

ANNEMARIE AMBÜHL, Preface, in: Annemarie Ambühl (ed.), *Krieg der Sinne – Die Sinne im Krieg. Kriegsdarstellungen im Spannungsfeld zwischen antiker und moderner Kultur / War of the Senses – The Senses in War. Interactions and tensions between representations of war in classical and modern culture = thersites 4* (2016), i-xxiv.

KEYWORDS

Was and violence; senses and sensory perceptions; emotions; classical scholarship; classical reception studies

ABSTRACT (English)

The editor's preface contextualizes the main topics of the present special issue of *thersites* within classical scholarship and classical reception studies. After a brief overview of recent approaches to the representations of war and violence in the ancient world and their impact on contemporary culture, ongoing research on the role of the senses or sensory perceptions and the emotions in classical literature and culture is critically reviewed especially in connection with war, an issue which has garnered relatively little attention in this field to date. Finally, a preview of the papers contained in the volume outlines various cross-connections and identifies some shared topics and methodological approaches that might also suggest new directions for future research.

ABSTRACT (German)

Das Vorwort der Herausgeberin verortet die Schwerpunkte des vorliegenden Themenheftes von *thersites* im Kontext der Klassischen Philologie und weiteren Altertumswissenschaften und der Forschung zur Antikerezeption. Nach einem kurzen Überblick über neuere Forschungsansätze zu antiken Kriegs- und Gewaltdarstellungen und deren Resonanzen in der Gegenwart wird insbesondere die aktuelle Forschung zur Rolle der Sinne bzw. Sinneswahrnehmungen und Emotionen in der antiken Literatur und Kultur kritisch evaluiert, die bisher noch kaum in einen direkten Bezug zu den Kriegsdarstellungen gesetzt worden ist. Schließlich zeigt eine Vorschau auf den Inhalt des Bandes verschiedene mögliche Querverbindungen zwischen den einzelnen Beiträgen sowie gemeinsame Themen, Fragestellungen und Methoden auf, die auch der künftigen Forschung neue Impulse geben können.



Preface

Annemarie Ambühl (Mainz)

I. Ancient and modern responses to war and violence

“And all the beautiful words of the poets, Cornelius, can say nothing, I swear to you, of the fifty thousand ways to die like a dog, within a few hours.”

Boubacar Boris Diop, *Murambi: The Book of Bones* (translated by Fiona Mc Laughlin, Bloomington 2006)¹

How does one write a war or narrate a battle?² What words or images can depict horrible acts of violence committed against enemies or even against fellow-citizens and family members? Who will believe that such things ever happened if they did not see them with their own eyes?

War has again become an omnipresent phenomenon, and sadly not just in the academic world. In view of the ongoing violence and its huge impact on individual human beings and society as a whole, the question arises as to how such experiences can be processed and reworked in different cultural contexts. On the one hand, the traumatic experience of war and violence tends to silence victims and perpetrators alike. On the other hand, it provokes an urge to speak,

1 The quote is derived from [the contribution by Mark Thorne](#), who discusses Diop’s novel on the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (the original French version was published in 2000).

2 For comparative approaches to war writing see, e.g., the collection of essays ‘*Krieg und Kultur*’ (Feichtinger/Seng [2007]) and the studies by Christa Karpenstein-Eßbach (2011) on the ‘New Wars’ in literature and by Kate McLoughlin (2011) on the literary representation of war from the *Iliad* to Iraq; cf. the combination of thematic and chronological approaches in McLoughlin (2009), where ‘classical war literature’ (Pitcher [2009]) figures among ‘influences’. The volume ‘*War in Words: Transformations of War from Antiquity to Clausewitz*’ (Formisano/Böhme [2011]) looks specifically at the role played by the ancient discourse of war in the history of the ‘science of war’.

Annemarie Ambühl

to give expression to the unspeakable and transform it into art. Eyewitnesses and their first listeners, as well as later artists and audiences, come to form a community of authors and readers or spectators that perpetuates the memory. These two conflicting tendencies – the impulse to look away from the horror and the need to witness it, even if only from a ‘safe’ distance – may partly explain the lasting fascination that representations of war and violence have exerted from antiquity to the present day.

By focusing primarily on artistic responses to war and violence in various media, the present volume seeks to establish a common ground for such a comparative study. To what extent do modern war narratives still use patterns deriving from a ‘tradition’ (or rather from variously composed and individually selected bodies of transmitted texts and other documents) that reaches back to the classical world? One shared element seems to be the search for a sense of ‘authenticity’, the urge to relive the experience of ‘what it felt like’, through listening to war narratives or in an even more tangible way through visiting battlefields or reenacting ancient battles in computer games.³ Artistic expressions respond to this desire by engaging their audiences through the vivid depiction of sensory impressions or emotions experienced by the fictional characters. Therefore many of the contributions will highlight the role of the senses and emotions in classical and modern representations of war in literature and other media.

In comparing and contrasting ancient and modern responses to war and violence, of course the vast gulf that separates us from classical antiquity has to be taken into account. In the face of the technological incommensurability of ancient and modern warfare, can ancient and modern experiences really be studied side by side? Or is this rupture compensated for by basic human responses to the experience of war that have not changed significantly over time? In other words, when discovering similarities between ancient and modern representations of war, are we dealing with phenomena of reception or with

3 I owe the phrase ‘What it felt like’ to the title of [Anke Walter’s contribution](#), who in turn borrows it from Kevin Powers, the author of a 2012 novel on the Iraq War. On battlefield tourism see the beginning of [the article by Marian Makins](#); on ancient battles in computer games, [the article by Christian Rollinger](#).

Preface

typological parallels and ‘anthropological constants’ (for a more extensive discussion of this issue see section IV below)? For the present purpose, it seems sensible to apply an open definition that includes all kinds of constructions or manipulations of the past that shape our experience of the present and transform our views of the classical texts.⁴ In this broad sense, the field of reception studies is in no way constrained to direct responses to classical works or to the perspective of classical scholars on contemporary wars, but can include any reflections of modern wars from the American Civil War and the First World War to the ongoing wars of the 21st century and their interactions and tensions with wars from various historical and cultural contexts of the ancient world.⁵

II. The senses and emotions of war in contemporary scholarship

Here is not the place for an extensive overview of scholarship on ancient war, let alone of research on war and violence in general.⁶ For instance, in connection

4 For a recent manifesto of classical reception studies in such a broad sense see Butler (2016: ‘*Deep Classics*’). Cf. also the editors’ preface to the first issue of *thersites* (Walde/Stoffel [2015]: <http://www.thersites.uni-mainz.de/index.php/thr/article/view/13/12>).

5 Cf. the conference ‘*Classics and Classicists in the First World War*’ (Leeds, April 8–10, 2014). For some meditations by classical scholars on the war in Iraq (in direct or indirect form) see Scodel (2008) and Thomas (2015). Leezenberg (2007) warns against anachronistic political actualizations of classical texts (which of course need not necessarily be pacifist or liberal but can also be used for conservative or reactionary ends); cf. also Bakogianni (2015) 1f. The readings of classical war narratives by scholars such as Jonathan Shay, Lawrence A. Tritle, Peter Meineck, and Alfred S. Bradford are colored by their own experiences as war veterans or their professional work with veterans (see nn. 25 and 26 below). For a critical survey of these American approaches from a European perspective see Lauriola (2014); cf. also the trenchant thoughts by Silke-Maria Weineck (2016) on the inevitable distance between us as academic scholars and the experience of war as well as possible ways to bridge the gap (Epilogue to Caston/Weineck [2016]; on this volume see below at the end of section II).

6 As the present volume focuses mainly on violence in the context of war, I note here only a few select studies on acts of violence perpetrated in other contexts of the ancient world as well as their representations in various media (van Wees [2000]; Nauroy [2004]; Bertrand [2005]; Fischer/Moraw [2005]; Rohmann [2006]; Seidensticker/Vöhler [2006]; Muth [2008];

with the centenary of the First World War, a wealth of recent publications study the huge impact of this ‘first modern war’ both as a catastrophe and as a catalyst for revolutionary innovations in politics, society, culture, and aesthetics.⁷ Such an approach might also prove fruitful with regard to the Roman civil wars that not only brought forth a political and cultural revolution but also had a crucial impact on the literary production of the age.⁸ In the following I give a brief and highly selective account of how the perspectives adopted in the present volume relate to contemporary classical studies and reception studies.

In recent years, classical scholarship has responded to the cultural turn in the humanities by contextualizing war and violence in the ancient world, from military history, battlefield archeology, and attempts to reconstruct the ‘face of battle’-experiences of ancient soldiers (after John Keegan’s seminal 1976 study; a challenge due to the nature of the sources) to narratological and aesthetic analyses of battle descriptions or aftermath narratives in Greek and Roman literature.⁹ Among such approaches, especially interesting are those that bring together methods from different fields, e.g. the application of trauma theory to the interpretation of descriptions of war and violence in classical literature and of the various forms of commemoration of war in ancient cultures,¹⁰ or the

Zimmermann [2009; 2013]; Andò/Cusumano [2010]; Andò [2013]; Wessels [2014]; Riess/Fagan [2016]).

- 7 See [the contribution by Manuel Mackasare](#) for a selection of recent titles. For the lasting impact of World War I cf., e.g., Winter (1995; 2006) and Seybert/Stauder (2014).
- 8 Cf. Habinek/Schiesaro (1997) on the ‘Roman cultural revolution’ in the times of the civil wars. On literary reflections of the Roman civil wars see, e.g., Jal (1963), Molyneux (1993), Gurval (1995), and Breed/Damon/Rossi (2010). On civil war in antiquity generally see Börm/Mattheis/Wienand (2016).
- 9 A variety of recent approaches can be found in ‘*The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*’ (Sabin/van Wees/Whitby [2007]) and in ‘*The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World*’ (Campbell/Trittle [2013]); cf. also Chaniotis (2005), Dillon/Welch (2006), and Bragg/Hau/Macaulay-Lewis (2008). On the cultural history of ancient battles cf. Günther (2014) and on the ‘face of battle’ Sabin (2000) and Kagan (2007). On the poetics of Greek and Latin war narratives see, e.g., Glei (1991), Ash (2002), Rossi (2004), Gibson (2008), and Ambühl (2015).
- 10 For a review of relevant bibliography on trauma I refer to [the article by Mark Thorne](#); cf. also [the article by Anke Walter](#) and above n. 5 and below nn. 26 and 33. On the

Preface

reimagination of ancient battlefields from the perspective of landscape and memory studies.¹¹ Research in the field of gender studies, too, has to some extent broadened the horizon with respect to the roles of women in ancient war, who figure not only as passive victims but also as active participants.¹² Still, brutal acts of violence committed by women provoke conflicting reactions in both ancient literary texts and modern scholarship.¹³

Despite the ‘affective turn’ that has also found broad resonance in classical studies, the role of the emotions in experiencing ancient war is still a somewhat marginalized topic.¹⁴ Likewise, notwithstanding recent attempts at writing a cultural history of the senses from antiquity to the present, the role of the senses and of sensory perceptions in ancient war has gone largely unnoticed.¹⁵ Whereas

commemoration of war from a comparative perspective see Low/Oliver/Rhodes (2013). Cf. Clark (2014) on how the Romans dealt with military defeat during the Republic.

- 11 For relevant literature see [the article by Marian Makins](#) (and Makins [2013]). Cf. also the contributions on battlefields in Riess/Fagan (2016) and the section on battlefields and memory of war in McNerney/Sluiter (2016), comprising chapters by Elizabeth Minchin, Bettina Reitz-Joosse, and myself.
- 12 Cf., e.g., ‘*Women and War in Antiquity*’ (Fabre-Serris/Keith [2015], reviewed by Christian Rollinger in this issue) and Walde/Wöhrlé (forthcoming).
- 13 See [the contribution by Rebekka Schirner](#) on the Lemnian women who murder their male relatives.
- 14 For a selection of recent studies on ancient emotions see [the article by Rebekka Schirner](#). Although she refers to Chaniotis/Ducrey (2013a) 9f. (“War ranks high up among the factors that influenced political and social institutions, and left its imprint on art, literature, and culture, thus allowing us to measure the role and importance of feelings, both collective and individual. [...] For this reason, Greek and Roman historical narratives of war cannot be dissociated from descriptions of emotional backgrounds and emotional responses”), war gets surprisingly little attention in these studies; contrast, e.g., Fauth/Krejberg/Süselbeck (2012) on emotionalizing strategies in modern representations of war. The main emotion studied in connection with literary representations of ancient war is anger (cf., e.g., Braund/Most [2003]; Polleichtner [2009]). From a different perspective, [Christian Rollinger’s contribution](#) emphasizes the role of ‘affective historicity’ in computer games.
- 15 The series ‘*The Senses in Antiquity*’ (edited by Mark Bradley and Shane Butler) aims to cover the whole field: Butler/Purves (2013) on synaesthesia (with a chapter by Brian Walters on death and dismemberment in Lucan and Lucretius), Bradley (2015) on smell, Squire (2016) on sight, Butler/Nooter (forthcoming) on sound, Rudolph (forthcoming) on taste, and Purves (forthcoming) on touch. There is some consideration for the senses and emotions in

current research has defined the impact of modern warfare (at least before the seemingly ‘clean’ and anaesthetized postmodern technological warfare) as an overwhelming sensory experience,¹⁶ the specific quality of sensory impressions in ancient battles and their fictional representations in literature and other media have not yet been studied in depth. Besides the well-known focus on the visual in ancient battle descriptions that are often focalized through the general’s gaze,¹⁷ the acoustic dimension and the roles of the other senses (smell, taste, and touch, including synaesthetic phenomena; cf. onomatopoeics)¹⁸ need to be acknowledged, too, as well as their connections with the feelings experienced by the characters and the audiences – and of course the unspoken assumption that ancient senses and emotions were perceived in precisely the same way as ours has to be critically evaluated in each case.¹⁹

For example, Livy’s account of the battle at Lake Trasimene (22,4–6) has a rather unusual focus on auditory impressions. Blinded by the thick mist, the Roman soldiers can no longer rely on their visual sense and become disoriented

Butler (2016), too. Classical antiquity is represented by the first volume (Toner [2014]) of *‘A Cultural History of the Senses’* (edited by Constance Classen), whereas the series *‘Sensory Formations’* (edited by David Howes) and *‘Studies in Sensory History’* (edited by Mark M. Smith) focus mainly on the modern age (with occasional attention to war), as does Classen (1993); but for some ancient background cf. Smith (2007). For recent archaeological approaches see Jo Day (2013) and Hamilakis (2015). Studies focusing on the definition of the senses in the history of philosophy and science are not considered here (cf., e.g., Jütte [2000; 2005]).

16 On the American Civil War see Smith (2014), on World War I, e.g., Encke (2006) and AA.VV. (2014) on an exhibition at Stuttgart that tried to convey the immediate sensory experiences of war participants to a modern audience.

17 Cf., e.g., Kagan (2007) on Caesar. The importance of the visual is also stressed in Fredrick (2002), Lovatt (2013), and Lovatt/Vout (2013). The volume *‘War as Spectacle: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Display of Armed Conflict’* (Bakogianni/Hope [2015], [reviewed by Martin Dinter](#) in this issue) defines the ‘spectacle’ of war as a “multi-sensory event worth watching” (Bakogianni [2015] esp. 5).

18 With regard to classical poetry see, e.g., Lilja (1972) on odours and Catrein (2003) on synaesthesia. Various aspects of the acoustic dimension and ancient soundscapes are treated by Wille (2001), Bettini (2008), Butler (2015), Emerit/Perrot/Vincent (2015), and Gurd (2016). Generally on ancient aesthetics based on material and sensory perceptions see Porter (2010).

19 Ayelet Peer makes a start here [with her contribution](#) on the sounds of battle (in a very broad sense) in Caesar’s *Commentaries*. See also [Anke Walter](#) on sensory imagery in the *Aeneid*.

Preface

in the indistinct din of battle, amidst the screams of the wounded, the sounds of bodies being hit and weapons clattering, and the mixed shouts of attacking or panicking fighters; ironically enough, the sun only reappears to reveal the cruel slaughter the Roman army has suffered.²⁰ Yet the overwhelming experience of fighting seems to have eclipsed the soldiers' other senses as well, for they do not even notice the major earthquake taking place simultaneously.²¹ In Lucan's graphic imagining of the aftermath of the battle at Pharsalus (itself a highly emotional scene focalized through the comments of the narrator, who identifies with the civil war dead), olfactory sensations as well as visual 'spectacles' (7,797: *laeta ... scelerum spectacula*) and suggestions of tasting figure prominently. The decomposing bodies of the unburied soldiers take revenge on Caesar, who has just celebrated a victory meal while feasting his eyes on the heaps of fallen enemies (7,786–796), by driving him away from the scene of his victory with their stench (7,820–821). Still the senses of smell and taste are not explicitly ascribed to Caesar but implied only indirectly by the (infected) water he drinks and the (polluted) air he breathes (7,822) – which by the way also serves as a reminder that a survey of relevant passages cannot be confined to the semantic level, as 'neutral' words in the vicinity also get 'contaminated'. In contrast to Caesar, scavengers are drawn to the scene by the smell; they actively pick up the

20 Liv. 22,4,7: *Romanus clamore prius undique orto quam satis cerneret se circumventum esse sensit* [...]; 22,5,1: [...] *vertente se quoque ad dissonos clamores* [...]; 22,5,3–4: *Ceterum prae strepitu ac tumultu nec consilium nec imperium accipi poterat, tantumque aberat ut sua signa atque ordines et locum noscerent, ut vix ad arma capienda aptandaque pugnae competeret animus, opprimerenturque quidam onerati magis iis quam tecti. Et erat in tanta caligine maior usus aurium quam oculorum. Ad gemitus vulnerum ictusque corporum aut armorum et mixtos strepitum paventiumque clamores circumferebant ora oculosque*; 22,6,5: [...] *per omnia arta praeuptaque velut caeci evadunt, armaque et viri super alium alii praecipitantur*; 22,6,8–9: *Sex milia ferme primi agminis per adversos hostes eruptione impigre facta, ignari omnium quae post se agerentur, ex saltu enasere et, cum in tumulto quodam constitissent, clamorem modo ac sonum armorum audientes, quae fortuna pugnae esset neque scire nec perspicere prae caligine poterant. Inclinata denique re, cum incalcescente sole dispulsa nebula aperuisset diem, tum liquida iam luce montes campique perditas res stratamque ostendere foede Romanam aciem*. Similar phenomena may occur in descriptions of nocturnal battles (cf. [Anke Walter](#) on the night episode in *Aeneid* 9).

21 Liv. 22,5,8: [...] *adeo intentus pugnae animus, ut eum motum terrae qui multarum urbium Italiae magnas partes prostravit avertitque cursu rapidos amnes, mare fluminibus inuexit, montes lapsu ingenti proruit, nemo pugnantium senserit*.

scent and come to feast on the cadavers (7,825–830).²² Then in the parallel scene of Vitellius visiting the battlefield of Bedriacum in Tacitus’ *Histories* (2,70), the focus lies almost exclusively on the visual ‘spectacle’ (*foedum atque atrox spectaculum*), whereas Suetonius again dwells on the smell and also quotes Vitellius’ sneer against the civil war dead, who ‘smell even sweeter than fallen foreign enemies’ (*Vit.* 10,3).²³ This is only a random selection of examples, and systematic research is likely to unearth many more. In short, the sensory and emotional history of ancient war has yet to be written.

If we look at the role of war in classical reception studies, the picture is rather uneven, too. Reception scholarship has so far concentrated mainly on Greek history and culture (the Persian Wars, the Peloponnesian War, Alexander the Great) and the representation of mythical and historical wars in Greek literature (Homer, Attic tragedy, Herodotus, Thucydides).²⁴ In contrast, Roman warfare (with the partial exception of the Punic Wars and Julius Caesar, and, of course, Spartacus and the gladiators) has been rather neglected – at least insofar as general reception beyond military history and theory is concerned.²⁵ Likewise,

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- 22 Luc. 7,820–830: *tu, cui dant poenas inhumato funere gentes, / quid fugis hanc cladem? quid olentis deseris agros? / has trabe, Caesar, aquas, hoc, si potes, utere caelo. / sed tibi tabentes populi Pharsalica rura / eripiunt camposque tenent victore fugato. / Non solum Haemonii funesta ad pabula belli / Bistonii venere lupi tabemque cruentae / caedis odorati Pholoen liquere leones. / tunc ursae latebras, obscaeni tecta domosque / deseruere comes, et quidquid nare sagaci / aera non sanum motumque cadavere sentit.*
- 23 Suet. *Vit.* 10,3: *Utque campos, in quibus pugnatum est, adit, abhorrentis quosdam cadaverum tabem detestabili voce confirmare ausus est, optime olere occisum hostem et melius civem. Nec eo setius ad leniendam gravitatem odoris plurimum meri propalam hausit passimque divisit.* Cf. Morgan (1992), Ambühl (2015) 269f. with further bibliography, and now also Hope (2015) 168 and 171f.
- 24 E.g., on responses to the Persian Wars cf. Bridges/Hall/Rhodes (2007). In the present volume, see the contributions [by Pietro Verzina](#) on Homer and the cinema (which however takes a very different direction from traditional approaches) and [by Lydia Langerwerf](#) on modern receptions of Thermopylae in Herodotus and Pericles’ Funeral Oration in Thucydides.
- 25 ‘*War: Antiquity and Its Legacy*’ (Bradford 2015) from the ‘*Ancients and Moderns*’ series gives a rather sweeping overview of the history of warfare in Western culture and its reception. Despite his inclusive treatment of Greek and Roman war and war writings, Bradford privileges the *Iliad* as the “most striking legacy of all” (3), which he along with the plays of Sophocles also relates to his personal experience as a Vietnam War veteran (23–25, 145–147).

Preface

modern poetry and performance culture loom large in classical reception studies, whereas the field of (fictional) war prose is still largely unexplored.²⁶

The same thematic biases also characterize an otherwise highly interesting collection of essays which has appeared very recently and which has several points of contact with the present enterprise: *‘Our Ancient Wars. Rethinking War through the Classics’* (Caston/Weineck 2016) originated in a conference that brought together scholars, veterans, and a wider audience in order to read and discuss war through the classics. The three sections of the edited volume (‘Rethinking the Ancient, in View of the Modern’ – ‘Rethinking the Modern, in View of the Ancient’ – ‘Other Moderns, Other Ancients’) well reflect the multifocal perspectives of classical reception studies and together open up new dimensions of possible interactions between classical and contemporary experiences and interpretations of war. As was mentioned before, the essays focus on wars in Archaic and Classical Greece viewed through the lens of Greek epic, drama, historiography, philosophy, and their modern receptions, while the only subjects that figure from Roman history are – tellingly – the Punic Wars (but as described by the Greek historian Polybius) and Spartacus. Therefore, the present volume aims to redress this imbalance a bit by focusing in part on war narratives in Roman literature in comparison with modern war novels, be they quasi-autobiographical accounts, historical novels or fantasy literature.²⁷

26 See, e.g., Vandiver (2008; 2010) on Homer in British World War I poetry and Liapis (2014) on Greek tragedy in poems by George Seferis on the Greek Civil War. Likewise the comparative study by Karpenstein-Eßbach (2011) only considers classical receptions in drama although it treats novels and essays, too, and most of the reception-oriented papers in Bakogianni/Hope (2015) also focus on modern lyric, theater, and movies. The reception of war narratives from Homer and Greek tragedy in (post-)modern culture, often through theater performances (cf. several contributions in Hardwick/Gillespie [2007]), has also been connected to trauma studies (Shay [1994; 2002]; Tritle [2000]; Tatum [2003]; Cosmopoulos [2007]; Meineck/Konstan [2014]; cf. Meineck [2016]); but see also Melchior (2011) from a Latinist perspective.

27 [Mark Thorne](#) sets Lucan side by side with two accounts of the Rwandan genocide, [Manuel Mackasare](#) reads a World War I narrative before the background of Caesar, [Marian Makins](#) traces an episode from Tolkien back to Tacitus, and [Anke Walter](#) compares a novel on the Iraq war to the *Aeneid*.

III. Overview of the present volume

In line with the broad and innovative outlook of *thersites* that invites approaches venturing beyond the conventional areas and boundaries of (classical) scholarship, the contributions making up this special issue approach the topic from multiple perspectives.²⁸ Some of them focus specifically on the senses and emotions of war, while others discuss in a more general sense interactions and tensions between classical and modern representations of war in various media. As the contents of the individual papers can be easily accessed through the multilingual abstracts preceding each of them, I will here give only a synoptic preview and point out some of the directions taken by the authors. According to the arrangement suggested by the table of contents, the volume can be read in a roughly chronological order.

The first section ('Classical and modern representations of war and violence compared and contrasted') comprises four contributions with a strong focus on Greek and Latin texts ([Pietro Verzina](#) on Homer; [Ayelet Peer](#) on Caesar's war commentaries; [Mark Thorne](#) on Lucan's civil war epic; [Rebekka Schirner](#) on the Lemnian women in the mythological epics by Apollonius Rhodius, Valerius Flaccus, and Statius) that are either compared to modern representations of war and violence in different media (cinema; accounts of the Rwanda genocide) and/or studied from the perspective of contemporary scholarly approaches such as psychology, psychoanalysis and trauma studies, gender studies, and research on the role of sensory perceptions and emotions.

The two papers in the second section ('War narratives and classical receptions from World War I and II') concern novels written in the context of the First and Second World Wars that engage with classical texts and ideas connected with classical antiquity ([Manuel Mackasare](#) on Walter Flex and [Marian Makins](#) on J.R.R. Tolkien).²⁹ Both Flex' and Tolkien's narratives are based to

28 Cf. the editors' outline of *thersites* (Carlà/Stoffel/Walde [2015]: <http://www.thersites.uni-mainz.de/index.php/thr/article/view/15/14>).

29 Another paper originally envisaged for this section unfortunately could not be included due to circumstances: Stephan Busch (Trier) on *Adler über Gallien* by Hermann Stresau (1943), a

Preface

some degree on the authors' autobiographical war experiences that are however shaped and transformed by their classical receptions.

The third section ('Representations of war from the 21st century in various media') moves forward to the turn of the 20th into the 21st century, which also involves a broader range of media to be considered. Of the three papers in this last thematic section, the one by [Lydia Langerwerf](#) demonstrates the ideological uses and abuses of famous examples from classical antiquity (notably Thermopylae) in political speeches and movies; the one by [Anke Walter](#) looks back from an autobiographically colored American novel on the Iraq War to Vergil's *Aeneid* in order to reveal shared plot patterns and imagery; and the one by [Christian Rollinger](#) studies the aesthetic and sensory representation of ancient battles in computer and video games and the affective involvement of the players.

The volume is rounded off by reviews of two recent collections of essays connected to the topic: *War as Spectacle. Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Display of Armed Conflict* (Bakogianni/Hope 2015) and *Women and War in Antiquity* (Fabre-Serris/Keith 2015).

However, the open format of *thersites* strongly encourages other potential arrangements, as every reader may choose his or her own preferred sequence and discover various cross-connections between papers. Here I give just a few suggestions for such possible re-orderings: On the one hand, narrative genres like ancient epic and historiography (mainly featuring in section I) can be set alongside the modern novel in its various shapes (in sections II and III) in order to discover shared patterns in autobiographic or fictional eyewitness accounts describing the experience of war. On the other hand, contemporary media such as movies and video games feature not only in the third section but also in the very first paper ([Verzina on Homer](#) and the cinema). Several contributions discuss Caesar's commentaries and contrasting responses to these seminal war narratives from different periods ([Peer](#), [Mackasare](#), and [Rollinger](#)). Mark [Thorne's paper](#), too, bridges the gap between antiquity and our own present as it sets the Roman civil wars side by side with the Rwandan genocide of 1994, while [Lydia Langerwerf](#) connects widely divergent responses to the Battle of

novel that combines reception of Caesar with the author's autobiographical experiences from World War I. Hopefully it will be published in a future issue of *thersites*.

Thermopylae from antiquity through the American Civil War and the Third Reich to the commemoration of 9/11, incidentally demonstrating the dangers inherent in selecting and manipulating examples from classical antiquity for political purposes.

IV. Brothers-in-arms and classical receptions³⁰

One surprisingly consistent leitmotif I came across during the editorial process is the emphasis on comradeship that keeps reappearing in one form or another in almost all the texts studied in the various papers. From the friendships between Achilles and Patroclus in Homer's *Iliad* and Nisus and Euryalus in Vergil's *Aeneid* to the close intergenerational relationships between the first-person narrator and the 20-year-old volunteer Wurche in Walter Flex' World War I narrative and Bartle and the young soldier Murph in Kevin Power's Iraq War novel, we encounter time and again a pair of friends who face the challenges and horrors of war together (and not to forget Frodo and Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*, who in contrast to the others both survive).³¹

The death of one of the comrades (usually the younger one) functions as a tragic peripeteia for the plot, but also as a catalyst for the sensory perceptions and emotions experienced by the main character at that crucial moment, that keep coming back as haunting memories. The strong emotional bond between

30 One of my favorite pop songs from the 1980s is *Brothers in Arms* by Dire Straits (1985), which originated in 1982 in the context of the Falklands War and was reissued in 2007 for the 25-year commemoration of the conflict, with the profits going to the aid of veterans suffering from PTSD. The accompanying video features background images from World War I (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhdFe3evXpk> [last accessed February 24, 2017]). Cf. also Thomas (2010) for a comparative intertextual study of the motif 'My brother got killed in the war', especially in civil war contexts, from antiquity to Bob Dylan. Regrettably, in the present issue of *thersites* there is no contribution on classical receptions in (popular) music, but cf. [Christian Rollinger](#) on the soundtracks of videogames.

31 That this is not a mere literary motif or even a worn-out cliché needs no proof in the face of countless autobiographical testimonies by war veterans, including that of my own husband Hamid Tehrani, who lost his brother-in-arms Abbas Karimi in a shell explosion during the Iran-Iraq War.

Preface

comrades in war, whether it is framed as brothers-in-arms, as a father-son relationship, or with the undertones of a homoerotic relation, can be seen as a substitute for family relationships that have been severed by the war. Not by coincidence, the role of mourning mothers and their emotional responses to the loss of their sons also forms a recurring motif in these narratives (Euryalus' mother, Wurche's mother, and Murph's mother), whereas in the Lemnian episode the gender roles are turned upside down by mothers who murder their own sons and husbands in a kind of civil war within the family (and cf. the families torn apart by civil war in Lucan and in the Rwandan narratives).

Even in texts whose genre at first glance might not favor such an emotional focus on the close relationship between two protagonists, similar constellations occur in embedded episodes. In Caesar's *Gallie War* (5,44) we encounter the rival centurions Titus Pullo and Lucius Vorenus (known to a wider audience from the HBO-series *Rome*), who after maneuvering themselves into a critical situation manage to escape with each other's help (a model that in a way also mirrors the mutual bond between Caesar and his soldiers). In the midst of civil war, when all normal relationships break down, loyalty towards family members is highlighted in contrast: As the only exception from the collective rage of the Lemnian women, Hypsipyle saves her aged father. The anonymous old man in Lucan, who remembers the horrors of the civil war between Marius and Sulla, narrates how he recovered the mutilated corpse of his own brother from the heap of the victims of Sulla's proscriptions (2,169–173). In a sense, Leonidas and the 300 Spartans fit this pattern too, as their military self-sacrifice ordered by Sparta is seen in later interpretations as a voluntary death undertaken to save their loved ones. And perhaps even the player engaged in a video game simulating an ancient battle, who does not act as a first-person shooter but in the role of a commander responsible for his troops, participates in these emotions.

However, the sheer number of recurrences of such constellations involving bonds of friendship or family amidst war also raises methodological issues connected with reception studies. Is this to be seen only as a successful narrative strategy independently employed by writers from different periods, as the depiction of such relationships invites emotional responses from the readers and helps them to connect with the experiences of the characters? Or are there more specific links, such that a long chain of war narratives since antiquity might still

be informing directly or indirectly the ways in which modern authors and audiences perceive and describe war? In every single case, the processes involved need to be studied carefully. The highly intertextual nature of ancient poetry establishes beyond reasonable doubt that Vergil consciously reworked Homer, whereas such a direct response to Vergil's epic in the case of an American war veteran seems rather unlikely – or at least much more difficult to prove, as [Anke Walter](#) cautions in her reading of Kevin Powers' novel *The Yellow Birds* (2012) against the background of the *Aeneid*.³² However, if more specific information can be gained from testimonies left by the author himself, the evidence may be in favor of direct reception, as [Marian Makins](#) demonstrates in her interpretation of an episode from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as a rewriting of William Morris' historical novel *The House of the Wolfings* through the lens of Tacitus.

Nonetheless, even in cases where such a direct connection or chain of receptions cannot be established beyond doubt (or is not at all the aim of the paper in question), a comparative and contrasting reading of ancient and modern representations of war and violence can still turn out to be very illuminating and enriching. So [Pietro Verzina](#)'s study of daydreaming scenes in the Homeric epics and in modern cinema, despite the obvious differences between the respective media, lays bare the shared psychological mechanisms and even analogous narrative techniques informing those violent fantasies. [Mark Thorne](#), who draws a highly intriguing comparison between Lucan's civil war epic and two modern accounts of the Rwandan civil war and genocide, in his methodological reflections on how to read the *Bellum Civile* as trauma literature

32 Thomas Palaima and Lawrence A. Tritle in their epilogue to Campbell/Tritle (2013) attribute the declining relevance of the classical tradition in contemporary war literature after the Second World War to technological progress as well as to the demise of classics in higher education. However, they apply a rather narrow definition of classical reception by limiting it to direct quotations from or allusions to works read in their original languages (732; cf. 734): "Soldier-writers and writers about what soldiers now do are given to using certain themes, ideas, and figures in classical literature as touchstones, but they leave the impression of having no serious familiarity with the works they cite or use." Such phenomena are certainly worth studying seriously, too.

Preface

(still a relatively new and seriously understudied approach)³³ states his purpose as follows: “These are in no way receptions of Lucan in the traditional sense; they rather offer a striking set of shared narrative patterns which together provide welcome comparative insight into the strategies available for an author of any time and place faced with speaking the unspeakable.”

At the end of this introductory survey, I would like to thank our contributors from all over the world for their enthusiasm and cooperation during the various phases of putting together this special issue, as well as the peer-reviewers and my three co-editors of *thersites* for their valuable advice, especially Filippo Carlà-Uhink for his technical support. Above all, Christine Walde has been a constant source of inspiration in discussing war in ancient (and modern) literature and culture since we started working together in the Lucan project directed by her at the University of Basel in the early 2000s. Thanks are also due to Christian Stoffel for sharing ideas in the initial stages of the project and for designing the title page, as well as to Marian Makins for correcting my English. It remains for me to wish all our present and future readers a safe passage through the volume. The terrain to be crossed will not be easy and many of the texts encountered along the way may provoke strong emotional reactions, but I do hope it will prove to be an inspiring experience.

33 Cf. the pioneering study by our co-editor Christine Walde (2011) and her forthcoming book on Lucan. Henry J.M. Day (2013) takes a transhistorical approach to trauma and the sublime in Lucan and in modern literature.

Annemarie Ambühl

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