**Cover letter**

**Abstract**

Studying how well the works of an author, such as Tyrtaeus, are received, and in particular, his theme-setting elegy that glorified dying at war for one’s country (fr. 10 W.), is an interesting way to measure how classical culture has infiltrated the literary repertoire of a whole society, all the way down from its elite. It also provides an opportunity to evaluate mechanisms used to defend this, and thus used in the immortal weapon of Greek poetry, beginning with its rediscovery in the modern age up until today.

The purpose of my research is to investigate the success of such a reception in England, on the basis of a similar work, which I am about to publish as an essay, and which I shall be dedicating to Italy. Tyrtaeus is fatally bound to the myth of Sparta, and has been researched in a great book by Elizabeth Rawson. However, I take a more historical and literary view, which can be associated with the individual editions and translations of Tyrtaeus. This includes *Martial Fragments of Tyrtaeus*, by James W. Bailey (1862), which was ceremoniously dedicated to Lord Viscount Palmerston, the then prime minister. On the other hand, the turn of the century and the First World War saw a different attitude prevail. This was a more critical one, and one that was less prone to nineteenth-century rhetoric and, with the advent of contemporary poetry, followed some very different pathways, such as that of the War poets.

Examining the political motives that underlie these various translations, as well as their historical implications, forms the driving force behind this type of research. The objective here is to identify a process of interpretation using all available material, without excluding findings from newspapers, magazines, parliamentary speeches and the great literary works, in order to create an updated and original essay on this subject.

**Project**

The premise of a work of this type is not always based on a linear interpretation of its reception. Indeed, this can very often take a dangerous path, leading to conflicting realisations with regard to its historical and philological data.

Equally, this has, since ancient times, also been the case with Tyrtaeus. Traditionally, this poet is believed to have been sent by the Athenians to the Spartans, playing the role of an inciter for joining the military campaign of the Second Messenian War. With Plutarch, a new, and at times distorted interpretation of this archaic poet has been created. He introduced this interpretation in his *Life of Cleomenes* (2.3), where he recalls an episode in which the Spartan king, Leonidas, has asked for an opinion on Tyrtaeus, and was told ἀγαθὸς νέων ψυχὰς κακκανῆν.[[1]](#footnote-1)

According to H. James Shey, in the words of Leonidas, he was an archetypal figure of courage, but also, and above all, through being so readily disposed to defend his homeland, a new image of Tyrtaeus would be created, decontextualized with respect to his place in the great Messenian wars and having been iconized as a living warrior-poet fighting to defend his homeland, or rather, his freedom. No matter how far removed from the reality of his obligation, he was wholly committed to the Spartans' war of conquest against the Messenians.

In Italy, although in retrospect, also in Europe, the reading and translation of fr. 10 W., which contains the famous line that Horace would have translated, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, was the reason for its many editions, which hinged on the wide range of historical events that took place. These included the Napoleonic Wars, The Italian Risorgimento, the Ethiopian expedition and the Battle of Adwa, the Libyan War and then the Great War in Italy with the commemoration of its fallen soldiers. These were often ex-post translations done in memory of the fallen. However, there have been highly evident cases of a more bellicose handling of these. While at times unsuccessfully concealed, and at times openly declared, these were carried out by philologists who were motivated by their own ambition, and whose aim was to get the attention of contemporaries who were paving the way for ancient texts they recognised as relevant to their times.

For the duration of this research, I shall be focussing on England, with the aim of tracing the history of the reception, translations and presence of Tyrtaeus in the minds of the elite and beyond. Similar research carried out within Italy, which was extended to political and parliamentary speeches and newspapers, and then continued through to the world of literature, has produced some extremely interesting results.

As for modern and contemporary England, I shall examine the differences and similarities. Here, I shall restrict myself to presenting some successful periods, and episodes of revival, of Tyrtaeus in England, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An educational book, published in Glasgow in 1759, and bearing the significant title of *Spartan lessons: or, the praise of valour; in the verses of Tyrtaeus; an ancient Athenian poet, adopted by the republic of Lacedaemon, and employed to inspire their youth with warlike sentiments* is the first case of "Spartan pedagogy" found in eighteenth-century Europe. A century later, in 1862, a book edited by James W. Bailey, which, through its title, *Martial fragments of Tyrtaeus*, points to the high degree of political realisation in Tyrtaic poetry. This was ceremoniously dedicated to Lord Viscount Palmerston, the then prime minister, during the Golden age of British colonialism. Bailey's Tyrtaeus was followed with one by the Reverend J. Banks in 1864. This was included in a volume, mainly dedicated to all the Hellenistic poets (such as Theocritus, Mosco and Bione), and bore the title *The idylls of Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus; and the War-songs of Tyrtaeus literally translated into English prose by the Rev. J. Banks; with English versions by J. M. Chapman*. The addition of Tyrtaeus' War songs seemed to have paved the way for a passing fad. An epideictic stance is characteristic of these publications, namely taken by way of their slant towards current politics, which is dedicated and consummate.

During a century in Europe that saw the flourishing of many young Tyrtaeus types, such as Koerner in Germany, Petofi in Hungary and Mameli in Italy, the Bardic poets arrived. While England was not the homeland to these poets, they encouraged bravery, and often stood out for their gratitude to the battlefield. Ireland, on the other hand, engaged in claiming its own cultural and political identity, bearing several such poets. These included William Drennan, the author of a text of paramount importance to the return to the laconic myth, entitled *Letters of an Irish Helot* (1785), and James Orr ( 1770-1816), known as the *Bard of Ballycarry*. Both of these were partisans to the *Society of United Irishmen*, which at this time was committed to a passionate struggle of Irish pride against British rule.

These circumstances make the study of the success of reception of Tyrtaeus quite exciting, since it is a question of identifying, through the ages, the images attributed to this poet. This could either be a fighter for freedom against the oppressors or a fighter for the homeland, depending on the war being fought. As an example, at the end of the nineteenth century, during the high age of imperialism, the balm of war classicism, and the myth of Tyrtaeus, spread itself fatally. This went even as far as the classical positivist philologists. Consequently the poetry of the time began to directly reflect the myth of the "beautiful death".

In England, with direct references to Tyrtaeus, inspiration taken from Latin works has prevailed. This has been turned towards the more accessible Horace and his *dulce*, which has added a pleasant and sentimental note to the idea of dying on the battlefield. (Carm. 3.2). In the same way, and well before the most famous antimilitarist poet, Owen, came along, *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* was the title given to a patriotic poem by James Rhoades, during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). This has, more recently, caught the attention of Stefano Jossa. Subsequently, in the light of the so-called War poets, many of whom were brilliant classical scholars, the anti-militarist attitude has exploded. It is from this, albeit with some innovative ideas in respect to traditional opinion, the wonderful study by Elizabeth Vandiver (2010) has emerged.

Therefore, researching the intersection of the world of literature and that of its translations increases the strength of this research, making way for an evaluation of how classical culture affects England's contemporary history. This provides something much more than a just a lacquered and stereotyped image of Greek and Latin poetry. I have previously dedicated myself to similar research on Greek lyricists in Italy, and not only Tyrtaeus. With this, I have achieved some unexpected results. English culture, with its literature that is diversely influenced by Greek and Roman civilizations, at least until the first half of the last century, offers just as many points of interest. This brings along the advantage of a greater impact on European cultural events.

A work of this type should find a strong home ground in Durham, due to the opening of its department in the research of audience reception, and to my current preference for integrating individual research with the exchange of knowledge and points of view.

**Project outline**

**Title: The success of Tyrtaeus in England, during the modern age and contemporary times**

**Project objective**:

* To review all the modern and contemporary English translations of Tyrtaeus, with particular reference to fr. 10 W., concluding with an overall interpretation of its diachronic development, while also showing the potential to simultaneously take a contrastive and alternative point of view.
* To write a historical account of English political culture, related to the theme of war and the defence of this, as well as its glorification through the Greek classics, and in particular, those of Tyrtaeus.

**Task description**:

* Analyse and interpret the translations in relation to literary movements.
* Evaluate the different objectives pursued by the translators, as well as their possible historical and political motives.
* Review Rawson’s research on Sparta's presence in modern European culture, taking into account the perspective of Chapoutout's recent book on Nazism and Antiquity.
* Investigate the English writers’ points of view regarding the poetry of Tyrtaeus.

**Expected results**:

* Write an essay exploring the diachronic perspective of the translations of Tyrtaeus into English.
* Carry out complementary research (articles) on the success of Tyrtaeus’ reception in other European countries, especially France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and Russia.
* Regularly present studies undertaken through classical philology conferences.

**Conditions**:

* Individual research, enhanced by discussion with other researchers and students, and by participation in seminars and conferences.

1. «In this way, Tyrtaeus became associated with the gallant Spartan stand against the invading Persians and shares in their glory and achievement. Forgotten is the fact that Tyrtaeus wrote to encourage the Spartans in a war of naked aggression» (Shey 1976, 21). *Così, fu per ironia della storia che nel Rinascimento Tirteo fu riscoperto come* «prototype of the artist urging his countrymen to fight for freedom». [↑](#footnote-ref-1)