Rosanna Lauriola

Re-making Greek Tragedies: a Perspective on the American Charles Mee's 'Project' with a Case Study[*]

There is not such a thing as an original play
Charles Mee[1]

Abstract
In the last few decades Classical Reception has come to represent a major area of inquiry within Classical Studies. The need to make Classical Antiquity relevant and accessible to a broader audience has certainly contributed to the growth of Reception Studies, but also to the revitalization of the ancient texts themselves. Whatever new form the ancient text takes – from the traditional more-or-less-close translation to a complete rewriting – it constitutes the 'palimpsest' *par excellence*, or, to keep using Genette's well-known terminology (G. Genette, *Palimstestes: La litttérature au second degré*, Paris 1982) the hypotext with which contemporary writers, either professionals or amateurs, use for a specific purpose: to convey important messages about, and raise awareness of, some crucial issues of our 'modern' world that connect to the ancient one. Greek tragedy is granted a special space within this trend of re-writing and re-making ancient texts. Recently, among several contemporary 're-makers' of Greek Tragedy, the American historian-turned-playwright Charles Mee stands out. He has set out a long-term 'Project' under the name *The (Re-)making Project*, hoping both to raise awareness of issues afflicting our society and, in consequence, to set in motion an appropriate reaction. What is peculiar to Mee's work is the technique and methodology he has been adopting to re-propose the ancient text. In his hands Greek tragedy is the 'palimpsest' over which Mee not only re-writes his version of the ancient story, but indeed builds a collage over it, cutting and pasting fragments of assorted materials (from pieces of several different Greek plays to pieces of modern texts, from TV news and internet blogs to excerpts of magazines of any kinds) while simultaneously prompting his readers and audiences to recognize and appreciate the ancient matrix. The final result is a radical metamorphosis of the ancient text whose impact and pedagogical purpose remain the same. The present paper intends to analyze one of Mee's radical 're-makings' of Greek Tragedy through a specific case study pertaining to what we may call 'the never ending tragedy' of the world, i.e., the tragedy of war. Our case study in fact concerns Mee's re-making of Euripides' *Trojan Women*.

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[1] All quotations are from the text published on the website at http://www.charlesmee.org/about.shtml (the quotation above is in the section: About the Project). No page numbers appear on the website. I shall thus refer to the website specifying the specific section from which I quote. For a description of this website, see below p. 104 and nn. 30, 31, 34.

Un filone di ricerca che negli ultimi decenni si è imposto, e continua ad imporsi, nell'ambito degli studi classici è certamente quello della tradizione classica, oggi più comunemente denominato alla maniera anglo-sassone 'Classical Reception'. La necessità di rendere l'antichità rilevante per la società moderna e accessibile ad un pubblico più vasto ha contributo non solo al successo degli studi sulla ricezione dei classici ma, e forse inevitabilmente, anche alla rivitalizzazione dei testi classici medesimi. Quale che sia la forma in cui il testo è riproposto – dalla tradizionale più o meno 'fedele' versione alla totale riscrittura – il testo antico resta il 'palinsesto' o, per continuare ad usare la ben nota terminologia genettiana (G. Genette, *Palimstestes: La litttérature au second degré*, Paris 1982), l''ipostesto' per eccellenza con cui si confrontano contemporanei scrittori, di professione o semplicemente *amateurs*, con l'intenzione di comunicare importanti messaggi e 'svegliare le coscienze' su problematiche del mondo moderno, ma che facilmente sono riconducibili al mondo antico. La tragedia greca sembra detenere una certa priorità in questo fenomeno. Tra i diversi 'rifacitori' di tragedia greca di recente si distingue l'americano Charles Mee, storico di formazione, convertitosi alla letteratura greca o, per meglio dire, a 'ri-scrivere' alcune specifiche opera greche, per lo più tragedie. Mee ha dato vito ad un 'progetto' a lungo termine, chiamato *The (Re)making Project* con la speranza di contribuire alla presa di coscienza di cui detto sopra, e, conseguentemente, attivare una reazione, un cambiamento. Ciò che rende specificamente peculiare l'opera di Mee è la tecnica e metodologia adottata nel suo riproporre il testo antico. Nelle sue mani la tragedia greca è il palinsesto su cui l'autore non si limita a riscrivere la sua propria 'versione' della storia; su di esso Mee, di fatto, costruisce un vero e proprio *collage*, incollando ritagli e frammenti di materiali diversi (da passi di differenti tragedie greche a drammi moderni, da notizie date in TV e blogs a stralci di riviste di ogni tipo) e, ciononostante, invitando il lettore e/o spettatore a riconoscere e apprezzare la matrice antica. Il risultato è spesso una trasformazione quasi radicale dell'opera greca di cui restano salvi, in ogni modo, l'impatto comunicativo e l'intenzione 'pedagogica'. Il presente lavoro analizza in dettaglio una di queste radicali trasformazioni, prendendo in esame il rifacimento di una 'tragedia perenne' del genere umano, i.e., la tragedia della guerra, attraverso la 'versione' di Charles Mee delle *Troiane* di Euripide.

1. *Introduction: a few theoretical notes on 're-making'*

The re-making of classical material in new and diversified forms in particular in the field of literature might be described as 'a not-unusual' artistic practice that finds its origin in classical antiquity itself[2]. While traces of such a practice might be found in as poets early as Homer and Pindar[3], it becomes more apparent in the fifth-century BC Athenian tragic

[2] As far as the 'remakes' in general are concerned, I should note that, although undoubtedly Greek myth has been the main and richest source material of literature (and the arts in general) from antiquity to present days, a fair amount of attention has recently been given to other mythical, folkloric and legendary sources (including, but not confined to, Greek myth) as they are re-used above all by contemporary authors (mostly playwrights): see, e.g., FOSTER (2012).

[3] To mention just a few. Regarding this, see, e.g., LAURIOLA (2014a, 40 and n. 20).

playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. With myths – the basic subject matter of ancient Greek literature – being singularly malleable, the three tragic poets put on stage recycled and revised stories of heroes and gods, handed down to them from their predecessors and/or, sometimes, even from quasi-contemporary authors[4]. They never, however, simply duplicate myths. They rather 're-made' them[5] by keeping the core narratives intact and, yet, varying them through shifts of emphasis in certain details, the ones that would mostly be relevant to the expression of the poet's concerns and that, at the same time, could resonate with the concerns of the poet's contemporary society. The mythological stories constituted, in a way, a template, a basic layout for the new work that each playwright was to create by 'updating' those stories with layers of subtle variations capable of making them 'contemporary'[6]. After all, tragedy did not require new dramatic subjects, and mythic subject matters were not used and perceived merely as a residue of old tradition. They were rather used as «a means of generating critical distance, so issues of the moment could be turned into issues of principal»[7], which – I would add – contributes to giving ancient Greek drama its timelessly representational power. Based – as it is – on mythic subjects which «have become archetypal in understanding elements of human behavior, a part of the legacy of Western social and psychological culture»[8], this representational power in turn explains why ancient Greek dramatic matters have been re-used over and over, re-made, adapted and refigured[9] throughout the centuries, across different geographic areas and cultures[10].

[4] As BURIAN (2009, 326) notes, the surviving list of titles points to the fact that «[…] the earliest history of Attic tragedy already shows subjects repeated by later tragic poets». By predecessors, however, I meant above to refer to a more extensive range of mythic sources, from Homer on, which the three great dramatists could have at their disposal.

[5] See, e.g., WILES (2000, 5): «[…] the job of the dramatist was not to reproduce myths but to recreate them». In a similar vein, on the same subject, BURIAN (2009, 322) has talked of Greek tragedy as a set «of variations on a relatively few legendary and formal themes, forever repeating but never the same». For Burian, in fact, a performance is to be seen as «repetition and innovation». In particular BURIAN (2009, 322f.) provides the example of the three *Electra* tragedies «to observe [this] play of repetition and innovation at work».

[6] Needless to say that the variations also concerned structural features given the transition to a new, and far different, literary genre, i.e., from the previous epics and partly lyric poetry to the dramatic genre.

[7] WILES (2000, 11); see also CAMPBELL (2010, 56f.).

[8] CAMPBELL (2010, 57).

[9] For the meaning of terms that are central to reception studies, such as 'adaptation' and 'refiguration' (and related verbs), I follow HARDWICK (2003, 9f.). A useful discussion is also in MEE – FOLEY (2011, 6-10, with a concise analysis of key terms, such as «translating», «adapting» « remaking», and «remixing»), and FOSTER (2012, 2f., with a focus on the terms 'adaption' and 'revision').

[10] This explains why and how Receptions Studies have become a leading area of inquiry in the field of Classics. Very vast is indeed the related scholarship: for a theoretical synthesis, see LAURIOLA (2014a, 37-42).

If this representational power might be responsible for the never-ending revivals of Greek drama, it stands to reason that one of the keys, if not *the* key, to success in this re-making process is «the complicity of the audience»[11]. The fifth-century BC Athenian dramatic poets undoubtedly counted on the spectators' cultural competence, i.e., on their familiarity with the 'megatext' of Greek myth[12], that is, the corpus of legendary subjects in all their specific literary-narrative forms. This competence allowed the poets to make allusions to, and cross-references within, that 'megatext', meaningfully intersecting it with 'original' nuances. By implicit comparison, the audience was expected to recognize and understand the adaptation's innovative features, thus playing a major role in the making of meaning[13]. The innovative features were aimed at 'modernizing' the old story, that is, as hinted at above, at making it contemporary and relevant for the people of the poet's time. The challenge for the dramatic poets was thus to make the 'old' myth 'fit' for the 'new' socio-historical and cultural environment.

As for the means through which the poets would make the 'adjustments', if we are to leave aside the much debated presence of anachronisms[14], it should be safe to say that the innovative and modernizing components of the recycled stories were often not very blatant. It all relied on echoes/allusions and analogies with contemporary (unmentioned) persons and events, which the audience was expected to identify. Perhaps Euripides' *Trojan Women* (415 BC) offers one of the best examples, as the mythical Trojan war, the brutal treatment of Troy's population –with the slaughter of male adults and the enslavement of women and children–, and the miserable fall itself of Troy, once a great kingdom, would stand for the current, brutal spectacle of the war –the Peloponnesian War–[15], the savage treatment of Melos and its population (416/415 BC: e.g., Thuc. V 84-116), and the 'premonitions' of imminent disaster, i.e., the miserable fall of Athens, once a great city-state[16]. Euripides 're-

[11] I borrowed this expression from BURIAN (2009 322, 326). See also below n. 13.
[12] For the introduction of the term and notion 'megatext', see SEGAL (1986, 50-53).
[13] On the Athenian dramatists' expectation of the audience's theatrical experience and competence, see BURIAN (2009, 336f.); also REVERMANN (2006, 50 and *passim*). This expectation certainly surfaces more clearly in Aristophanes' comedies (e.g., *Knights* 504f.; *Clouds* 521, 527; *Wasps* 1059): on the topic, see also LAURIOLA (2010, 31 and n.54; 42 and nn. 13f.).
[14] Anachronisms have been usually seen as an artistic failing or a mark of ineptitude by the author; for a 'rehabilitation' of the presence of anachronism and a related productive debate, see EASTERLING (1985); WILES (2000, 209f.). For a summary of the scholarship on anachronism in Euripides, in particular, see NEUMANN (1995, 16-21); with reference to Euripides' *Trojan Women* (on which our case study is based), see ROISMAN (1997); CLAY (2010, 236f.).
[15] On the use of the Trojan War to think through the Peloponnesian war in tragedy, see, e.g., GOFF (2009, 30 and n. 52).
[16] I am referring to the well-known 'Melos interpretation', a reading notoriously started by MURRAY (1907, 7; for further discussion and bibliography see GOFF 2009, 29-35, 140 n. 51); and to the disastrous expedition to

made', in a way, and updated the 'old' story by turning Homeric Greece into his time-Greece: the past of Troy becomes the present of Athens. And the audience was expected 'to pick it up'.

The challenge with which the ancient dramatists had to deal in their 're-making' has never been over. Each author who has chosen to re-propose 'the past' has in fact had to face the same trial: to make it 'fit' for new environments and new audiences[17]. What is more, for modern dramatists the challenge is even harder given that, although they need the 'complicity of the audience' to succeed, they cannot count on the same cultural competence as their ancient predecessors could. If the ancient dramatists had 'only' to worry that the audience would understand the 'modernizing' allusions and/or analogies while relying on a shared knowledge of the story put on stage, the same cannot be said for modern authors. To ensure the audience's deep understanding of their own works, modern authors usually first have to make the audience familiar with the 'old' story that they have meant 're-make'. And to ensure the audience's appreciation of the re-making's features and, above all, of the reasons and aims behind them, they seem to need to introduce explicit modernizing items, unmistakably recognizable by everyone. To overcome the audience's unfamiliarity with the 'old' story re-enacted in the new play, an easy, if not obvious, way has been found: modern authors and directors, or even theater companies, usually provide 'paratextual' tools, such as program notes (most often) or lobby displays. Whether these tools are enough to replace the competence of the ancient audience is certainly very questionable[18], but they do contribute to creating a common ground of knowledge on which the modern dramatist's expectation of the 'complicity of the audience' has to rely. To then make recognizable the re-making's innovative traits, and thus let the audience understand the reasons and aims behind them due to the 'modern' relevance that the old story would gain, evident anachronisms have usually been the quasi-inevitable means. These anachronisms might

Sicily (to which an allusion might be found in last exchange between Poseidon and Athena, in Euripides, *Trojan Women* 65-97), on which see CROALLY (1994, 232-34); DUÉ (2006, 147-50).

[17] Interestingly, HUTCHEON (2006, 31f.), building on some suggestions by Richard Dawkins' book on Darwinian theory (*The Selfish Gene*, 1976), remarks on the Darwinian connotation of the term 'adaptation' in the sense of making something 'fit' for a new cultural environment or new audiences.

[18] Of course, one cannot expect that a few notes in a program might fill the whole gap in knowledge and familiarity. But it is certainly not the modern author's intention to make her/his audience 'erudite' about the ancient theatre. To provide the audience with a knowledge sufficient to understand and appreciate how and why an ancient work can still speak to us today is the basic step to induce that audience to reflect, to feel, to mature, in a way, while receiving some 'bits' of the classical culture. One main concern, above all of classicists, might be whether an adaptation might be so 'extreme' that it risks giving a misleading view of the ancient world. But this is beyond the scope of this paper, important as that concern is: for a synthetic discussion of such concerns, see LAURIOLA (2014a).

take different forms, whether by placing the characters in modern settings or, vice versa, incorporating references to modern persons, things, and events into the ancient Greek settings. Examples of both kinds are indeed so numerous that choosing one or two for each would certainly give an impression of arbitrary partiality[19]. There is more, which also makes it harder to exemplify the issues under discussion: the re-making's features depend on times, situations and places (along with the poet's related concerns); therefore, as times, situations and places change, not only might the same play undergo different adaptations and be differently 're-made', but also the selection itself of the plays to 're-make' varies[20]. What is quite constant in all this variety informing the 're-making' phenomenon is, in my view, a recent tendency toward radical change, often experimental in nature, which sometimes makes it difficult to see the 'umbilical cord' between the ancient play and the 're-made' one, above all, but not exclusively, for an 'inexperienced' audience.

Among the most radical 're-makings' one would certainly include the work of the controversial American historian-turned-playwright Charles Mee, one of the most produced American playwrights from the late 1990s to the present. While his belief that we must remember the past explains why he turned to the past and drew his inspiration from several Greek tragedies[21], his belief in «culture as a process in which a society sifts through the past and its artifacts, salvages what is of interest and value, and redefines itself by combining recycled materials in new ways, from a new perspective, and with new ideas and materials»[22] is what has informed his method of 're-making' Greek drama, in such a peculiar way that some scholars have felt compelled to seek a new definition of tragedy[23].

Against the background of the 're-making' phenomenon as outlined above, this paper aims at describing and discussing Mee's peculiar engagement with ancient Greek tragedy both through an analysis of one of his 're-makings' selected as a case study, and through the lenses of the scholarly and audience response. This allow us to assess the Classics' everlasting relevance to the modern and, at the same time, the limitations and /or flaws of certain types of 're-makings'.

[19] See above, n.10.
[20] See TEEVAN (1998, 86). Furthemore, as Auden remarked «Each nation […] fashion(s) a classical Greece in its own image»: MENDELSOHON (1973, 4).
[21] See HARTIGAN (2011, 55f.).
[22] CUMMINGS (2006, 5).
[23] This is in particular the assumption of HARTIGAN (2011). I shall return to this, later (see below p. 131 and n. 120).

2. *Charles Mee and "The (Re)making Project": The 'pillaging' of Greek Drama*

> *I like to take a Greek play, smash it to ruins, and then, atop the ruins, write a new play. The new play will often take some of the character names of the Greek piece and some of the story – even some of the ruined structure. But it will be set in today's world.*
> (Charles Mee)[24]

Charles Mee (1938-), the «accidental historian [who] had become a citizen playwright»[25], is widely, although not unanimously, considered one of the most significant American theatre artist working today. Graduated from Harvard in 1960 in History and English Literature, he first spent his time in writing political history books which were, as he himself said, «about the behavior of America in the world and how that came home to damage life and politics in America»[26]. It was in the '80s when he switched to writing plays, which mostly address political and social issues. Some of these plays are based on Greek tragedies (mostly Euripides')[27], others on European and American political history. In the early 1990s, Charles Mee's website entitled "The (Re)making Project" appeared on the Internet[28], featuring his complete *oeuvre* free to download and to be freely used in the composition of one's own work by whoever would like «to pillage» his plays as Mee admittedly did with the Greek plays and other resources.

As suggested by the title of the website, the statement to have 'pillaged' others' works, and the invitation to his readers to do the same with his own material, Mee's (re)making project explores the notion that «there is no such a thing as an original play». To be fair, it explores the more complex, and yet-easy-to understand, notion that a work «is both received and created, both an adaptation and an original, at the same time» – as Mee himself then stated[29].

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[24] MEE (2007, 361). A few years earlier, in his memoirs, while talking of this *sui generis* approach to the Greek plays, MEE (1999, 214) specified what he meant by «today's world»: «the America of my time».
[25] CUMMINGS (2006, 22). Currently Mee is Professor and Head of Playwriting Concentration at Columbia University (http://arts.columbia.edu/theatre/faculty/charles-mee).
[26] MEE (2002, 102). A detailed biographic report is in HARTIGAN (2011, 9-15).
[27] The plays based on Greek drama (on which, below p. 104) have been recently produced in all major cities across the nation and also performed abroad, especially in Germany and Holland: see HARTIGAN (2011, 15f. and n. 17).
[28] See above, n. 1. http://www.charlesmee.org/about.shtml (Section: 'about the Project'). For a full description, see below p. 104. For a review of this website, see DONEGAN (2005).
[29] http://www.charlesmee.org/about.shtml (Section: 'about the Project').

The website, the major direct source at our disposal for any inquiry pertaining to Mee, is well articulated into sections, the major one of which is expectedly "The Plays"[30]. This section is in turn organized into eight subsections, one of which is entirely and exclusively reserved for plays specifically based on Euripides' tragedies[31]. This subsection is called "The Trilogy: Imperial Dreams", and it includes *Iphigenia 2.0* (2007)[32], *Trojan Women: A Love Story* (1995), and *Orestes 2.0* (1991)[33]. These three plays are respectively the re-making of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Trojan Women*, and *Orestes*[34]. While they clearly evoke the 'prototype' through the title, this does not correspond to a special degree of 'faithfulness' to the original. Mee admittedly does not feel the need either to be faithful or to have an obligation «to bring faithfully forward into the present any vestige of what the Greeks thought or felt or said or did»[35]. The only obligation he feels to respect is «an obligation toward the present and the future, not the past». The main goal of his 're-making' is in fact to use Greek works mostly as a source material for an exploration of the contemporary. He radically overwrites classical texts with the cultural code of the contemporary[36].

If this combination of *ancient* source material and *modern/contemporary* cultural code might be common, at least to a different degree, to many artists who revive the classical texts, the way by which Mee realizes it can be seen as 'one of a kind'[37]. Collage,

[30] Mee website homepage (http://www.charlesmee.org/about.shtml) is articulated into the following sections: About the Project; Charles Mee; The Play; A Note on Casting; Support the Project; Home.

[31] The other subsections, which are not mentioned above as they are not related to plays based on Greek Drama, are: "Solos"; "Duets"; "Some Other Genres"; "The Lives of the Artists"; "Love Sonnets [Monologue]".

[32] I mentioned the plays above according to the order in which they are arranged in this specific subsection ("The Trilogy: Imperial dreams") on the website, not the chronological order in which they had been composed. As for the reason of this specific cluster, see below n. 60. Detailed information on their productions (premiere, date, place, etc.) is available in HARTIGAN (2011, 29f., 57, for *Iphigenia 2.0* and *Orestes* 2.0; 89 for *The Trojan Women: a Love Story*).

[33] As HARTIGAN (2011, 30) well explains, the number that accompanies several of Mee's plays based on Greek Tragedy refers to the revisions which the extant text underwent «in the manner of software that goes through various versions», which is also consistent with the electronic status of these plays.

[34] Other plays based on the ancient Greek drama are located in other subsections, namely: "Other Tragedies and History Plays" (for a full discussion of the remakes belonging to this section, see HARTIGAN 2011, 45-56, 72-88, 99-108), "Comedies and Romances" (among which a radical remake of Aeschylus' almost entirely lost *Danaids* trilogy stands out: see REHM 2002, 118f.; PATSALIDIS 2006; HARTIGAN 2011, 109f.), and "Fragments".

[35] See MEE (2007, 361-63, the quotations above are at pp. 361 and 362).

[36] See HOPKINS – ORR (2001, 16).

[37] I should however note that, although Mee has never talks of his style and technique as a result of a subscription to postmodern and post-dramatic aesthetics, some characteristics of his work, such as the 'fragmentation of subject, plot or narrative' (see below n. 46), have been seen by critics as consistent with

pastiche, assemblage are the most common labels that critics use to describe the final result of Mee's remaking[38]. Consciously, if not programmatically, Mee composes his plays in the same way in which the German artist, pioneer of the Dadaism movement, Max Ernst, composed his *Fatagaga* collages[39]. To compose his plays Mee takes scissor and cuts all kind of texts, including the Greek plays, as to build a collage[40]. His impulse is «to pillage the Greeks […], and to use what [he] steal[s] for [his] own purpose»[41]. He picks and chooses what he wants and loves most from the Greeks; by using Brooklyn slang, he calls this process «sampling»[42]. He then combines the bits and shattered wreckage taken as samples from the classical works with «shards»[43] from modern texts of all kinds, texts which mostly 'speaks' of pop culture and contemporary America, such as *Vogue* magazine, *Soap Opera Digest*, *The National Inquirer*[44], etc. Adding 'chunks' of TV culture, too, Mee re-assembles the whole in a three-dimensional collage which 'comes to life' on the stage. By blending these diversified materials Mee creates disjointed narratives without neat transitions between scenes[45] and with characters not fully developed. As a result, contrary to the Aristotelian *Poetics*' prescriptions on tragedy, 'fragmented' plot, subject and characters are what characterize Mee's plays[46]. His plays «are not too neat, too finished,

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those movements: see, in particular, CAMPBELL (2010) for the definition of 'postmodern' and 'post-dramatic', and a discussion of their presence in the remaking of Greek Tragedy in general (with a quick reference to Charles Mee at pp. 63f.); BRYANT-BERTAIL (2000) and REILLY (2005) specifically analyze Mee's works in the light of those literary-aesthetic trends. See also, below p. 130s.

[38] See, e.g., REILLY (2005); BLANKENSHIP (2007); HARTIGAN (2011, 2). On the other hand, as I mentioned above in the text, although he does not label his works as 'collage', Mee himself, however, admits his usage of that technique, mentioning the 'inventor' of the collage technique in art, Max Ernst: see also below nn. 41, 42.

[39] For a concise explanation of Ernst's *FATAGAGA* collage pieces, see MEE (2002, 87; 101f. n. 4).

[40] More concisely in his website Mee states: «The plays on this website were mostly composed in the way that Max Ernst made his Fatagaga pieces toward the end of World War I: texts have often been taken from, or inspired by, other texts. Among the sources for these pieces are the classical plays of Euripides as well as texts from the contemporary world». (http://www.charlesmee.org/about.shtml; Section: "About the Project").

[41] MEE (2007, 361).

[42] MEE (2007, 363).

[43] MEE (2002, 89).

[44] A widely read magazine completely devoted to celebrity gossip.

[45] Indeed it is sometimes difficult to follow the transition among some scenes and grasp some sort of sequence, if any. The words of one of his directors might give a clearer idea of some difficulties that one can experience reading and/or watching Mee's plays, for they «[…] fly so low beneath the accepted radar that no conventional means seem adequate to decipher them»: WILDER (1994, 41).

[46] As hinted at above (n. 37) 'fragmentation' of the subject, the plot or narrative is a key feature of postmodern and post-dramatic works as a result of the «*obsession*» – to put it with Carlson's words – that these artists have with «textual material consciously recycled, often almost like pieces of a *collage*, into new combinations *with little attempt to hide the fragmentary and 'quote' nature of these pieces*»: CARLSON (2001, 14, the italics is mine).

too presentable […] [they] are broken, jagged, filled with sharp edges, filled with things that take sudden turns, careen into each other, smash up, veer off in sickening turns»[47].

In Mee's 'fragmented'-'broken'-'not too neat'-plays based on Greek drama, war and love – a seemingly oxymoronic couple – are the predominant themes. Connected to each other to a different degree and taking different 'shapes', these two themes, I would say, seem indeed to be the backbone of the Greek tragedies which Mee 'has pillaged' and 'smashed to ruin', to write, «atop the ruin», new works. As is well known, love accounted for the Trojan War, which constitutes *le fil rouge* of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Trojan Women*, and *Orestes*, i.e., the plays that merge in Mee's trilogy "Imperial Dreams" (i.e., *Iphigenia 2.0*, *Trojan Women: A Love Story*, and *Orestes 2.0*)[48]. What is more, in each of these tragedies different forms of love – different also from the one responsible for the war itself – end up being connected with that war whether in terms of the drive to questionable actions (e.g., Iphigenia's self-immolation for the sake of her father' and fatherland's love; Orestes' matricide for his killed father's love) or in terms of being destroyed by/subjugated to the iron laws of war (e.g., Hecuba' and Andromache's family and maternal love brutally dismissed).[49]

[47] MEE (1999, 214) (also, http://www.charlesmee.org/charles-mee.shtml, Section: Charles Mee). As for the «sickening turns», although Mee might want to allude to some appalling brutality that informs some scenes of his plays (the intention being to denounce it and prompt some attempt at reaction), I should also warn about the presence of obscene, sometimes disgusting, language (usually lines that are too sexually explicit) which causes a feeling of repulsion, given also the impression of the gratuitous nature of such vulgarity. As we shall see, Mee's intent is to display human nature and the world as they are, including their unpleasant aspects which, filtered by the contemporary society's 'trends', too, turn often to violently sexual language: see, e.g., HARTIGAN (2011, 78). On Mee's objectives and hopes, see below pp. 129ss.

[48] It is a motif that also underlines Aeschylus' (thus, Mee's) *Agamemnon*. I shall explain below in which sense *Orestes* and *Agamemnon* – usually categorized into the Mycaenean/Atreides cycle – are clustered, in my discussion, as belonging to the Trojan cycle.

[49] And again, love – love with deadly consequences, as it causes either some sort of fighting (e.g., in Euripides' *Hippolytus* between father and son) or an actual war, along with murders (in Aeschylus' *Danaids* trilogy) takes center stage both in the Greek models and in Mee's *True Love* and *Big Love* remakes. As for Aeschylus' *Danaids*, *The Suppliant Maidens* is the only extant tragedy of the trilogy, which included *Aegyptii* and *Danaides*: on this trilogy, see GARVIE (1969, 163-233); EWANS (1996, XXXXIX-L). The war I hinted at above, in the original play by Aeschylus, is the one between the army of the Argive Pelasgos, who gave asylum to the fifty daughters of Danaos, after they flew from an unwanted marriage with their Egyptians cousins, and the Egyptians, who won and have their connubial way. As well known, upon their father's suggestion the Danaids murdered their husbands on their wedding night, except for Hypermnestra. She spared Lynkeus and was put on trial for disobedience and absolved with the intervention of Aphrodite. Condensing the plots of the three Aeschylean tragedies, Mee 'skips', in a way, the war between the host/protector of the maiden and the prospective husbands, demanding their 'fiancees'; but Mee does reserve much space for the fighting which arose on the wedding night between the maiden and their husbands: each bride, indeed, except for one, in her own way killed her husband. For some bibliography on this play, see above n. 34. In a way,

Violence and death are indeed a common outcome of Mee's remakes, whether the focus is war or love. Between the two themes, war seems to hold the first place. Four of his remakes of extant Greek drama gravitate around the Trojan War, the war «for all time»[50]. Personal interest and sensitivity to such an everlasting socio-political issue as war have certainly played a major role in 'selecting' this theme, along with the need to look for contemporary situational correspondences, and thus use the ancient plays to explore the contemporary. As we have seen, Mee turned to re-making Greek plays starting from the 1990s, i.e., from the years in which the U.S. has been involved in several wars overseas, with many people doubting and even protesting against them. Mee has always been a fervent pacifist[51]; he has thus taken war-based Greek tragedies as a vessel to also convey his anti-war protest and sensitize the audience[52]. The atrocities of war, the sufferings and the pointless waste of individual lives, the victimization of innocent civilians, the effects of war on those who fight in and/or return from it, the meaninglessness of war and the repeated going to senseless wars, all of these issues come into play.

For instance, *Orestes 2.0* is explicitly conceived of as a «Euripides after-war play»[53]. Although it closely follows the original story line, it is re-set in a contemporary post-war environment, a medical facility hosting the soldiers returning from the war and suffering from physical and psychological injures (*in primis* the well-known PTSD, i.e., Post

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love 'makes an appearance' in Euripides' *Bacchae* and Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1* remake, if one considers that, on account of his varied and complex nature, Dionysus is associated with unrestrained drives including sexual love, a motif that Mee exploited far beyond Euripides (regarding this, see HARTIGAN 2011, esp. 83-85). In these plays, too, together with love fighting and deadly consequences come along (it is enough to think of Pentheus' belligerent intentions against the bacchant women: see, e.g., Euripides, *Bacchae* 781-86).

[50] I above 'adapted' Easterling's label of the Trojan myth as the «myth for all time» (EASTERLING 1997, 173).

[51] On Mee's passion for the anti-war cause see, e.g., WILLIS (2005, 193), and HARTIGAN (2011), who emphasizes it repeatedly through her book. By Mee's admission, this passion began in the Vietnam era when he actively participated in the Vietnam anti-war movement.

[52] In the U.S., since the 1990s, starting from the initiative of the American psychiatrist Jonathan Shay (1994, 2002) and gradually growing almost into a new branch of Classical Studies, Classical Literature, in particular Epic and Tragedy, has been re-proposed, re-read, and adapted as a tool of 'cultural therapy' and a medium to raise people's awareness about the trials of the military, both combat-soldiers and veterans, a very burning issue in contemporary American society as the toll of behavioral/mental disorders (e.g. PTSD, on which below pp. 108s. and n. 57) and suicide in the military is increasing. For an overview of the 'history' of related projects (such as "The Philoctetes Project/The theater of War", 2008, by B. Doerries, and "Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives", 2010, by P. Meineck), public events/initiatives, reactions and publications, see LAURIOLA (2013); (2014a); (2014b). A further mark of the increasing vitality of this 'new' branch of Classics, in particular the American culture, is the recent publication of the first collections – to my knowledge – of works by classicists addressing this peculiar issue: see MEINECK – KONSTAN (2014).

[53] I am quoting from Mee website http://www.charlesmee.org/plays.shtml#trilogy (Section: "The trilogy: Imperial Dreams").

Traumatic Stress Disorder)[54]. They stand for the veterans of American modern wars who often return from war only «to find that the disorder and nightmare of war has come with them». The violence and brutality that they experienced in war often drive them to madness/insanity, the malady from which Orestes is suffering. He is recovering in the same medical facility although he is not a veteran. Yet his 'brutal and violent action' and ensuing 'madness' are the ultimate products of the brutality and violence performed by his father for the sake of war. In perfect line with his 'collage' technique, Mee blends the pieces of his pillage of Euripides' *Orestes* with pieces from other texts and media, adding radio voices, forensic reports (e.g., for the autopsy of Clytemnestra's body), and excerpts from blogs posted on the web by American soldiers in the early years of the war in Iraq. The latter have often been Mee's source for the lines spoken by the veterans in his *Orestes 2.0*. Above all the chorus of the veterans, suffering from mental insanity caused by the war, or crying out about their injuries, permanent but forgotten by others[55], carries Mee's anti-war message.

Similarly in *Iphigenia 2.0*, through the chorus consisting of soldiers, Mee updates the ancient war to that of Iraq or Afghanistan and has the soldiers voice issues and sentiments familiar to many people of all time, as they are issues and sentiments that question, in the very end, 'the point' of war. In this play, in particular, Mee's soldiers question their leaders not only in line with the challenge that Agamemnon has to face – to sacrifice his own child, and thus to engage personally in the war rather than to ask the others 'to do the job' – but also, if not foremost, in line with what has become a striking issue in modern wars, which are often led by generals who stay safe in their camp offices and send out the soldiers where they think the battle should be fought. It is by no accident that distrust of their leaders is an issue surfacing in reports about American soldiers who have been involved in the twenty- and twenty first-century wars and have been suffering from PTSD[56]. Accordingly and, I would say, wittily, «some sense of commitment from their leader» is the wish, indeed the demand, that ends the list of the simple things that soldiers might want, a list compiled and delivered, at a certain point, by the chorus of soldiers in *Iphigenia 2.0*[57].

[54] See, e.g., HARTIGAN (2011, 41); also below n. 57. It was indeed this disorder with which the psychiatrist Shay (above n. 52) was dealing when he turned to Classical Literature as a tool for therapy.
[55] «And what is remembered in the body is well remembered […] The record of the war survives in the bodies, both alive and buried, of the people who were hurt there […]», as a character named Tapemouth says, expressing a truism of war (quotation from http://www.charlesmee.org/orestes.shtml; Section: "The Trilogy: Imperial Dreams-Orestes).
[56] See below n. 57.
[57] Striking as the soldiers' demand for commitment by their leaders might be, among the symptoms of PTSD there is indeed the feeling of distrust, the inability to ever trust anyone, usually caused by the experience of

3. *A case study:* Trojan Women: A Love Story

3.1. *General Overview*

Trojan Women: A Love Story seems to me the best 'whole sample' of Mee's remaking of Greek drama in terms both of content and style, as its strikingly oxymoronic title would suggest[58]. The title indeed resembles the juxtaposition – and yet relationship – of the two main themes characterizing Mee's plays, i.e., war and love, and, at the same time, is in itself emblematic of the 'collage/pastiche' technique of Mee's dramaturgy.

Composed and first produced in 1995[59], this remake has come to be a part of Mee's "The Trilogy: Imperial Dreams"[60], a thematically related trilogy pivoting – as hinted at

betrayal of «what is right» by people (i.e., leaders) who hold legitimate authority in a high-stakes situation: see, e.g, SHAY (2002, 166).

[58] Personally I was first intrigued by the title, which the presence of a colon between the two components made even more captivating. But I should note that I am not sure about the real function of that punctuation mark in this title. My doubt arises not only from the oddity of explaining a story about the atrocious aftermath of war with a love story (although, as we will see, the two are strictly related), but also from the fact that I have been seeing this title quoted differently in different publications. For instance, BRYANT-BERTAIL (2000) has "The Trojan Women a Love Story" (without any punctuation mark and with the addition of the article 'The') while HARTIGAN (2011, 71, 89) has "Trojan Women – A Love Story" (she too added the article). I adopted the title as it appears on Mee's website.

[59] For the production history of this play, which has been revived numerous times, see WILLIS (2005, 293-97), and HARTIGAN (2011, 89). An interesting, detailed description of the premièred production at the University of Washington in Seattle (spring 1996) is in BRYANT-BERTAIL (2000, 42-47). In this paper I shall focus on the script, style, adaptation-features and message rather than on the stage/performance- aspects.

[60] At first Mee's trilogy clustered different plays, although they are still thematically link to each other and with the Trojan War. At first it included: *Orestes 2.0*; *Agamemnon 2.0*, and *Iphigenia 2.0* (see, e.g., HARTIGAN 2011, 29-70). At the time I had access to Mee's website for preparing and refining this paper (January-May 2015), the trilogy appears as I have above described it, i.e., it lists at the beginning *Iphigenia 2.0*, replaces, in the middle, *Agamemnon 2.0* with *Trojan Women: A Love Story*, and ends with *Orestes 2.0*. At first I thought there might be some sort of chronological and logical sequence in this new arrangement: *Iphigenia* would represent a background, some atrocities of that war at its beginning; *Trojan Women* the immediate aftermath, thus the atrocities at the end of that war (with a further 'spin off'); and *Orestes* the ultimate aftermath with reference to a family, the Atreides, who did play a major role in the beginning, thus closing the cycle. This was, and partly remains, my own way to interpret this arrangement. I had the lucky chance to contact Mee, by an e-mail, eager to know the reasons for his changed arrangement rather than to have my thoughts be confirmed. Interestingly since the beginning, as he told me, Mee had actually planned to gather *Iphigenia*, *Trojan Women* and *Orestes*, in this very order, as a trilogy, but because of some personal feelings, he could not realize his plan. Although Mee did not explain to me the choice of those three tragedies and their order, it might be interesting to know his story. I have Mee's permission to quote verbatim his reply (personal emails exchanged on January 2, 2015): «I'm not sure I'm remembering this correctly […] I wrote *Orestes* back in 1989 or 1990 and then wrote *Trojan Women* in 93 or 94. And I always thought I should write *Iphigenia*, which would then be the first play of a trilogy that would be *Iphigenia*, *Trojan Women* and *Orestes* in that order. But I couldn't bring myself to write Iphigenia then because I had two small daughters, and I just couldn't invest myself in a play with a father murdering his daughter. So I didn't write Iphigenia until 2006

above – on the Trojan War's effects both prior (*Iphigenia*) and after the war itself (*Trojan Women…*, *Orestes*), a war 'caused' by love, or, better say, a 'marriage', as the captive women lament in Euripides' *Hecuba*[61].

Reversing the Trojan myth's sequence 'love-war', thus starting from the ruins of the war, Mee's play features both the background for 'a love story' – namely, the immediate aftermath of the Trojan War – and the love story itself – specifically, the one of Dido and Aeneas, the survivor Trojan hero who was destined to found a new Troy. Prefaced by the short statement «Based on the works of Euripides and Berlioz»[62], the play is articulated into two sections: 'The Prologue' and 'The Play'. 'The Prologue' is the Euripidean-derived part, while 'The Play' is drawn on the 19th-century opera *Les Troyens* by the well-known French composer Hector Berlioz[63].

As for 'The Prologue', which sets the background, it is not built exclusively on Euripides' *Trojan Women*. In the statement mentioned above, Mee indeed uses the plural («works») when referring to Euripides, without specifying which works other than *Trojan Women*[64]. An attentive classicist can easily recognize some influence from a tragedy that is closely related thematically, i.e, *Hecuba*, for the significant presence of the episode – a remade one – of Polyxena. In Euripides' *Trojan Women* the sacrifice has already occurred and Hecuba remains unaware for a while[65]. The allotment of Polyxena to Achilles' grave, her killing and quasi-self immolation, Hecuba's strenuous attempt to save her daughter, the

(when my daughters were much older and living happy lives). But then, when I put the plays together on my website, at first I thought *Trojan Women* didn't quite make an appropriate trilogy, because of the second act love story of Aeneas and Hecuba. So I put *Agamemnon* into the trilogy instead. Then, when we redesigned the website, I thought, no, not *Agamemnon*. The real, best trilogy, as I had thought back in the 90s, is *Iphigenia*, *Trojan Women*, and *Orestes* – even if *Trojan Women* wanders off from Troy for a while... I think that's the whole story».

[61] See Euripides, *Hecuba* 944-47.

[62] The quotation is, as usual, from Mee's website at http://www.charlesmee.org/trojan-women.shtml (Section: "The Trilogy: Imperial dreams"-*Trojan Women: A Love Story*).

[63] For a detailed study of this opera that is attentive to both its classical sources and its musical features, see McDonald (2001).

[64] There is, however, a slight contradiction between the statement prefacing the play and the short summary which accompanies the link to the script for downloading. In this short note Mee talks of «the play of Euripides», clearly alluding exclusively to *Trojan Women.* He does not even mention Berlioz. Here is the note: «The play by Euripides, set in the modern world, in which we see Troy in ruins, and a world reduced to such disarray and anguish that it will never recover again, but will, instead, spread death and disorder out into the world in all directions».

[65] In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, the audience is informed about Polyxena's fate in the prologue (ll. 39f.); Hecuba asks Talthybius about Polyxena, only to receive a vague, cryptic answer that the girl was allotted to minister at Achilles' tomb (ll. 258-64), an answer that Hecuba fully understands only later, through the intervention of Andromache (ll. 622f.).

detailed report of the girl's last moments to Hecuba and the returning of her body for burial, all are integral parts of the plot of Euripides' *Hecuba*[66]. In their 'remade' version, these events are all present in Mee's play[67]. The fact that some words of Mee's Polyxena's last speech resembles very closely the Euripidean Polyxena's ones[68] leaves no room for doubting that Mee 'has pillaged' Euripides' *Hecuba*, too[69]. As for the 'The Play', i.e, the sequel, I would say that it is vaguely inspired by, rather than substantially based on, Berlioz' *Les Troyens*[70]. Beside using some music from his opera – and much more from a great variety of other sources –[71], Mee seems to me 'to have pillaged' Berlioz's idea both of retelling Virgil's love story of Aeneas and Dido (*Aeneid* IV), and of connecting, in some way, Virgil's story of the fall of Troy (*Aeneid* II) – with a focus on the Trojan women's fate – with that love story. Berlioz's opera is in fact articulated into two parts: *La prise de Troie* – based on Virgil's *Aeneid* II, and *Les Troyens à Carthage* – based on Virgil's *Aeneid* I and IV.

The mixture of the sources as described above certainly does not reveal much about the «Frankensteinian»[72] collage/pastiche style characterizing Mee's plays in general and

[66] See, e.g., *Hecuba* 97-443; 484-582.

[67] I shall focus on Mee's Polyxena later (below pp. 122s.). Here suffice it to say that Odysseus, the one who is sent to Hecuba to take Polyxena (cfr. Euripides, *Hecuba* 216-443), does not appear. In Mee it is Talthybius who asks about her and takes her, and it is the chorus women who report her last moments to Hecuba and return her body to the mother for burial: see also below pp. 115s.

[68] I am referring in particular to Polyxena's words as reported by Talthybius in Euripides' *Hecuba* 563-65, her offering her chest, neck or throat to Neoptolemus to strike it: regarding this scene, see also below p. 115.

[69] I am also tempted to see some influence (perhaps subconsciously) from Seneca' *Troades*: indeed, the combination of Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* occurs first in Seneca, perhaps under the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* XIII 408-576 (see, e.g., STOK 1988-1989, who also remarks on the possible presence of this combination in some earlier Roman authors, such as Ennius and Accius); furthermore, the well-known presence of the double sacrifice-theme (Polyxena and Astyanax) first occurs in Seneca as well.

[70] Regarding this, it is no accident that HARTIGAN (2011, 89) talks of the «few traces of Berlioz' *Les Troyens* [that] echo» throughout Mee's play.

[71] The musical component in all of Mee's plays is an integrative part of the whole and, as one can expect, it consists of a 'collage' of pieces of different kinds, from classical music to American pop songs. In this specific play the musical component is quite 'heavy' above all in the second part, i.e., "A Love Story", to the point that some critics called it «Ballad Opera» (e.g., FEINGOLD 1996, 67) or «The Musical» (e.g., CUMMINGS 2006, 68). Mee himself admits that there are too many songs. I shall not focus on each musical piece; they really are too many and most of them are only familiar to an American audience, although quite simple to appreciate, tied, as they are, to the plot. For a more attentive discussion of the 'too many songs' in this play, see WILLIS (2005, 295 and n. 110); HARTIGAN (2011, 93-97 and n. 84). I should note that, contrary to what one can expect considering the mention of Berlioz as source material, his music has very little effect on the play. According to the stage directions, music from Berlioz's *Les Troyens* only marks the very beginning of the play, i.e., "The Prologue", where it is also mixed with sounds of gunfire, explosions, sirens and screams, soon to fade as the introductory accompaniment for the first pop song comes up (see below pp. 113s.).

[72] HOPKINS – ORR (2001, 14).

Trojan Women: A Love Story in particular. 'Shards' of the contemporary world are mixed, alternated with, and incorporated in the 'classical' pieces of the whole collage. As Mee states in a note at the very end of his script, the play «incorporates, also, texts by the survivors of Hiroshima and of the Holocaust, by Slavenka Drakulić[73], Zlatko Dizdarević[74], Georges Bataille, Sei Shonagon[75], Elaine Scarry[76], Hannah Arendt, the Kama Sutra, Amy Vanderbilt[77], and the Geraldo show[78]». Most usually, this kind of modern source material provides the cues for the lines performed by the new characters that Mee adds to the ancient 'cast', such as, for instance, the two Special Forces soldiers, Bill and Ray Bob, who escort Talthybius in "The Prologue" and work as a small secondary chorus; and the women with different, modern names, who, in "The Play", populate the court of Dido – a remade court, as we will see – appearing as fellows of the queen, rather than as her subjects, as they all spend time in exercising and relaxing in a luxury spa. The more traditional characters, the ones derived from the ancient works, on the other hand, performed lines resembling the original ones[79] or, better, lines that render the thoughts of the original – what a character meant to say – in a language that more fits the modern mode of thinking[80]. This is, indeed, the case of the royal women of Priam's house in 'the Prologue', and partially that of Aeneas in "The Play"[81]. There are, however, examples of 'traditional' characters who instead performed lines of Mee's own – which should not come as a surprise considering how 'fluid' his plays are. An example of this is Dido, as we shall see. Last but not least, the mélange of ancient and modern forenames – an expected result of Mee's collage of 'traditional' and modern personages – adds further to Mee's pastiche mode.

[73] Croatian writer, known for her works related to war crimes against the women committed in the Bosnian War.
[74] Activist journalist and writer from Sarajevo; diplomat and publicist, he once served as the Ambassador for Bosnia-Herzegovina in Croatia and in the Middle East; he is mostly known as a chronicler of events in the Middle East.
[75] An 11th-century Japanese author and court lady, known for her *The Pillow Book*, an eclectic collection of poetry, gossip and complaints written during her service in the court.
[76] A renowned American professor of Aesthetics and General Theory of Value, currently working at Harvard University (http://english.fas.harvard.edu/faculty/scarry/).
[77] A well-known American authority on etiquette, whose best-seller, *Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Book of Etiquette* (1952), is the most authoritative of its kind, still in circulation.
[78] A daytime talk show, on the air for 10 years (1988-1998), often criticized for its controversial and, at times, distasteful topics.
[79] Although sometimes the impression is that Mee is quoting Euripides *verbatim*, it is really difficult to support this impression given that Mee has never specified which translation he has been using, whether his own or others'. My impression is that he has also 'pillaged' different translations.
[80] This will become clearer as my discussion above proceeds. As for the label 'correspondence', I use it according to the definition given by HARDWICK (2003, 9).
[81] I mentioned above the clearest and most significant examples on which I shall focus.

3.2. *Delving into some details: key motifs and key characters*[82]

3.2.1. *"The Prologue"*

"The Prologue" is set in the aftermath of a modern city's downfall, a city that appears destroyed in a bombing attack, thus serving as a clear reminder of recent scenes of war. It opens with a chorus of «3rd world» women portrayed as 'modern slaves' as they are making computer components for their conquerors; their clothes are torn and many had been raped[83]. All this hints *en passant* at both the modern economic exploitation of the Third World and the 'always-existing' sexual exploitation of women – such an issue that surely worsens in time of war[84]. The 'fate' of the ancient Trojan captive women as slave-concubines of their conquerors has been thus re-made more accessible to a modern audience, decoded, as it is, into a 'language' more intelligible to it, and conveying, at the same time, a clear denouncement and polemic against the ancient and modern brutality of men, and male warfare, to women. This incipit clearly signifies and seals what is 'the' key motif running throughout the whole play. The pop song that these women perform in this very beginning juxtaposes, with a striking contrast, the love-theme to a scene that speaks completely of the horror of war. "All the Way", is the song, a song about unconditional love, which significantly will be performed again at the end of the whole play[85]. One may think that this song corresponds, more or less, to the ancient parodos. But, beside the fact that Mee's chorus is already on the stage, in such a collage-fashioned («Frankensteinian») work there is not (obviously!) a specific correspondence between parodos/stasima and Mee's choral songs, although Mee's chorus, too, often interposes its songs with the parts performed by the individual, leading characters (parts that, in an ancient Greek tragedy, would constitute the episodes).

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[82] What follows is a complete analysis of the whole play in its two parts with a focus on some main characters and on some interventions by the 're-made' choruses, the most significant ones. As for the main characters of 'The Prologue', I discuss in depth all but Menelaus and Helen, for their scene is almost completely full of songs (on my reservation about this, see above, n. 77), mostly duets, which turned them in a sleazy couple, yet one that is appealing to the audience: see BRANTLEY (1996); WILLIS (2005, 294f.); GOFF (2009, 112). I shall however hint at the couple's role in some crucial moments, and mostly in its interaction with the chorus, who appropriates the role that Hecuba has in Euripides' *Trojan Women* in the related scene: see below pp. 118s.

[83] All descriptions are from the stage directions present in the script at http://www.charlesmee.org/trojan-women.shtml (Section: "The Trilogy: Imperial Dreams"- *Trojan Women: A Love Story*"). From the same site (and section), from here on, are also all the quotations of Mee's *Trojan Women: A Love Story*.

[84] It is a sad issue, both ancient and modern: female war captives are «frequently forced into domestic slavery by day and sexual slavery by night»: ASKIN (1997, XV-XVI).

[85] See below p. 128.

Out of the several, varied interventions of this chorus, two seem to me most significant in that they contribute both to updating the story to modern war-stories, and to diversifying this chorus itself from the original, with a touch (perhaps intentional) of feminism. One of these two interventions occurs at the beginning of "The Prologue", the other at its end. The first one follows the first appearance of Hecuba and works almost as a pendant of Hecuba's first words: both, in fact, center on the atrocities of the war, which the chorus' members heard and witnessed[86]. They provide a graphic narrative of their own experience of the bombing («When the blast came»), where they were and what they were doing. Their words are drawn, if not repeated *verbatim*, from the testimonials of survivors of modern wars. They vividly picture the experiences which we all hear about from today's news and the scenes that we all see on the TV, experiences and scenes that powerfully describe the destructive impact of the war on the daily life of innocent, civilian victims: their fear, their despair at not knowing where their beloved are in that very moment, their fight for survival in some way, the disruption of their life, and so forth:

> [Sei][87]: When the blast came, my friend and I were blown into another room. When I came to, I found myself in the dark. I was wondering what my family were doing. I found that all the houses around had collapsed […] Then, I looked next I saw the father of the neighboring family standing almost naked. His skin was peeling off all over his body […] He was looking for his family.
> [Valerie]: We were on the bus. I had been holding my son in my arms, the young woman in front of me said, "I'll be getting off here. Please take this seat". We were just changing places when there was a strange smell and sound. All of a sudden, it went dark and before I knew, I was outside. I was holding my son still, and I looked down at him. Fragments of glass had pierced his head. Blood was flowing from his head over his face […]

The familiarity of a modern audience with such testimonials and scenes is undeniable, and 'this familiarity', I would think, is one of the issues at stake in Mee's play as it inevitably raises the question, in each of us, of why men keep making war, repeating a cycle of senseless violence and brutality over and over again. At the same time, this familiarity might work toward the 'complicity of the audience', which is necessary for the message to be conveyed and understood, despite the broad mythological disguise of the frame, which might be not familiar to all. The graphic tableaux of this chorus' accounts replace, in my opinion, the Euripidean chorus' lament over its impending slavery (*Trojan*

[86] On Hecuba, in particular, see below pp. 116-20.
[87] In parenthesis are the names that Mee has individually assigned to the members of the chorus. The passages above are a selection from all the testimonials of this chorus.

Women, esp. ll. 153-96), and, preserving all the anguish, hopelessness and helplessness of the original, it adds 'shards' of the contemporary. On the other hand, the women of Mee's chorus, although shocked and traumatized[88], are not as completely submissive as the captive Trojan women. They are aware that they have become just a «chattel[89]», but they do not seem to be resigned to that. They are fierce, in a way, and eager for revenge[90]. They are the ones that try continuously to push Hecuba to take action – namely, revenge – such a push that Hecuba – as we will see – dismisses until she heard of Polyxena's death and received her body for burial. This occurs at the end of "The Prologue", and here is the other among the most significant interventions of the chorus. It is the chorus who consigns Polyxena's body to Hecuba, a moment that – as I see it – seals the women's empathy by uniting them in a motherly and companionate pain to which men, the men who cause those pains, are insensitive or become so, blinded – as they are – by the war and its violence. Mee's chorus here replaces the part that in Euripides' *Hecuba* Talthybius performs, both by bringing Polyxena's corpse to Hecuba and by describing the last moments of the girl's life (cf. Euripides, *Hecuba* 518-82). The report of Mee's chorus closely resembles the original, condensing the part related to Neoptolemus (i.e., Euripides, *Hecuba* 526-40) and reserving more space for Polyxena (i.e, Euripides, *Hecuba* 546-80), whose direct words are repeated almost *verbatim*. This is a pivotal moment that – we will see – marks a turning point in the story by favoring the transition to the second part, "The Play". This is a highly emotional moment that the women, rather than the enemy's herald, 'deserve' to perform as they share the same cruel victim-status of Polyxena and, in a way, 'triumph' over the men in her death. Polyxena's death is one which cries out about the senselessness of war' and men's violence.

A touch perhaps of modern feminism[91] might have played some role in reshaping, in such a pivotal moment, the part of the chorus, such a feministic touch that, indeed, becomes more 'tangible' in other interventions by this same chorus. With reference to this, I would mention, in particular, the series of stories about domestic violence, by husband or lovers,

[88] The stage directions describe these women as having «expressions and attitudes of being shell-shocked» and shivering.

[89] «Chattel, like all the rest of us» is the comment by which a woman of the chorus reacts to Menelaus when he appears to demand his wife «to bring her home with me».

[90] Indeed, in this very beginning the chorus suggests to Hecuba that she summon Aeneas and entrust to him a mission of revenge. Their fierce desire to take revenge will explode later, in the Helen-scene: see below n. 94; also pp. 118s.

[91] Feminist readings of Greek tragedy are now widespread: for a good comprehensive collection, see, e.g., FRIEDMAN (2009). As for Euripides' *Trojan Women*, the adaptation of the Irish author Brendan Kennelly (1993) stands out as he turned this tragedy into «a feminist declaration of independence»: WILLIS (2005, 267 and n. 32).

which this chorus exchanges, at a certain point in "The Prologue", with the two Special Forces soldiers Bill and Ray Bob[92]. These stories, once again, add 'shards' of the contemporary, vividly echoing episodes of violence that people ordinarily learn from the mass media. They are – I would add – only seemingly 'shards of the contemporary', considering the long path to emancipation that women have been walking so far. Although not strictly related to war, yet related to 'love' in its different, even perverted, forms, this violence is still a violence perpetrated by men against women, who, here, do not keep silent about it. These women are so self-aware of their rights that they even venture out into an ironic lecture on 'feministic utopias'[93], which ends with sad feeling of hopelessness.

«This is how men are» is, indeed, a line which the chorus members often repeat, whether they are referring to male warfare or, more generally, to male behavior toward women.

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Undoubtedly, Hecuba is the main leading character of "The Prologue", although her spoken parts are quantitatively reduced compared to the original[94]. Her presence, however, can be

[92] They constitute a secondary chorus and exemplify the brutality and violence of the military. As such they serve as a counterpoint to the soldier-veterans who will appear in the second part: see below pp. 124s.

[93] For feminists, utopia is a place – as the 'lecturer' says – «where egalitarian, consensual, and cooperative relationship flourish and where both sexes are able to engage in meaningful work. […] the social structure is such that women do not have to choose between work and love […]».

[94] It is the female chorus who often seems to take over the part that in the original is reserved for Hecuba. The most noticeable case, in my opinion, is the interaction of Mee's Hecuba with Menelaus and Helen. Here Hecuba exchanges very few words with Menelaus when, looking for Helen, he declares his love (far differently than in the original: cf., e.g., Euripides' *Trojan Women* 864-66; 1051-1059). To this Hecuba replies, «for that you took thousands to their death», a reply which is consistent with the 'anti-war-*par excellence*'-role that Mee's Hecuba embodies. Mee's Hecuba does not have any interaction with Helen, while, as it is well known, in Euripides the two women engage in a fierce-sophistic *agon* (ll. 904-1032). In Mee it is the chorus who interacts at length with both Menelaus and Helen without missing chances to be very sarcastic. It is the chorus, for instance, who warns Menelaus not to look at her, for «you can't look at her without wanting her» (cf. Euripides, *Trojan Women* 890-92, where Hecuba says: «Be careful not to look at this woman, lest she makes you captive with longing. She entraps the eyes of men […]» [the translation is mine]). As for the couple Menelaus and Helen, they have more space than in Euripides, and – as hinted at above (n. 82) – their mutual interaction occurs mostly in form of a duet as they perform several love songs, which is in striking contrast with the context of brutality and sufferings of "The Prologue". I would read the fact that Menelaus and Helen 'end up singing Kumbaya' as an expression of bitter sarcasm about the senseless causes of this and any war, which results in thousands of deaths, despair and suffering […], and for what? [95] By saying this I do not mean at all to diminish the grandeur of Hecuba's role in the original, nor do I mean to express dislike for the overall tone of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, summoning, so to say, the well-known '*damnatio* of Euripides' (see SCHLEGEL 1840, 179; BEHLER 1986). I only mean to set out the differences between Euripides' and Mee's Hecuba, which are mainly due to the updating process which the character undergoes in the remake, as I show above.

powerfully perceived throughout the act even when she is silent: she in fact is «a grand woman». In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Hecuba is the grieving queen, resigned to her fate, who has seen her husband and sons murdered, her home on fire, and who has to see her daughters and herself be allotted as slaves to the enemy. The spectacle she sees, the acts of inhumane brutality she still hears about (e.g., the slaughter of Astyanax), though the war should be over, and her laments, all convey a clear anti-war message, an overt denouncement of the war's senselessness. As I see it, Mee expands this role of 'vessel of an anti-war message' by (re-)making Hecuba the embodiment not only of grief but also, if not primarily, of human questioning and puzzlement in front of such a unanimously recognized inhumane, and yet repeated, event as war, a war that goes on and on without end, even if is officially ended. This is a situation – should there be any need to say it – not far away from contemporary ones (are Iraq or Afghanistan, etc. at peace?), and it is a scenario that certainly mirrors the victims' perspective, the ones who are defeated. The part that Mee's Hecuba performs does not consist of motherly lamentations and helpless suffering, which might exhaust the audience's compassion[95]. Certainly Mee's Hecuba is still a maternal figure, as her attention to children and mothers in one of her descriptions of the casualties she has witnessed, her concerns for her own daughters' lots and, finally, her reaction to Polyxena's death well show[96]. And in this regard, she still represents and champions the innocent and defenseless civilian victims of any war, like Euripides' Hecuba and her country's women, too. But Mee's Hecuba is above all the one who critically raises the questions about 'why wars happen', 'why men do not do something to avoid it', or – to tell this with her own words – «what ever could make [men] want to start again?». So she speaks:

> The war is ended;
> and yet it goes on without end.
> Yesterday, between one streetcar stop and the next
> Six people were killed, twenty wounded;
> two mortar shells
> killed five children and wounded twenty;
> these are the reports we hear;
> […]

[95] By saying this I do not mean at all to diminish the grandeur of Hecuba's role in the original, nor do I mean to express dislike for the overall tone of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, summoning, so to say, the well-known '*damnatio* of Euripides' (see SCHLEGEL 1840, 179; BEHLER 1986). I only mean to set out the differences between Euripides' and Mee's Hecuba, which are mainly due to the updating process which the character undergoes in the remake, as I show above.

[96] See below p. 119s.

People are shot and killed every day,
day after day,
[…]
They take the women off somewhere to rape them.
When the television works
one can see the dead bodies in the streets
[…]
They've killed all the young boys
Along with the men.

Why was this done?

Mee's Hecuba is the one who voices what humankind perhaps wants to ignore, i.e, the fact that they themselves are not able to understand, or prefer to ignore (or pretend not to understand!), why wars happen and why they repeat them over and over despite knowing the atrocious result.

«Why was this done?» is emblematic of this overtly anti-war and awareness-raising role of Mee's Hecuba, as it is a line often repeated in crucial moments[97]. This Hecuba reacts with grief, as in Euripides, but not with resignation in that she wants to try to understand and, above all, to act in a way that prevents herself and her people from becoming complicit in that perverted 'game' of cycle of violence by setting the circumstances that would contribute to the wars' chain reaction. She is, in fact, the one who strongly deplores any wish and/or attempt to engage in revenge, understanding that maintaining civilized standards might be the key to ending the cycle[98]. Revenge might be, and often is, one of the conditions that set war in motion, as it is the uncivilized way to respond to an offense, big or little. Mee's Hecuba resists any temptation, at least until the very end.

«No. Enough. Let it end… Let it end here. Let it end now», is indeed Hecuba's response to the proposal of one of the chorus women who, at the beginning, suggests that they should summon Aeneas and «let him escape. Let him live to gather up all the others who ran away and pay them [*scil.* the enemy] back for the wrong that's been done to us».

[97] Regarding this, see also below pp. 129ss.

[98] Hecuba shows this concern of keeping one's own dignity and of behaving in a 'civilized' way, no matter the circumstances, throughout the entire piece. More than once, in fact, she tries 'to restrain' her royal daughters, in particular Cassandra and Andromache, when they let themselves go by behaving and speaking not as princesses and good women should (about this, see below pp. 120ss.). One time, in the face of her failure to restrain Cassandra, Hecuba shows her disapproval by refusing to continue to hear, and witness, what Cassandra is saying and doing, to the point that she retires under the pile of rags from which she had emerged at the beginning (that was her 'entrance' on the stage). Hecuba's concern with civilized standards is consistent with her criticism of civilization: regarding this, see below pp. 129s.

And a blunt «NO» is Hecuba's response to the suggestion that Helen should be stoned to death.

With some sense of civility and dignity Mee's Hecuba rebels against the decision to take Polyxena away from her to honor the still-unhonored grave of Achilles. In this scene, true to Euripides' *Hecuba*, the motherly component of Hecuba's complex character becomes prominent. «She is a child, a young child», Hecuba vainly cries out, calling «perverse» the enemy who want to search out her young girl and kill her so that she might be Achilles' companion in death! She vainly asks Talthybius to let her do her job of mothering and thus let her keep the youngest child, at least. «Let my child stay with me» are Hecuba's last words before she is thrown to the ground by the two Special Forces soldiers who take hold of Polyxena without any compassion. It is at the moment of the concrete realization of Polyxena's death, when her body is returned to her for burial, that finally Hecuba yields to revenge:

> Oh, my child,
> this goes past all endurance.
> *Now I am no longer who I was.*
> […]
> I myself
> finally feel
> this rage of war
> deep deep within me
> I would myself have vengeance
> How can I live now
> silently accepting what they have done
> […]
> *this pain must be answered with pain*
> *this savagery with savagery in kind*
>
> Bring Aeneas to me[99].

Once Aeneas enters, showing Polyxena in her arms, Hecuba asks him to look at her and to remember, as his time has come to avenge her death:

> Your time has come
> to find all those who have survived,
> take them to a new country
> build a home.
> […]

[99] The italics are mine.

Make a nation that can endure.
And when you have,
come back,
reduce these Greeks and their world
to ruins.
Destroy their cities.
Burn them.
Pull down their homes.
Leave them wounded and alone,
Abandoned […]

This seals the transition to the second part, "The Play". Aeneas leaves with a 'lethal' mission: neither simply to resurrect Troy by building a new home for the survivors, nor to build a safe and peaceful new life, but rather to build a powerful nation whose only purpose is to wage a new war. The cycle continues.

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The sequence of the encounters with the royal women of Priam's household, which in the original follows the first dialogue between Hecuba and Talthybius, occurs similarly in "The Prologue" upon Hecuba's questions about the allotment of her daughters. She in fact first asks about Cassandra and then about Andromache (Euripides, *Trojan Women* 247f.)[100], and the two women appear on the stage accordingly. Although the sequence of the questions is the same, in Mee it is Andromache who first appears, «remote, disconnected […] and in shock». She holds a doll dressed as a boy: Astyanax, «a living heir to the throne», as later Talthybius says 'to justify' the Greeks' decision to kill the child. As I see it, the speeches of Mee's Andromache keep and expand two particular key points of the original: (1) the woman's shock and laments over the destruction of the city, and (2) her quasi-regret for a life spent setting her «sight on the target of a good reputation» (Euripides, *Trojan Women* 644). As for the first key point, differently from Euripides (which is rather condensed in a few lines: e.g., *Trojan Women* 596-600), Mee's Andromache 'indulges' in describing the blast that she too experienced, and all the ensuing deadly spectacle. Once again, the character's words resemble testimonials of witnesses of modern wars. But, 'bits' of the contemporary increasingly shape her account of her life as a good woman and her regrets for missed opportunities. 'What for? What's the point to keep inside the house, never go out not to attract bad reputation, be a faithful wife […] if the reward for such qualities and

[100] As for Polyxena in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, see above n. 67 (also n. 69).

good reputation is slavery?'. These are the implied questions of both Andromaches[101], although Mee's Andromache is far more explicit in her regret and expresses it as a modern woman would, referring to opportunities of modern life, opportunities she had missed since she was a teenager. This Andromache recounts in details her past life, how she was attentive to respect etiquette's rules instead of going out and enjoying the same experiences as her teen peers. In her grief and regret she becomes almost obsessive:

> I can't help myself from thinking
> too
> if I'd known
> there were other things I meant to get
> things I would have liked
> if I'd known it was going to end so soon[102].

This is definitely an Andromache re-made from a modern mold. There is not the wish to be dead rather than become a slave, as in Euripides (*Trojan Women* 630f.); there is only regret for a life she could not, and never will, have. Her motherly tone is not as remarkable as in Euripides. There is not any emotional 'farewell' speech (cf. Euripides, *Trojan Women* 740-63), and she is described as treating the doll, representing Astyanax, with «absent-minded casualness». But the strength of her motherly love and instincts does surface in her account of how she protected the boy when the blast came and when, after that, some men went to see if there were any survivors:

> I had been lying on top of my son
> to protect him from the gunfire
> I still held his hand
> I'd kept him with me all that time
> like a bird underneath his mother's wing[103].

[101] See Euripides, *Trojan Women* 643-56, esp. 654-56: «Rumor of these qualities has reached the Achaean army and ruined me. When I was taken captive, Achilles' son wanted me as his wife», cf. Mee: «And what, after all, is my reward for having been a good wife / a reputation that some foreigners think I'll make a perfect slave».

[102] It is above all by listing the 'things she would have liked to do', that this Andromache proves to have thoughts that more properly belong to a modern, perhaps progressive, certainly uninhibited, woman. She in fact mixes recitation of the rules of etiquette with grief and regret for specifically sexual opportunities that she would not have missed, had she known her fate: on sexual language and contents in Mee's play, see above, n. 50.

[103] I was particularly impressed by the image which Andromache here describes of herself protecting and keeping her child «like a bird underneath his mother's wing» as, in my opinion, it very closely recalls Euripides' *Trojan Women* 750f., where Andromache, in her farewell to Astyanax, rhetorically asks him why he is weeping and why he is clinging to her mother, holding onto her robe «like a baby bird shaking under its

And this Andromache, too, tries to resist the soldier who brutally snatches the doll from her, only to be knocked to the ground with a savage blow. Although in portraying Andromache Mee seems to have given a certain priority to the woman, rather than to the mother, I would think that her 'absent-minded' treatment of Astyanax and almost casual references to his presence rather reflect the real entity of the shock of war, how in reality – and not in a fictional tragedy – one might react to the shock, given the brutality to which she/he is exposed.

The scene with Astyanax torn away from Andromache and the mother's mourning is in a way interrupted as Cassandra enters. Her frantically rushing in would resemble –I think– the bacchic-mad behavior of 'frenzied' Cassandra in the original (e.g., *Trojan Women*, 170, 306, 342) as she embraces her lot with euphoric joy. Like in Euripides, Mee's Cassandra rejoices in her marriage to a king: «[…] blessed am I to lie at a king's side» (*Trojan Women* 310-12; 354f.). Hers is a vindictive joy, covering rage, as she knows that her marriage with Agamemnon will be fatal to him and his all family:

> I'll tell you [*scil.* Talthybius] what I see
> in this king's future,
> I see he takes a bride
> who will climb into his bed
> and cut his throat[104].

In Mee, there is no trace of Cassandra's sophistic argument about the inversion of the significance of victory and defeat (Euripides, *Trojan Women* 365-80). In fact, perhaps with the forced marriage being a cue, the parts delivered by Cassandra, in dialogue with the chorus' women, speak more of rage and sexual violence against men.

It is then the turn of Polyxena, whose presence, as mentioned above, imports the Euripidean *Hecuba* into this remaking. She is a modern Polyxena, dressed in jeans, a teenager of 13 years old who offers herself to Talthybius when Hecuba asks him to take her instead. As in Euripides, this Polyxena accepts her death, but she does not have the same heroic temperament of her 'prototype'. Mee's Polyxena simply accepts 'her fate'; she does not fear it for a second as if she is aware that there is no way to escape it. There is no hint at

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mother's wings». This might be one example of how, 'pillaging' the original Greek play, Mee has re-used the material in a different, though related, context, which he has quite completely 're-made'.

[104] Cf., e.g., *Trojan Women* 356-60; 404f.; 460f. Differently from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, in Euripides, Cassandra's 'marriage' to Agamemnon, rather than Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, will cause the ruin of the Atreides, first by causing Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra, and then, in consequence, Clytemnestra's murder by Orestes, thus sealing the demise of Agamemnon's house: see GOFF (2009, 50f.).

the preference for death over enslavement (cf. *Hecuba* 201-15), which, together with the bravery shown at the moment of the sacrifice, is what grants her a heroic overtone. The fate/destiny in which Mee's Polyxena believes, to the point of naively resigning herself to it, fits modern teenagers well: it is horoscope and numerology, a concept of fate to which present-day people might more relate – debatable, of course, as it is. As a result, I think, of updating Polyxena to a teenager of today, Mee remakes and expands the typical regret of any young girls being prematurely 'given' to Hades, i.e., the lament that they are going «unmarried, without wedding songs» (Euripides, *Hecuba* 418)[105]. Mee's Polyxena wishes that she could have lived longer at least to have the chance to 'experiment' and to satisfy some curiosities, which are all about guys and their behaviors with girls, and all reflecting concerns that modern teenagers might have in this regard:

> […] how come they call on Friday to ask you out
> for Friday night?
> […]
> How come guys wait till way after they love you
> to say they do?
> […]
> How come they back off as soon as they know you like them?

These are some of the pressing questions that Polyxena asks, letting herself be content with the answers that Bill and Ray Bob give. *Mutatis mutandis*, the implied criticism about the gratuitous waste of innocent lives because of war remains identical as both girls, the ancient and the modern ones, are unfairly deprived of the joys and experiences that life would have reserved for them.

After a last exchange with Hecuba, Polyxena is brutally taken away by the two soldiers.

3.2.2. *"The Play"*

As we have seen, Polyxena's killing incites Hecuba to finally yield to revenge and to set in motion a new chain of violence and war. Aeneas has to be the 'medium' of Hecuba's and

[105] See, e.g., Sophocles' *Antigone* 867f., 872-82. As is known, heroines who died before they could be married were called «brides of death»: such were Antigone, Cassandra, Iphigenia, and, in a way, Polyxena, too, to mention a few. For an exploration of this topic in tragedy, see REHM (1994).

the Trojans' revenge as he is summoned and asked to sail for a new 'Troy', only to then be able to return and raze the Greeks' home[106].

Hecuba's command thus marks the transition to the second part of Mee's work, "The Play". This part is inspired by the story of Dido and Aeneas that occupies the first books of Virgil's *Aeneid* and has been retold by the other source that Mee mentions for this remaking, i.e., Hector Berlioz. "The Play" is where the love-theme more evidently surfaces, but – as mentioned above – it is still a 'destructive' love, a love tied to war, as in the first part and in its premise[107]. The story of Dido and Aeneas, although maintaining the essential plotline, is updated to the point that it becomes an occasion to talk of such a universal drive as the relationship between women and men, how they act in love, what they expect from love. The pastiche/collage technique characterizes this part, too. It indeed contributes to shape the romance of Dido and Aeneas as «a bulletin board on which he [*scil.* Mee] pins a myriad of texts and songs that plumb the differences between men and women and examines the mysterious desire that attracts such seeming opposites to each other»[108].

The modern setting of this second part underlines the impression of juxtaposition and fragmentation which Mee's 're-made' plays often cause: Carthage, a peaceful city of women *versus* Troy, a bombed city; heaven *versus* hell[109]. The paradise-land of Carthage is represented in the form of a luxurious American spa, with exercise machines of all kinds, fresh flowers, hot tubs, etc. There are young women working out on the machines. They constitute the chorus and represent the court of Dido. As in the first part, this chorus will mostly interact with a small, secondary one, consisting of three males, Eddie, Joe and Jim, once again soldiers, but 'veteran'-soldiers, refugees, along with Aeneas, at the city of Carthage. While Bill and Ray Bob, in "The Prologue", symbolize the insensitiveness and brutality of the military accustomed to any sort of violence, Eddie, Joe and Jim rather resemble the exhausted and traumatized soldiers back from war, who have to get used again

[106] It seems to me that Mee's Hecuba replaces the agency of destiny and the gods, thus making the mythic voyage of Aeneas to Italy more 'accessible' to modern audiences who might be not familiar with the ancient concept of fate and all it involves. Already in Homer's *Iliad* (XX 300-305) Aeneas is said to be destined to survive his homeland's demise, to escape and assure that the Trojan people (Dardanus' descent) will not perish. Aeneas' mission is recalled by Jupiter in Virgil's *Aeneid* I 254-96, and by Aeneas himself, when he tells the story of the fatal night of Troy at Dido's court: he recalls the dream he had that night, in which Hector appeared to him and, entrusting to him Troy's sacred objects and gods, 'ordered' him to leave, to seek and build a new city after wandering over the sea (*Aeneid* II 290-97). Far differently, in Berlioz, it is Cassandra who prophesied that Aeneas and his companions will found a new Troy in Italy.

[107] In this part, the theme is especially emphasized through the numerous American pop songs on love: about this, see above n. 77.

[108] CUMMINGS (2006, 71). As we shall see later, women-men relationships, and their trials, play a major role in this part.

[109] The stage directions describe the setting of this part as «[…] dreamland, a world of drift, heaven».

to the civilian life and have to defeat their fears, their nightmares, their suicidal thoughts. They resemble the contemporary American veterans who, as hinted at above, frequently suffer from the PTSD [110]. So one of them speaks:

> [Jim] I haven't really slept much lately.
> I lie down, but I don't sleep.
> I'm always watching the door,
> the window,
> then back to the door.
> I get up five times a night,
> to check the windows
> sometimes ten or fifteen times.
> There's always something within reach,
> like a knife or a chair
> I used to sleep with a gun underneath my pillow.

These soldiers are kindly welcomed by the women with whom they converse about love: their words are not rude or brutal – as those of Bill and Ray Bob – nor are they lascivious; they are rather «memories of gentler days».

Within this idyllic background Dido's and Aeneas' encounter and interaction take place as well. Dido is not as shy and discreet as in Virgil. Mee's Dido is rather a modern, uninhibited woman as she 'makes the first move' on a man, i.e., Aeneas – which, according to modern dating rules, seems to be 'ok' for a woman. As Dido enters, she looks at Aeneas and, singing, «reaches out her hand» to him, while Aeneas goes to her. She just asks for his name and immediately begins to undress him and bathe with him in the hot tube. Aeneas seems to be rather 'submissive', acquiescing to everything Dido says or does. For a while, the only word he pronounces is just «Yes». Only once does Mee's Aeneas lapse into remembering a moment of his war-experience, just a flash, which does not have much to do with the Virgilian Aeneas' retelling of the sack of Troy (esp., *Aeneid* II). His words resemble, once again, modern testimonials and memories that combat-soldiers sometimes share:

> All I can remember was a pale lightning flash for two or three seconds. Then, I collapsed. I don't know how much time passed before I came to […] I was trapped under the debris, and I was in terrible pain [...] I couldn't move, not an inch. I found

[110] On PTSD, see already above, 107ss. and nn. 52, 55, 57. The passage I quoted above echoes most of the symptoms of the behavioral disorders which Shay describes in his comparative analysis of ancient Greek Homeric heroes and modern veterans, such as continuously being on the alert, distrusting almost everybody, etc. For a concise description of the symptoms of PTSD as they emerged though therapy, see SHAY (1994, XX). See also SHEPHARD (2003).

> one of my friends lying alive. I held her up in my arms. Her skull was cracked open, her flesh was dangling out from her head […] The lower part of her body was trapped, buried inside of the debris. First, she was mumbling something but I couldn't understand her. […] then she started to reach for her notebook in her chest pocket, so I asked her, I said, "You want me to take this along to hand it over to your mother?". She nodded. Then she was gone.

Mee's passive Aeneas might be representative of the kind of confusion which combat-veterans undergo: some sort of apathy and disorientation are among the conditions that soldiers experience once those return to the civilian life. This Aeneas seems to have forgotten his mission, at least for a while. Indeed, as Dido's and Aeneas' romance continues, the audience is given the impression that Aeneas will settle with Dido in Carthage[111]. Yet Mee skillfully counters this impression with different 'signals', the first of which is 'graphic'. It is a signal that appropriately, in my opinion, comes as a premise of the long, and very important, scene of the reading of the Tarot cards by Dido to Aeneas. After taking the bath and lying together on a couch, before Dido engages Aeneas in her Tarot cards game, «a minuscule sailboat crosses from one side of the stage to the other, very, very slowly» – as the stage direction indicates. It is clearly a reminder of Aeneas's mission and, perhaps more importantly, of his 'original' fate. It is a clear reminder for those who have a good knowledge of the original story, for it might be interpreted as a replacement of Mercury's message, on Jupiter's behalf, to 'recall' Aeneas to his mission (Virgil, *Aeneid* IV 219-78)[112]. For those who are not so familiar with such a detail, it works, in my opinion, as a foreshadowing signal, as it might instill in the audience the thought that Aeneas will eventually sail to fulfill the mission that Hecuba assigned to him in "The Prologue".

After this emblematic 'vision', upon Dido's initiative, the two start playing at the Tarot cards. As in "The Prologue" the modern concept of numerology and horoscope replaces ancient fate/destiny in the episode of Polyxena, so in "The Play" such a role is reserved for a modern form of 'divination', i.e., the Tarot cards. All the cards that Aeneas chooses symbolize what is the original, and traditional, path of this couple's love story: from the longing to leave (which belongs to Virgil's Aeneas) to abandonment (of Dido, of course), from pain, tears and desolation (those of Dido) to prudence, discernment and success (which prevail in Virgil's Aeneas), from seduction, deception and lying (those of

[111] Indeed, at a certain point, Mee's Aeneas seems to fear that it will be Dido who might abandon him: «Sometimes I worry you will leave me».
[112] On this scene, see also HARTIGAN (2011, 96f.).

Aeneas) to death (of Dido, of course)[113]. Although at the beginning Mee's Aeneas denies all these possibilities, confirming on the contrary his willingness to stay with Dido, the movement of destiny as highlighted by the Tarot cards comes up. Abruptly, in fact, Aeneas changes tone and speaks of promises he had made, the promises «to go on, to find a home for those who have come with me. […] To take revenge». It is here that the couple starts fighting, or, better say, squabbling, in a way that easily might remind the audience of a modern couple's typical fight. They first discuss the life-location issue, with Dido insisting that he has indeed found a home, there at Carthage, and Aeneas replying that she actually could go with him and leave her home. It is a squabble that echoes, in a way, a modern couple's problem in finding the same work place where they can settle and which they both can call 'home'. Dido is the queen of Carthage, but Aeneas has to do his job elsewhere: a typical conflict of interest comes up. After Dido holds the seduction and ensuing deception against Aeneas, how he let her fall in love while he meant to leave, Aeneas puts forth a list of arguments, political and typically male arguments, to justify himself:

> You know,
> I have to think about my age
> and my health
> how long I have to do the things I set out to do in the world
> in order to feel okay about myself
> […]
> I don't know if this is a difference between men and women
> where men can't
> in a way
> just follow their hearts
> but have to honor certain obligations they have made and things to do in the world
> as men/people who were meant to achieve something
> […]
> There are certain things—
> the goals a man has for his life
> politics
> his career
> to feel good about himself
> to feel he is someone
> or even just to honor the commitments he has made
> to feel he is an honest person

[113] We might remember that Virgil does use the term «deception» to describe the moment when Dido realized that Aeneas would leave (e.g., *Aeneid* IV 296), and the queen does address Aeneas directly as «Liar» (*Aeneid* IV 366). Besides being a 're-made' way to involve destiny in the story (and thus to foreshadow the outcome), I would also think that Dido's playing with the Tarot cards is Mee's 're-made' way to have Dido reveal what she sensed during her brief relationship with Aeneas.

a man
who can be counted on
what else is it to be a man
if, when you give your word,
it can be counted on
[…]
men are meant to DO something
or else they've just never existed
stand by something
be ready to die for it
put their lives on the line
there may even be some deep biological thing to this […]

While the honor-motif, along with the need to do something that might leave behind *vestigia* of your existence and thus grant you some sort of immortality, could be traced back to the well known κλέος-motif as codified by the shame-oriented culture of ancient society, all the rest of Aeneas' arguments clearly reflect not simply the issues of modern society, which interfere with a couple's relationship, but also the misogyny which is still deeply rooted in our society, where men are supposed to follow their head not their hearts, to care for their career, for politics, for 'counting on', as «men are meant to DO something» (!), as Aeneas emphasizes. And what about women? The implied assumption is that they have just to accept it. In one way or another, I would think, in both "The Prologue" and "The Play", women appear victims of men's selfish and 'political' ambitions.

As Dido and Aeneas quarrel, the chorus women and Aeneas' fellows start fighting physically, pushing one another, throwing one another to the floor, and slamming each other into the wall, as the stage directions indicate. By way of irony, the play ends with the song on unconditional, true love ("All the way") which opened the whole tragedy. And, once again, love is coupled with war, fighting, and violence.

Love turns into 'war' and almost into death. Mee's Dido does not commit suicide; on the contrary, she attempts to kill Aeneas, grabbing him by the hair and pushing him under water in the hot tub again and again. Eventually she lets him emerge. Dragging himself from the hot tub, Aeneas appears nearly dead[114]. But he is still alive to follow his destiny and accomplish his mission: to find a new home and – according to Mee's addition – to

[114] «Or else, he doesn't drag himself out of the tub and he is dead». This is a second stage direction: Mee, indeed, often offers a number of different options (above all, when it comes to music), leaving it up to his cast and director to choose which action (and music) might be closer to their understanding of the story. Regarding this, see HARTIGAN (2011, 5, 98 and n. 87).

take revenge. As the traditional (Virgil's) story goes, while the first goal is fully accomplished through the foundation of Rome, the second takes a different road. There will be a war of revenge, but it will be not the one Hecuba envisioned. In Virgil, Dido dies, true to one of the Tarot cards that Mee's Dido read to Aeneas. Before dying, she curses Aeneas and his descendants (*Aeneid* IV 599-629), wishing for them war, not love, not treaties between her own people and Aeneas' people and descendants. As is known, the three Punic Wars (264-146 BC) would be the working out of this curse.

Reading it against the traditional background of the story, the chain of violence reset by Hecuba's assignment will thus end in a war of revenge, once again set in motion by a love story.

4. *By way of conclusion: reflection on the message and its 'peculiar' mode*

> Why was this done?

Hecuba cries in her first appearance, before the spectacle of death and destruction caused by the war, before «a world destroyed» – as she continues – «by the hands of those who thought themselves the creators of civilization».

> Why is it at the end of war
> The victors can image nothing better
> Than to remake the conditions
> That are the cause of war?

Hecuba hopelessly asks as she has come to know about the 'enslavement' reserved for all the women of Troy.

> Will human beings be caught forever
> in a cycle of hatred, violence, and war?

Hecuba finally asks in her despair, as she felt eventually forced to contribute to that cycle by charging Aeneas with the task of revenge.

Mindless repetition of cycles of violence and war is central to this play, in particular, and it is central – so it seems to me – to Mee's concerns and ensuing messages. His Hecuba's questions are crucial questions that puzzle all of humankind; they are questions about civilization. Appropriating a thought that in Euripides' *Trojan Women* Andromache voices

in front of the *uncivil*, *barbaric* deliberation of Astyanax' fate (l. 764)[115], Mee's Hecuba questions our civilization, or, to say it better, the history of civilization given that our civilization remains full of the same atrocities as the one perpetrated by its 'creators'. The 'shards' of the contemporary that pertain to war and warfare, while updating the past and making it (sadly!) familiar to modern audiences, might be meant, in my opinion, to 'equate', to a certain degree, the past and the present, as far as humankind's behavior, mind, and actions in certain situations (such as war) are concerned, thus urging people to actually start learning from the past. Sadly, behind war and its atrocities is 'the imperial dream', the greed for power which crosses centuries, perhaps since the origin of humankind, and which subjugated to its iron law anything else that contributes to defining civilization (even love is turned into war!). The women of Troy and Dido are all the innocent victims, of any time, of men's 'imperial dream'. As men's mistakes are repeated over and over, all the crucial questions that Hecuba emblematizes seem to be doomed to be asked again and again.

> It is beyond knowing

Indeed, Hecuba says in answer to those questions, and her strenuous attempts to understand are ours, and are certainly an incentive for the audiences to remember the past, to connect it critically with their present as the best hope for the future. This is the hope that drives Mee to 're-make' the old stories[116]. His 'peculiar' mode – the pastiche/collage technique' that allows him to incorporate the 'shards' of the contemporary, in terms of language, media, texts, customs etc. – has mostly been successful, given that the audiences have been responding enthusiastically and remaining engaged through their effort to grasp, and reflect on, the numerous contemporary references[117]. Critical reviews and the reaction of classicists have been mixed, from extremely negative to very positive. Differently from the general public, the expectations of those who are familiar with, if not expert in, Greek Tragedy are almost inevitably disappointed: the very first impression might be that the drive for contemporary resonances and for being effective with a contemporary audience is, at times, excessive[118]. The 'pastiche/collage' technique certainly raises a feeling of

[115] «O you Greeks!! With your *barbaric*, evil inventions!» (The translation is mine, as are the italics).

[116] As HARTIGAN (2011, 56) notes, «Mee understands the world cannot change, will not change, but he hopes that through his work he can urge people to consider the option of a better world». On Mee's use of Greek Tragedy in this perspective, see also BRYANT-BERTAIL (2000, 40, 47). On a personal note, I should say that, as extremely pessimistic as Mee's view of the world, and its future, seems to be, it is sadly confirmed by the breaking news of today's television broadcasts, which often speak of such uncivil, barbaric, acts of terror as beheading or burning alive hostages in an umpteenth, senseless war!

[117] On the audience's reaction, see, e.g., WILLIS (2005, 295f.); HARTIGAN (2011, *passim*).

[118] Excessive is, for instance, the presence of sexuality and related language: see already above n. 50.

uneasiness as this expert audience is used to interpret Greek Tragedy through the lens of Aristotle's notes on tragedy in the *Poetics*. Should Mee's re-made Greek tragedy be categorized in some way, 'postmodern' and 'post-dramatic' are the labels that immediately come out[119]. One might certainly prefer a script and performance closer to the original, and yet capable of resonating with contemporary issues, to thus engage and provoke a contemporary audience, as Mee intends. But if one allows her/himself to read and watch Mee's remaking through the lens of the new notions of postmodern/post-dramatic theatre, she/he can grasp and appreciate the deep message and objectives – as highlighted above – behind that aesthetic so distant from Aristotle's prescriptions[120]. It remains that the core purpose of ancient drama survives in Mee's re-made Greek tragedies and reaches out to the contemporary audience: urging the citizens to engage with, and reflect on, issues of socio-political relevance and values that are central to the human community, the hope being to react and change for the better.

[119] For these concepts see, already above, nn. 37 and 46. See, also, LEHMANN (2006); CAMPBELL (2010, esp. 55-57).

[120] If reading/watching Mee's plays through those lens, there should not be a need to provide a new definition of tragedy, «one applicable for today», as HARTIGAN (2001, VI) says. Throughout her book Hartigan often talks of this need to redefine tragedy; she says she is compelled to give a new definition, but, in fact, she did not. Post-dramatic theatre is not the exclusive way through which Greek tragedies are 're-made' today. I thus see a bit of excess in seeking a new definition as «one applicable for today». It is just a different mode, as explained above, what marks the difference with the kind of remakes Mee's plays represent and the more 'traditional' remakes, those which, more or less, keep Aristotle's prescriptions. The only time when HARTIGAN (2011, 125) seems to finally give the 'new' definition of tragedy she was looking for, is at the very end, when she concludes that: «[Mee's] (re)made tragedy is not tied to the universal but to the individual». I disagree with this view, which I found also in contradiction with Mee's hope to urge people, through his work, to consider the possibility of changing the world, to consider the option of a better world (see above, n. 123). I wonder how the pain, suffering and agony of the individual can prompt such a quest if people cannot 'universally' relate to that pain, suffering and agony, i.e., if this spectacle of human misery, repeated mistakes, senselessly everlasting violence, cannot speak universally.

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