

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Bristol		
Unit of Assessment: 29) Classics		
Title of case study: Transforming theatre artists' and audiences' understanding of ancient tragedy in modern performance		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Emma Cole	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Lecturer in Liberal Arts and Classics	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2015 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Dr Cole's research into the reception of tragedy in contemporary theatre has inspired and informed new theatre productions, while deepening artists', practitioners', and audiences' understanding of ancient tragedy. Her research has 1) enhanced knowledge of classical performance and created cultural change within the UK's leading immersive theatre company, Punchdrunk, and inspired two new adaptations of ancient drama within the company, one of which sold out (2017); and 2) transformed the creative practice of Australian playwright Tom Holloway, and enriched the form and content of his original trilogy *Medea in Exile*. Through these performances, as well as interactive engagements with theatre audiences and schools, Dr Cole has also created educational impact by changing the public's perceptions of ancient drama.

2. Underpinning research

Dr Cole is an early-career researcher (University of Bristol since 2015) whose work on the reception of ancient tragedy in contemporary theatre comprises two distinct strands: 1) the theorisation of the role of translation and adaptation in contemporary theatre, and 2) the analysis of specific productions of ancient drama. The research includes interpretive scholarship on: individual ancient plays; individual modern adaptations in performance; and the oeuvres of modern playwrights and theatre directors. The University of Bristol has supported the entirety of Dr Cole's post-PhD research career; she joined the university as a teaching fellow in the same month as receiving her PhD (UCL), and was appointed to a lectureship in 2017; outputs published while employed at Bristol include a sole-authored monograph [3.2], an edited collection [3.3], two book chapters [3.4, 3.5], two journal articles [3.6], and several open-access essays on public-facing websites such as *The Conversation* and *Exeunt*. The research was also carried out through the curation of specific seminar series and public events in collaboration with theatre practitioners, including the Conversations with Iphigenia seminar series (2016), the *Medea in Exile* staged reading (2018), and the Knowledge Exchange and the Creative Industries seminar series (2019-2020).

1. The Theorisation of the Role of Translation and Adaptation in Contemporary Theatre

Cole's research on translation and adaptation is published in [3.3], which was co-edited with Dr Geraldine Brodie (UCL) and features a co-written introduction and a sole-authored chapter. The research argues that all theatre translation is a form of adaptation, developing Linda Hutcheon's idea of a continuum of adaptation going from literary translation through to spin-offs and fanzines to argue that instead of being thought of as an either/or dichotomy, theatre translation and adaptation should be thought of as a spectrum, or continuum, which is forever in flux and embodies the potential to loop back on itself. Cole's research developed the new theory of 'paralinguistic translation' for the reception of ancient drama. Paralinguistic translation facilitates the analysis of classical reception as a form of translated drama, even when the translator does not have ancient language proficiency. It provides a framework to study the translation of not

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only language, but also—or instead—themes, images, and even issues to do with the performance context and reception history of a work into other elements of the theatrical experience, such as the *mise-en-scène*. Her editing of the book has resulted in a collaborative, multidisciplinary examination of the role of translation and adaptation within the reception of ancient drama, as well as within modernist, naturalist, and contemporary theatre. It brought academics with expertise in different languages together with theatre practitioners to provide interdisciplinary and interprofessional insights into translation and adaptation.

2. Analysis of Specific Productions of Ancient Drama

Cole explored the performance reception of ancient plays, resulting in publications which examined the role of Greek tragedy during the War on Terror [3.6] (2016), the role of Greek tragedy in postdramatic theatre [3.2] (2019), and the use of Greek tragedy in social impact settings for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder [3.5] (2019). Her 2019 monograph [3.2] is the paradigmatic example of her approach to performance reception; here Cole applies her combination of a semiotic and phenomenological methodology to seven separate case studies, to demonstrate the significance of ancient drama to the development of the postdramatic genre, as well as the importance of postdramatic theatre to the role of tragedy in modernity. Much of her research is accessibly summarised in her article on ‘drama, reception of’ for the Oxford Classical Dictionary [3.4]. Her key findings within this overall area of research reveal how tragedy can be used as a semantic scaffold to provide a form of narrative shorthand within experimental, or postdramatic productions, and highlight the potential that interpolations and lacunae in ancient and/or fragmentary scripts hold for performative realisation and adaptation. In addition, research via the Conversations with Iphigenia seminar series (2016), which was a collaboration between the University of Bristol, UCL, and Notting Hill’s Gate Theatre, explored the potential that the corrupt text of *Iphigenia at Aulis* holds for theatrical reinvention. It led to the publication of two edited transcripts (with critical introductions) for *Practitioners’ Voices in Classical Reception Studies*.

Cole’s work on the reception of ancient drama is now funded through the AHRC, via a Leadership Fellowship [3.1], which supports the next stage of her work into the role of ancient tragedy in contemporary performance. Cole is now exploring the potential of ancient literature for realisation in immersive formats. Her research seeks to answer three interrelated questions: 1) what are the benefits of using ancient Greek literature within immersive mediums for both artistic creation and audience experience? 2) What processes of development underpin immersive experiences and the role of tragic narrative within them? And 3) What can a study of the rehearsal period of an immersive adaptation of Greek tragedy reveal about the current role and future direction of Greek tragedy in the creative industries?

3. References to the research

Funded research

3.1 **Cole E** (PI), *Punchdrunk on the Classics*, AHRC Leadership Fellowship/UKRI Innovation Fellowship AH/S00453X/1, 2019-2021, GBP234,189

Publications

3.2 **Cole E** (2019), *Postdramatic Tragedies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press [100,000 words] [Available on request]

3.3 Brodie G and **Cole E** (eds. 2017), *Adapting Translation for the Stage*, Routledge [120,000 words, with a sole-authored chapter and co-authored introduction, shortlisted for the 2019 Theatre and Performance Research Association Prize for Editing] [Available on request]

3.4 **Cole E** (2020). Drama, Reception of, *Oxford Classical Dictionary* [8,000 words] [Available on request]

3.5 **Cole E** (2019). Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and the Performance Reception of Sophocles’ *Ajax*, in Stuttard D (ed.) *Looking at Ajax*, London: Bloomsbury [6,000 words] [Available on request]

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3.6 Cole E (2016). Adapting Greek tragedy during the War on Terror: Martin Crimp's *Cruel and Tender*, *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, 9:1, pp.37-51
https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp.9.1.37_1

4. Details of the impact

Dr Cole's underpinning research [3.2-3.6] has transformed attitudes towards, increased knowledge of, and deepened understanding about ancient drama within individual theatre companies/practitioners and audiences.

Impact on theatre practitioners and companies: co-production of new cultural artefacts and shaping the creative process in theatres

Investigative scholarship and open-access articles created a public profile for the researcher as an expert on tragedy and its reception, which led to theatre practitioners approaching Cole about potential collaborations. Since 2017, Cole's research has led to the creation of new productions, including Punchdrunk's *Kabeiroi* (2017) [5.1, 5.3], Punchdrunk's in-development [text removed for publication] (2021-) [5.1, 5.2], and Tom Holloway's *Medea in Exile* [5.4, 5.5]. The researcher's direct participation in the development of these three artistic productions, now supported by an AHRC Leadership Fellowship [3.1], has created greater understanding of how to communicate the richness of ancient tragedy and its potential for performance in experimental theatre and other cultural experiences. It has improved the quality of the artists' work, evidenced by sell-out and longer-than-ever-before performance runs [5.3].

Punchdrunk's *Kabeiroi*

Punchdrunk is a global leader within the creative industries and the most influential practitioner of immersive theatre internationally. In 2017, Punchdrunk and Cole collaborated on a six-hour adaptation of Aeschylus' *Kabeiroi* (2017). Cole provided details of the narrative context of the tragic fragments, as well as information about initiation rituals in Greek religion, and the potential of this source material for adaptation as experimental performance. Her collaboration with Punchdrunk represents the first time the company has embedded a researcher into its creative development process. To Punchdrunk's Artistic Director, Dr Cole's 'time, wisdom, and generosity' was 'transforming [to] this show' [5.3]. Her research 'was key to creating the narrative arc for our resulting production; her expertise surrounding Greek tragedy and its reception was crucial to our understanding of the surviving fragments and their performative potential' [5.1].

Kabeiroi was a commercial and artistic success for Punchdrunk. The researcher's direct involvement on *Kabeiroi* led to the production being over-subscribed; [text removed for publication] people entered a ballot for an available [text removed for publication] tickets [5.3].

Punchdrunk's [text removed for publication]

Cole's sustained collaboration with Punchdrunk has created ongoing impacts for the theatre company. In 2019, Dr Cole was awarded an AHRC Leadership Fellowship [3.1], on which Punchdrunk is a project partner [5.1]. The continued innovative and inspirational role of the research within the company's work reflects the cultural impact of Cole's work.

The evolving partnership between Cole and Punchdrunk involves Cole working with the company on the research, development, and rehearsing of a major new immersive theatre production. [Text removed for publication] will open in Woolwich in 2021 [delayed from November 2020 due to covid-19] and is a major cultural event, budgeted to run for up to five years for up to 3,500 audience members per week [5.1]. The collaboration sees Cole contributing her academic expertise and current research on immersivity and the classics [3.1], as well as her prior research on staging Greek drama, in a dramaturgical role, inspiring, co-creating, and supporting new forms of artistic expression [3.2-3.6]. Since 2019, Cole has worked with Punchdrunk's Artistic Director, alongside their Director and Choreographer and the design

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team, on the research and development phase of the production. The Artistic Director notes that Cole is transforming Punchdrunk's creative process, stating: 'It would be very hard to undertake another project without this level of dramaturgical scrutiny now [...] vast swathes of knowledge and learning will now make its way into the work, making the show richer, more focused and dense with detail in ways that we couldn't have thought possible without her' [5.1, 5.2].

Her impact upon the company is long-lasting and feeds into their strategic direction. Punchdrunk are developing an Augmented Reality game based upon ancient myth, in collaboration with Silicon Valley software developers Niantic [5.1] and have invited Cole to join their team.

Tom Holloway's Medea in Exile

In 2016, Cole and award-winning Australian playwright Tom Holloway co-created a trilogy of *Medea* adaptations (2016 –) [5.4]. Cole's research into postdramatic reinventions of the Medea myth [3.2] changed Holloway's understanding of the potential of this story in contemporary theatre. In addition, Cole provided Holloway with access to fragments of ancient Greek tragedies and epics, alongside iconographic sources that are largely inaccessible to non-specialists. Through the introduction of these additional sources Holloway gained new insights into how unrepresentative our extant tragedies are of the rich mythological varieties found in our non-extant tragic texts; he writes that the collaboration 'absolutely' deepened his creative practice and that it 'has changed the scale on which I work' [5.5]. *Medea in Exile* is Holloway's first trilogy of plays, and is the first adaptation he has written where every plot point is based upon a piece of evidence from antiquity; Cole's research has been integral to the form and content of Holloway's playwriting.

Cole facilitated the play's development via the 2018 Being Human Festival of the Humanities, by organising a staged reading. This brought funding to the playwright for a trip from Australia to the UK for a script development workshop in 2018, as well as new work for the actors and director at the staged reading [5.6].

Impact on audiences and practitioners: deepening engagement and understanding of Greek tragedy

This staged reading also widened access to research on lost and fragmentary Greek tragedies and changed understanding regarding the make-up of the tragic corpus and the possibilities it holds for modern-day performance; 91% of surveyed attendees stated that the reading increased their awareness of research and that it encouraged them to find out more about the subject [5.7].

Further public events, including seminars, lectures, and post-show discussions, have stimulated engagement with and widened access to research on ancient drama to two additional groups, namely theatre audiences and school students, deepening understanding about Greek tragedy and its role in the theatre industry.

NB during the 2018-19 academic year the below activities ceased as the researcher was on a career break (maternity leave).

Theatre Audiences and Practitioners

Cole has co-convened and participated as a speaker in the Conversations with Iphigenia seminars (10 and 17 May 2017). These seminars shared research specific to Greek tragedy to coincide with the Gate Theatre's production of *The Iphigenia Quartet* (2016). The then-Artistic Director of the Gate Theatre commented that his engagement with Cole and co-convenor Geraldine Brodie changed his view that academic experts 'might rage at how many liberties we had taken [in the translation and adaptation of texts]' and empowered him to realise that 'the translations that I make as a director might feel very different from those of the dramatist or academic, but ultimately they take place on the same spectrum' [5.8]. Cole's participation in two post-show events at the Gate Theatre ('Reimagining Classics', on 25 November 2015 and

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'Confrontations with Iphigenia', on 16 May 2016) widened access to research even further, to audiences of the Gate's Greek tragedy productions.

Schools: Educational Impacts and Engagement

Since 2017, Cole has given public talks to four separate branches of the Classical Association, as well as to several schools, and at a variety of summer schools and Greek drama programmes (dates specified in the appendix). The outreach lectures have deepened understanding of, and widened access to, tragic texts and led to creative and interactive engagements with tragedy from students; when asked if the lectures at a Bristol Classics Hub A Level and GCSE day were helpful, the 52 students surveyed responded with an average score of 3.8/5, and five students specifically highlighted Cole's lectures on Medea and Greek tragedy as what they liked most that day [5.9]. Audience engagement is evidenced by repeat invitations, including to speak at the Repton Summer School, whose organiser commented that the lecture was 'one of the best we've ever had, given how interactive and up to date it was' [5.10].

Appendix- dates of lectures and public talks:

- 17 October 2018, Manchester and District branch of the Classical Association
- 9 May 2018, St Katherine's School
- 6 December 2017, South West Branch of the Classical Association
- 31 October 2017, Harrow School
- 11 May 2017, Bristol Branch of the Classical Association
- 20 March 2017, Bristol Classics Hub A Level and GCSE Study Day
- 13 March 2017, Roehampton and South West London Branch of the Classical Association
- 8 February 2017, KCL Greek Drama Study Day
- 14 July 2016, Repton/JSST Classical Civilisation Summer School
- 27 June 2016, UCL Greek and Latin summer school

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Punchdrunk project partner letters of support to AHRC x 2 (2018, 2020)
- 5.2 Questionnaire from Punchdrunk Artistic Director (September 2020)
- 5.3 Punchdrunk email correspondence x 2 (2017, 2019)
- 5.4 *Medea in Exile* script, with introductory note by Tom Holloway (2016)
- 5.5 Questionnaire from Tom Holloway (September 2019)
- 5.6 Successful funding application for *Medea in Exile* staged reading
- 5.7 Evaluations and surveys from *Medea in Exile: Origins of a Myth* event (21 November 2019)
- 5.8 Foreword to *Adapting Translation for the Stage* by former Artistic Director of Notting Hill's Gate Theatre
- 5.9 Bristol Classics Hub A Level and GCSE Study Day student surveys (compiled March 2017)
- 5.10 Repton Summer School email correspondence (January 2017)