¹⁶ On the question of exactly what version of the myth Aeschylus alludes to, see D. Kovacs, 'The Way of a God with a Maid in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*', *CPh* 82 (1987), 326–34.

- Cass. None among the fortunate hears such words.
 Ch. But a glorious death is happiness for a mortal.

A predisposition to look for what is normal rather than what is abnormal is a defining characteristic of this as of many other choruses. In the Cassandra scene, it comes to the fore as they fail to understand that Agamemnon could be murdered by a woman (1251); as they take in only the literal dimension of Cassandra's utterances about the house and the smell of blood (1088, 1310); and, in a rather different way, as they search out the distraught young woman behind the prophetic. It also separates the Chorus from the spectators, whose knowledge of both the myth and the genre makes them override their everyday presumptions of normality in mind-reading.

The Chorus of the Cassandra scene show the human tendency to speculate, consciously and unconsciously, about the minds of others in all that tendency's diversity and with all its strengths and limitations.

Cues to mind-reading in *Antigone*

Antigone is a famously engaging play, which has never lost its hold on readers and audiences; it has been repeatedly reinterpreted and argued over, with its leading figures eliciting strikingly diverse responses. This is interesting, because the text offers a series of explicit cues to the reader/spectator, prompting speculation about feelings and motives, and implying that there is something 'inward' behind what the characters say and do that we must engage with and try to make sense of, though never offering definitive answers.

The first such cue to reading minds comes as early as v. 20 in the prologue, when Ismene interprets Antigone's urgent concern to share news with her as a sign of her emotional turmoil. This is even before Antigone has explained what Creon's decree amounts to; Ismene is inferring from her words, and perhaps from her intonation or gestures, that she is deeply troubled: 'You are obviously growing dark over some piece of news'.¹⁷ As editors note, the word she uses, *kalchainô*, is very rare (from *kalchê*, 'murex') and seems to function in the same way as the epic metaphor *porphûrô*, 'worry' or 'brood', with connotations of

¹⁷ Griffith's translation.

the darkness and turmoil associated with stormy seas.¹⁸ The striking choice of verb signals the importance of Antigone's feelings, which in the exchange that follows (21–99) prompt a complex reading by Ismene: Antigone is being impossibly rash in wanting to disobey Creon, and Ismene can see no practical sense in her defiance of the edict, but she is still 'to your dear ones truly dear' (99).

Creon's opening speech (162–210) sets out his programme as new ruler and his principles of government. He begins his exposition with his own version of a maxim on the testing effect of power (175–7):

It is impossible to gain a full understanding of any man's moral nature (*psûchê*), mentality (*phronêma*), or judgement (*gnômê*) until he has shown himself exercising the functions of ruler and law-giver.

This harks back to a saying of one of the Seven Sages: 'Office reveals the man', quoted by Aristotle in his discussion of justice.¹⁹ Critics have been interested in this as a sign of Creon's sententiousness and inability to apply his maxims to himself except in favourable terms (as in what he says in the rest of his speech, confident in his devotion to the city), but the saying is programmatically placed²⁰ and can surely act as a signal that the relation between his words and his actions will need to be watched as the play unfolds, and that the question of a person's inner nature – what he or she is 'really like' – can only be answered experientially.

Creon's words will be pointedly recalled at 707–9 (discussed below), but even the short exchange between him and the Theban elders that immediately follows his speech,²¹ and especially sections of his dialogue

¹⁸ See R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles. Antigone*, third edition (Cambridge, 1900); Griffith (n. 3), ad loc.

¹⁹ Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 5.1130a: 'There are many people who can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but are unable to do so in their relations with others. This is why the aphorism of Bias, "Office will reveal the man", seems a good one, since an official is, by virtue of his position, engaged with other people and the community at large' (trans. R. Crisp, *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics* [Cambridge, 2000]). The scholion on *Soph. Ant.* 175 notes that some sources attribute the saying to Bias, others to Chilon; R. Tosi, *Dizionario delle sentenze latini e greche* (Milan, 1991), 466, cites other attributions (Solon, Pittacus, et al.).

²⁰ Cf. *Soph. Trach.* 1–3; *Aj.* 646–9, 664–5; *OC* 607–15. On readings of Creon's maxim, see F. Budelmann, *The Language of Sophocles. Communitarity, Communication and Involvement* (Cambridge, 2000), 74–9.

²¹ The old men treat Creon's speech with extreme caution; their remark at 220 ('No one is such a fool as to desire death'), in response to his warning that they should not take sides with anyone who defies his edict, *might* imply that already, on the strength of Creon's past behaviour, they have reason to fear brutal reprisals. Similarly, Creon's reply at 221–2, that death is indeed the penalty for collaborating, although people have often been ruined by hopes of making profit, *might* confirm their anxiety. But the exchange gives little away at this stage.

with the Guard, give plenty of opportunities for the audience to begin testing Creon's use of power.²² The scene ends with a mildly comic exchange (315–23): the Guard asks for permission to say something, which turns out to be a seemingly logic-chopping question about the place where Creon feels pain: is it in his ears, which receive the message, or in his *psûchê* ('inner nature' or, as we would say, 'heart')? *Psûchê* is replaced by *phrenes* at 319: 'The culprit [the person who buried Polyneices] pains your mind, but I your ears'. The phrasing suggests some form of echo of Creon's sententious words at 175–7, especially as *psûchê* – now in the sense of 'life' – reappears at 322, in Creon's refusal to believe the Guard innocent: 'You were guilty, and you sold your life (*psûchê*) for money'.²³ The audience, though, know better than Creon, and the Guard wins this round when he remarks on Creon's failure to see the difference between reality and appearance (323): 'What a terrible thing it is to rely on guesswork and guess wrong'.²⁴

When Antigone is brought in at 376 she stays silent while the Guard describes how she has been caught; it is only at 441 that Creon addresses her: 'You there, the one bowing your head to the ground, do you admit or deny all this?' This is a neat, built-in stage direction, keeping the audience guessing about how Antigone will behave, but interesting, too, in drawing attention to her possible inner state: is it fear (as felt by the guards, similarly described as bowing their heads²⁵), shame, sullenness, or could it be resignation (Brown), or awareness 'that she and Creon can never come to terms' (Jebb)?²⁶ Actors, like readers and critics, will have different nuances to offer; the significant

²² The Guard describes how he and his colleagues reacted with terror when someone pointed out that they had no alternative but to report to Creon the ritual burial of Polyneices' corpse: his words 'made us all bow our heads to the ground in fear' (269–70). Their anxiety is soon shown to be justified, when Creon's response is to read the burial as the work of his political opponents: they must have bribed the guards, and the guards will suffer torture and execution if they do not find the culprit (289–314).

²³ When the Guard returns with the captive Antigone, he begins with a couple of gnomic remarks about the unexpected turning out to happen; the second of these plays on the idea of *gnômê* being fallible: here it means 'intention' or 'purpose' rather than 'judgement', but it is still relevant to Creon's maxim.

²⁴ Cf. Griffith (n. 3) on 315–31.

²⁵ See n. 22 above.

²⁶ A. Brown, *Sophocles. Antigone* (Warminster, 1987); Jebb (n. 18). For further interpretations see A. Boegehold, *When a Gesture Was Expected. A Selection of Examples from Archaic and Classical Greek Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 59–62. His own view is that 'bowing her head' here implies nodding in affirmation ('the actor who plays Antigone, masked and robed, will have nodded – we can imagine – slowly, majestically, unmistakably while the guard spoke' [62]). For M. Ewans (ed.), *Sophocles. Four Dramas of Maturity* (London, 1999), 217–18, Antigone's bowed head makes most sense if, as she is brought in, she is hurled forward by the Guard and stumbles,

point for our present argument is that it functions as one more in the series of cues that started at 20 with Ismene drawing attention to Antigone's troubled looks, and is soon to be followed by Antigone's claim at 504–5 that the elders would agree that it was glorious for her to bury her brother, if fear did not make them hold their tongues.²⁷ Creon denies that this could be so: Antigone is 'alone among these Cadmeans' in seeing things as she does (508), but when she repeats her idea (509), saying that the old men are 'cringing with their mouths' (that is, staying silent for fear of him), there is no refutation, and the audience must be encouraged at least to wonder how they are reacting.²⁸

The old men sound sympathetic to Ismene, at least, when they announce her arrival at 526–30: 'See, here is Ismene at the doorway, / shedding a loving sister's tears; / a cloud over her brow darkens her flushed face / and wets her lovely cheek'. They do not have the evidence, known to the audience, of her exchange with Antigone in the prologue; all they have heard is Creon's claim at 488–94, that she too must be guilty and deserve punishment because he has just seen her indoors 'raving and not in possession of her senses', which he takes as evidence of guilt; but their words do nothing to suggest that they interpret the situation as he does.

Then everyone is in for a surprise (except perhaps Creon, who accuses her of lurking like a viper in his house and secretly draining his life-blood), when Ismene's first words are 'I did the deed' (536). For the audience, there is the contrary evidence of the prologue, but at least when Ismene says that life without Antigone would be unbearable (548) this is not in conflict with the impression she gave at the end of the prologue, that despite her 'madness' Antigone was still dear to those who loved her (99). If we try to go further and ask more specifically why Ismene claims complicity and Antigone rejects it, 'reading minds' becomes much more difficult. The scene certainly prompts such questions, but its power must depend in part on its not imposing answers. One has only to sample the secondary literature to

so that she is lying prone in the centre of the *orchestra* when challenged by Creon. Such readings seem to miss the point that the gesture both invites interpretation and gives nothing away.

²⁷ A clear reminder of Creon's own words at 179–80, where he expresses disapproval of any ruler who avoids following the best policies and 'holds his tongue from fear'.

²⁸ Critics have often read 471–2 (the elders' only comment in reaction to Antigone's bold defiance of Creon) as downright disapproval; but saying that she takes after her father in the savagery of her language and 'does not know how to give way', though strongly worded, is somewhat evasive in the context.

see how differently their motives can be understood according to the different cultural perspectives of readers.²⁹

The scene that follows opens with the strongest signal of all, when, immediately after their brooding lyric on the never-ceasing troubles of the royal house, the Chorus announce to Creon the arrival of his son, asking a question that could not be more pointed: 'Here now is Haemon, last of your sons. Has he come in distress at the fate of his bride-to-be, Antigone, and pained at being cheated of his marriage?' (626–30). Creon reformulates the question into a pair of alternatives: is Haemon frenzied with rage against his father, or is he loyal, whatever Creon may do (631–4)? The reformulation may prompt thoughts about Creon's expectations, but there are even more pressing questions about Haemon's motivation, especially as he begins with what seems like a dutiful statement of his readiness to be guided by his father.³⁰ When he gets a chance to put an opposite point of view to his father, he asks for willingness to acknowledge other ways of thinking (707–9):

For if anyone believes that only he has good sense (*phronēin*),
or has powers of speech (*glōssa*) or moral quality (*psūchē*) unlike any other
– such people, when they're laid open,³¹ are seen to be empty.

This takes us back to Creon's programmatic claims and offers a contrasting model for understanding the rest of the scene. But even if Haemon's words can be felt to apply very pointedly to Creon as the action develops, it would be wrong to see them as a verdict on his whole situation: his suffering in the final scene, when he laments over the dead Haemon and Eurydice, is surely designed to evoke a strong

²⁹ Some examples: Jebb (n. 18), Introduction, xxix, sees Ismene's 'feverish impulse towards self-immolation' as 'of a sentimental and almost hysterical kind'; J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles III. The Antigone* (Leiden, 1978), on 552, discusses the possibility that Ismene has a strategic aim, to make Antigone less inflexible or Creon less angry; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles. An Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1980), 133–5, offers a subtle analysis of Ismene's language and objects to 'the prim disparagement of Ismene we sometimes read – as though we were all heroes'; H. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), 194, looks for the sociopolitical implications of the contrast between the two sisters.

³⁰ Though his careful participles at 635 and 638 might be understood conditionally; cf. Griffith (n. 3), ad loc: 'Haimon's pledge of filial allegiance is immediate, but not unequivocal'.

³¹ The word translated 'laid open' (*diaptuchthentes* from *diaptussō*) suggests 'opening up' something folded, such as a written tablet. For the importance of the 'tablets of the mind' as an image in fifth-century literature, see R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship. From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford, 1968), 25–6. Cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 985; Kamerbeek (n. 29), ad loc, for more examples.

response of pity from the audience, which may qualify the notion of ‘emptiness’ advanced by Haemon.

Conclusion

In choosing these examples, our aim has been to illustrate from familiar (and endlessly engaging) plays some of the different ways in which mind-reading can be stimulated. In *Agamemnon* there is the exceptionally detailed commentary of an interlocutor struggling to make sense of the state of mind behind a prophet’s anguished revelations, while in *Antigone* there are pointed reminders that outward appearance and comportment (dark looks, tears, bowed head) may give clues to the interpretation of inner states, especially when the speakers themselves articulate the idea that a person’s actions will reveal the inner self. Of course these are not the only modes in which uncertainty about motives and feelings is created by a drama – scenes of deception or madness, for example, are other rich contexts in which the process of reading minds can be explored. Many of the details that we have discussed can also be seen as ‘metatheatrical’ pointers, reminding the audience of the fictionality of the play as play, but we like to think that this function, too, is integral to the dynamics of engagement that we have been sketching. Indeed, the more open-ended the engagement that a play invites, the better are the chances that it will go on seeming ‘relevant’ to people of different times and places.

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