



From reception of classics to outreach: classical reception and American response to war. A case study. Part I

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ABSTRACT. This paper presents as a case study a discussion pertaining to a peculiar approach that some US scholars have applied to texts of ancient Greek literature, as a response to a specific reality that for decades has been afflicting American society: the timeless experience of war and its aftermath. It is a type of reading and re-usage of some ancient texts that can be regarded as a case of Classical Reception, which also, and almost inevitably, involves Outreach: it in fact provides a service beyond conventional limits to reach out to particular segments of the community. The analysis will be articulated into two parts: the first one will consist of (i) a theoretical overview of the *status* of Classical Reception Studies with a survey of a few cases as a sample of 'how it works', and (ii) an introduction to the above mentioned approach to classical texts to respond to the reality of modern war, such an approach that turns Classics into an important tool of outreach and therapy. The second part (forthcoming in *Acta Scientiarum* v.36, n.3) will consist of a detailed discussion of the 'case study' in terms of reception, outreach, and therapy, with an attention to the pedagogical discourse, and with a conclusion on a personal note of the author of this paper, based on a related personal experience.

Keywords: classical reception, outreach through classics, theater as 'political weapon', theater of war, post-traumatic stress disorder, pedagogical legitimacy of classical reception studies.

Da recepção dos clássicos até a terapia: a recepção clássica e a resposta estadunidense à guerra. Um estudo de caso. Parte I

RESUMO. Discute-se, através de um estudo de caso, uma abordagem específica que especialistas estadunidenses estão aplicando aos textos da literatura clássica grega como resposta à realidade específica que durante décadas atormenta a sociedade dos Estados Unidos, ou seja, a experiência da guerra e suas consequências. Trata-se de uma re-leitura e re-uso de textos antigos, os quais, até agora, não foram explicitamente analisados como recepção clássica. A terapia é uma categoria que não pode transcender a recepção clássica. Argumentando que a leitura, mencionada acima, pode se encaixar na categoria de recepção clássica e proporcionando ao mesmo tempo um serviço além dos limites convencionais para alcançar alguns segmentos da comunidade, esse ensaio analisará um caso particular como algo emblemático para problemas mais extensos na recepção clássica, com atenção particular ao discurso pedagógico. A análise divide-se em duas partes: a primeira consistirá numa retomada teórica sobre os Estudos de Recepção nos Clássicos com uma breve análise da recepção clássica, uma amostra como funciona, e uma introdução à abordagem acima mencionada aos textos clássicos para responder à realidade da guerra moderna. Essa abordagem transforma os clássicos num instrumento de alcance. A segunda parte (na *Acta Scientiarum. Language and Culture*, v. 36, n. 3) consistirá numa análise detalhada e uma discussão sobre um caso de estudo em termos de recepção e no contexto do discurso pedagógico, concluindo numa nota pessoal baseada em experiências pessoais.

Palavras-chave: recepção clássica, terapia pelos clássicos, teatro como uma 'arma política', teatro da guerra, perturbação pós-stress traumático, legitimidade pedagógica da recepção clássica.

Introduction

A short note on Reception Studies in Classics from the perspective of its pedagogical 'legitimacy'

Reception studies in classics, or classical reception, is a new academic field that has recently become prominent, in particular in the Anglophone area (HARDWICK, 2003;

MARTINDALE, 2006; HARDWICK; STRAY, 2008; PORTER, 2008)¹. It is, as well, a much debated academic discipline, for the definition itself of classical reception is something on which scholars do not

¹An invaluable network of Classical Reception Studies (CRSN) has been started in 2004 by a collaborative initiative of six universities in UK and has so far experienced exceptional growth, in the UK and internationally. Their accessible unrivaled website (<http://www2.open.ac.uk/crsn>) aims at expanding this new field and at making it universal.

agree². We may feel safe, however, in saying that there is a general agreement about considering classical reception as a branch of Classical Studies that focuses on the *appropriation*, *adaptation* and *refiguring* of ancient works by subsequent writers, artists, designers, etc., and analyzes how a new work *has re-shaped*, in some way, the ancient one, adapting it to its new cultural and historical context: that of the receiver. Classical Reception thus promotes a ‘two-way’ relationship between the source text or culture and the new work and receiving culture (HARDWICK, 2003)³. It involves the acknowledgment that the past and the present are always implicated in each other. Working on Classical Reception, therefore, means analyzing how the ancient ‘texts’ *are shaped* by the different ways in which they are read, viewed, heard, used, re-used, appropriated and transformed in the different historical and cultural contexts of what we call ‘modernity’⁴. In this light one may wonder “[...] how malleable the classical world turns out to be in terms of the range of significances it can be made to bear”, to put it with the words of prof B. Goff (personal communications).

This observation, indeed, rings alarm bells from both a scholarly and a pedagogical perspective. Certainly, re-adapting or re-shaping an ancient work is not to be meant as “[...] an unthinking modernization, erasing the difference between past and present” (MARTINDALE, 2006, p. 8). Yet, perplexities bordering on a fear of falling into a ‘crude presentism’⁵, thus making the ancient world bear any significance we want, persist. Once we admit that reception is concerned with the individual and the collective historical, cultural background and life experience of the receivers, the risk of a facile acceptance of any readings, which may nullify the difference between past and present by denying to the past its own individual identity, becomes apparent⁶. It also appears

²Indeed, ‘What’s in a name?’ is the question with which Martindale (2006, p. 13) concludes the introduction to his book *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, thus pointing out the issue with the definition, an issue that – he says – “[...] will not readily go away” (Martindale 2006, p. 13). One of the problems related to the definition of Classical Reception is the risk of confusing it with the more familiar strand that deals, in the end, with the same things, i.e., Classical Tradition: on the relationship between these two fields, see e.g. Hardwick; Stray (2008), Budelmann; Haubold (2008). For a synthetic review of the problematic definition of Classical Reception, see also Leonard and Prins (2010). Furthermore, see below, n. 3.

³In a recent email-correspondence Prof. Hardwick, who has always offered helpful answers to my questions, has acknowledged the occurrence of some changes in the ‘so-far controversial’ relation between Classical Tradition and Classical Reception. Stating that ‘reception can also be a dynamic part of a tradition,’ Hardwick explained, “[...] one of the interesting things that is happening at the moment is that practices in the academic sphere of Classical Tradition are responding to the stimulus of reception-oriented research, and so are less dominated by mono-directional ‘influence’ and more attuned to interactions between ancient text and subsequent writing/reading. Equally, reception work is gaining from a close engagement with the more formal/philological approaches that have been developed in Classical tradition research” (personal communications). And I find this bilateral openness to be the best thing we may wish for our studies of Classics in general, given that a true understanding of the past in relation to the present, as well as that of the present in light of the past, should be our commonly shared aim.

⁴I borrowed part of the vocabulary which I used above from the ‘working vocabulary for reception studies’ elaborated by Hardwick (2003). I reported the whole vocabulary, above, in an appendix.

⁵I use the expression according to Armstrong’s definition (2003, p. 29), i.e., “[...] the reading that too peremptorily assimilates a text to contemporary concerns”.

⁶Evidently Classical Reception relies on the ‘aesthetic reception’ theory (JAUSS,

evident that, along with the risk of falling into a ‘crude presentism’, there is the risk of falling into a ‘mere subjectivity’. The object of study – which can be generically called a ‘text’, but might be a literary text, a work of art, a musical composition, a performance, or an historical event – is in fact viewed as actively interpreted by the receivers (readers or audience) who produce meanings based on their individual and cultural background and life experience. And a ‘text’ “[...] is something that a reader reads, differently” (MARTINDALE, 2006, p. 3)⁷.

If experienced scholars may rely on a solid background that would limit such risks, how can we prevent younger students from exploiting too freely the fascinating chance of interpreting texts belonging to a too remote time and a far away society, in a way that allows them to relate more to those texts? One may say that part of the task of the classical reception researcher and teacher is to show what is lost and / or what is added within the almost inevitable process of assimilation of the ancient to the present that any reader – from younger students to modern directors – may set in motion. In this way, as both scholars and teachers, we should help students to ‘judge what difference is made’. Yet, if we can help students to see the objective difference, how can we objectively help them to ‘judge’ the difference? In other words, how can we then really assess, and help to assess, the adequacy of a case of reception if, for instance, we may not see the things in the same way as the ones who propose that case?

Discussing Joanna Paul’s argument about the “[...] limited usefulness” of films that do not seem to be linked to an ancient text [...]” (McDONALD, 2008, p. 340) Marianne McDonald raises questions that *mutatis mutandis* might apply to several areas of Classical Reception. While questioning the ‘limited usefulness’ issue, McDonald asked, “Who determines which links are close and which are not?” (McDONALD, 2008, p. 340)⁸. It seems to me that McDonald’s question applies more broadly to any other classics-related item that relies on parallelism, allusion and quotation in general (WYKE, 2003); but,

1982; ISER, 1978), a reader-response literary theory according to which the meaning of a text is not built in the text itself; it is created within the relationship between the reader and the text. On the opposite side are the historicists for whom literature articulates the cultural values and the ideas of its own time and is not produced independently of its author and its author’s society. For a concise discussion and objections to historicism, see Martindale (2006) and related footnotes.

⁷The approach described above is not meant, however, to allow any reading as it would be possible if one subscribes to a more general hermeneutic approach.

⁸In her essay *A New Hope: Film as a Teaching Tool for the Classics*, McDonald highlights the prerogatives of the analogical /comparative approach that shapes the use (or, at least, her use) of films in teaching Classics. In this respect she challenges the argument that Paul developed in her essay *Working with film: Theories and Methodology*. Paul, however, does not dismiss all the usefulness of the cinema in the studying of Classics; she emphasizes how rich a source of material it represents for Classical Reception studies. She suggests, though, some caution, above all when and if cinema is used in teaching, and from this perspective she rightly questions: “[...]If a film has no clear link with classical antiquity [...], in what sense might we be able to understand it as a reception of antiquity?” (PAUL, 2008, p. 309).

more importantly, her question also resonates with other doubts that, as mentioned above, may arise when we try to assess cases of reception without being concerned whether we are falling into an extreme presentism and/or simply modernization. What would be a 'clear' and 'close' link with classical antiquity that would enable us to interpret a work – text, movie, music, etc. – as a reception of that antiquity? How do we discern and evaluate this 'clarity/closeness'? If, as argued above, reception studies focus on the receivers' response, not only may the degree of this 'clarity' inevitably vary, but it also subjects classical studies to some degree of subjectivity which, in turn, may complicate the pedagogical 'discourse'. Yet, despite the considerable challenges it presents for scholars and educators, undoubtedly Classical Reception both adds to the understanding of the ancient world and redirects the general public's attention to that world.

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss and analyze as a 'case-study' some particular, modern readings of, and approaches to ancient texts and events involving war, violence and survival, which have been developed, specifically and significantly, in the US in response to the American experience of war, and which, with some precautionary considerations, may constitute a case of reception, although they have been never explicitly considered under this label¹⁰. They certainly constitute a case of Outreach, the intention being, ultimately, to reach out to specific segments of the community. This introduction and the next paragraph are meant to give a theoretical and paradigmatic framework through which to conduct the analysis, an analysis that will show how compelling the points raised above are. The Conclusion will re-state some of the questions and doubts raised here with an attempt to find an answer. It will also include a personal note that may shed further light on the choice of this specific case study as a result of an additional layer of reception, given that it is a case pertaining to recent American history as received by an Italian – the author of this work – resident in the US¹¹. This particular situation points to a distinction which might have not been fully considered, that is, the distinction between 'the work as reception' (i.e., an ancient work re-proposed by a modern author, artist, director, etc.) and 'the scholarship of reception', which has to evaluate, or make judgments about the work as a classical reception, and has also to be intellectually and ethically responsible by being critically aware how, as a

scholar, one is temporally, socially and culturally situated.

Short survey of cases of Classical Reception: how it works

When *Antigone* was chosen as the play [for a prison 'concert' on Robben Island], I volunteered my services and was asked to play Creon [...] Creon will not listen to Antigone, nor does he listen to anyone but his own inner demons. His inflexibility and blindness ill become a leader, for a leader must temper justice with mercy. It was Antigone who symbolized our struggle; she was, in her own way, a freedom fighter, for she defied the law on the grounds it was unjust (MANDELA, 1995)¹².

These words of Nelson Mandela, a 'freedom fighter' who ironically played the role of an unjust oppressor, exemplify a common field for Classical Reception studies, namely, ancient greek drama¹³. In particular Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Medea*, more than other plays (with, maybe, an exception for Euripides' *Trojan Women*), have been used as 'political weapon' and adapted first to protest abusive regimes and the consequences of living under them and dealing with them¹⁴; additionally, to address cultural and racial prejudices (above all in the case of *Medea*)¹⁵, as well as gender issues. Each adaptation places the ancient myth in a new cultural and historical context, usually that contemporaneous to the re-creator/author. As Mandela's words imply, the choice of *Antigone* as a metaphor of the struggle for freedom is almost obvious due to the fact that the Greek heroine fought for individual rights, which conflate into what we call 'human rights', against what she perceived as the law of an abusive state. It is indeed significant that this tragedy has been proposed as a means to voice the individual claims to justice in many countries of our modern world that have experienced political oppression. To give a few examples: in South Africa the play has been used to protest the injustice and the inhumanity of the apartheid system¹⁶; in Ireland, *Antigone* in particular,

¹²Mandela is here referring to the performance of Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973) as a radical reworking of Sophocles' *Antigone*, produced in response and protest to the country's racist apartheid laws, suggesting how symbolic resistance to oppression can play a role in giving birth to freedom itself (see, e.g., FUGARD, 2002; GIBBS, 2007; REHM, 2007).

¹³Although some preference seems to be reserved for drama, there are, however, examples of modern reception of other genres of classical literature: one example would be *Omeara* (1990) and *The Odyssey: A Stage Version* (1993) by D. Walcott, on which see Walcott (1997); Davis (1997, 2007).

¹⁴As to Sophocles' *Antigone*, since Hegel, as Steiner (1984) noted, it 'has obsessed' the modern world as compellingly as a few other dramas of antiquity have done. Beside Steiner, see Ziolkowski (2000), and very recently Mee and Foley (2011) on a global range of *Antigones*. With particular attention to Europe after the Second World War up to the 1980s, and with reference both to the Nazi ideology and the terroristic movements of those years, see Fornaro (2012).

¹⁵As Hardwick (2005, p. 110; 2007, p. 320) observes, "[...] classical texts are rewritten in postcolonial contexts in order to provide the basis for a negotiation and critique of modern sociopolitical issues."

¹⁶For a useful overview referring to both the Apartheid and Post-apartheid period, see Van Zyl Smit (2008). For a general background and analysis of adaptations of Greek drama in South Africa, see Orkin (1994); Hauptfleisch (1997); Kruger (1999); Wetmore; Kevin (2002).

⁹The questions I am asking above are clearly inspired by Paul's arguments (see above, n. 8).

¹⁰As we shall see, the above-mentioned readings have partly been classified, by their proposers, as cases of comparative studies. I shall also discuss what relation comparative studies may have with reception studies.

¹¹I was encouraged to reflect on this further layer of reception by Prof. Hardwick and Prof. Kallendorf, and I am grateful to them for this input.

works as a reminder of the injustice inherent in a divided country – where re-writings and reproductions of Greek drama in general tend to address the so-called ‘Irish question’ (McDONALD, 1997; ROCHE, 1988; MACINTOSH, 1994; TEEVAN, 1998; McDONALD; WALTON, 2002); in Latin America, namely Argentina and Peru, Sophocles’ play is re-appropriated as a story of protest against state oppression. Among several, the reception of this play in Argentina might serve as a significantly instructive example. There *Antigone* has been used to focus on the *desaparecidos*, giving voice at the same time to the rights of the victims, the disappeared, unburied dead who, like Polyneikes cry out for earth; and to the struggle of the survivors of political atrocity, namely the women, i.e., the mothers and sisters of those dead, notoriously referred to as *Las madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, all modern *Antigone(s)* whose plight illuminates the struggle to exert individual agency in the face of unethical and abusive political authority and demands¹⁷. The best re-adaptation of Sophocles’ play resonating with the issues of the ‘Dirty War’ (1976-1983) is *Antigona Furiosa* (1986) by Griselda Gambaro (SCOTT, 1993; FLEMING, 1999; LANE, 2007; NELLI, 2009)¹⁸. The tragedy of *Antigone* is also used to reflect “[...] the gendered dynamics of state repression” during both the ‘Dirty War’ in Argentina and the *Manchay Tiempo* (1980-2000) in Peru (LANE, 2007, p. 518-521). It means that this same play marks, at the same time, the emergence of the traditionally silent and invisible women in national political discourse (TAYLOR, 1997; WANNAMAKER, 2001; NELLI, 2009). Euripides’ *Medea*, too, has often been ‘working’ as a metaphor of political victimization by abusive government personified, in her case, by Jason; but re-adaptations also address racial issues – as in the case of Guy Butler’s *Medea* (WERTHEIM, 1995) – and gender issues: as a woman and an ethnic ‘Other’, Medea is the victim of a double patriarchy or double colonialism¹⁹.

Examples of this kind of Classical Reception may continue almost *ad libitum*, as the tidal wave of ‘revivals’, ‘adaptations’, etc., occurring in most countries, along with the related scholarly studies, demonstrates. It is a practice that, in the end, we might

¹⁷ Still maintaining the core-struggle of the Sophoclean model, i.e., a woman who rebels against a law that she finds unjust and abusive of the individual rights, very recently (2012) a young Italian playwright, Valeria Parrella, has re-written Sophocles’ *Antigone* as the tragedy of a sister who fights for ‘returning’ her brother to the land of dead to which he belongs, thus defying a law that keeps her brother, who has been in a state of coma for fifteen years, ‘on the upper-world’ through a machine. This new *Antigone* is a sister who, on the ground that it is also an ‘act of pity’, fights for and executes euthanasia on her brother, facing the hard consequences of this ‘transgression’. I have conducted a detailed analysis of this case of reception; the related paper is forthcoming (LAURIOLA 2013).

¹⁸ For valuable general collections of essays on the reception of classics in Argentina, see Pellettieri (1997); Talens et al. (2006).

¹⁹ One would be tempted to say that re-adaptations of Euripides’ *Medea* in particular – leave alone the related scholarship (see, e.g., HALL et al., 2000) – are almost uncountable. Worthy of being mentioned, however, among the others and with reference to the above mentioned ‘double colonialism’, is *Beloved* (1987) by African American writer Toni Morrison (see, e.g., EMMETT, 2010)

say, has always existed and since antiquity, indeed²⁰. But, if we single out the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the revival of classical texts especially in time of socio-political crisis seems to have become a significantly common trend (RABINOWITZ, 2008, p. 237-238), a way to pose questions to and reflect upon concerns of contemporary societies.

Among these modern concerns, those related to war prevail. In this respect, not by accident, we may think, the tragedy that perhaps has most been re-adapted is Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, a war play that is “[...] not about a specific war; it is about all wars” (CLAY, 2010, p. 233). Performed in Athens in 415 B.C., almost at the end of the Peloponnesian War (430-404 B.C.), *Trojan Women* is a tragedy that focuses on the consequences of the war on both the defeated and the victors, namely on the plight of the victims of the war, i.e., the Trojan women, and on the dehumanizing impact on those who fought it. From the translation of Gilbert Murray on the Eve of the World War I (1915), which also served as the base for G.B. Shaw’s *Heartbreak House* (1916-1917, on which see WEINTRAUB, 2009), to Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Les Troyennes* (1965), produced during the Algerian War to denounce ‘l’absurdité des guerres’ (O’DONOHUE, 2005); from Charlotte Delbo’s *Qui rapportera les Paroles* (1974), an autobiographical portrayal of the author’s experience in the Auschwitz women’s camp, structured like a Greek tragedy and specifically recalling Euripides’ *Trojan Women* (GOLDFARB, 1980), to Hanoch Levin’s *The Lost Women of Troy* (1984), an adaptation of the Euripidean tragedy staged at the Tel Aviv Cameri Theater, as a protest against the war in Lebanon²¹, this ancient Greek tragedy has been endlessly re-adapted to echo contemporary events, while conveying specific critiques of them.

²⁰ I should note here that reception is indeed vital in antiquity. With reference to the practice of reception within antiquity, an evidence of how ancient this practice is can be found in Homer himself, which – so far I can ascertain – has not been noted, or, at least, analyzed in terms of reception. As the Homericist Willock (1964) observed some decades ago, Homer tended to adapt traditional myths to the current fictional situation. One of the best examples of this practice can be Homer’s innovation of the myth of Meleagros and the Calidonian bear which Phoenix told to Achilles during the embassy (*Iliad* 9) in his attempt to persuade Achilles to give up his anger, accept the gifts they are offering, and go back to fight. Willock noted that the poet had added to the traditional story two details: (1) that of an angry Meleagros withdrawing from the fighting, and (2) that of an embassy to him with the offering of gifts, the purpose being that of adapting the traditional story to the new situation; and thus make it a suitable paradigm for Achilles (the fictional audience). Homer, we may say, has almost ‘re-written’ the previous story; he has certainly re-used it and has adapted and refigured it for the new context. Adaptation and refiguration, as we will see, are among the ways in which reception relates to its classical sources, with adaptation being a version of the source developed for a different purpose, and refiguration being a selection or a reworking of material from a previous tradition (HARDWICK 2003; see also the Appendix). We may also say that these activities were not exclusive of Homer. As Prof. Hardwick noted, during our correspondence, it is often underplayed that the Greek tragedians were themselves adapting and rewriting myth – leave alone the translation, re-writings and re-adaptations of Greek works by ancient Roman authors. For useful insights on reception within antiquity, see Hardwick, 2003., Budelmann and Haubold, 2008, Emlyn-Jones, 2008 and Graziosi, 2008.

²¹ See Levy and Yaari (1998, 1999). In his adaptation, Levin tends to emphasize the dehumanization suffered by the Trojan women as a result of the abuse, rape and murder perpetrated by the Greeks.

Something similar can be said about another of the greatest antiwar plays of all time, i.e., *The Persians* by Aeschylus. Performed in Athens in 472 BC, *The Persians* is the earliest surviving tragedy in Western Literature and the only surviving Greek play on a historical theme. It dramatizes the first historical clash between Europe and Asia, West and East, which must be identified with the Islamic World. It dramatizes, indeed, the Persian Wars that the Greeks, united in their effort to preserve their freedom from the Persians, fought in the first decades of the 5th century BC, and won. Profoundly productive from an ideological point of view, the revivals and adaptations of this tragedy from the era of the early Crusades to the present have helped create “[...] the corrosive Western identification of cosmic Freedom with the war against the Islamic faith” (HALL, 2007, p. 168). Significantly, in relation to wars with the ‘new Persians’, i.e., the modern Iraq, the most recent adaptation of this tragedy “[...] speaks less for the western aggressor than for a more human and pacific world order” (HALL, 2007, p. 168-169)²². Indeed, despite the equation of Xerxes with Saddam Hussein as a megalomaniac perversely intended to defy the US, Peter Sellars’ 1993 production of the *Persians* returns to the fundamental innovation of the play and adapts it to challenge the stereotypical American image of the enemy in the Gulf War and to denounce the brutality of US militarism (HALL, 2007). The disaster that the cast lamented is the bombing of Iraq by the US in early 1991, the action being transposed from ancient Susa to modern Baghdad (HALL, 2004.). Repeated insistence that the casualties suffered by Iraq caused those people terrible hardship and suffering shows how this adaptation takes the side of the victims, the defeated, inverting the traditional conflation of ‘self’ as Greek and ‘other’ as Persian²³. This inversion is completed in another adaptation of the *Persians* as a response to George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003: the *Persians* by the American playwright and actor Ellen McLaughlin (HALL, 2007), where the aggressive policies of Xerxes have been unequivocally associated with those of the US²⁴.

Some Results from the Survey

One thing that appears evident from the survey above is that most of the ancient stories are able to transcend time and to be relevant to the present not

simply because they are timeless and universal as if they exist outside of time (LANE, 2007). Indeed, they are relevant because of their connection to each specific time – or better, each specific ‘present time’ – in which they are re-proposed. This is possible because certain human, social struggles repeat themselves at intervals in history from antiquity to our time. The classical past thus often becomes the site for the projection of what the German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin called ‘now-time’, an experience of time in which one – an individual, a class, a whole nation – can recognize the convergence of its present in the past and vice versa (LANE, 2007, p. 524). History, as Benjamin argues, is time filled by the presence of the ‘now’, a “[...] now of recognizability, [...]” i.e., a ‘now’ that “[...] achieves a certain legibility or readability in relation to the present [...]” (EILAND; McLAUGHLIN, 1999, p. 463 and 468). We may say that the presence of this ‘now-time’ in the classical stories makes them meaningful, again and again, in each different moment and context. In other words, the quick survey above shows that “[...] as situations change so the texts translated and produced appear to change” (TEEVAN, 1998, p. 86) – that is, it is the contingent situation, the contingent ‘now-time’, that enables a specific past, embodied by the classical texts, to become present. But our survey also shows how, as both situations and places change, so the same texts undergo different adaptations. To mention a few examples, in Ireland Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* has been readapted, in Seamus Heaney’s *The Cure at Troy* (1990), to address the so-called ‘Irish Question’, so that Philoctetes resembles Northern Ireland as being obsessed with a wound and the breakdown in the peace talks in the text echoes the breakdown in the real peace talks (McDONALD, 1996). In the US that same tragedy has recently been re-read and adapted to issues related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in combat-soldiers and combat-veterans, such as social mistrust, feeling of complete isolation and abandonment (as will be discussed below). Similarly, while in Argentina Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* in its most recent adaptation, in Inés de Oliveira Cézar’s film *Extranjera* (2007), is re-appropriated “[...] in order to expose the inconsistencies and incongruities of patriarchy and interrogate the hierarchical structures of rural Argentine society, which perpetuate female dependency and oppression [...]” (NIKOLOUTSOS, 2010, p. 93), in Ireland, in its 1990s renaissance, the tragedy is barely re-adapted to protest against the patriarchal system. Indeed, it is re-appropriated there with a twofold purpose: (1) by emphasizing the agony of Clytemnestra, it establishes an etiology for the cruelly vengeful character of Clytemnestra, as she is portrayed in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, so that the text has

²²Hall also notes that, for similar reasons, there was an almost contemporaneous revival of another Greek tragedy, i.e., Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* (HALL, 2005).

²³For a comment on the inversion of the invader / defeated models, see also Hardwick (2005).

²⁴For a general overview of modern performances of ancient tragedies, involving different degrees of adaptation, refiguring, appropriation, etc., see Rabinowitz (2008).

been adapted “[...] to reveal the future legacy left by Agamemnon’s war crime at Aulis, and especially Clytemnestra’s revenge [...]” (HALL, 2005, p. 31); (2) more importantly, by emphasizing the figure of the virgin, her being unable to rebel and almost ‘spun to death’, the tragedy has been re-adapted to speak

to a world where innocent victims of international war – many still children and teenagers – have no power even to protest against their fates; they are at the mercy of international wars justified by the sophisticated orchestration of public opinion in both domestic politics and global enterprises (HALL, 2005, p. 31).

With Auden, we may say, “Each nation [...] fashion(s) a classical Greece in its own image” (MENDELSON, 1973, p. 4). National and collective historical-cultural experiences, as well as individual ones, seem to maneuver, in some way, the reception of Classical Texts. The re-reading of an ancient text in light of the new context in which it is revived, may result both in a re-interpretation and in a re-creation of the text in line with that context. As Kallendorf rightly put it with reference to Milton and Virgil, whoever re-uses the classics is then both a reader-interpreter and a re-creator (KALLENDORF, 2005). While these considerations, together with the examples in the first part of this essay, confirm the malleability of the classical world ‘in terms of the range of significances it can be made to bear,’ – the degree of subjectivity that each reading-interpretation and re-creation imply brings us back to the questions I previously posed about how to evaluate works of reception, how to be sure not to fall into a ‘crude presentism’ and, I would now add, into ‘mere subjectivity’.

Possible answers might come through an analysis of the ways in which reception operates, so to speak. The useful chart of ‘a working vocabulary for reception studies’, drawn by L. Hardwick, offers a great help in identifying ‘those ways’ as ‘Acculturation’, ‘Adaptation’, ‘Analogue’, ‘Appropriation’, ‘Authentic’, ‘Correspondences’, ‘Dialogue’, ‘Equivalent’, ‘Foreignization’, ‘Hybrid’, ‘Intervention’, ‘Migration’, ‘Refiguration’, ‘Translation’, ‘Transplant’, ‘Version’ (HARDWICK, 2003; see also Appendix). As Hardwick points out, these ways are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they might co-operate, the differences being sometimes so subtle that some of the concepts listed above become interchangeable. This might be, for instance, the case with appropriation and adaptation. Appropriation is defined as “[...] taking an ancient image or text and using it to sanction subsequent ideas or practices (explicitly or implicitly), [...]” (HARDWICK, 2003, p. 9) and adaptation is defined as “[...] a version of the source developed for a

different purpose or insufficiently close to count as a translation [...]” (HARDWICK, 2003, p. 9). I would think that it is evident that an adaptation can be also an appropriation²⁵; taking over a text to use its authority to sanction an idea might imply or pass through the development of a version of the source for a different purpose, such as to sanction subsequent ideas or practices. Both may also involve what is called ‘Intervention’, i.e., the reworking of the source “[...] to create a political, social or aesthetic critique of the receiving society”, (HARDWICK, 2003, p. 10) which, in turn, seems to me to also imply ‘Acculturation’, i.e., “[...] assimilation into a cultural context [...]”, (HARDWICK, 2003, p. 9) and so forth. This is to say that the analysis of the ways in which reception operates, which may give some answers to the questions posed above, may also complicate them and raise some others²⁶.

Using Hardwick’s chart with this in mind, let us now move to the ‘case study’.

Classical Reception and outreach: american response to war. A case study

“Each nation [...] fashion(s) a classical Greece in its own image”. (MENDELSON, 1973, p. 4).

As we saw, there is indeed some truth in this statement. It might not be accidental that experts in the field in England focus on the ‘colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’ reception of Classics mostly in South Africa, given that re-adaptations of classical texts there aim at mirroring that country’s issues, so that it ‘fashions’, in some way, the ancient world in its own image²⁷. Similarly, in South America, as we saw, greek texts are re-read and re-shaped to commemorate and protest against their own ‘dark age’, such as the ‘Dirty War’ in Argentina. And again, we saw, in the US some preference and special attention have been directed to

²⁵It might be that all of the kinds of work mentioned above, when applied to an ancient source, are interconnected, since they all conflate with reception, so that overlapping or bordering on another category is almost inevitable. On the other hand, this impression of overlapping applies to the reception studies-concept itself, if one thinks, for instance, of a possible interconnection between Reception Studies and Comparative Studies. They are, obviously, two different fields, yet a comparative study is a reception study too, since a comparison between two products implies a specific reading-response to those products, a response that emphasizes the similarities and references between them. An interesting, possible evidence of this is that articles dealing with reception are also published in journals specialized in Comparative Studies. Such is the case, for instance, of A. Wertheim, ‘Euripides in South Africa: *Medea* and *Demea*’ published in *Comparative Drama* (1995).

²⁶Indeed, conversing on this topics with Prof. Hardwick, she did raise other questions, wondering whether some degree of acculturation would be needed for the force of the ancient text to be accepted and understood, but – at the same time – asking if there is also a need for some kind of critical distance to enable a judgment to be made on the receiving society. I would be tempted to answer to both questions with: ‘yes’ and ‘yes’. But how harmonize these far different, almost opposite, actions (acculturation and distance) is another story. Do they have something to do with the different layers of reception I hinted at above, i.e., one with ‘the work as reception’ (a modern author, or director etc. would tend to assimilate the work into the cultural context of the receiving society), and the other with ‘the scholarship of reception’ which, assuming that a scholar is critically aware of her/his temporal, cultural, social positioning, should enable a critical distance to be taken? And we see, the number of questions increases.

²⁷Informative sources for Classical reception and Colonialism-Post-colonialism are Goff (2005); Hardwick; Gillespie (2007).

tragedies involving war and its after-effects, as with Euripides' *Trojan Women*, and Aeschylus' *The Persians*²⁸. These re-adaptations reflect a reading of the ancient texts in terms of 'oppositional form,' i.e., as a form of political and social protest against current struggles (BOAL, 1979). In the wake of the US attack on Iraq, above all, tragedies staging the 'Trojan War' have been reproduced to critique american policy. However, the protest conveyed through the re-adaptations mostly tends to voice the victims' side both in protesting against the brutality of the aggressor's militarism and in emphasizing the sufferings and hardships of the defeated.

What has been forgotten in this kind of reception of classical texts is the suffering of another category of war victims: the survivors who come back home from war, i.e., the veterans; and those who are left at home waiting for them - their mothers, wives, girlfriends, sons and daughters - the forgotten warriors, as Matsakis (1988) calls them, who have to fight their own enemies: fear, loneliness, despair.

Staff psychiatrist Jonathan Shay (Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, Boston, MA) was the first to draw attention to this other category of war victims, by using Classical texts in dealing with them. Re-reading the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from the point of view of contemporary soldiers at war and back at home, Shay addresses issues that are specific to military personnel, namely Post-Traumatic (Combat) Stress Disorder²⁹. Reading Homer's poems through these specific lenses has become a way to help soldiers deal with war-related feelings, such as survivor guilt, isolation, loneliness, anger and despair. We may say that Shay's reception of Homeric poetry has turned Classical Literature into a tool of what he terms 'cultural therapy'. Building on Shay's re-usage of Classical Texts, theater director and translator Bryan Doerries, with the support of the Department of Defense, has founded the *Theater of War: The Philoctetes Project* (DOERRIES, 2008). Paraphrasing from the related website, this project consists of organizing innovative, participatory events which are intended to increase awareness of post-deployment psychological health issues, to disseminate information concerning

available resources, and to foster greater family and troop resilience³⁰. To thus facilitate a public conversation about veterans and health care, and to address the psychological cost of war, are among the main aims that the *Theater of War* pursues by presenting excerpts from two specific Sophoclean plays, *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, to military communities across the country. Almost contemporaneously, a professor of Ancient History and Vietnam veteran from Loyola Marymount University (CA), Lawrence Tritle, encouraged by the initiative of Shay and expanding it, has written a series of essays in which he 'matches up' or 'compares' - to use his terminology - Homer and other literary works of ancient Greek Literature (from Thucydides to Xenophon) with the nature of modern war experience, in particular with the Vietnam experience³¹. His intention is "[...] to enlarge our sensibilities and knowledge about both the ancient Greek and modern American reaction to the experience of war, the trauma of violence [...]" (TRITLE, 1998, p. 35). Indeed, ancient incidents (such as that of Melos, during the Peloponnesian War: Thucydides V, 84-114) "[...] reveal the range and depth of human experience in war, and studying them enlarges our understanding of both the ancient past and the 'present past'" (TRITLE, 1998, p. 36).

More recently, in a vein similar to Doerries' outreach project, Clinic Associate Professor of Classics at the New York University, P. Meineck, has launched a program called 'Ancient greeks and modern lives: poetry-drama-dialogue'. Funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH), this program aims at staging free dramatic readings from ten works of literature — including Homer's *Odyssey*, Sophocles' *Ajax*, and Euripides' *Trojan Women* — for the public: beside inner-city residents and rural communities, a special attention is now given to combat veterans' audiences³². Interestingly, in the last Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association (Philadelphia, PA - Jan., 5-8, 2012), in a workshop devoted to 'Classics in action: how to engage with the public', two

²⁸The same happens with Euripides' *Hebe*: see Rabinowitz (2008). This scholar also mentions the *Lysistrata Project* (started in 2003), which coordinates staging of Aristophanes' play around the world to protest the war. An extensive discussion of the *Lysistrata project* is in Hardwick (2010). Moreover, in reference to the reproduction of Greek Tragedy in relation to very recent conflicts, Rabinowitz points out the occurrence of responses to the 9/11 attack that draw on Greek tragedies: see Romain (2002) and Rabinowitz (2008).

²⁹PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) was discussed for the first time in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatrists Association in 1980. The diagnosis of this mental disorder was partly the result of the treatment of veterans from Vietnam War. Indeed Shay was exactly dealing with those veterans when he came up with the idea to approach the problem through classical literature. On the historical background of the term and concept of PTSD, see Shephard (2001); Lasiuk; Hegadoren (2006).

³⁰An excellent source of information about this project is indeed the website of the above mentioned *Theater of War* (now part of a broader program named *Outside the Wire*). Available from: <<http://www.philoctetesproject.org/>>.

³¹Tritle started using ancient 'Greek history and classical texts' to specifically address the issues of war with a reference to the 'Vietnam war' in the mid-1990, namely Spring 1996, when he designed and taught for the first time a seminar class entitled 'Achilles in Vietnam'. Since then Prof. Tritle has devoted his research to this topic, producing several articles, book-chapters, and two major books (TRITLE, 2000, 2010) on which I shall focus in the current paper. I should here note that recently it is becoming very common, however, to find scholarship pertaining to the Classics which assumes the relevance of the reactions of those exposed to combat-violence in ancient time to present-day psychology: see, for instance, Retief; Cilliers (2006); Toner (2009); Melchior (2011). These three scholars, however, differently from Shay, Tritle, Doerries, are interested in finding and discussing possible evidence of the existence of PTSD in classical antiquity through its literary products, rather than in discussing and evaluating the efficacy of using classical literature as 'therapy tool' for veterans. Another good source on these topics is the collection of essays edited by Cosmopoulos (2007), deriving from the conference *Achilles in Iraq: War and Peace in Ancient Greece and Today*, hosted by the University of Missouri-St. Louis, in 2004.

³²See Meineck (2010a, 2012).

out of the four presentations concerned the Theater of War (GAMEL; ADAMITIS, 2012) and the program of Prof. Meineck. Gamel and Adamitis's presentation reported the existence of a new production, whose intentions are similar to those of Doerries's *Philoctetes Project*. The new production is called *The Ajax Project*: its distinctive trait is that the actors do not confine themselves to reading the dramatic passages; they re-write their parts based on the original text, adding their own personal ideas³³. Still very recently, a similar project, focusing more on the role of women in war and wartime, has been created by Peggy Shannon (Chair of the Ryerson Theatre School at Ryerson University in Toronto, ON – Canada), and Candice Monson (Professor of Psychology and Director of Clinical Training at Ryerson University in Toronto, ON – Canada), with the support of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada: 'The Women and War Project' (2011). Combining artistic creation, social science and mental health practice, it consists of a multi-national creative research study aimed specifically at the female experience of war. Classical literature plays a major role in this project, mainly be designed to investigate the experience of women in war, both in the past and in the present, using Greek drama as a means to promote public discourse and raise awareness about issue such as PTSD.

The ground of these outreach-projects can but be some sort of reception of classical texts. To demonstrate this let us thus turn to the pioneers Shay, Doerries and Trible, whose activity, so far as I can ascertain, has not explicitly labeled and analyzed as a case of Classical Reception³⁴.

As for the authors themselves, Shay *compares* the stories of veterans with the story of Achilleus in the *Iliad* (SHAY, 1991; SHAY, 1994, p. xv). It became clear to him, at a certain point, that his patients were echoing many of the sentiments expressed by warriors in the Homeric poems. "I realized," Shay said in an interview, "[...] that I was hearing the story of Achilles over and over again" (SONTAG; O'LEARY, 2008, p. xx). And when he turned to the *Odyssey*, he talks of the "[...] detailed *allegory* of many a real veteran's homecoming" (SHAY, 2002, p. xv). As to Trible, he more explicitly

talks of his works in terms of 'comparative study' (TRITLE, 2000, p. xi - emphasis mine). Although 'allegory' and 'comparison' do not appear in the 'working vocabulary' for reception studies compiled by Hardwick, I tend to think that they presuppose a form of reception³⁵: they take an ancient text to sanction a subsequent idea – namely, how comparing and echoing those ancient stories may help address war-related concerns in our times (appropriation), which also means developing the ancient source for a different purpose (adaptation), the purpose being that of giving voice to the problems of veterans, including what we now call PTSD, and of addressing the ancient stories specifically to an audience of veterans³⁶. This is, indeed, the way in which Shay and Trible 're-use' some ancient texts, whose meaning, however, cannot be confined only to this. The re-use is possible – as in any case, I would say, of explicit reception – because there is a comparable source and reception (analogue)³⁷. Besides these points of contact with what we would called reception, the usage and interpretation of ancient texts by Shay and Trible are their own response, as readers, to those texts, which in turn prompts a similar response in their audience. Similarly, the theatrical initiative promoted by B. Doerries depends on his own way of reading and looking at some of Sophocles' tragedies, i.e., on his individual reception of those texts, which has led him to adapt those texts for a different purpose (adaptation) by relying on comparable relationships between source and reception (analogue). Last, but not least, Shay, Trible and Doerries base their work on a concept that is paramount to Reception Studies in Classics, that of the two-way relationship between past and present, which allows a refocusing on the ancient text and context, to shed light on the new context, and vice versa.

Final Considerations

We might by now agree that the activities of Shay, Trible and Doerries can be analyzed as a case of Classical Reception. It is, however, a peculiar case since, except for the translation that Doerries provides for his events³⁸, Shay and Trible do not re-write, so to speak, any ancient text to adapt it to the new context: they both re-read these texts through new lenses, those

³³In terms of reception studies – though, as said, these projects have not been analyzed as such – one may say that there are here at least two layers of reception: the reception implied in the re-writing of parts by the performers overlap and add to the reception implied in the selection and adaptation of the chose passages for the 'targeted' audience of the project.

³⁴Indeed, Meineck's recent program, which is quite more widespread than his 'antecedent's, i.e., Doerries's project, is an 'enlargement' of a previous public, national program aiming at promoting Classics in general for all, not peculiarly for military and veterans communities. I am referring to 'Page and Stage': *Theater, Tradition and Culture in America* (2008-2009). Supported by the NEH, it was created and based on a partnership between the library and the theater. It placed live theatrical events, workshops, scholar-led reading groups, moderated film screenings, and lectures in public libraries across America, using classical literature, in particular Homer, to inspire people to gather together and read, and to influence and re-invigorate cultural life in America (see Meineck, 2010b).

³⁵As to allegory and classical tradition, see Boys-Stones (2003).

³⁶Indeed, both Shay and Trible insist on this component of the ancient audience. Moreover, Trible has constantly pointed out that the authors themselves, such as Thucydides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Xenophon, to mention a few, had military experience. However, we must consider that, as we will argue later with some details, although Homer or Thucydides or Xenophon, etc. might have wanted both to voice warriors' problems (including what we now call PTSD), and to address their literary works to a warrior-veteran audience, their aim was not exclusively limited to it, as Shay and Trible, at times, seem to imply. In other words, we cannot disregard that those ancient authors looked at broader audiences with more varied objectives in mind.

³⁷The words in italics refer to the above mentioned 'working vocabulary', for which see also the appendix below.

³⁸Translation is itself a form of reception: see, e.g., Hardwick's 'working vocabulary' (2003).

of a specific segment of the American population that might relate to them, the veterans. And while Shay re-tells those stories, Trible re-analyzes and re-describes, in the form of scholarly essays and in his practice of teaching ancient history, both stories and historical events, still relying on literary texts.

Once we agree on this, as with almost any case of reception, the problem raised here relates to the degree of subjectivity in the reception itself. How can we be sure we do not fall into an extreme presentism? How can we be sure we are not forcing the sources to make them suitable for a modern reception?

These usual doubts, coupled with the idiosyncrasy of Shay's and Trible's works, make them a worthwhile 'case study' in Classical Reception and its pedagogy, and perhaps it prompts to re-examine research methodology, too. These will be the specific topics of the second part of the current work which will be published in *Acta Scientiarum. Language and Culture*, v. 36, n. 3, 2014.

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APPENDIX

Towards a working vocabulary for reception studies (HARDWICK, 2003, p. 9-10)	
Acculturation	- assimilation into a cultural context (throughnurturing or education or domestication or sometimes by force)
Adaptation	- a version of the source developed for a different purpose or insufficiently close to count as a translation
Analogue	- a comparable aspect of source and reception
Appropriation	- taking an ancient image or text and using it to sanction subsequent ideas or practices (explicitly or implicitly)
Authentic	- close approximation to the supposed form and meaning of the source. At the opposite end of the spectrum from invention (i.e. a new work)
Correspondences	- aspects of a new work which directly relate to a characteristic of the source
Dialogue	- mutual relevance of source and receiving texts and contexts
Equivalent	- fulfilling an analogous role in source and reception but not necessarily identical in form or content
Foreignization	- translating or representing in such a way that 'difference' between source and reception is emphasized
Hybrid	- a fusion of material from classical and other cultures
Intervention	- reworking the source to create a political, social or aesthetic critique of the receiving society
Migration	- movement through time or across place; may involve dispersal and diaspora and acquisition of new characteristics
Refiguration	- selecting and reworking material from a previous or contrasting tradition
Translation	- literally from one language to another. Literal, close, free are words used to pin down the relationship to the source as are phrases like 'in the spirit rather than the letter'. Translation can also be used metaphorically as in 'translation to the stage' or 'translation across cultures'
Transplant	- to take a text or image into another context and allow it to develop
Version	- a refiguration of a source (usually literary or dramatic) which is too free and selective to rank as a translation.