



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

Rosanna Lauriola

Independent Scholar. E-mails: lauriola@uidaho.edu; rlauriola19@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT. After providing a theoretical framework pertaining to the field of Reception of Classic in the first part of this essay (LAURIOLA, 2014) and after discussing some related issues from a pedagogical viewpoint, I introduced, as case study, works and initiatives by a psychiatrist (SHAY, 1991, 1994, 2002), an American director (DOERRIES, 2008), and two scholars (MEINECK, 2010a, b, 2012; TRITLE, 1998, 2000, 2010) who have been proposing a use of Classical Literature as a therapeutic and awareness-raising tool in response to the problems that modern wars have been causing. Veterans and their family, as well as the whole civic community, are the addressees of their work. What follows is a detailed analysis of those works with the intention both to determine whether they can be classified as work of reception – which, so far, has never been proposed – and to discuss the plausibility of this kind of reception, which also turns into social outreach, and how it can be proposed without risking to completely dismiss changes that have occurred in the vision of war, although we may agree that the sufferings of war did not change too much¹. Like in the first part, the discussion will be also carried on within a pedagogical discourse. A personal note based on a personal experience will conclude the analysis.

Keywords: classical literature, therapy, war veterans, pedagogical legitimacy, Classical Reception Studies.

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

RESUMO. Após proporcionar a teoria da Recepção dos Clássicos na primeira parte desse ensaio (LAURIOLA, 2014) e após discutir problemas relacionados ao assunto a partir do aspecto pedagógico, introduzirei nessa segunda parte, como um estudo de caso, as pesquisas e as iniciativas de um psiquiatra (SHAY, 1991, 1994, 2002), um diretor de teatro (DOERRIES, 2008) e dois especialistas (MEINECK, 2010a, b, 2012; TRITLE, 1998, 2000, 2010). Esses autores têm proposto o uso da literatura clássica como instrumento terapêutico e conscientizador em resposta aos problemas que as guerras modernas estão causando. Os veteranos de guerra e suas famílias, como também toda a comunidade civil, são os receptores de suas pesquisas. Segue-se uma análise detalhada de seus trabalhos para determinar se podem ser classificados como trabalho de recepção – o qual jamais foi sugerido – e discutir a credibilidade desse tipo de recepção, a qual poderia se transformar em terapia social. Discute-se também como poderia ser proposta a guerra, sem prejudicar as mudanças que ocorreram ao termo, embora os sofrimentos de guerra não tenham mudado tanto. Semelhante a que foi investigado na primeira parte, a discussão entrará no discurso pedagógico. Um aspecto pessoal, baseado numa experiência pessoal, concluirá a análise.

Palavras-chave: literatura clássica, terapia, veteranos de guerra, legitimidade pedagógica, Estudos de Recepção Clássica.

Introduction¹

Achilles and Odysseus: A 'Combat-Soldier' and a 'Combat-Veteran'. Notes on Shay's reading of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*²

Jonathan Shay is a clinical psychiatrist who specializes in treating the psychological injuries of combat veterans (SHAY, 1994, p. xiii). He has been working specifically with American combat veterans of the Vietnam War, all suffering from

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.² His treatment of combat disorder coalesces with his re-reading and re-interpretation of the Homeric poems, which he has used to deepen our understanding of the effect of warfare on the individual. Identifying parallels between the story of Achilles and of Odysseus' homecoming, on the one hand, and the experiences of a group of veterans, on the other hand, Shay has

¹ I would like to point out that for the authors of the works and initiatives I shall discuss above in details, the temporal gap between classical time and modern time barely matters in that they focus on the 'human' effects of and reactions to the war, which – to their eyes – are of the same kind, regardless the changes occurred in the conception of the war itself.

² I shall give a very brief description of Shay's and Tritle's books; my intention is to survey them from the perspective of reception studies and related pedagogical concerns. For a good synthesis and critical views on Shay's books, see Goetsch (1994); Kutash (1994); Palm (1995); Roth (2003). For Tritle's books, see Lee (2001); Palaima (2001); Goldhill (2002); Mason (2010).

written two books, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994), and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (2002).

In the first, Shay proposes a reading of Homer that focuses on what he perceives to be “[...] two common events of heavy, continuous combat: betrayal of what is right by a commander, and the onset of the berserk state” (SHAY, 1994, p. xiii). These two common events would very likely induce a trauma severe enough to ‘undo’ character, i.e., turn even a quiet, meek person into a violent one. The connection between the indignant wrath (*menis*) of Achilles and the justifiable rage of soldiers when they are betrayed in ‘what is right’ by their commander constitutes the basis for subsequent parallels. Shay labels this ‘what is right’ by borrowing a Greek word, *nomos*, which is not in Homer, but is able to encompass several suitable meanings, such as normative expectations, moral order, ethics and commonly understood social values. Achilles felt betrayed by Agamemnon’s violation of ‘what is right’: to keep one’s own war prize was a commonly understood social value, a normative expectation that was perfectly in accordance with the moral order of the time. In Shay’s therapy experience with Vietnam veterans, many of the traumatic events that his patients had reported represented for them a betrayal of ‘what is right’, and each of these instances of betrayal contributed both to the destruction of their sense of trust and to their propensity for rage, which in turn are among the symptoms of PTSD³. Shay found Achilles’ self-righteous wrath familiar to all who work with combat Veterans. What Agamemnon did to Achilles was no private wrong. He abused his power and, as Shay points out, there is no private wrong in the application of power in a military organization. Trustworthiness is expected from those who hold power, for it nourishes loyalty, motivation and perseverance. The violation of that trustworthiness, the violation of ‘what is right’ by a leader, cannot but hurt motivation and loyalty. Hence a psychological withdrawal comes, as if to say, it is no longer worth fighting for your leader and for the cause. Social mistrust is the immediate consequence. Moreover, Shay found that Achilles’ open grief at the death of Patroclus, which marked a turning point in the course of his actions and emotions, was something familiar to combat veterans, as well. Achilles went back to fight, he went ‘berserk’ committing atrocities against the

living and the dead⁴, he longed for suicide, he felt already dead, he felt guilty for failing to protect Patroclus, and he felt that he should have been the one who should have perished – as the poet Homer, indeed, described him in *Iliad* 19, 326 ff. Shay found these feelings echoed in the stories of his patients. And both in Homer’s story of Achilles and in the stories of his patients, Shay also speculates that there is a path which leads directly from indignation after betrayal of ‘what is right’ to the state of being berserk.

As the author himself declared in the ‘Preface’, the second book, *Odysseus in America* published in 2002, “[...] is an obvious next step” (SHAY, 2002, p. xi). Shay uses the *Odyssey* in particular to explore the problems of the soldiers’ reintegration into civilian life, once back home. He thus focuses on Odysseus mainly as a veteran, an aspect that has often been glossed over in the many interpretations of the *Odyssey*⁵.

The *Odyssey* as a whole – but most vividly the fantastic adventures of Books 9-12 – may profitably be read as a detailed allegory of many a real veteran’s homecoming (SHAY, 2002, p. XV).

Odysseus, indeed, appears over and over as a man who does not trust anybody. The destruction of the capacity for social trust, Shay argues, is one of the central problems facing the most severely injured Vietnam veterans. Subtly, however, Shay observes that Odysseus may work both as a metaphor for the veterans and as “[...] a deeply flawed military leader himself, for he also stands for the destroyers of trust” (SHAY, 2002, p. xv). As a veteran trying to come home and as a military leader who has affected and shaped the experience of others, mostly in disastrous ways, Odysseus and the *Odyssey* are the basic subject of Part One of Shay’s book, *Unhealed Wounds*, which is the part that deals more with the Classics. Articulating this Part One into different segments, which resemble the sequence of the *Odyssey* narrative starting from book 8 to the end⁶, Shay illustrates some aspects characterizing the return of veterans to civilian life, such as the tension between those who fought and

⁴ The word ‘berserk’, from an Old Norse root, is used by Shay to describe a state of mind, body and social disconnection which may occur in moments of extreme frenzy in combat, and which thus leads to extreme violence and blind killing. In other words, true to its cultural origin, ‘berserker’ – i.e., the one who goes into a berserk state – refers to a warrior out of control, one who goes into the battle as in a trance-like-state: see Speidel (2002).

⁵ Ch. Frazier’s *Cold Mountain* (1997) would constitute an exception to this comment. On the connection between Frazier’s novel and the *Odyssey*, see McDermott (2004); Vandiver (2004).

⁶ One immediately evident divergence from the Homeric model is the complete dismissal of the so-called *Telemachia*. Being supposedly the result of a selection from the original material, the lack of that important component of Homer’s Epic may be categorized as ‘refiguration’, if we are to apply Hardwick’s working vocabulary (for the definition of ‘refiguration’, see the *Appendix*).

³ For a concise overview of PTSD symptoms, see Shay (1994, p. xx).

those who did not, drug abuse, memory unconnected to the community, survivor guilt, the inability to recognize home and feel at home, etc. Once he analyzes these aspects, building on parallels between Odysseus and the experiences of the veterans, Shay proceeds to the next obvious steps, *Restoration* (Part Two) and *Prevention* (Part Three), which are much less concerned with Homer's poem, although we do find quotations from Classical authors.

Not only Homer. Notes on Tritle's reading of some historical events and personages of Classical Greece

Following Shay, Lawrence Tritle, a historian of Classical Antiquity at the Loyola University (CA) and a Vietnam veteran, has deepened the discourse about the psychological effects of war on Greek warriors and the echoes of those effects on modern soldiers. Besides several papers on the topic, Tritle is the author of two books where, to a different degree, he focuses on a dimension to which professional scholars tend to pay little, if any, attention: the darker sides of human conflict, the experience of the psychological stress of battle. Such an experience is not exclusive to modern wars; on the contrary, it can be identified already in the representation of war in ancient Greece. It can thus be labeled as universal. Tritle's two books are *From Melos to My Lai: War and Survival* (2000), and *A New History of the Peloponnesian War* (2010).

The first book, as the title may suggest, is meant to provide parallels between the representation of war in ancient Greece and the experiences of American soldiers in Vietnam and of their return home, with Melos and My Lai being among the central battles, respectively, of the Peloponnesian War and the Vietnam War. "The principal concern [...]", says Tritle in his 'Introduction',

[...] is [...] to show how societies sustain conflict and violence for prolonged periods, and how the experience of surviving that violence ripples through societies and cultures from one generation to the next (TRITLE, 2000, p. 4).

Indeed, Tritle is interested in accounting for the psychological effects of violence on soldiers who survive rather than in the historical events themselves. Bringing together his personal experiences as a survivor with his training as a classical historian, Tritle singles out the continuity of human nature and the shared experiences of soldiers throughout time, persuaded that survivors of war can "[...] enrich our understanding of events by establishing a living link between past and present" (TRITLE, 2000, p. 5). This brief synopsis is

enough to show that Tritle's one is evidently a personal reading of several historical events from classical Greece in light of more recent events in American history. Tritle's seems to be a strictly personal reception, informed, we may say, by a first-hand experience, which allows the author to draw *analogues* between past and present, by re-reading classical texts that represent the experience of war.

The second, more recent book, *A New History of the Peloponnesian War*, is a comprehensive overview of the war that sealed the decline of Athens, the war between the two major city-states of Classical Greece in the second half of the fifth century BC: Athens and Sparta. Tritle's is 'a new history' in that it provides a deep account of the social impact of the war by interweaving analysis of historical reports with the literary products of the time, in particular tragedies and comedies. As in the previous book, the author re-tells this history in light of his own personal experience as a soldier in Vietnam. Once again he focuses on the psychological effects of war on the common soldiers, including the PTSD suffered by many soldiers returning from war. It is above all through incorporating literary sources, such as Sophocles and Euripides, that Tritle highlights the neglected side of conflict, i.e., the human side, the human costs, "[...] the corrosive effect of violence and its impact on human society" (TRITLE, 2010, p. xxiii). The author introduces discussions of selected passages of tragedies and comedies, as each topic requires, and shows how they resonate with actions that were taking place during the war. In some way, Tritle expands an approach that has been applied with particular notoriety to Euripides' *Trojan Women*, a play – as I have already pointed out in the first part of this essay – on the consequences of war, both on the defeated and on the victors. Without arguing for any strict one-to-one correspondence between the events at Melos (416 BC) and Euripides' tragedy (415 BC), scholars tend, however, to postulate a connection between the two, so that the tragedy is seen as a commentary on current events. We may think that the relative scales of writing and production have here played some role. Euripides was almost certainly writing before Melos, but the spectators could have interpreted the play in the light of Melos' event, which preceded its actual performance. And, as Thucydides points out, Melos was paradigmatic for the Athenians' treatment of other states and their populations. In a similar vein, Tritle argues that the events occurring during the siege of Plataea (429-427 BC), with the Spartans showing little sympathy for their Plataean prisoners, provided the background of Euripides' *Andromache*. Tritle

therefore draws on parallels between the historical events and the play, which allows him to address his basic concern, that is, to demonstrate the strong impact of violence on human society. In terms of reception, we might say that we are almost in the presence of two layers of reception: Euripides' *Andromache* may be 'read' as a reception, through a mythic disguise, of contemporary events, while Tritle's analysis and reading as his own reception of Euripides' reception.

In the spirit of Shay: Theater of War and 'Cultural Therapy'

Bryan Doerries is a New York-based writer, translator, director, educator, and lover of the Classics. Building on Shay's theory that the Athenian tragic theater was "[...] a theater of combat veterans, by combat veterans, and for combat veterans [...]" (SHAY, 2002, p. 152), Doerries has created the *Theater of War*,

[...] a project that presents readings of ancient Greek plays to service members, veterans, caregivers and families as a catalyst for town hall discussions about the challenges faced by military communities today⁷.

Specifically it presents dramatized readings, performed by professional actors, of passages from Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. These two plays, in particular, are re-read as depictions of the psychological and physical wounds inflicted upon warriors by war. Doerries hopes that this re-adaptation of classical texts for military communities across the US would "[...] de-stigmatize psychological injury and open a safe space for dialogue about the challenges faced by service members, veterans, and their caregivers and families"⁸. Ancient Greek drama is basically viewed as a form of storytelling that serves as communal therapy and ritual reintegration for combat veterans by combat veterans, considering that Sophocles, among others, was himself a general. The initiative of the *Theater of War* exploits the thesis of A. Boal, *The Theater of the Oppressed* (1979), according to which it is through participation that change can take place. Indeed, it is by telling stories about the lives of others that – to paraphrase a thought of Martha C. Nussbaum – one learns to imagine what others might feel in response to various events, while at the same time identifying with the others, and, in this way, learning something about her/himself. And, as said, the *Theater of War* is

a participatory event. Each reading is followed by a panel discussion, consisting of a diverse group of community members, and by a town hall-style audience discussion. The panel includes an active duty soldier who has experienced at least one deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan, a veteran who has experienced at least one deployment, a spouse or other family member, and a mental health professional and/or a member of the military chaplaincy.

What this has to do with Classical Reception, if, as I would think, we can label it as such? In my eyes the entire project is based on some features characterizing what we call Classical Reception. To use the working vocabulary of Hardwick, what we can identify as the understructure of the *Theater of War* project is partially an 'appropriation' and, perhaps primarily, an 'equivalent': it takes ancient texts and uses them to sanction ideas that 'might' be subsequent – the ideas that those stories serve as communal therapy specifically for combat veterans (= partial 'appropriation')⁹. The project also fulfills an 'analogous' role in source and reception¹⁰, but not in 'identical' form (= 'equivalent'): the analogous role is both (1) to relieve people from tension through the cathartic process which grief (form: tragedy) and laughter (form: comedy) can set in motion, and (2) to prompt people to identify themselves with the characters, and thereby understand something more about themselves. All these operations pass first through Doerries' individual response to, and reception of, some classical texts.

From Shay to Tritle, from reception of Classics in the American response to war to reception of Classics in the teaching of undergraduate courses: some limits and pedagogical concerns.

There is no doubt that the kind of reading of Classical texts that Shay, Tritle and Doerries propose is very valuable, both for the target-audience (i.e., military personnel and relatives), and for the whole community, considering that one of

⁷ All the above quotations concerning the *Theater of War* are from the related website which I cited and described in Part I of this essay: see Lauriola (2014, p. 44 n. 36).

⁸ "What we're trying to do is create a safe place for people to talk about very difficult things [...]", said Doerries in a recent interview (see BENZEL, 2010).

⁹ Shay (2002, p. 153) argues that "[...] the Athenian tragic theater was one of combat veterans, by combat veterans, and for combat." I defined it as a 'partial appropriation' in that it does not take into account a few important things: (1) there might have been simple civilians attending the theater (supposedly, some who had been exempted from the military duty?), for whom, too, those plays would work in terms of communal therapy, considering the broader meaning that Shay seems to give to the connotation 'communal': it is not just a synonym for 'group'(-therapy); it rather refers to engaging the entire community. The main problem for veteran combats is re-integration into the community which, in turn, needs to be aware of the problems of those who come back from war, to be able to contribute to the 'communal therapy'; (2) more importantly, not all 'the Athenian tragic theater' is concerned with war (what, for instance, Euripides' *Hippolytus* has to do with the Peloponnesian War?); (3) although Shay talks of 'tragic theater', that great community event called 'theater' in classical Athens includes comedies too, whose purpose was also to raise awareness of the community's issues, including those related to war.

¹⁰ With regard to this, given that Doerries personally translated the passages he used for his project, it would be interesting to also consider the theory of the so called 'Thick Translation' by Appiah (1993) who, though not in a classical context, suggested that what a translation should seek to do is to matter to the new readers in a way analogous to how it mattered to the source readers.

the objectives is to raise awareness and sensitivity toward war-related issues¹¹. Shay and Doerries in particular have been claiming positive results, which should encourage them to continue on the same path. Shay, Tritle and Doerries all have in common one merit among others: they point out something that – I have to admit – we scholars tend to gloss over, that is, the darker dimensions of war itself. This happens either because our interests may shrink to our own narrow area of research, or because of a subconscious – if I may – desire to sanitize, in some way, topics that may cause uncomfortable feelings.

“War [...]”, said the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (B 53 D-K), “[...] is king of all and father of all; it has revealed some as gods, others as men, it has made some slaves, others free” (The translation is mine). It is a sad reality. Yet, with the most profound regret, I must say that it is a reality. At the same time, I see some delusional underpinnings in Heraclitus’ statement: does war really make some gods and others men, or some slaves and others free? Does not the cost, the human cost, level all those who are involved in a war, our army and our enemy, those who go to war and those who stay at home, those who die there and those who come back, the winners and the defeated? Paraphrasing Thucydides (3.82.2), the sufferings that conflict brings upon countries are many and terrible, “[...] such as have occurred and always will occur, as long as the nature of mankind remains the same”. These sufferings make the winners defeated as well, and the free slaves as well, if we look at the other side of war, at its darker dimensions. Bringing to light these darker dimensions, instead of covering them up, is, in my opinion, what the initiatives of Shay, Tritle and Doerries do in an unusual way, through literary analysis and performances, instead of through cold reports filled with statistics and diagrams which say little to the people involved, and cannot, certainly, help them.

These cases – we saw – can be considered as a form of Classical Reception. As such they raise concerns about the adequacy of being able both to satisfactorily communicate about the ancient world,

and to illuminate the point of the reception studies themselves. These more pedagogically-focused concerns apply in particular to the readings of Shay and Tritle¹².

I shall focus on a very few examples, just to give an idea of what kind of shortcomings can be found in these readings, from the perspective of a classicist’s rigorous analysis and with pedagogical concerns in mind¹³.

Shay’s declared awareness that he is not a Homerist, not even a Classicist, is in itself a sign that he does not mean to encroach on anybody else’s field, nor does he mean to wipe out the thousands of traditional readings that have been produced. He rather adds to existing readings, making Homer relevant today for some specific problems in American society. Nonetheless, although undoubtedly without any malicious intention to force the text in order to prove his arguments, Shay gives some misinformation which does not do justice to Homer’s poetry and the culture it mirrors. One example that to a classicist inevitably stands out is found in chapter 6 of the book *Achilles in Vietnam*, when Shay discusses the treatment of the enemy in the Vietnam era, when soldiers were trained to see the enemy as almost a demon, an ‘inhuman thing’ deserving to be killed. Comparing this with Homer, Shay states:

By contrast, the *Iliad* emphatically portrays the enemy as worthy of respect, even honor. For example, Agamemnon, the Greek commander in chief, speaks of ‘holy Ilion [Troy]’ ‘in the presence of his troops’ (4. 199ff). It’s hard to image General Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, speaking of ‘holy Hanoi’ under any circumstances at all (SHAY, 1994, p. 103)¹⁴.

Shay’s reason for drawing this contrast is twofold: (1) to point out, in a way, the dehumanizing of the enemy as a cultural habit “[...] powerfully engraved by Biblical scripture [...]” (SHAY, 1994, p. 111) and, as such, instilled in the American soldiers of the Vietnam era; and (2) to help veterans restore honor to the enemy, through Homer’s story, with this being an important step in recovery from combat PTSD.

¹¹ The same is true for the program of Prof. Meineck which I mentioned above in the abstract, and I already described in Part I of this essay (see LAURIOLA, 2014, p. 44 n. 36). With this said, following the suggestions of one of the anonymous referees of this paper – whom I take the chance to thank – I would like to emphasize again that, although changes in the perception concerning such a terrible experience as war have occurred from antiquity to our days, those changes do not matter as long as the objective which is behind the kind of reading and reception of the texts under discussion is successfully reached. As previously stated, and as it will become more apparent in this part of my work, although mainly from a didactic point of view, I too have had some reservations, such reservations that, however, cover the whole matter of reception of classics, as I am arguing throughout this work. That some distance and some differences between the Ancient and the Modern should be taken into account is an important issue.

¹² As it will become apparent in the discussion conducted above, I have some more concerns about Tritle’s first book (*From Melos to My Lai*), whose personal dimension is perfectly understandable but inevitably tends, at times, to vitiate the account. Tritle’s second book is far less influenced by personal acrimony and shows a wide range of knowledge within which connections between past and present are discussed more broadly than with a reference to the Vietnam era, which might sometimes be too narrow.

¹³ I shall try to focus on some shortcomings that have not been noted in the various reviews that Shay’s and Tritle’s works have so far received. The intention is, as stated above, only to explain concerns that a teacher of Classics can have in presenting those works of reception. The positive outcome that Shay’s and Tritle’s work may have on their specific addressees, i.e., veteran combats, is not in doubt, nor is appreciated any less by the author of this paper.

¹⁴ It should be noted that Shay admittedly relies on the 1974 translation of the *Iliad* by R. Fitzgerald. Where I quote from Homer, as stated above through the text, I gave my own translation.

While I agree with, and would support, the positive effects that such a comparison can have, I cannot but observe that it relies on some misreading of Homer, or at least on a too-subjective reception of Homeric ways of saying things, and of some traits that are specific to ancient culture, which shows the difficulty in keeping the right balance between past and present. The phrase 'holy Ilion' that Shay singled out to demonstrate the respect and honor Homer's warriors reserved for the enemy is what Homerists and Classicists call a 'formula'. According to the definition given by the American scholar M. Parry, who first elaborated the theory, a formula is a "[...] fixed group of words that occur in the same metrical condition to express an essential idea [...]" (PARRY, 1930, p. 80). It is, in other words, a stylistic device used to build lines in such a way as to enable them to reproduce a specific rhythm, which is in turn obtained through the arrangement of fixed group of words always in a precise position within the line, i.e., always at the beginning, or in the middle, or in the end. The essential idea the formula conveys refers to an objective cultural perception of characters, events, places and things rather than to a subjective one. Ilion, in other words, is not holy because Agamemnon acknowledged it as such, thus showing respect toward his enemy in front of his troops (to expand the argument of Shay). Ilion is 'holy' in that it is 'under the divine protection'¹⁵ almost 'by birth', we may say. Indeed, the adjective may refer back to the moment of its foundation, when Ilios, the city's founder, asked and received from Zeus a favorable sign. This sign was the statue Palladium, which Zeus dropped from heaven, and whose prerogative was to make the newly born city indestructible¹⁶. It was the Palladium that made Troy 'holy', whereas Shay erroneously argues that the place was "[...] made holy by worship of the same gods [...]" (SHAY, 1994, p. 106).

Shay is partially correct in citing the episode of Glaucos and Diomedes in *Iliad* 6 as an example of respect toward the enemy¹⁷, but he misses all the

cases in which Trojans warriors even begged for their life in vain. The Greeks kill them, almost without any pity. An example is in *Iliad* 6. 37-65, where Menelaus captured alive a valiant Trojan warrior, Adrastus, who, "[...] grabbing him by knees, supplicated [...]" to take him alive and accept a ransom (l. 45: the translation is mine). Yet, under the influence of his brother Agamemnon (i.e., the one who called 'holy' Ilion out of respect for the enemies, according to Shay), Menelaus did not respect his enemy's prayer and let Agamemnon stab him. It was not just Achilles, as Shay seems to argue, who, losing respect for the enemy, was behaving "[...] abnormally and unnaturally for his culture [...]" (SHAY, 1994, p. 106-107). Although there is a respect for the enemy that we barely can find in other times, it was not the rule. Indeed, even Hector, at least once, acted dishonorably against the enemy:

But Hector, after he had stripped the glorious armors from Patroclus, dragged at him, intending to cut his head from his shoulders with the keen-edged bronze, to haul off the body and leave it to the dogs of Troy [...] (HOMER, *Iliad* 17.125-127: the translation is mine)¹⁸.

The shortcomings that we find in the other book of Shay, i.e., *Odysseus in America*, are similar. Here Shay takes the *Odyssey* as an allegory of real homecomings from war; the problem is that sometimes he seems to impose his metaphors on the text (ROTH, 2003). A good example of this is Shay's treatment of Odysseus' stop in the land of the Lotus-Eaters. The danger they represented pertains to their food, the lotus, a plant able to induce amnesia: those who ate of it would forget the way home – as the poet Homer tells in his *Odyssey* (9. 91-97). Although I might agree that in terms of metaphor/allegory the episode suggests "[...] the path of destruction taken by a horrifyingly large number of Vietnam veterans [...]" through their "[...] chemical attempts to forget with alcohol or drugs [...]" (SHAY, 2002, p. 36-37), I feel, at the same time, that there is a difference: the abuse of alcohol or drugs was what induced forgetfulness in the veterans mostly when at home, while simply tasting the lotus induced amnesia in Odysseus' men on their way home. Furthermore, Homer does not talk of abuse, as Shay's comment would imply:

We shall never know if Homer had some particular narcotic plant in mind, and if so what plant this *lotus* was, but the description is clear enough: you get into

¹⁵ Indeed, the Greek adjective translated as 'holy' literally means "filled with divine power, under the divine protection" (LSJ 1968) and "dedicated to a god" (BEEKES, 2010, I, p. 580).

¹⁶ See Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, III 12.3; *Epitome* 5. 10. Indeed after the prophecy of the seer Helenus, Odysseus sneaked into the city to steal the statue (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, Ep. 5.13: SCARPI; CIANI, 2001, p. 364-365).

¹⁷ Shay's discussion of this passage is partially correct for the following reason: it was typical of the warriors to introduce themselves by asking each other their own genealogy, since 'to be the son of X or Y' was as to state one's own identity, to have input in acting in a way that would not bring dishonor and disgrace on their fathers, and to learn with whom one was about to deal. More than a form of respect, it was a norm. As to the episode of Diomedes and Glaucos, Diomedes' question about his enemy's genealogy is additionally prompted by the fear of committing *hybris*, should Glaucos be a god in disguise and not a warrior. Shay says that this circumstance should not weaken the force of his example (SHAY, 1994, p. 108). Indeed, it does: avoiding *hybris* was one of the driving forces of action in ancient times, far more than respecting the enemy. Furthermore, still in the case of Diomedes, what else prompts to respect his enemy is the bound of *xenia* that he discovers existed with one another, through the genealogical 'report' given by Glaucos.

¹⁸ Another example that contradicts Shay's argument is the disrespectful treatment that Achilles' son, Neoptolemus-Pyrrhus, reserved for the old king of Troy, Priam, as vividly narrated by the Roman poet Virgil (cf. *Aeneid* 2. 506-550).

lotus abuse and you lose your homecoming. Forget your pain - forget your homecoming! (SHAY, 2002, p. 36).

As for Tritle, as hinted at above, he has been approaching the topic as an historian of ancient Greece and as a Vietnam veteran. Focusing on the field of comparative war and violence, expanding – as he himself states – “Shay’s initial investigation by including a much wider body of Greek sources that also reflect on the experience of violence, culture and survival [...]” (TRITLE, 2000, p. XIII), Tritle has investigated the effects of war on the individuals who fight, and the wider impact of violence on culture and society. Indeed, Tritle uses a large *corpus* of ancient texts, which amplifies the risk of falling into shortcomings. For a traditional classicist, it is questionable to adapt a translation “[...] when it seemed to clarify the sense or aid in making [one’s] point” (TRITLE, 2000, p. XV). While the first option is usually accepted, the second one is usually seen as ‘forcing the text to tell what we want it to tell’. Yet, it fits, in some way, the concept of ‘version’ we find in the working vocabulary for reception studies elaborated by Hardwick¹⁹. And, if this kind of adaptation is questionable for a traditional classicist, but acceptable for a scholar of Classical Reception, to isolate a passage to be used to demonstrate a point is an arbitrary operation for both. Here is a simple example: while explaining the secretion of adrenaline that produces the ‘fight or flight’ response when a body is threatened with violence, Tritle states that the ancient Greeks recognize its mechanism although they were unable to fully understand it. I would say this might be possible. But the evidence he brings up is questionable. It is a passage from Euripides’ *Bacchae* (ll. 436–439), where a guard brings the god Dionysus before the king Pentheus. The guard tells how Dionysus, intentionally disguised as a stranger, almost surrendered himself on the occasion of his arrest: he refused to run or hide; he held out his hands, completely unafraid; his cheeks were flushed as though with wine; and he stood there smiling. In this way, then, Tritle comments on the passage:

Dionysus’ refusal to run or hide (he is a god overall and moreover to do so would not develop the drama) should not obscure Euripides’ realization that in times of stress the body went through certain physiological changes. While the causes of these would have been beyond his knowledge and that of his contemporaries, physical changes in the body would be the sort of thing that many would have noticed (TRITLE, 2000, p. 8).

It might be possible that Euripides and his contemporaries were able to notice (and thus describe) physical changes in response to stress (such as the flushed cheeks); yet, at least two shortcomings jeopardize Tritle’s thesis, showing that he sometimes not only does ‘force’ a translation, but tends also to isolate passages from their context, and over-impose on them the interpretation that most fits his point: (1) Why did he choose a passage that by contrast (‘should not obscure’) would demonstrate his point? (2) Indeed, the reaction of Dionysus is functional to the development of the drama: he had to react in that way. This reaction has thus little, if anything, to do with recognizing the occurrence of physical changes in the case of stress.

Similarly questionable is Tritle’s treatment of the figure of Ajax, as portrayed in Sophocles’ play (TRITLE, 2000, esp., p. 74–76). Tritle’s argument about the hero’s perception of betrayal as corresponding “[...] with the diagnosis of PTSD, particularly that aspect of it that focuses on the destruction of the capacity for social trust [...]” (TRITLE, 2000, p. 74), is consistent with Shay’s analysis and with some of the motivations that are behind the initiative of Doerries, as described above. Similarly consistent is Tritle’s remark on the suicide of Ajax, that it “[...] could be set beside the real-life suicides of many Vietnam veterans, who finally took their own lives, convinced that everyone had abandoned them” (TRITLE, 2000, p. 74). Assuming Tritle’s perspective, I may agree on this. But, rethinking about it through the lenses of a more traditionally rigorous classicist, I should note that (1) the comparison that Tritle then establishes between the case of Ajax, as “[...] a literary creation of the playwright’s experiential world, [...]” and the case of “[...] real life Ajaxes, men who were driven to suicide as a result of battle-induced trauma, [...]” (TRITLE, 2000, p. 75) and (2) the example that he quotes to support this comparison, seem a bit forced. The example pertains to the case of two Spartans, Aristodemus and Pantites, who survived the battle of Thermopylae in the Persian War (480 B.C.), although – as Tritle specified – “[...] not for long as they both took their own lives” (TRITLE, 2000, p. 75). Tritle argues that they both are evidence of violence-induced trauma which can only be resolved in suicide. They would represent the perspective of “[...] the folks at home who were left to live with the trauma of nearly three hundred of their men not returning to them” (TRITLE, 2000, p. 75–76). Relying on the account of Herodotus for this specific episode, Tritle complains that the Greek writer has left out the trauma and the sense of guilt that those two warriors felt for having

¹⁹ See the *Appendix*. Version is described as ‘a refiguration of a source (usually literary or dramatic) which is too free and selective to rank as a translation.’

survived the deaths of their friends. Herodotus insists on the sense of honor and shame. Indeed, this is what we find in the report of the historian Herodotus (7. 229-232): Aristodemus and Pantites are both mentioned as the only ones that survived at the Thermopylae, but more space is devoted to Aristodemus. Affected by *ophthalmia*, he had been dismissed by Leonidas from the camp. Together with another of the three hundred, i.e., Eurytus, sick of the same eye-disease and equally dismissed by Leonidas, Aristodemus had a choice: to come home safely or to die with the others. The problem, according to Herodotus' account, was that, although they had been given the same options, Aristodemus and Eurytus could not agree on with each other, and had different intentions. The result was that, in one way or another²⁰, Eurytus died bravely fighting, Aristodemus came safely home. Had both chose to come safely home, the Spartans – according to Herodotus – would have not had anybody to blame. But since one of them died, and the other, though having the same excuse, was unwilling to die, the Spartans had no choice but be angry towards Aristodemus. Indeed, he was disgraced, deprived of honor (*atimia*), and called 'Aristodemus the coward'. But – Herodotus adds – in the battle at Plataea Aristodemus made up for all blame brought against him. There he was first in valor (Herodotus 9.71); he fell in doing away his disgrace by the wildest feats of valor. The Spartans removed, in fact, his *atimia*. Far shorter is Herodotus' reference to Pantites. He survived because he was sent as messenger to Thessaly and did not (or did not want to [?]) make it on time to fight at the Thermopylae. Upon his return to Sparta, he was dishonored and he hanged himself. Whether it was a suicidal bravery (as in the case of Aristodemus) or a conscious act of taking away one's own life (as in the case of Pantites), the honor was the driving force of action. It was for removing the stain of dishonor that they eventually took their own life.

Herodotus' report is perfectly in line with some basic characteristics of ancient society, which was a shame-oriented rather than a guilt-oriented one. In such a society, suicide is preferable to living in disgrace, and it is almost the only way to retrieve one's own lost honor²¹. It is for this reason that Ajax,

in the end, committed suicide²². Modern soldiers may well be able to relate to those figures through their own experience of combat trauma, which involves such a deep sense of guilt in survivors that, as Shay remarks, it may lead to self-destruction. Again, assuming this specific perspective, I can see the things in this same way. However, I cannot but note that 'this way' to see the things would be the response of some modern readers, such as Shay and Tritle. Therefore, I feel some uneasiness about ascribing to Herodotus, the ancient author, a wrong interpretation of the motivations of the two warriors' suicide, since it does not fit Tritle's comparison perfectly. Twice, indeed, Tritle insists that his own interpretation is correct, while what Herodotus has actually understood and reported, is not. I think that we are not entitled to go this far: we may read ancient texts differently from the way in which they were conceived and read, and differently from one another; but we cannot and should not say that ours is 'the' reading and that the ancient authors were wrong.

As Tritle's reading shows, reception may imply such an internalization of themes that they might be re-proposed as symbols or metaphors of the individual experience of the 'receiver' rather than of a universalized or collective experience. With this realization in mind, once again, I see the degree of subjectivity as an issue, above all when, or if, 'that subjectivity' is then proposed as something universal and collective. This is the impression that, at times, Tritle's analysis gives to the reader. And, it is worth noting, at this point, that the acceptance and the teaching of certain kinds of reception of the Classics do not simply involve pedagogical concerns. I feel that there might be also an ethical component at stake.

Final considerations

When we attempt to evaluate Classical Reception studies in terms of subjectivity, we tend to end up in a vicious circle or an aporia. Undoubtedly, not all reception-works are as hard to evaluate as the ones I have been considering. Certainly, in all of them there is something useful to take, something worth considering and developing further. And, certainly what to take, how to develop it, and how to evaluate it, may depend on some basic questions that are at the root of Classical Reception Studies: what is that makes a reception of an ancient text valuable? Is it

²⁰ Herodotus reports two versions: (1) Eurytus asked his armor and put it on, bidding his helot to lead him to the fighting. The helot led him there but then fled, while Eurytus rushed into the fray and was killed. Aristodemus, however, losing his strength stayed behind, and by this excuse came safely home. (2) Both, Aristodemus and Eurytus, were sent out of the camp as messenger and both could make it on time to participate in the battle. But, while Eurytus did so, Aristodemus chose not to, stayed behind and thus survived.

²¹ See Cairns (1993), for a comprehensive discussion of such important ethical concepts as honor and shame in ancient Greek Literature. See, also, Williams, 1993.

²² It is not by chance that Ajax has been labeled as the most 'Iliadic' of the Greek tragedies: as for Homer's heroes so for Ajax prowess in battle, with the honor and glory gained therein, is what most matters and what fulfills the collectivity's expectations, which Ajax failed (see also ZANKER, 1992). On Ajax' suicide, see Garrison (1995, p. 46-52); Belfiore (2000, p. 100-116); Lawrence (2005).

the light it can shed on its own time and context? Or on the way it refocuses attention on the ancient text and culture? Or is it the chance to better understand, and relate to, the present through interpretations of the past, and vice versa? Or is it a combination of all of this? And still, the subjectivity issue seems to re-surface: who decides what is important and how it is to be understood? And as to some pedagogical concerns, one of the biggest problems, in my opinion, is how to give students, within a maybe one available course of Classical Reception, an appropriate knowledge of the ancient culture as it was, on which they can then build a critical knowledge of what that culture has become in terms of reception, without falling into crude presentism, unfairly erasing any difference between past and present, and without indulging in a 'mere subjectivity'.

Despite some reservations which I discussed above, where what the ancient text says is 'adapted' to say something that relates to the present, and where this does not happen by the arbitrary substitution of ancient thoughts and contexts with modern guesses, I think it is worth pursuing reception studies and teaching Classics in light of this approach, too.

As to the works related to war and their very peculiar re-adaptation to 21st century US culture, I had no problems in understanding the activity of some directors, such as Peter Sellars, who, as it happened in other parts of the world, re-used *ad hoc* some ancient plays to address issues of American contemporary society, *via* references to contemporary events. It is something almost expected. In the end, modern people are repeating what the Ancients did above all in 5th century Athens: besides Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, whose plays – as we saw above – sometimes resonated with the current socio-political issues, there was also Aristophanes, whose comedies almost always called the people's attention to problematic, contemporary events. The difference with the case of Peter Sellars – to keep using him as example – is that he has not created *ex novo* a play that would denounce the Iraq war and related issues, as Aristophanes did, for instance, with reference to the Peloponnesian War. Certainly it remains impressive the fact that Peter Sellars, as others, turned to the Classics. But what most impressed me has been Shay's and Tritle's usage of the Classics, along with Doerries' initiatives, that is, the usage of classical texts both to address specific war-related issues of a specific segment of American population (i.e., combat soldiers and combat veterans), and to try to help that segment of American population in dealing

with their issues. In my case, it has been like a revelation, a disclosure of something in American society and culture which I have not previously realized, but which is, obviously, completely familiar to someone born into American culture: how 'present' the reality of war is, and how sometimes this reality is taken for granted in the US, if I may express my impression. Differently from what happens in my country, Italy, and, I would suppose, in other European countries, in American university campuses it is very common to see students in uniform since they are enrolled in the armed forces, and are contemporaneously students and soldiers in training. Indeed the military represents a large portion of the overall student-population²³. But, it is less common to see, or better, to realize also the presence of those who fulfilled their military duty and are back in school: the veterans. Both soldiers in training and veterans embody two different sides of the same reality, which is war. The veterans, however, often represent what one does not want to know about war, despite the more or less general acquiescence toward it. They are the ones who inevitably need some more attention, which is not always given to them. Certainly this happens not because society does not care; it is often because society does not know how to deal with them. Yet, they just ask to be listened to, to be understood, the way one who has been fortunate enough not to experience war can understand. To me the works of Shay, Tritle, and Doerries mirror this specific reality of war in the American culture²⁴; those works are born exactly because of this reality. There is a realization that those who serve their country in war, once back, need help; there is a realization that the trauma of war is such that a therapy based mostly on psychopharmacological medicines does not always work or is not enough; there is an effort to reach out to these persons, even by trying what, with Shay, we can call 'cultural therapy'. To me this kind of reception of classical texts, specifically directed to

²³ In the US to encourage the recruitment, military corps offer scholarships for College. Such is, for instance, the method of the ROTC, i.e., Reserve Officer Training Corps. In exchange of the expenses necessary to achieve the College degree, the young people that apply to ROTC may receive a scholarship. They thus contemporaneously attend College and take the Officer training, under the condition to then serve, be deployed, at least for two years after College. For this reason, it is very common to see a lot of students in uniform on the US University campuses, which is something that struck the author of this paper and, supposedly, more generally, would be a surprise for non-US citizens. Additionally, education of military personnel, after deployment, is also supported through the so called The Post 9/11 GI Bill. It provides financial support for education and housing to those who have served for at least 90 days on or after September 11, 2001. It thus mostly aims at guaranteeing educational entitlement of veterans. Useful information can be found on the website of the US Department of Veterans Affairs at <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>

²⁴ With reference to this, among other things, it might be interesting to observe the peculiar cover illustration of the translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* by P. Meineck (1998): the picture evokes US victorious military parades upon a return from war, a further evidence, I would think, of this peculiar 'appropriation' and cultural assimilation (or, 'acculturation') of ancient Greek literature pertaining to war and its aftermath.

veterans in the hope of helping them face their issues, is an extreme and, at the same time, admirable response to the need of American culture to approach, in any way it can, such a crucial issue of its own society.

I could partially verify these feelings of mine, or my own reception of the American reception of classical texts like that of Shay, Tritle, and Doerries, through an assignment I gave as a final test to one of my classes, *Special Topics in Classical Civilization*, in spring 2011. Among the topics that students could choose, there was one related to Shay's book *Odysseus in America*. I assigned a specific chapter to read, along with the Introduction and some explanations of mine²⁵, to build a critical essay. Two chose this theme²⁶, and one of them particularly impressed me with his description of how he had considered beneficial that kind of re-use of Classics, as a student who grew up in a military family and has several friends currently serving in the armed forces. This student has involved those friends in a discussion on Shay's chapter and has used their remarks in his essay, remarks that confirm the basic assumption of Shay's re-use of Classics, as well as that of Tritle and Doerries.

It is from listening to him [one of his friends] and other veterans that makes me feel that Shay's work is beneficial. Because compassion and understanding are so important to veterans' healing process, an example of ancient soldiers suffering from the same grief, numbness, and guilt for surviving where so many others have died, lets them know that they are not alone in their plight, nor are they at fault for their emotional responses²⁷. (SEAN FOSTER, Final Essay on *Special Topics in Classical civilization*, 2011)

It is evident, in my opinion, that this re-use of the Classics is a response to a specific problem in American society aroused by the war, that of the veterans and their need, which is maybe not always

considered, of being listened to, of being helped in their re-integration into civilian life after what they have experienced in war. It is exactly this problem that Shay and the others are trying to address by drawing parallels between ancient and modern times, telling stories that may prompt a specific audience, the veterans, to speak out about their issues, to cry out in their need to be listened to, and to be understood.

Although I find myself in the strange predicament of not being able to answer for all the concerns I have mentioned throughout this essay, I feel safe to say that in such a rapidly globalizing world, where understanding cultural attitudes that are 'other' than ours is crucial, Classics may provide both a bridge between the Ancients and the Moderns, and – on the ground of those Ancients – a key for accessing other cultures (SETTIS, 2006). Each work of reception seems to demonstrate this, exactly. As long as proper precautions are taken, accepting the Classics, as Shay and others are doing, to shed light on the problems of modern society, and to use modern conditions to enliven the Classics, is always worthwhile if one also considers the final result from a 'human' and social perspective. As last 'evidence', I would like to cite Prof. Meineck's report about the effects that the *Philoctetes Project* had on an audience of veterans, which leaves large room for further questions, and for rethinking the importance and the impact that the reception of the classics may have at different degrees, in different situations and contexts, with different readers / audience, today.

As Meineck reported, at the end of one of those public reading-events organized within that project, a young Marine sergeant got up and asked to speak. Under the intense effect of the reading of the classical passages that were proposed that evening, this sergeant felt so safe and understood that he asked to read a poem he had written about his feelings when he returned from a recent tour of Iraq, and that he had never read to anyone. Here is the poem:

This land is my home no more,
My home now is the land I was fighting for.
So I want to go back, where it is all just black and white,
I want to get away from all this strife.
Here in this land, all seems gray,
Sadly it fills me with dismay.
I want to go back where life was simple and free.
I want to go back where I can be me.
I want to not feel alone, so I want to go back,
I want to go back home. Home to Iraq.

(quoted from MEINECK, 2009, p. 190).

²⁵ I briefly introduced Classical Reception Studies to enable my students to choose, if they liked, related themes. This has been a kind of pilot-experiment, if I can say so, in order for me to see how receptive students would be to such an approach, and how to integrate it in a single course without renouncing to also properly explain classical culture as it was in the time and society in which it was produced, i.e., from an *historicism* point of view.

²⁶ Interestingly, as a confirmation that reception may have a specific 'national' connotation, all the other students who chose to face a Classical Reception-related theme expressed preference for the Hollywood adaptation of Odysseus' journey in the Cohen Brothers' movie *O Brother, where Art Thou?* (2000) vs. Pasolini's *Edipo Re*, an Italian cinematic adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy, available with English subtitles. Evidently, students felt to be able to understand, and to relate to, a reception of a classical text produced by their cinematic culture rather than that produced by a foreigner country. It also confirms how reception, and the preference for a specific reception, is linked to the personal and cultural experience of the receiver.

²⁷ The student Sean Foster agreed to being mentioned and I take here the chance to thank him for letting me use part of his reflection. Encouraged by the results of this class assignment, in the Fall 2011, I then organized an event similar to those characterizing the *Philoctetes Project: Classics meets with Veterans. Reading, discussing, sharing stories* (University of Idaho, November 8, 2011. On this event, see LAURIOLA, 2013, p. 386-389) and I was fortunate enough to personally experience the same positive response from the community (both veterans and civilians), which has been given to the initiatives of Doerries and Meineck.

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APPENDIX

Towards a working vocabulary for reception studies (HARDWICK, 2003, p. 9-10)	
Acculturation	- assimilation into a cultural context (through nurturing 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