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### ► To cite this version:

Cyril Libourel, Etienne Baron, Juliana Lenglet, Laurent Amsellem, Fabrice Roux, et al.. The genomic architecture of competitive response of Arabidopsis thaliana is highly flexible among plurispecific neighborhoods. Frontiers in Plant Science, 2021, 12 (741122), 13 p. 10.3389/fpls.2021.741122. hal-03357772v1

## HAL Id: hal-03357772 https://hal.science/hal-03357772v1

Submitted on 29 Sep 2021 (v1), last revised 17 Mar 2022 (v2)

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# The genomic architecture of competitive response of Arabidopsis thaliana is highly flexible among plurispecific neighborhoods

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Submitted to Journal: Frontiers in Plant Science

Specialty Section: Plant Abiotic Stress

Article type: Original Research Article

*Manuscript ID:* 741122

Received on: 14 Jul 2021

Revised on: 10 Sep 2021

Journal website link: www.frontiersin.org



#### Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest

#### Author contribution statement

F.R., L.A. and D.R. supervised the project. E.B., L.A. and F.R. designed the experiments. E.B. and J.L. conducted the greenhouse experiment. J.L. and E.B measured the phenotypic traits. C.L. analyzed the phenotypic traits. C.L. performed the GWA mapping. C.L. performed and analyzed the enrichment tests. C.L., D.R. and F.R. wrote the manuscript. All authors contributed to the revisions.

#### Keywords

plant-plant interactions, Arabidopsis thaliana, Genetic Variation, GWAS, Local population, plurispecific interactions

#### Abstract

#### Word count: 227

Plants are daily challenged by multiple abiotic and biotic stresses. A major biotic constraint corresponds to competition with other plant species. Although plants simultaneously interact with multiple neighboring species throughout their life cycle, there is still very limited information about the genetics of the competitive response in the context of plurispecific interactions. Using a local mapping population of Arabidopsis thaliana, we set up a Genome Wide Association study to estimate the extent of genetic variation of competitive response in 12 plant species assemblages, based on three competitor species (Poa annua, Stellaria media and Veronica arvensis). Based on five phenotypic traits, we detected strong crossing reaction norms not only between the three bispecific neighborhoods, but also among the plurispecific neighborhoods. The genetic architecture of competitive response was highly dependent on the identity and the relative abundance of the neighborhoods. While RNA related processes might confer a broad range response toolkit for multiple traits in diverse neighborhoods, some processes such as signaling and transport might play a specific role in particular assemblages. Altogether, our results suggest that plants can integrate and respond to different species assemblages depending on the identity and number of each neighboring species, through a large range of candidate genes associated with diverse and unexpected processes leading to developmental and stress responses.

#### Contribution to the field

Despite the importance of plant-plant interactions on crop yield and plant community dynamics, our understanding of the genetic and molecular bases underlying natural variation of plant-plant interactions is largely limited in comparison to other types of biotic interactions. In addition, most studies reporting the genetic and molecular mechanisms of natural plant-plant interactions are based on bispecific heterospecific interactions. However, in natural communitiaues and crop field, a focal plant rarely interacts with only one neighbor species, thereby strengthening the need to study plant-plant interactions in the context of plurispecific interactions. By setting up a Genome-Wide Association mapping study, the genetic architecture of competitive response of Arabidopsis thaliana was found to be highly flexible not only between bispecific neighborhoods, but also between bispecific and plurispecific and plurispecific neighborhoods. Our results suggest that plants can integrate and respond to different species assemblages depending on the identity and number of each neighboring species, through a large range of genes associated mainly with RNA related processes, signaling and transport.

#### Funding statement

This work was funded by a PhD fellowship from the University of Paul Sabatier Toulouse and a PhD fellowship from the University of Lille 1 - Région Nord-Pas-de-Calais to EB. This study was also supported by the LABEX TULIP (ANR-10-LABX-41).

#### Ethics statements

#### Studies involving animal subjects

Generated Statement: No animal studies are presented in this manuscript.

#### Studies involving human subjects

Generated Statement: No human studies are presented in this manuscript.

#### Inclusion of identifiable human data

Generated Statement: No potentially identifiable human images or data is presented in this study.



#### Data availability statement

Generated Statement: The authors acknowledge that the data presented in this study must be deposited and made publicly available in an acceptable repository, prior to publication. Frontiers cannot accept a manuscript that does not adhere to our open data policies.

# The genomic architecture of competitive response of *Arabidopsis thaliana* is highly flexible among plurispecific neighborhoods

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- 12 Keywords: plant-plant interactions, Arabidopsis thaliana, genetic variation, GWAS, local
- 13 population, plurispecific interactions
- 14
- 15
- 16 Number of words: 58335051
- 17 Number of figures: 5
- 18 Number of tables: 1

#### 19 Abstract

20 Plants are daily challenged by multiple abiotic and biotic stresses. A major biotic constraint 21 corresponds to competition with other plant species. Although plants simultaneously interact with 22 multiple neighboring species throughout their life cycle, there is still very limited information about 23 the genetics of the competitive response in the context of plurispecific interactions. Using a local 24 mapping population of Arabidopsis thaliana, we set up a Genome Wide Association study to estimate 25 the extent of genetic variation of competitive response in 12 plant species assemblages, based on three 26 competitor species (Poa annua, Stellaria media and Veronica arvensis). Based on five phenotypic 27 traits, we detected strong crossing reaction norms not only between the three bispecific neighborhoods, 28 but also among the plurispecific neighborhoods. The genetic architecture of competitive response was 29 highly dependent on the identity and the relative abundance of the neighboring species. In addition, 30 most enriched biological processes underlying competitive responses largely differ among 31 neighborhoods. While RNA related processes might confer a broad range response toolkit for multiple 32 traits in diverse neighborhoods, some processes such as signaling and transport might play a specific 33 role in particular assemblages. Altogether, our results suggest that plants can integrate and respond to 34 different species assemblages depending on the identity and number of each neighboring species, 35 through a large range of candidate genes associated with diverse and unexpected processes leading to 36 developmental and stress responses.

#### 37 INTRODUCTION

38 Because pPlant-plant interactions are recognized as a major factor mediating plant community 39 structure, diversity and dynamics (Tilman 1985; Goldberg & Barton 1992; Chesson 2000; Martorell & 40 Freckelton 2014). Thus, deciphering the genetic and molecular bases of plant-plant interactions appears 41 fundamental to predict the evolutionary dynamics of plant communities in ecological time (Pierik et 42 al., 2013; Frachon et al., 2017). This is especially relevant in the context of current anthropogenic 43 modifications of plant assemblages, which may in part result from the intertwined effect of increased 44 plant biomass and reduced plant diversity under climate warming (Baldwin et al., 2014) or from native 45 species having different geographical range shifts under climate change (Bachelet et al., 2001; Gilman 46 et al., 2010; Singer et al., 2013). Furthermore, Because in absence of pesticides, the average potential 47 to-reduction of e-crop yield by weeds is significantly higher for weeds than by any other crop pests in 48 absence of pesticides (Oerke et al., 2004; Neve et al., 2009). - iIdentifying and characterizing the 49 function of genes underlying crop-weedplant-plant interactions appears therefore also fundamental to 50 accelerate breeding programs aimed at regulating weeds increasing crop competitiveness (Worthington 51 & Reberg-Horton 2013; Onishi et al., 2018). In addition, in the context of complementarity in using 52 resources, optimizing species assemblages in crops may be facilitated by the understanding of the 53 genetics underlying overyielding (Litrico & Violle 2015; Pakeman et al., 2015; Weiner et al., 2017).

54 However, iIn comparison to other types of biotic interactions such as plant response to virus, 55 bacteria, fungi, oomycetes and to a lesser extent, herbivores (Roux & Bergelson 2016; Bartoli & Roux 56 2017), there is still very limited information about the genetics associated with natural variation of 57 plant-plant interactions, i.e. when plants have been directly challenged by other plants (and not in 58 artificial environments simulating plant plant interactions) (Bergelson & Roux 2010; Bartoli & Roux 59 2017). For example, a recent review listed only 47 Quantitative Trait Loci (QTL) mapping studies 60 (including three Genome Wide Association studies, GWAS) that have been designed to study the 61 genetic architecture underlying natural variation of plant-plant interactions (Subrahmaniam et al., 2018). In agreement with other types of biotic interactions (Roux & Bergelson 2016; Bartoli & Roux 62 2017). Natural genetic variation in plant-plant interactions are mainly driven by a complex genetic 63 64 architecture, ranging from the identification of few medium-effect QTLs to the identification of up to 65 tens of small-effect QTLs (Subrahmaniam et al., 2018). In a heterospecific context, Amore than 80% 66 bout two-thirds of these QTL mapping studies focused on asymmetric interactions (i.e. when one of 67 the interacting partners benefits at the expense of the other), including response to parasitic plants and

68 weed suppressive ability mediated by allelopathy and response to parasitic plants (Subrahmaniam et 69 al., 2018). Surprisingly, despite the importance of competition in driving plant community 70 assemblages, only six QTL mapping studies (including two GWAS) focused on competitive 71 interactions in a heterospecific context, i.e. when both interacting species suffer significant cost by 72 investing in competing and therefore compromising on the benefit (Dudley 2015). In agreement with 73 other types of biotic interactions (Roux & Bergelson 2016; Bartoli & Roux 2017), plant-plant 74 interactions are mainly driven by a complex genetic architecture, ranging from the identification of few 75 medium-effect QTLs to the identification of up to tens of small-effect QTLs (Subrahmaniam et al., 76 2018). While informative, most of these OTL mapping studies were based on bispecific heterospecific 77 interactions (i.e. one single pair of interacting species; Subrahmaniam et al., 2018). In the first GWAS 78 conducted on bispecific heterospecific interactions (Baron et al., 2015), we used 48 natural accessions 79 of Arabidopsis thaliana from the highly genetically polymorphic French TOU-A local population 80 located in a highly competitive habitat (Frachon et al., 2017) and genotyped with a SNP-array of 81 214,051 SNPs (Hancock et al., 2011; Horton et al., 2012). These accessions were grown in field 82 conditions with four competitor species frequently associated with A. thaliana in natural plant 83 communities (i.e. Poa annua, Stellaria media, Trifolium arvense and Veronica arvensis). Interestingly, 84 the genetic architecture was found to be highly flexible between the four competitor species for each 85 of the nine phenotypic traits measured on A. thaliana plants, including a proxy of total seed production 86 (Baron et al., 2015).

87 While informative, most QTL mapping studies conducted in a heterospecific context were 88 based on bispecific interactions (i.e. one single pair of interacting species; Subrahmaniam et al., 2018). 89 However, throughout their life cycle, focal plants often interact simultaneously with several 90 neighboring species, either in crop fields or in natural communities (Wilson et al., 2012). This 91 highlights the need to study the genetic architecture underlying plant-plant interactions by considering 92 the response of a focal species to plurispecific interactions. In particular, whether the genetic 93 architecture underlying the response of a focal species in a plurispecific neighborhood corresponds to 94 the sum of QTLs that are specific to the presence of a neighbor species and/or to the emergence of new 95 QTLs, remains on open question (Subrahmaniam et al., 2018). In a first attempt to address this 96 question, a Genome-Environment Association (GEA) analysis was recently set up to finely map 97 genomic regions of the model plant Arabidopsis thaliana associated with various plant community 98 descriptors in 145 natural populations of A. thaliana located in south-west of France (alpha-diversity, 99 community composition, presence/absence of the 44 most prevalent plant species; Frachon et al.,

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100 2019). The genetic architecture was highly dependent not only on the identity of a specific neighboring 101 species, but also on the diversity and composition of the plant communities inhabited by A. thaliana 102 (Frachon et al., 2019). In agreement, the candidate genes underlying QTLs were highly dependent on 103 the assemblage of plant species co-occurring with A. thaliana (Methods in Supplementary InformationMaterial, Supplementary Figure 1), suggesting a flexible genetic architecture between 104 105 bispecific and plurispecific plant-plant interactions. While informative, aA main drawback of GEA 106 studies performed on biotic descriptors is however related to the confounding effects of abiotic factors 107 such as climate variables and soil physico-chemical properties, thereby advocating for the need for a 108 controlled common garden approach to confirm or not the main conclusions obtained from a GEA 109 approach (Frachon et al., 2019).

110 In this study, we extended the study from Baron et al. (2015) by setting upwe set up a GWAS 111 to compare the genetic architecture of competitive response of A. thaliana between bispecific and 112 plurispecific neighborhoods. Based on a common garden experiment performed in greenhouse 113 conditions, we first estimated the extent of genetic variation of competitive response in a set of 91 114 whole-genome sequenced A. thaliana accessions from the highly genetically polymorphicsame French 115 TOU-A local population located in a highly diverse competitive habitat previously used in Baron et 116 al. (2015)(Frachon et al., 2017). These accessions were submitted to bispecific and plurispecific 117 competition treatments based on all one-way, two-way and three-way combinations of three species 118 frequently associated with A. thaliana in natural plant communities in France, i.e. P.oa annua, 119 S. tellaria media and V. eronica arvensis. Based on the whole-genome sequences of the 91 accessions, 120 we then run GWA mapping combined with a local score approach to compare the genetic architecture 121 of competitive response of A. thaliana between bispecific and plurispecific neighborhoods. Finally, we 122 compared the biological processes over-represented among the candidate genes identified in 123 competitive response among bispecific and plurispecific neighborhoods and discussed the function of 124 some candidate genes.

125

#### 126 MATERIAL AND METHODS

#### 127 Plant material

128A set of 96 whole-genome sequenced accessions of A. thaliana collected in the TOU-A local129population (Toulon-sur-Arroux, Burgundy, France, 46°38'53.80"N - 4° 7'22.65"E) were used for the

purpose of this study. As previously described in Frachon et al. (-2017), the TOU-A population is highly polymorphic at both the phenotypic and genomic levels. Importantly, the very short Linkage Disequilibrium (LD) observed in this population ( $r_{0.5}^2 \sim 18$ bp) allows the fine mapping of genomic regions associated with natural variation of phenotypic traits down to the gene level (Brachi et al., 2013; Huard-Chauveau et al., 2013; Frachon et al., 2017; Lonjon et al., 2020; Aoun et al., 2020). These 96 accessions were chosen amongst a set of 195 accessions in order to be representative of the genetic diversity observed in the TOU-A population (Platt et al., 2010).

Maternal effects of the 96 accessions were reduced by growing one plant of each family for one generation under controlled greenhouse conditions (16-h photoperiod, 20°C) in early 2011 at the University of Lille. Given an estimated selfing rate of ~94% in this population (Platt et al., 2010), the 96 accessions were considered as mostly homozygous along the genome.

In this study, we used three neighboring species commonly associated with *A. thaliana* in natural plant communities in France and detected in the TOU-A plant community (F. Roux, personal observation). These species are the meadow grass *P. annua* (Poaceae) with a low spreading growth form, the chickweed *S. media* (Caryophyllaceae) and the speedwell *V. arvensis* (Scrophulariaceae) both with a crawling growth form. Seeds for these three species have been obtained from the Herbiseeds company (http://www.herbiseed.com/home.aspx).

147

#### 148 **Phenotypic characterization**

149 Experimental design

An experiment of 4,608 focal plants of *A. thaliana* and 12,672 neighbor plants was set up at the University of Lille 1 (North, France), using a split-plot design arranged as a randomized complete block design (RCBD) with 12 treatments nested within four blocks. These 12 competition treatments correspond to (Figure 1):

- one control treatment where *A. thaliana* was grown alone (i.e. absence of interaction; hereafter named
  treatment A).
- 156 10 interspecific interaction treatments corresponding to the full combination of the three neighboring
  157 species *P. annua* (P), *S. media* (S) and *V. arvensis* (V): PPP, SSS, VVV, PPS, PPV, PSS, PVV, SSV,
  158 SVV and PSV.

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- one intraspecific interaction treatment (hereafter named treatment AAA). This treatment was included in the experiment to test whether the differences observed between the treatment where *A*. *thaliana* was grown alone (i.e. treatment A) and the treatments of interspecific interactions were not only due to the presence of a neighbor plant, but were rather dependent on either the identity of the neighboring species or the combination of neighboring species. With respect to the barochorous mode of seed dispersal in *A. thaliana* (Weinig et al., 2006; Wender et al., 2005), the intraspecific interaction treatment corresponds to intra-genotypic interaction.

166 Each 'block x competition treatment' combination was represented by 96 pots (7 cm x 7 cm x 7 cm. vol. ~250 cm<sup>3</sup>; TEKU MQC) filled with damp standard culture soil (Huminsubstrat N3, Neuhaus) 167 and disposed in staggered rows, each pot corresponding to one of the 96 TOU-A accessions. The 17<sup>th</sup> 168 169 of January 2013 (day 0), a minimum of five A. thaliana seeds were sown in the central position of each 170 pot. For all the treatments (with the exception of treatment A), seeds for neighboring plants were evenly 171 spaced, two cm away from the A. thaliana central position (Figure 1). Germination date of A. thaliana 172 focal seedlings was daily monitored until six days after sowing. At this time, five accessions had a poor 173 germination rate (between 0% and 6.25%) and were therefore discarded from further analyses. Plants 174 that germinated after 6 days (i.e. 1.16%) were also discarded from further analyses.

A. *thaliana* focal seedlings and neighboring seedlings were thinned to one per pot 18 to 20 days after seed sowing. Plants were grown at 20 °C under natural light supplemented by artificial light to provide a 16-hr photoperiod and were top watered without supplemental nutrients. The experience lasted 87 days, from sowing to harvesting of the last plants.

179

#### 180 Measured phenotypic traits

181 Three raw phenotypic traits were measured on each focal plant of A. thaliana at the time of their 182 flowering (FLO), which was measured as the number of days between germination and flowering dates. 183 The first trait corresponds to the height from the soil to the first flower on the main stem (H1F expressed 184 in mm). H1F is related to seed dispersal (Wender et al., 2005) and shade avoidance (Dorn et al., 2000) 185 in A. thaliana. The two other traits were used as proxies of resources accumulation. The maximum 186 diameter of the rosette was measured at the nearest millimeter (DIAM; Weinig et al., 2006). This trait 187 is a proxy of the growth of the rosette of the focal plant from germination to flowering. The above-188 ground dry biomass (BIOMASS, expressed in grams, with a precision down to the tenth of a milligram) 189 was estimated by drying the aboveground portion for 48H at 60°C. We additionally quantified the 190 strategy adopted by *A. thaliana* in response to neighboring plants by calculating the ratio HD as the

- 191 height of the first flower on the rosette diameter (i.e. H1F/DIAM). Values of HD below and above 1
- 192 would correspond to an aggressive and escape strategy, respectively (Baron et al., 2015).

Although all plants bolted at the end of the experiment (i.e. 87 days after sowing), Pplants that had
not flowered 87 days after sowingat this time (i.e. 1.15%) were assigned a flowering date value of 87.
H1F and HD values were therefore not available for these plants. All raw phenotypic data are available
in Dataset 1.

197

#### 198 Statistical analysis

#### 199 Exploring natural variation of plant-plant interactions at different levels of complexities

Using the *lmer* function implemented in the *R* library *lmerTest* (Kuznetsova et al., 2017), the following mixed model was used to explore the genetic variation of response among the 91 TOU-A accessions (Methods in Supplementary Information):

203  $Y_{ijkl} = \mu_{trait} + block_i + treatment_j + block_i \times treatment_j + accession_k + treatment_j$ 204  $\times accession_k + germ_l + \varepsilon_{ijkl}$ 

205 where 'Y' is one of the phenotypic traits scored on focal A. thaliana plants, 'µ' is the overall phenotypic 206 mean; 'block' accounts for differences in micro-environment among the four experimental blocks; 207 'treatment' corresponds to effect of the 12 treatments (A, AAA, PPP, PPS, PPV, PSS, PSV, PVV, SSS, 208 SSV, SVV and VVV); 'accession' measures the effect of the 91 accessions; the interaction term 209 'treatment x accession' accounts for genetic variation in reaction norms across the 12 treatments; the 210 term 'germ' is a covariate accounting for natural variation for the germination date between the 91 211 accessions; and 'ɛ' is the residual term. All factors were treated as fixed effects because levels of no 212 factor were random samples from a population to which we intended to extrapolate. Given the split-213 plot design used in this study, the only exception was the 'block x treatment' term that was treated as 214 random, thereby allowing to use its variance as the error term for testing the 'block' and 'treatment' 215 effects. The residual variance of the term 'ɛ' was used for the calculation of the F-values for the terms 216 'accession' and 'treatment x accession'.

- 217 . For the calculation of *F*-values, terms were tested over their appropriate denominators. Given the
- 218 split plot design used in this study, the variance associated with 'block x treatment' was used as the
- 219 error term for testing the 'block' and 'treatment' effects.
- For each treatment, estimated marginal means (EMM) were obtained for each accession using the function *emmeans* implemented in the *R* library *emmeans* (Lenth et al., 2018) (Methods in Supplementary Information). Because *A. thaliana* is a highly selfing species (Platt et al., 2010), EMM correspond to genotypic values of accessions.
- 224 To test whether the five phenotypic traits were not redundant, we estimated for each treatment
- 225 the genetic correlation for each pair of traits, by calculating the correlation coefficient of Pearson based

#### 226 <u>on genotypic values as described above</u>.

- 227 Using the function *marker\_h2\_means* implemented in the *R* library *heritability* (Kruijer et al.,
- 228 <u>2016</u>), narrow-sense heritability of each phenotypic trait ( $h^2_{\text{trait}}$ ) was estimated by fitting genotypic
- values of accessions against the corresponding kinship matrix estimated on the whole set of 1,692,194
- 230 SNPs detected among the 91 accessions (Methods in Supplementary Information). This set of SNPs
- 231 was obtained from the whole-genome sequencing of 195 accessions of the TOU-A population,
- 232 including the 91 accessions used in this study (Frachon et al., 2017).
- 233

#### 234 <u>Detecting the presence of crossing reaction norms</u>Genetic correlations

235 For each phenotypic trait, we estimated the strength of 'accession x treatment' interactions by 236 estimating across-environment genetic correlations for each pairwise treatment combination. Crossing 237 reaction norms requires that (i) different accessions show different slopes across environments (with 238 the extreme case of significant differences on the sign of the slope across environments), and (ii) the 239 ranking of accessions largely differs between the two environments. This pattern corresponds to the 240 cross-over effect (either symmetrical, or asymmetrical) (Lacaze et al., 2009). In order to estimate the 241 strength of crossing reaction norms for each phenotypic trait, we estimated across-environment genetic 242 correlations for each pairwise treatment combination Genetic correlations were estimated by 243 calculating the correlation coefficient of Pearson based on genotypic values (by using the cor.test 244 function implemented in the R environment). Significant crossing reaction norms were detected by 245 testing whether 95% confidence intervals of Pearson's r were not overlapping with the value of 1.

- To test whether the five phenotypic traits were not redundant, we estimated for each treatment the genetic correlation for each pair of traits, by calculating the correlation coefficient of Pearson based on genotypic values as described above.
- 249 Genome-wide association mapping combined with a local score approach

250 The effects of population structure on phenotype-genotype associations has been demonstrated 251 to be limited in the TOU-A population (Brachi et al., 2013; Baron et al., 2015). Nevertheless, GWA 252 mapping was run using a mixed-model approach implemented in the software Genome-wide Efficient 253 Mixed Model Association (GEMMA, Zhou & Stephens 2012). This model includes a genetic kinship 254 matrix as a covariate to control for the effect of the demographic history of the TOU-A population. In 255 this study, we discarded SNPs with more than 17 missing values across the 91 accessions. In addition, 256 because rare alleles may lead to an inflation of low *p*-values (Atwell et al., 2010; Brachi et al., 2010), 257 we only considered SNPs with a minor allele relative frequency (MARF) > 10%, leaving us with 258 630,234 SNPs. Because phenotypic traits were scored at the time of flowering time, GEMMA was run 259 independently on H1F, DIAM, HD and BIOMASS for each of the 12 treatments. H1F, DIAM, HD and 260 BIOMASS were genetically correlated with FLO (mean value ± standard errors across the 12 261 treatments, BIOMASS: Pearson's  $r = 0.768 \pm 0.043$ , DIAM: Pearson's  $r = 0.360 \pm 0.133$ , H1F: 262 Pearson's  $r = -0.434 \pm 0.085$ , HD: Pearson's  $r = -0.625 \pm 0.015$ ). by including FLO genotypic values 263 were thus included as a covariate in GEMMA analyses, thereby allowing controlling for putative

264 <u>effects of a confounding developmental stage (Uffelmann et al., 2021)</u>.

265 Thereafter, we implemented a local score approach on the set of *p*-values provided by GEMMA. The local score allows accumulating the statistical signals from contiguous genetic markers in order to 266 267 detect significant genomic regions associated with phenotypic natural variation (Fariello et al., 2017). 268 In a given QTL region, the association signal, through the p-values, will cumulate locally due to linkage 269 disequilibrium between SNPs, which will then increase the local score (Bonhomme et al., 2019). The 270 tuning parameter  $\xi$  was fixed at 2 (Bonhomme et al., 2019). Significant SNP-phenotype associations 271 were identified by estimating a chromosome-wide significance threshold for each chromosome 272 (Bonhomme et al., 2019).

273

# Identification of candidate genes associated with response to monospecific and plurispecific interactions

To identify candidate genes associated with plant-plant interactions, we retrieved genes around significant zones identified by the local score approach. Using a custom script, we selected all genes inside the zones and also<u>as well as</u> the first gene upstream and the first gene downstream of these zones. The TAIR 10 database (<u>https://www.arabidopsis.org/</u>) was used as our reference, leaving us with 4,524 unique candidate genes ( $N_{\text{BIOMASS}} = 1,538$ ;  $N_{\text{DIAM}} = 1,008$ ;  $N_{\text{HIF}} = 1,559$ ;  $N_{\text{HD}} = 1,572$ ; Supplementary Figure 2).

To identify the biological processes involved in response to the different neighborhoods for the different traits, we submitted the candidate gene list to the classification superviewer tool (<u>http://bar.utoronto.ca/ntools/cgi-bin/ntools\_classification\_superviewer.cgi</u>, Provart & Zhu 2003) to identify the biological processes and MapMan processes significantly over-represented (P < 0.05).

287

#### 288 **RESULTS**

#### 289 Extent of natural genetic variation of response to bispecific and plurispecific interactions

290 Highly significant genetic variation was found across the 12 treatments (Figure 1) for the five 291 phenotypic traits scored on focal A. thaliana plants (Table 1, Supplementary Table 1). Similar results 292 were observed without considering the treatments where A. thaliana was grown alone or with clones 293 (Supplementary Tables 24 and 32). Narrow-sense heritability SNP-based estimates were significant for 96.7% of the 60 'phenotypic trait \* treatment' combinations (Supplementary Table 43) and ranged 294 295 from 0.36 to 0.99 (mean = 0.72, median = 0.76), suggesting that a large fraction of the phenotypic 296 variation observed within each treatment was driven by genetic differences among the local A. thaliana 297 accessions (Figure 1). Interestingly, heritability estimates were significantly negatively associated with 298 the number of species surrounding A. thaliana (linear regression, t = -2.564, P = 0.01322, 299 **Supplementary Figure 3).** 

300 Importantly, as evidenced by highly significant 'Treatment x Accession' interactions, a strong 301 genetic variation of reaction norms was found for the five phenotypic traits, with or without considering 302 the treatments where *A. thaliana* was grown alone or with clones (Table 1, Supplementary Tables 1,

303 24 and 32). For the phenotypic traits DIAM, H1F, HD and BIOMASS, across-environment genetic 304 correlations ranged from 0.06 to 0.97 (mean = 0.69, median = 0.73; Figure 2), indicating that the 805 ranking of accessions for a given phenotypic trait largely differed among the 12 treatments. This pattern 306 of crossing reaction norms is well illustrated for the height from the soil to the first flower for which 807 the mean value was similar among the 12 treatments (Figure 1, Table 1, Supplementary Table 1). In 308 contrast, across-environment genetic correlations for FLO were very close to the unity (min = 0.91, 309 max = 0.97, mean = 0.95, median = 0.95; Figure 2), suggesting that the ranking of flowering time was 310 similar among the 91 accessions across the 12 treatments. FLO was therefore discarded from further 311 analyses.

For each treatment, genetic correlations among the four remaining phenotypic traits were significantly different from the unity (absolute values of Pearson's r: min = 0.02, max = 0.89, mean = 0.53, median = 0.62), suggesting that the traits scored in this study partly behave independently (Supplementary Figure <u>3</u>4).

#### 316 Genetic architecture revealed by GWA mapping combined with a local score approach

To compare the genetic architecture underlying the competitive response of *A. thaliana* between bispecific and plurispecific neighborhoods, we used GWA mapping based on 630,234 SNPs (i.e. 1 SNP every 189bp) combined with a local score approach (Bonhomme et al., 2019). This combination of approaches was demonstrated to be efficient in the TOU-A population, allowing a fine description of the genetic architecture (in particular, the detection of QTLs with small effects) associated with quantitative disease resistance to the bacterial pathogen *Ralstonia solanacearum* and the cloning of fourone of the detected QTLs (Aoun et al., 2020; Demirjian et al., 2021).

The genetic architecture associated with natural variation of the traits DIAM, H1F, HD and BIOMASS was polygenic with a number of detected QTLs ranging from 13 for BIOMASS in the SVV treatment to 72 for H1F in the A treatment (mean = 32, median = 28) (Supplementary Table <u>54</u>). Across the 12 treatments, the mean number of detected QTLs was not significantly different between DIAM, H1F, HD and BIOMASS (Supplementary Table <u>54</u>).

For each phenotypic trait, the genetic architecture of competitive response of *A. thaliana* was highly flexible among the 12 treatments. Firstly, the genetic architecture of competitive response of *A. thaliana* to bispecific interactions was highly dependent on the identity of the neighboring species (Figure 3). For example, no significant QTL region was shared between the treatments PPP and SSS 333 for H1F or between the treatments PPP and SSS for HD (Figure 3). Secondly, the genetic architecture 334 of competitive response of A. thaliana was also highly dependent on the number of species co-335 occurring with A. thaliana. For instance, two very neat peaks of association were identified for HD in 336 the middle of chromosome 3 in the treatment PSV (Figure 4A). While the first peak was not identified 337 in the treatments PPP, SSS and VVV, the second peak was identified in the treatment PPP but with a 338 much lower association score (PSV: Lindley process value = 214, PPP: Lindley process value = 9.5). 339 Thirdly, the genetic architecture of competitive response of A. thaliana to the presence of a specific 340 pair of neighboring species largely differed not only from the genetic architecture identified in the 341 corresponding bispecific interaction treatments, but also between the two related assemblages. As an 342 illustration, we detected a neat association peak for H1F at the beginning of chromosome 1 in the 343 treatment PSS (i.e. one *P. annua* individual + two *S. media* individuals), but neither in the treatment 344 PPS (i.e. two P. annua individuals + one S. media individual), nor in the treatments PPP and SSS 345 (Figure 4B).

346 From these QTLs, we retrieved 4,524 unique genes located within and in the vicinity of 1kb of 347 the significant QTL regions detected for each 'phenotypic trait x treatment' (Dataset 24). In agreement 348 with the values of genetic correlations between these four traits (Supplementary Figure 43), a large 349 fraction of candidate genes was specific to a given treatment (BIOMASS: 77.4%, DIAM: 63.4%, H1F: 350 77.2%, HD: 70.6%), suggesting that the genetic bases are largely distinct among the 12 treatments 351 (Figure 5A, Supplementary Figure 45). Therefore, in this study, the genetic architecture underlying 352 intraspecific variability of the competitive response largely depends on both the composition and 353 assemblage of the neighborhood of A. thaliana.

354

#### 355 Identification of enriched biological processes

Across the 48 'phenotypic trait x treatment' combinations, we identified 139 significantly overrepresented gene ontology (GO, MapMan functional annotation) terms, which belong to 25 unique GO processes (Dataset <u>32</u>). Interestingly, RNA related processes correspond to the most abundant GO term over-represented found in 28 'phenotypic trait x treatment' combinations, with eight treatments for BIOMASS, seven treatments for DIAM and HD and six treatments for H1F (Figure 5, Supplementary Figure <u>56</u>, Dataset <u>32</u>). The second most represented GO terms are transport and minor CHO metabolism processes with 13 and 12 'phenotypic trait x treatment' combinations, respectively (Figure

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363 5, Supplementary Figure 56, Dataset 32), but with different distribution across traits. In one hand, the 364 transport processes were represented in the four traits, while minor CHO metabolism processes was 365 not found for BIOMASS in any of the 12 treatments. Conversely, C1-metabolism processes were 366 mostly enriched for BIOMASS in six treatments out of the seven 'phenotypic trait x treatment' 867 combinations identified for these processes (Supplementary Figure 56). The remaining enriched 368 MapMan processes are related to tetrapyrrole synthesis, miscellaneous, protein, redox, secondary 369 metabolism, stress, lipid metabolism, hormone metabolism, cell, photosystem, signaling and not 870 assigned genes (Figure 5, Supplementary Figure 56, Dataset 32).

371

#### 372 **DISCUSSION**

873 What are the causes and consequences of variation in competitive ability is a long standing 374 question in studies on the dynamics of structure and diversity of plant communities (Aarssen, 1992). 375 Some experimental and theoretical studies suggest that intraspecific genetic variation in competitive 376 response and effect in a heterospecific context can promote maintenance of within-species genetic 377 variation and species coexistence at a fine spatial scale (Aarseen, 1992; Fridley et al., 2007). This may 878 originate from the rank order of competitive ability among genotypes/species shifting from transitive 379 to intransitive, depending in the identity of the genotypes of both species (Bossdorf et al. 2009; Baron 380 et al., 2015). On the other hand, other theoretical studies predict that variation among genotypes may 381 negatively affect species coexistence. For instance, an extension of intraspecific niche variation due to 382 genetic variation in resources requirements would reduce niche differentiation among species (Hart et 383 al., 2016). In addition, plant-plant interactions might constrain life history evolution of a focal species, 384 thereby limiting its evolutionary potential to respond to other environmental challenges than plant-385 plant interactions (Wilson, 2014). While informative, most of these studies consider the interactions 386 between two plants species. However, Because a focal speciesplant rarely interacts with only one 387 neighboring species either in crop fields or in more natural environments (up to 89 species, Wilson et 388 al., 2012)., tThe genetics of plant-plant interactions and their consequences on the dynamics of plant 389 coexistence need therefore to be studied in a community context. In this study, we compared the genetic 390 architecture of the competitive response of A. thaliana between bispecific and plurispecific 391 neighborhoods on a highly genetically polymorphic local population of A. thaliana known to interact 392 in situ with the three neighboring species considered in this study.

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A flexible genetic architecture for competitive response among bispecific and plurispecific
 neighborhoods Extensive crossing reaction norms among diverse plant assemblages within the
 local population TOU-A

397 Several studies reported extensive genetic variation of the competitive ability of A. thaliana in 398 the context of pairwise heterospecific interactions, both at the worldwide and local scales (Bossdorf et 399 al., 2009; Brachi et al., 2012; Bartheleimer et al., 2015; Baron et al., 2015; Frachon et al., 2017; Frachon 400 et al., 2019, Palacio-Lopez et al., 2020). Based on several phenotypic traits related to resource 401 accumulation and life-history traits such as traits related to seed dispersal (Reboud et al., 2004; Wender 402 et al., 2005), we also found extensive local genetic variation of the competitive responseability of A. 403 thaliana in all the plurispecific neighborhoods tested in this study. More importantly, we detected 404 strong crossing reaction norms not only among the three bispecific interaction treatments, but also 405 among the different plurispecific neighborhoodslant assemblages surrounding the focal A. thaliana 406 accessions. Altogether, these results suggest that the simultaneous interactions of A. thaliana with 407 several plant partners can promote maintenance of the high genetic diversity observed in the TOU-A 408 local population (i.e. only 5.6 times less than observed in a panel of 1.135 worldwide accessions) 409 (Frachon et al., 2017). This diversity may in turn confer a high potential for A. thaliana to respond to 410 future modifications of the assemblages in the TOU-A plant community.

411 Testing whether the presence of genetic variation in competitive response in plurispecific 412 neighborhoods can promote species coexistence in the TOU-A plant community would require several 413 additional phenotyping and analyses. For instance, it would be interesting to test for the presence of genetic variation in competitive effect of A. thaliana on the diverse competitor assemblages used in 414 415 this study, thereby allowing testing whether a potential shift between transitivity and intransitivity 416 depending on the identity of the accession of A. thaliana could vary between monospecific and 417 plurispecific neighborhoods. In addition, while we analyzed separately the phenotypic traits measured 418 in this study, it may be worthwhile to analyze them simultaneously in order to test whether the direct 419 and indirect gradients of selection acting on the phenotypic traits depend on the number of competitor 420 species and/or plant assemblage (Baron et al., 2015; Palacio-Lopez et al., 2020). In the context of major 421 ecological strategies (i.e. Grime's Competitive-Stress-tolerant-Ruderal CSR theory; Grime, 1974; 422 Grime, 1977), this may in turn help to test the importance of plasticity of trait syndromes in shifting 423 ecological strategies among diverse plant assemblages (Takou et al., 2019). While A. thaliana is still

424 <u>considered as a pioneer species with low competitive abilities and a typical ruderal strategy, several</u>

recent studies revealed that A. thaliana can inhabit highly competitive environments over several

426 generations (Brachi et al., 2013; Bartoli et al., 2018; Frachon et al., 2019).

### 427 <u>A flexible genetic architecture for competitive response among bispecific and plurispecific</u> 428 <u>neighborhoods</u>

429 In agreement with the strong crossing reaction norms observed among the three bispecific 430 interaction treatments, a GWA mapping approach revealed that the genetic architecture of A. thaliana 431 competitive response in bispecific neighborhoods was highly dependent on the identity of the neighbor 432 species. Similar results were observed (i) in A. thaliana challenged with four neighboring species 433 (including the three species used in this study) in field conditions (Baron et al., 2015), and (ii) in Oryza 434 sativa challenged with the three weed species Echinochloa oryzicola, Monochoria korsakowii and 435 Schoenoplectus juncoides in greenhouse conditions (Onishi et al., 2018). Altogether, these results 436 suggest that the effect of the identity of the neighboring species on the genetic architecture of 437 competitive response is conserved among focal plant species and across diverse phenotyping 438 environments. The genetic architecture of A. thaliana competitive response was also highly flexible 439 between bispecific and plurispecific neighborhoods, suggesting that the genetic response of a particular 440 accession of *A. thaliana* to a plurispecific neighborhood can be hardly predicted from the observation 441 of its genetic responses in the corresponding bispecific neighborhoods. These results confirm our 442 previous conclusions obtained from a GEA approach performed on 145 whole-genome sequenced 443 natural populations of A. thaliana located in south-west of France and described for various plant 444 community descriptors (Frachon et al., 2019). Our results are also in line with previous studies 445 reporting in A. thaliana (i) the limited overlap between QTLs underlying resistance to combined stress 446 responses, such as drought plus the specialist herbivore *Pieris rapae*, and QTLs underlying resistance 447 to the corresponding single stress response (Davila-Olivas et al., 20176; Thoen et al., 20176), and (ii) 448 the distinct transcriptomic responses for single and combined stresses in diverse plant species, as 449 illustrated for pathogen attack combined with heat stress (Suzuki et al., 2014; Dessaint et al., 2021).

In this study, three non-exclusive and interconnected hypotheses can be proposed to explain the emergence of new QTLs in plurispecific neighborhoods. They are based on (i) the putative generation of new signals or elimination/modification of pre-existing signals (e.g. light, aerial volatile organic compounds, root exudates and nutrient availability) in the context of plurispecific interactions, and (ii) their specific perception and subsequent signaling in *A. thaliana*. Firstly, the amount of some signals

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455 produced by the neighboring species A is strongly reduced in a plurispecific neighborhood, thereby 456 leading to the strong reduction of the perception/signaling events activated in the context of bispecific 457 interactions. Secondly, the production of new or modified signals in a given neighboring species is 458 triggered by the presence of another neighboring species. Thirdly, the simultaneous presence of 459 different signals produced by the neighboring species A and B leads to the generation of new signaling 460 processes. The two latter cases correspond to the production of new signals that emerged from higher-461 order interactions among the neighboring species (Levine et al., 2017).

462

# Biological pathways and candidate genes associated with competitive response depend on the identity and assemblage of neighboring species

While our experimental design identified a large set of genes (4,524 genes), we clearly observed RNA process as a significant enriched biological process for most of the 'phenotypic trait x treatment' investigated, including RNA processing, RNA binding and a large variety of transcription factors, with a more pronounced proportion of BHLH and homeobox genes. These transcription factors are known to regulate multiple developmental processes, including stress and light response (<u>Bürglin Burglin</u> Burglin & Affolter, <u>20162015</u>; Guo et al., 2021) and might exert a crucial role for promoting plant adaptation to diverse plant environments.

472 The second major over-represented biological process interaction category is related to 473 transport functions. Interestingly, 14 out of the 79 transport related proteins, identified in the seven 474 treatments for ratio HD corresponding to the height of the first flower divided by rosette diameterHD 475 trait, correspond to ABC (ATP-binding cassette) transporter proteins (Dataset 24). Although none of 476 them have been functionally characterized, these transporters have been recently proposed as key 477 players of plant adaptation to their abiotic or biotic environment (Hwang et al., 2016). Interestingly, 478 different ABC transporter genes were identified in the case of bispecific interactions (ABC-B2 and 479 G13) as compared to plurispecific interactions (ABC-C3, C6, C7 and G26). Because of their diverse 480 substrate specificities, they might constitute essential components of perception/signaling pathways 481 activated during plurispecific plant-plant interactions. Among transport processes, nutrient foraging 482 might also be a major response strategy in the context of plurispecific plant-plant interactions (Pierik 483 et al., 2013).

#### The genetics of plurispecific interactions

Our observations, if considering all the enriched biological processes found in this study, are partially in agreement with the previously reported seven categories of functions identified in artificial environments simulating plant–plant interactions: photosynthesis, hormones, cell wall modification and degradation, defense against pathogens, ABC transporters, histone modification and meristem identity/life history traits (Subrahmaniam et al., 2018). However, transcriptional regulation appears here as a major previously unidentified process, in line with a highly flexible genetic reprogramming in response to different plant assemblage environments.

491 In conclusion, our results suggest that plants can integrate and respond to different species 492 assemblages depending on the identity and number of each neighboring species, through a large range 493 of genes associated mainly with transcription adjustment (RNA process) leading to developmental and 494 stress responses. Our experiment also highlights that intraspecific variation in response to plant induced 495 constraints, is mainly due to processes not proposed to be involved in plant-plant communications (i.e. 496 light, nutrients, volatile organic compounds and root exudates). Complementarily to our findings in 497 our GWA study, transcriptomic and proteomic analyses of A. thaliana plants exposed to monospecific 498 and plurispecific neighborhoods would help to identify genes and proteins that are differentially 499 regulated under these conditions. To our knowledge, no such studies comparing global changes in 500 protein and gene expression between bispecific and plurispecific neighborhoods have been reported so 501 far (Subrahmaniam et al., 2018). Another step to understand the mechanisms underlying natural 502 variation of plant-plant competitive responses would be (i) to functionally validate the identified 503 candidate genes. This would open the way to functional analyses to investigate (ii) the nature of the 504 signals perceived by the plant, and (iii) decipher the signaling pathways resulting from signal 505 perception, leading to the plant response.

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#### 674 Acknowledgments

Special thanks are given to Cédric Glorieux, Nathalie Faure and Angélique Bourceaux for their
assistance during the common garden experiment. This work was funded by a PhD fellowship from
the University of Paul Sabatier Toulouse and a PhD fellowship from the University of Lille 1 – Région
Nord-Pas-de-Calais to EB. This study was also supported by the LABEX TULIP (ANR-10-LABX41).

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#### 681 Author contributions

F.R., L.A. and D.R. supervised the project. E.B., L.A. and F.R. designed the experiments. E.B. and J.L.
conducted the greenhouse experiment. J.L. and E.B measured the phenotypic traits. C.L. analyzed the
phenotypic traits. C.L. performed the GWA mapping. C.L. performed and analyzed the enrichment
tests. C.L., D.R. and F.R. wrote the manuscript. All authors contributed to the revisions.

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#### 687 Data Accessibility

688 Phenotypic data will be available in the Dryad database: doi:10.5061/dryad.XXX.are available In

689 <u>Dataset 1.</u>

#### 691 **Figure legends**

692 Figure 1. Natural genetic variation of reactions norms of 89 TOU-A accessions across 12 plant-

693 plant interaction treatments. (a) Diagram illustrating the 12 treatments. (b) Height from the soil to 694 the first flower on *A. thaliana* (H1F). Each line links the genotypic values of one of 89 TOU-A 695 accessions. The two remaining accessions A1-69 and A1-117 are not represented due to missing 696 genotypic values in the PPV and SSS treatments, respectively. For a given treatment, the mean H1F 697 genotypic value among the accessions is represented by a red dot.

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Figure 2. Pairwise genetic correlation coefficients of Pearson among the 12 treatments for each
 phenotypic trait. The dots correspond to the 66 pairwise treatment combinations. Black segments

701 correspond to the mean value of Pearson's *r*.

702

Figure 3. Identification of genomic regions associated with bispecific interactions in the TOU-A population. (a) Manhattan plots of GWA mapping results for the PPP and SSS treatments for the 'height of the first flower' (H1F, left-panel) and the ratio 'height of the first flower / the rosette diameter' (HD, right-panel). The *x*-axis indicates the physical position of the 630,234 SNPs along the five chromosomes. The *y*-axis indicates the Lindley process scores estimated from  $-\log_{10} p$ -values from the mixed model implemented in the software GEMMA using SNPs with MARF > 10%.

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Figure 4. Comparison of the genetic architecture among bispecific and plurispecific interactions in the TOU-A population. (A) Manhattan plots comparing GWA mapping results for the bispecific PPP, SSS and VVV treatments and the plurispecific interaction treatment PSV for the HD ratio. (B) Manhattan plots comparing GWA mapping results from the bispecific PPP to SSS treatments (PPP  $\rightarrow$ PPS  $\rightarrow$  PSS  $\rightarrow$  SSS) for the H1F trait. The *x*-axis indicates the physical position of the 630,234 SNPs along the five chromosomes. The *y*-axis indicates the Lindley process scores estimated from  $-\log_{10} p$ values from the mixed model implemented in the software GEMMA using SNPs with MARF > 10%.

718 Figure 5. Illustrations of the flexibility of genetic architecture and processes involved in HD 719 among the 12 treatments. (A) UpSet plot illustrating the variability of genes underlying QTLs related 720 to HD among the 12 treatments. (B) Heatmap illustrating the different MapMan enriched processes 721 among the 12 treatments. (C) UpSet plot illustrating the variability of genes involved in RNA process 722 underlying the seven treatments enriched in RNA process. (D) UpSet plot illustrating the variability of 723 genes involved in transport process underlying the six treatments enriched in transport process. (E) 724 UpSet plot illustrating the variability of genes involved in signaling process underlying the three 725 treatments enriched in signaling process. Blue dots and barplots highlights genes that are specific to 726 only one treatment for the corresponding trait.

727 Table 1: Natural variation of four phenotypic traits scored on A. thaliana plants in 12 treatments. Bold P-values indicate significant

- effects after FDR correction. FLO: flowering time, DIAM: maximum diameter of the rosette, H1F: height from the soil to the first flower on the main stem, HD = H1F / DIAM, BIOMASS: aboveground dry biomass.

	FLO		BIOMASS		DIAM		H1F		HD	
Model terms	F	Pr(>F)	F	Pr(>F)	F	Pr(>F)	F	Pr(>F)	F	Pr(>F)
block	4.93	6.11E-03	1.81	1.42E-01	2.63	6.60E-02	1.81	1.64E-01	1.57	2.15E-01
germ	2.46	1.17E-01	0.38	5.37E-01	0.45	5.01E-01	0.33	5.67E-01	0.41	5.22E-01
treatment	12.56	7.21E-09	686.62	<1E-272	139.93	1.22E-24	1.84	8.55E-02	31.32	2.45E-14
accession	247.51	<1E-272	112.52	<1E-272	67.52	<1E-272	28.92	<1E-272	49.76	<1E-272
treatment x accession	1.98	2.12E-44	9.45	<1E-272	3.94	3.69E-183	1.67	8.74E-25	1.42	1.21E-12























