

# Doing things with Thucydides: a global approach\*

Maria Fragoulaki

Cardiff University, UK

This introduction explores Thucydides' reception in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, combining theoretical and more creative and experiential approaches, examining the dynamic relationship between the two. 'Doing things with Thucydides' is used as a conceptual framework which reflects the emphasis on active engagement with the text. The five articles included in this collection concentrate on politics, education, and performance as three interconnected areas of the text's reception and are associated with the international workshop 'Thucydides Global: Teaching, Researching, and Performing Thucydides', which took place at the Institute of Classical Studies in London in 2019. In addition to the five articles published in this cluster, further presentations were delivered at the workshop, some of which were creative and practical in character, while others were experimental or work-in-progress, at early stages of research. This introduction situates the five articles in the 'Doing Things with Thucydides' conceptual framework, also expanding on themes and questions investigated at the workshop as a meaningful context. Additional research material is provided selectively, aiming to supplement and illuminate further key questions addressed in both the articles and the workshop: Why is 'doing things with Thucydides' a suitable conceptual framework for exploring the text's modern reception? How is it differentiated from 'reading' or 'thinking with' Thucydides, which have been the more dominant forms of engagement with this historical text?

The letter and the spirit of Thucydides' text have occupied ancient authors such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, and Sallust, in more or less traceable ways, have shaped school curricula from the Byzantine period until today, and have intrigued translators and scholars since the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> The consistent authorial flagging of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* as a written account (1.1; cf. 2.70, 2.103, 3.25) or other statements about method and aims, the handling of causes, observations about human nature, might vs right, national security, leadership and characterization, along with the narratological and rhetorical intricacies of the text have influenced the way human history is understood and written as least in the Western tradition. Thucydides has had a formative influence on modern disciplines such as political theory and philosophy, history of ideas, international relations, and war studies. In turn our understanding of

\* I am very grateful to the anonymous readers for their helpful comments and suggestions, to Neville Morley for expert advice and collaboration, and to Susan Deacy and Amaan Hyder for further support. The 'Thucydides Global' workshop (2019), from which the present collection of essays arises, was co-organised by Cardiff University, Ruhr Universität Bochum, and the Institute of Classical Studies in London, supported by the Classical Association and the Hellenic Society. I would like to thank co-organisers, panellists, and participants for valuable insights and support, especially Greg Woolf, Christian Wendt, and Paul Cartledge.

<sup>1</sup> Harloe and Morley 2012a, Orwin 1994: 24, n. 25 (Sallust).

Thucydides has been shaped by the evolution of these disciplines in the modern era.<sup>2</sup> The role of Thucydides in these areas has been studied extensively, whereas cultural, creative and practical environments of the text's reception remain underexplored. This introduction offers a reappraisal of the current field of research, aiming to redress the imbalance and bridge the distance between theoretical and practical approaches.

'Doing things with Thucydides' alludes to 'Doing Things with Words', a seminal study by the philosopher and classicist J. L. Austin, written over half a century ago. Austin theorized 'action' and 'performance', by arguing that utterances do not only say things or provide information, but also perform actions ('speech acts').<sup>3</sup> Austin's book has spurred a range of 'Doing things' discussions in performative linguistics and translation studies, literary criticism, philosophy and intellectual history, material culture, game and play theory (ludo-literacy, ludology), and last but not least classics and ancient history.<sup>4</sup>

'Doing Things with Thucydides' calls for active reception, that is, an exploration of not just how Thucydides has been read, but how it has been used, repurposed, and made to speak to new audiences, genres, ideological, cultural, and political moments. It underscores the importance of experience in the process of reception and the need for interaction among different disciplines, groups, and individuals; political scientists and philosophers, sociologists, translators, playwrights, novelists, artists, digital medialists, public discourse analysts, and so on. It broadens the scope by creating a dynamic space, where academic disciplines and creative industries can meet and share knowledge, skills, experiences, and methods.

Crossing boundaries and an 'anarchic'<sup>5</sup> intermingling of academic and non-academic environments inspired 'Thucydides Global: Teaching, Researching, and Performing Thucydides', the international workshop from which the present collection of articles arises. The workshop took a global or decompartmentalized approach, allowing for fresh and unexpected encounters, meanings and forms to emerge by not only readers and theoreticians, but also by listeners, viewers, translators, and theatrical practitioners of Thucydides' text.<sup>6</sup>

'Global' and 'globalism' have entered popular discourse since the 1990s and have been associated with both negative and positive connotations and values.<sup>7</sup> In the context of Thucydides' reception, where connections matter, they underscore chronological and geographical coverage, dialogue across disciplines, comparative discussion, a multicentric, non-hierarchical, and decolonizing approach to the classics and humanities at large.<sup>8</sup> 'Thucydides Global' and 'Doing Things with Thucydides' are inspired by the same holistic and active mindset, and in this discussion they are treated as two associated concepts. The workshop brought together academics and non-academics from different disciplines and backgrounds, who came together to share knowledge, skills, experiences, and methods and to explore questions such as: Why is Thucydides' so present today?<sup>9</sup> Why does Thucydides matter so much? Why and how does this text continue to invite dialogues between past, present and future? How do different societies, educational systems, groups and individuals respond to it and receive its historical lessons? Does Thucydides' *History* owe its lasting value and relevance to its ability to resonate with global and local crises?

<sup>2</sup> Morley 2014 on this two-way process.

<sup>3</sup> Austin 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson 2003; Coastall and Dreier 2006; Olesen et al. 2013; Fetzer and Weiss 2020; Grace 2020; Bett 2024. In the field of classics and ancient history, Allen, Christensen and Millett 2018 is a collection of essays, celebrating the legacy of Paul Cartledge, whose manifold contributions include theory and practice.

<sup>5</sup> For the term 'anarchic' in classical reception, as a meeting point of different traditions, contexts and specialisations in order to construct 'meaning at the point of reception' (Martindale 2006) and for the importance of connections, see Hardwick and Stray 2008a: 1–7.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hellenicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Thu-Glo-Report.pdf> [website]. Accessed 26 August 2025.

<sup>7</sup> On global classics, see Bromberg 2021; Hermans 2023, on the global reception of classical tradition encompassing cultures and geographies beyond Europe and North America; Tambakaki 2023, for a similar approach, on the reception of ancient Greek and Latin authors by modern world poetry. On the negative side, 'globalisation' has been associated with integration of markets and the promotion of Western, Eurocentric in particular, values and ways of living at the expense of national and local traditions and cultures, Bromberg 2021: 1–14.

<sup>8</sup> Fragoulaki 2019, on decompartmentalization based on a global approach. For 'global' in relation to intellectual and theoretical approaches, Iori and Matijašić 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Woolf 2019: 3, Director's note in the Annual Newsletter of the Institute of Classical Studies.

Concentrating on politics, education and performance the five articles published in this collection explore these questions and reception environments of Thucydides, which repurpose, reshape, and reinvent the text for twentieth and twenty-first century audiences and historical circumstances. The articles by Christian Wendt, Hans Kopp and Carlotta Voss sit in the wider area of active political and ideological readings. Wendt challenges the validity of ‘Thucydides’ Trap’, a notion from the field of International Relations, which has used, and misused as Wendt argues, Thucydides’ intellectual capital to explain the shifts in global power dynamics between USA (as classical Sparta, an established power) and China (as classical Athens, a rising power). Kopp probes into the power of Thucydides as an all-time model, and the text’s ability to inspire historical analogies, concentrating on Hartvig Frisch, a Danish politician and man of letters, operative in the Second World War. Voss turns the focus to Hannah Arendt, a political philosopher, and her framing of an active—and performative—life in politics (*Vita Activa*) through a political, philosophical, and poetical reading of Thucydides. Voss also uses Walter Benjamin as intermediary to analyse Arendt’s concept of history as experiential and poetic. Elizabeth Sawyer discusses the educational repurposing of Thucydides, namely the appropriation of Thucydides by the Great Books educational movement and its nationalistic rhetoric in the aftermath of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War. Ideology, politics and rhetorical discourse are interweaved in her argument, as she explains Thucydides’ entrance into US IR theory through the Great Books door. Neville Morley concentrates on creative and performative reimaginings of Thucydides, which involve creative writing (Anne Carson, Virginia Woolf, and Joseph Heller) and two theatrical remakings of the Melian Dialogue in which he took part as an expert observer and facilitator. Experience, subjectivity, and translation play a central role in Morley’s analysis, in relation to not only the specific reception examples discussed in his article, but also the strategies used in Thucydides’ remaking today more generally, which provide a useful theoretical framework for the discussion of his test cases and beyond.

Questions of translation are pertinent to all the discussions in this collection, throwing into relief connections across disciplines, media and approaches. Translation is arguably the most central factor of the ancient text’s mediation and recreation in different reception environments. Questions of performance too cut across politics and education, in more and less explicit ways, revealing deep connections across the three areas explored in this collection. The close relationship between translation and performance has become all the more salient in the cultural turn taken in Translation Studies since the 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

## DIALOGUES IN THUCYDIDES’ MODERN RECEPTION: POLITICS, EDUCATION, AND PERFORMANCE

Thucydides has been read, translated, and used as a source of political wisdom which can enhance historical understanding. Along with other classical texts such as Plato and Aristotle, he has been particularly influential in the formation of a liberal education ideology. In 1873, Richard Crawley offered his translation of Thucydides to the readers of English newspapers of his time as a manual that could illuminate current history and as a prototype of liberal political ideals.<sup>11</sup> Crawley’s vision is reflected in the title of his translation—‘History of the Peloponnesian War *Done* into English’ (my emphasis)—where the use of the verb *do* indicates an active stance and agency focused on the readability and usefulness of the translated text. As Crawley notes in the introduction, his translation was aimed at ‘English men and women who, without being Greek scholars, take an interest in Grecian history’ (p. xii) and who would be able to recognise in Thucydides’ pages the ‘prototypes’ (p. xi) of many political figures populating the English newspapers at the time. Crawley’s translation was indeed a landmark. It was this translation<sup>12</sup> that was used in the *Great Books of the Western World*, a canon

<sup>10</sup> Major voices in this field have defined translation as ‘the performative aspect of intercultural communication’, Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Introduction to the 1910 edition, Crawley 1910: x–xi.

<sup>12</sup> Revised by R. Feetham, in the sixth volume, which also contained Herodotus’ *Histories* translated by George Rawlinson. On the dominance of Crawley’s translation in the digital market and its effects on the public understanding and uses of Thucydides, see Morley 2016.

of over 400 works of western literature and thought, which laid the cornerstone for the liberal education movement in the USA.<sup>13</sup> According to John Erskine (1879–1951), a pioneering representative of the Great Books movement in the West, the classical texts were to convey their values in translation so that they could be understood by laymen.<sup>14</sup>

Thucydides' pivotal role in US liberal education and in the shaping of International Relations in the US in the historical conditions of the Cold War is the focus of Sawyer's article. As Sawyer demonstrates, US liberal education arose in the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War between USA and the Soviet Union (USSR), the two global powers in the West and East respectively, in the decades following the end of the Second World War. The analogy between Athens and Sparta as ancient contrasting models of USA and USSR respectively has been used extensively in Cold War political analysis and rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, who shaped the field of International Relations in the 1950s and 1960s, drew heavily on Thucydides, in order to articulate the Western democratic ideology and its vocabulary (democracy, freedom of speech, dialogue and so on). It is through the educational-ideological environment of the Great Books, Sawyer argues, that Thucydides was retrospectively inscribed into the narrative plot of International Relations as its founding father.<sup>16</sup>

Thucydides has not ceased to occupy International Relations as an archetypal voice of political realism. Since the final decades of the twentieth century USA's dominant role as a global power has been challenged by China. Appropriating Thucydides' ancient authority, the phrase 'Thucydides Trap' was coined in 2017 by the American expert of International Relations Graham Allison, in order to explain the shifts in the current geopolitical dynamics, between USA and China, as an established and a rising power respectively, or at least what looked like an established (USA) and a rising (China) power in 2017, when Allison's book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* appeared.<sup>17</sup> How far has Thucydides been read accurately by Allison? Can today's China be compared with classical Athens as rising powers, considering the significant differences across the two societies and political systems? These and similar questions are explored by Wendt in his article, which views 'Thucydides' Trap' as a misappropriation of the ancient text and a 'moment of academic bubble-making' (Wendt in this collection). As Wendt argues, it is a case of Thucydides' misuse for the sake of legitimating ideas that have little or nothing to do with his nuanced analysis. So has Thucydides created his own trap through his expressed will to deliver its historical lessons in perpetuity?<sup>18</sup>

Thucydides' analysis of the many expressions of war as a violent and unpredictable phenomenon has had resonance in the way the text has been interpreted and repurposed at moments of political and social crisis. Questions of political ethics (might vs right), causation, national security, neutrality, and effective leadership have inspired historical analogies, especially by readers who combined a classical education and political action. These readers tend to engage with the text deeply and reflectively combining intellectual and practical purposes. They read it as scholars and statesmen with the intention of making its lessons meaningful to their audiences, especially at critical moments of history. An example of such a reader was the Danish statesman and classical scholar Hartvig Frisch (1893–1950), who is the subject of Kopp's article in this collection. Frisch had intimate knowledge of classical texts and was Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Copenhagen during the Second World War. Before and during the War, he engaged with Thucydides' political ethics closely, in essays and

<sup>13</sup> *The Great Books of the Western World* first appeared in 1952 under the care of Robert M. Hutchings (editor in chief) and Mortimer J. Adler (assistant editor) in 54 volumes. The Advisory Board was mainly responsible for the list of works included, but 'the final decision was made by me [Hutchings]', Hutchings and Adler 1952: xvii (Vol. 1, Preface).

<sup>14</sup> De Bary 2013: 26; id. for a global approach to the idea of shaping a core curriculum of classical texts in East Asian educational traditions, such as China, Korea and Japan.

<sup>15</sup> Hodkinson 2012; id. p. 345 for the Peloponnesian War referred to as a 'lesson of history' by the American Secretary of State George C. Marshall's at a speech delivered at Princeton University in 1947; Sawyer 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Stradis 2015 for a similar story about Thucydides' entrance into the curriculum of professional military education (PME) in the 1970s.

<sup>17</sup> Allison 2017. The world 'is in a process of dramatic and unpredictable change' and China's role as an 'economic superpower that rivals the United States' is a fact (Cordesman 2023: 2). In the same report, Russia's 'diminished global economic role' (p. 2) is demonstrated.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Morley's 'Allison's trap' in this collection (p. 00), pointing to unacknowledged mediation and misrepresentation of the ancient text by a modern authority.

speeches, probing into whether and how far the power of the stronger is legitimized by natural law (Thuc. 1.76.3, 5.105.2). Frisch also contextualized Thucydides' ancient questions in modern theory of politics, philosophy and sociology, such as Marxism, Anarchism or Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Kopp's article illuminates Frisch's reading of Thucydides concentrating on 'might and right', 'advantage' and 'national interest'. The idea that considerations of justice can be upheld only when power is equal between parties (Thuc. 5.89) or that honour on the battlefield is irrelevant when a nation strives for survival (Thuc. 5.101) have had wider resonance in Thucydides' reception.

Unsurprisingly the Melian Dialogue had pride of place as a text of political realism in Frisch's writings. As Kopp argues, it is not the originality of Frisch's interpretation of Thucydides that stands out, but the way in which he angled Thucydides' lessons to advise his countrymen on the eve of the Second World War. Frisch drew an historical analogy between fifth-century BC Greece and Europe of 1939, when the threat of German occupation was becoming all the more real for Denmark and other European countries. The ancient Melians and their effort to persuade the imperialist Athenians to allow them to remain neutral in the war (Thuc. 5.94) provided Frisch with the ancient model of a 'small nation', which he used to advocate for Denmark's neutrality in the geopolitical tensions of the run-up to the Second World War.

Like the Danish Hartvig Frisch, the Greek statesman Eleftherios Venizelos (1864–1936), a major political and intellectual figure of modern Greece, combined a classical education, erudition, and political action. Unlike Frisch, Venizelos had studied law and not classics. Yet he had a deep fondness for the ancient classical texts, which he had read closely. Thucydides and Aristotle had a special influence on him as both his library and correspondence reveal.<sup>19</sup> Venizelos engaged with Thucydides as a translator and as a commentator closely and purposefully at another critical moment of history, namely the aftermath of the First World War. Venizelos translated the whole of Thucydides during a period of absence from active politics in 1920–28. The translation was completed by 1928, when he returned to Greece and was back to active politics to serve as a Prime Minister once more, but it was published later (1940) by Dimitrios Caclamanos.<sup>20</sup> His engagement with the translation seems to have become even more intensive after March 1925.<sup>21</sup> His commentary is not complete. It covers parts of Books 1–4 and was created concurrently with his translation.<sup>22</sup>

Venizelos had to deal with moments of crisis and division during his political career both at the international stage and within his country. A desire for moderate liberalism and reform is a defining feature of his political and intellectual legacy.<sup>23</sup> As a leader and citizen of a 'small nation', Venizelos tried to secure for his country a place on the map of Europe's nation states which were formed at a time when big empires were collapsing. The interior of Greece was tormented by what is known as 'National Schism' (Εθνικός Διχασμός): the constitutional division between the Royalists and the Liberals (Venizelos had founded and belonged to the Liberal Party). Another momentous crisis during Venizelos' lifetime was the Greek-Turkish War (1919–22), which ended in disaster for the Greeks, registered as the 'Asia Minor catastrophe' in Greek history books and national memory.

On the cultural and educational front, the 'Language Question' (a quarrel about which form of the Greek language should be used), tantalized the Greek education and society for almost two centuries, until its settlement by Greek state law in 1976. This problematic situation, also known as *diglossia* ('the existence of two languages'), created further causes for division among the Greeks who supported either one or the other of the two forms: the *katharevousa* (a purist, formal, mainly written, and

<sup>19</sup> Makraki 2001: 203 with nn. 26 and 27, on the *Athenian Constitution* and Thucydides. In one of his letters, Venizelos refers to the works of ancient Greek literature as 'my old loves' (*palaios mou erotas*). Letter to N. G. Hadjidakis sent from Paris, dated 12 November 1926 (in Greek), p. 2/3 (typed). No 73/71, folder 327–071. <https://venizelosarchives.gr/show/4522> [website]. Accessed 22 May 2023 (Digitized archive of the National Foundation of Research Study 'Eleftherios K. Venizelos').

<sup>20</sup> *Θουκυδίδου Ιστορία, κατά μετάφρασιν Ἐλευθερίου Βενιζέλου* [*The Histories of Thucydides, translated by Eleftherios Venizelos*], OUP 1940, 2 vols, with an introduction by Dimitrios Caclamanos in English. Greenwood 2015 on Venizelos' translation.

<sup>21</sup> This is suggested in the letter to Hadjidakis of 12 November 1926 (n. 19 in this article), where Venizelos notes that 'it has been about twenty months since I have been working on the translation', p. 1/3. Kitromilides 2006a: 378–379 on Venizelos' translation as a long-term and 'essentially political project' (p. 378) during 1920–1928, of 'self-reflection and self-examination' over his role in Greek politics (p. 379).

<sup>22</sup> Zachariadi-Holdberg 1991; Kitromilides 2006a: 378.

<sup>23</sup> Makraki 2001: 233–282; Tassopoulos 2006; Llewellyn-Smith 2021: 52, 204 *et passim*.

archaizing form of Greek) and the demotic (the simple form, used in oral communication, poetry, and part of prose literature). It affected intellectuals, authors, public servants, the common people, and had even claimed human lives. The problem peaked into a social crisis in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> If Crawley was on a mission to deliver his translation of Thucydides as a lesson to his fellow Englishmen and newspaper readers, Venizelos' translation of Thucydides, in addition to being a political project, was also an educational and cultural one, as it engaged with the 'Language Question'. The form of Greek used by Venizelos for his translation reflects his mission to provide his fellow countrymen with a single national language. As Llewellyn-Smith noted at the Thucydides Global workshop drawing on his biography of Venizelos, although Venizelos was a demoticist at heart, he chose to write his translation in a mild form of *katharevousa* rather than demotic because 'he argued that this better suited the austere nature of Thucydides' language. But probably the root cause was his feeling of discomfort in the use of written demotic Greek'.<sup>25</sup>

The Digitized Archive of Venizelos can shed light on the complicated question of Venizelos' motives and method of work on his translation. It is worth pausing here at a letter of Venizelos to Georgios N. Hadjidakis (1848–1941), Professor of Linguistics at the University of Athens, a fellow-Cretan and long-time friend of his, sent from Paris on 12 November 1926. There Venizelos mentions that he opted for a form of Greek that aims to 'bridge the gap between the written and spoken language', also adding that he engaged with the major German, English and French commentaries of Thucydides wishing to 'provide his fellow-citizens with a paraphrased translation (*paraphrasis*) supported by sound scholarship'.<sup>26</sup> *Paraphrasis* ('paraphrasing') suggests something looser than *metaphrasis* ('translation'), underscoring the agency of the translator. Venizelos was on a mission to find a balance between fidelity in the meaning of the original text supported by attention to scholarship on the one hand and a degree of liberty in recreating the text for the Greek audience of his time (primarily readers, but see below for a twenty-first century theatrical staging of Venizelos' translation) on the other hand, so that its political and historical meanings can be communicated to them.

Moderation and the idea of a middle-ground characterized Venizelos as both a politician and a translator of Thucydides. In this connection there is a significant authorial passage in Thucydides about the value of constitutional *synkrasis* ('blending'), in the context of the short-lived coup of Four Hundred in Athens of 411 BC, which could have been in Venizelos' mind as he was working on his translation. This is the closest we ever get to a statement about Thucydides' political views in the *History* in his own voice:

And now for the first time, at least in my lifetime, the Athenians enjoyed a political system of substantial and obvious merit (*eu politeusantes*), which blended the interest of the few and the many without extremes (*metria gar he te es tous oligous kai tous pollous synkrasis* [ζῆγκρασις] *egeneto*), and began to restore the city from the wretched situation into which it has fallen (8.97).<sup>27</sup>

The idea of a blended constitution has a pedigree in political theory. It is also found in Aristotle (*Politics* 1294a36, 'combination and mixing between democracy and oligarchy'), whom Venizelos also read. Venizelos' creation of a middle-ground in the language of his translation related closely to questions of Greek national identity and can be viewed as a cultural expression of his liberal ideas and vision for unity as a leader of Greece.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Carabott 1993; Mackridge 2004, 2009; Dimaras 2006; Llewellyn-Smith 2021: 255–66.

<sup>25</sup> Llewellyn-Smith 2021: 261 (p. 256 for *katharevousa* and demotic).

<sup>26</sup> *Dia na doso eis tous sympolitas mou artian epistimonikin paraphrasin*: Letter sent from Paris, dated 12 November 1926 (in Greek), 3 pages, no 173/71, folder 327–071. <https://venizelosarchives.gr/show/4522> [website]. Accessed 22 May 2023. In his letter of response to Venizelos, Hadjidakis briefly defends his preference for the 'language of the educated classes' when it comes to written Greek, promising to justify his views by a scholarly publication and hoping that Venizelos would be persuaded by it. Letter sent from Thessaloniki, dated 1 December 1926 (in Greek). 2 pages, no 173/80, folder 327–080. <https://venizelosarchives.gr/show/4524> [website]. Accessed 22 May 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Trans. M. Hammond; cf. Hornblower 2008: 1032–1036.

<sup>28</sup> The reasons for Venizelos' interest in Thucydides are an important question, which can be explained partly by his need for deep political reflection on the history of modern Greece and his own involvement in it, through the lens of Thucydides' historical analysis (Kitromilides 2006a). Greenwood 2012, for a historicising analysis of Venizelos' translation.

Hannah Arendt (1906–75) was not a politician, but she too read Thucydides closely. As a political philosopher she found in his pages evidence of the importance of an active political life (*Vita Activa*). As Carlotta Voss shows in her article in this collection, Arendt engaged with Thucydides selectively, paying special attention to rhetorical pieces such as the Funeral Oration and the Melian Dialogue, since speech and/as action were central to Arendt’s experiential conception of being and living in the *polis*. Arendt did not use Thucydides to theorise politics in a systematic or conventional manner, Voss argues, and this is perhaps one reason why neither the role of Thucydides in her work nor the potential of a new reading of Thucydides from the angle of her thinking have been explored adequately so far. Arendt’s approach to history was cultural, experiential, and poetic, influenced by Walter Benjamin’s view of the historical past not as a linear continuum but as ‘both disruption and purification of the present’ (Voss in this collection). Although she engaged with rhetorical sections in Thucydides where general statements are frequent, Arendt was not interested in the timeless truths in his work, but in the way in which the text delivers human action and events (‘great deeds’) to posterity. In that sense Arendt finds Thucydides ‘prephilosophic’, being closer to the poets rather than to philosophers.<sup>29</sup>

Arendt lived in politically dark times dominated by totalitarian regimes and the horror of the Holocaust.<sup>30</sup> As a political thinker she responded to the predicaments of her time with a non-traditional and non-positivist use of historical time, drawing on meaningful moments from antiquity to modern history, which could provide authentic and timeless experiences of democracy, freedom, plurality, and justice. The need for authenticity and timelessness in the experience of political phenomena and her commitment to humanity is expressed in the poetic metaphor of the ‘Pearl Diver’, inspired by Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and associated with Walter Benjamin’s fragmented vision of time. Like pearl divers, we are to rescue what has survived the decay of time through a process of crystallization. These timeless and strange forms in the bottom of the sea, waiting to be discovered and brought to the world of the living, are like ‘thought fragments’ or perhaps *Urphänomene*.<sup>31</sup>

Creative remaking of Thucydides too, such as fiction and theatre, offers responses to crisis and ways of (re)connecting humanity with timeless phenomena, through experience and artistic form. In this discussion recent examples of Thucydides’ creative reimagining for modern audiences will be explored, including recent theatrical performances of Thucydides in the UK and Greece. This exploration draws on Neville Morley’s overview of strategies in the remaking of the ancient text,<sup>32</sup> with some adjustments made for the purposes of this analysis, which focuses on creative and experiential reception environments, with special attention to theatre. Themes and strategies employed in these creative environments, which make the text meaningful to modern audiences, are authenticity and freedom; translation and intertextuality (broadly conceived); selection; gender dynamics and social inclusion; the interplay between communal and private or public and personal; and the didactic, healing, and ludic potential of remaking. These parameters also shed light onto the ideological and artistic-aesthetic agendas of these reception environments.

Creative remaking engages with Thucydides in a variety of ways, often reinventing the work thoroughly, breaking free from claims or obligations of authenticity. Even when Thucydides is present as a character in a work of fiction, he does not appear as an authority figure. As Morley shows in his discussion of fictionalized responses to the ancient text by Anne Carson, Virginia Woolf and Joseph Heller in this collection, it can be difficult to trace where and how Thucydides might have been an influence, although the new literary form might be ‘strongly reminiscent of Thucydides’ account’.<sup>33</sup> He is drawn on subtly and unobtrusively as a source of inspiration for any views offered about the war, truth or justice. In the creative reimagining of the text historical and mythical time blend and

<sup>29</sup> In Arendt’s thinking the poetic and the philosophical seem to stand apart from each other. On the other hand, Aristotle’s view about poetry suggests some affinity with philosophy, calling it ‘more philosophic and important than history’ (*Poetics* 1451b5–7), with Hornblower (1987: 9–12), who is uncomfortable with a rigid distinction between a poetical and a historical mode of narration in Thucydides.

<sup>30</sup> Arendt 1958 (first edn. 1951), 1968.

<sup>31</sup> Korsgaard 2020; Giuseffi 2023; Čelutka 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Translation, selection, decontextualization, simplification, and framing, Morley in this collection.

<sup>33</sup> Morley in this collection, p. 00.

figures such as Homer, Aristotle or Rembrandt (Heller, *Picture This*, 1988) cross paths in fictional plots. These encounters promote reflection on the present and allow voices to be heard, who are underrepresented in Thucydides, especially women.

Nowhere in Thucydides' *History* do we hear women presenting arguments or lamenting their dead in war in their own voices. This is one major point in which Thucydides differs from the Homeric epic or his contemporary ancient drama, despite the acknowledged affinities of his work with the theatrical genre.<sup>34</sup> Creative reshaping of Thucydides today 'restore' the lost voices of marginalized groups, such as enslaved and displaced individuals and different age groups, alongside women, bringing the text and its author—even if only as a hint or a name—outside of its traditional circle of receivers-readers, predominantly male erudite politicians and intellectuals. These recreations purposefully situate their scripts and plots in inclusive, multigendered and decolonizing contexts (see above on global classics). The cases discussed below sit in this area.

The juxtaposition of Thucydides with Virginia Woolf in Anna Carson's *Men in the Off Hours* (2000), discussed by Morley, stands out as a powerful reading of 'Woolf's story as a feminine critique of patriarchal madness' (Morley in this collection). A representative moment of this reading, selected by Morley, is a fictional encounter between Thucydides and Virginia Woolf which takes place on a theatrical set of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides is cast in the character of an oppressive stage director instructing the actor, who happens to be a woman, how to read a script about modern wars (First and Second World Wars) that took place well after his time.<sup>35</sup>

Experiments in the theatrical stage too engage with the big themes of war, democracy, freedom and the human condition, exploring the text's potential to transmit political lessons and facilitate the processing of collective and personal traumas. But the way in which these theatrical experiments engage with big themes is more emotive and personalized, often set in domestic and private environments, where again women and ordinary people are given airtime. The theatrical stage is a dynamic space which mobilizes imagination and experience. Silence, human voice, bodily movement, and music create a multisensorial type of communication and an embodied experience of past and present. Public and private, collective and intimate alternate: the audience is taken from a battlefield to a classroom or an assembly; or from a living room to a bedroom or an unspecified and abstract space, where more internalized forms and experiences can emerge.<sup>36</sup>

Twenty-first century theatrical experiments of Thucydides in the UK and Greece have reinvented the text along these lines and explored its emotive and intellectual potential in innovative ways. In his article Morley turns the focus onto *The Melian Dialogues* and *Do What You Must*, two theatrical productions which creatively remake the Melian Dialogue. Alongside academic outputs on Thucydides' role in intellectual and political history, Morley has engaged also with alternative, creative and technological platforms of classical reception, such as social media posts, blogs, games, and theatrical performance.<sup>37</sup>

The Melian Dialogue (Thuc. 5.84–115) is an influential rhetorical piece from antiquity, literally omnipresent in contexts of Thucydides' reception. In the UK at least it has been the most popular part in dramatizations of Thucydides. As is often noted, the dialogic form of the text is one obvious reason for the text's suitability for theatrical adaptation (although theatrical practitioners do not really find it 'dramatic' enough for the stage, Morley in this collection). But the real motive behind Morley's selection of the Melian Dialogue for theatrical adaptation on this occasion was the challenge of taking this foundational piece of political realism out of its usual intellectual and political contexts and expose it to directors, actors, and theatrical audiences, in order to explore its 'intended' meanings through creative and unexpected forms.

<sup>34</sup> Cornford 1907, an early exploration of this idea in scholarship; Bedford and Workman 2001; Rutherford 2007; Webb 2023, with attention to sensory and performative aspects.

<sup>35</sup> For more examples of Thucydides' reception in contemporary novel and poetry, Hornblower 2008: 733–734; Morley 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Brook 1968.

<sup>37</sup> For Morley's scholarly and creative contributions to the field, see e.g. Morley 2014; Harloe and Morley 2012b; Lee and Morley 2015; his *Sphinx* blog <https://thesphinxblog.com/> [Website]. Accessed 12 June 2025, or his *Melian Dilemma*, online game inspired by the Melian Dialogue <https://philome.la/NevilleMorley/the-melian-dilemma/play/index.html> [Website]. Accessed 12 June 2025.

*The Melian Dialogues* were directed by Rebecca Atkinson-Lord. For this new journey of the text into the unknown, Morley made his own theatrical adaptation and simplification, given the difficult and abstract language of the original. The central theme was still war and power dynamics, but in a more polyphonic and socially inclusive way (with alternations of tone from tragedy to comedy) and in everyday settings, such as a pub or an intimate space where a woman was trying to persuade her lover not to go to war. In this real-world theatrical remaking, where also songs were included, such as the Melian version of 'Let's Call the Whole Thing Off', the characters of the script, members of a family or a couple for example, explored personal emotions and arguments taking place within and between them.

Morley participated in this theatrical experiment perhaps more as a creative author-dramaturge and less as an academic consultant. In his article he discusses his 'own experiences' (Morley in this collection), in the form of an observer-participant's log, from the preparatory workshops, rehearsals and the evening of the single performance followed by an academic round table. The round-table discussion, in which two academics took part along with Morley and the director, hints at the didactic dimension of the experiment and a need for discursive framing.

Building on the experience of *The Melian Dialogues*, *Do What you Must* was the second phase of Morley's team project and a piece of interactive, participatory theatre. It gave the audience an active role in the dramatic experience through voting and guided participation in a modern re-enactment of the Melians' vote about their fate. Questions of power, justice and social responsibility were transposed from the ancient context of the Athenian Empire and its hegemonic ambitions to the modern global question of climate change, about which the audience had to make decisions as members of an advisory board to a North American winter leisure conglomerate. This theatrical experiment is akin to Morley's engagement with gaming as a form of experiential and ludic learning where participants-gamers are asked to explore options and potential scenarios for the future based on what Morley has called the 'Melian Dilemma'. The educational aim of such an experiential engagement with Thucydides, as Morley notes, is to enhance 'political literacy and understanding' in a complex and unpredictable world.<sup>38</sup>

*Do What You Must* paraphrases a much-quoted passage from the Melian Dialogue 'the strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must' (5.89), in Crawley's translation. As Morley notes, this British theatrical experiment was 'unashamedly selective, decontextualized, and simplified' (p. 00). It did not use Thucydides as an ancient authority, but merely as a hint or gesture for dealing with modern global and local dilemmas, still 'learning something from Thucydides' text' not in the normative sense but through experience and exploration.

Turning to Greece and the country's position in a global and interconnected world, the years that followed the outbreak of the Greek debt crisis saw a surge of theatrical performances of Thucydides.<sup>39</sup> The imposition of austerity measures by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, the refugee and immigration crisis, unemployment, increasing poverty, and the housing crisis caused despondency and a deep sentiment of insecurity and fear for the future. Why and how did the 'old master', as Thucydides is often viewed by modern Greeks, speak to meet the impasses, needs, and aspirations of the present in theatrical adaptations? Why and how did Greek dramaturges, directors, actors, and audiences engage with it? The history of Thucydides' performances in Greece and other countries has not been dealt with systematically. Here I will draw selectively on Greek examples from the period 2014–18, also suggesting that the Greek economic and social crisis, then at its peak, was a key factor in what can be viewed as a 'Thucydidean turn' in theatrical productions of the text.

<sup>38</sup> <https://epoiesen.carleton.ca/2019/02/06/the-melian-dilemma-remaking-thucydides/> [Website]. Accessed 12 June 2025. Grace 2020, on ludo-literacy.

<sup>39</sup> The global aspect of the Greek debt crisis is acknowledged by analysts. Greece is used as an example of a national economy whose destabilization threatened the Eurozone and the world economy at large. E.g. 'The Eurozone crisis began in earnest when, in late 2009, the Greek government disclosed that Greece had lied about its public deficit for years', Frieden and Walter 2017: 376. Cf. Mahbubani 2013: 73: 'Amazingly, the loss of confidence in one small European economy [Greece] led inexorably to fears that the Euro itself might collapse. It has not happened yet (at the time of this writing), but the possibility has undermined the entire Eurozone. No country is safe from the consequences.'

My first example is *I Thucydides, an Athenian*, a theatrical experiment by Anna Kokkinou, staged for the first time in 2014 in Athens. Kokkinou, who was also the director and sole actor, has a long record of theatrical experiments with literature. She has also adapted for the stage and performed the distinctive and challenging prose of the nineteenth-century Greek author Georgios Vizyinos (1849–96), who, like Venizelos and other educated Greeks of their time, had the demotic in his heart, but wrote in a mild form of *katharevousa*. For the script of *I Thucydides, an Athenian* Kokkinou worked with Nikos Flessas, making a selection of passages from the established and reliable translation of Nikos Skouteropoulos, also used in education. The production toured across Greece the following year and was performed also for school students. Its didactic aspiration is apparent in the rubric of the play: ‘Theatre and history are joined, in an adolescent performance-panorama of human nature’.<sup>40</sup> The bodily movement of the performer was minimal (throughout the play Kokkinou was seated in a specially adapted wheel-chair-chariot with mechanical wings), making, almost inevitably, the sound of the human voice—and Thucydides’ *logos* (word)—a dominant presence. A distinctive aesthetic and interpretative feature of this remaking was a gender-neutral approach combined with science-fiction dystopia. In a press conference Kokkinou mentioned that she was always intrigued by the dramatic potential of Thucydides, but her interest was rekindled decisively in the conditions of the Greek crisis after 2010.<sup>41</sup>

In the same year another theatrical experiment was staged in the open-air Small Theatre of Epidaurus, included in the programme of the summer Athens Epidaurus Festival, under the direction of Roula Pateraki, who was also responsible for the dramaturgy and adaptation. This time the production was of a much larger scale (over fifty actors were employed) and a new translation was used specifically aimed for theatrical performance by John Lignades (see below on Lignades). The production was entitled *The Manifesto of War—Part 1: Pericles, the Neurosis of Hegemony*, concentrating mainly on the Funeral Oration (2.34–46). The horror of war, the plague, democracy, imperialism and associated concepts also prominent in the Melian Dialogue (justice, expediency and the power of the stronger as a natural law) were also problematized in Pateraki’s theatrical code. Prose and poetic texts extraneous to Thucydides were included in the script, with emphasis on the Greek civil war (1946–49), with the modern Greek novel *From the Mouth of the Old Remington* (1981) by Yannis Panou being a significant intertext on the topic.<sup>42</sup> The Greek civil war was the first local conflict after the Second World War, part of the Cold War dynamics and the struggle for dominance between USA and USSR as global powers.

Emblematic rhetorical pieces such as the Funeral Oration or the Melian Dialogue tend to be selected by modern directors in Greece of the crisis. Dimos Avdeliodis selected and directed the Funeral Oration for his *Pericles’ Funeral Oration*, a theatrical ‘hymn and monument’ to democracy,<sup>43</sup> staged in 2018 in a politically and intellectually significant space, also in terms of its urban geography, being opposite the Greek parliament.<sup>44</sup> The Funeral Oration is a text with some resonance in Greek education and culture. Avdeliodis used the translation of Eleftherios Venizelos for his theatrical experiment, nodding to Thucydides’ authority mediated through another major political figure of modern Greece. The obvious challenge in this staging was to make Venizelos’ mild form of *katharevousa* (not a spoken form of language, see above in this article) dramatically vibrant and meaningful to today’s audiences. A woman actor undertook this task, Ioanna Spanou. The vision of Avdeliodis and Spanou was to deliver a ‘monument of Greek language on the theatrical stage’.<sup>45</sup> The solo-performer approach recalls Kokkinou’s experiment, but the aesthetic and interpretative environments of the two productions

<sup>40</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/rms7ynzt> [website]. Accessed 26 August 2025.

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7-tud2n\\_B4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7-tud2n_B4) [website]. Accessed 26 August 2025.

<sup>42</sup> [https://www.artandlife.gr/athens/events/royla\\_pateraki\\_to\\_manifesto\\_toy\\_polemoy\\_meros\\_a](https://www.artandlife.gr/athens/events/royla_pateraki_to_manifesto_toy_polemoy_meros_a) [website]. Accessed 26 August; Saïnis 2014. As *Part 1* in the title of the play suggests, the plan involved a sequence of three plays that would cover the whole of the *History*. Parts 2 and 3 have not materialised so far to my knowledge.

<sup>43</sup> Interview of Ioanna Spanou (Gaveas 2018).

<sup>44</sup> The performances took place at the Angelos and Leto Katakouzenou Foundation. They were dedicated to the memory of the eminent Greek archaeologist and former Director of the Benaki Museum Angelos Delivorias, who had died in the same year (2018) <https://katakouzenos.gr/o-epitafios-tou-perikli-2/> [website]. Accessed 26 August 2025. The ‘Karolos Koun’ Prize, an important theatrical distinction, was awarded to Avdeliodis for the direction of this production.

<sup>45</sup> Gaveas 2018.

were different. At an interview Spanou said that as a performer she found Venizelos' language theatrically 'functional' and effective, because Venizelos was a politician himself and 'knew better than all of us what it means to speak to people about war and peace'.<sup>46</sup> There was a therapeutic dimension or even mission in this experiment, which emerges from the comments made in the same interview, where Pericles' vision and pride about democracy in the Funeral Oration are contrasted with the discourse of catastrophization by modern politicians. During the years of the Greek crisis bleak scenarios about the country's future were recycled on news platforms and social media every day.

The fourth and final example of Thucydides' theatrical performances in Greece of the crisis explored here is the *Lessons of War*, staged in 2018 at the underground scene of the Athens Concert Hall.<sup>47</sup> This production was also the topic of a presentation, based on short videos and slides, delivered at the Thucydides Global workshop in London the following year by John Lignades, who also did the translation and dramaturgy (also drawing on his translation of Pateraki's production, see above). The production became 'the 'talk of the town', cherished by critics and audiences alike'<sup>48</sup> and met with international acclaim, having been performed at the European Parliament in March 2019.<sup>49</sup> It was directed by Dimitris Lignades, who also performed as an actor together with a group of five young actors,<sup>50</sup> accompanied by the composer Theodoris Oikonomou, playing the piano on stage.

The script was a collage of narrative and speeches selected from the first five books of Thucydides covering the first sixteen years (431–415 BC) of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC). The Funeral Oration and the Melian Dialogue were included in the script, meeting the pattern of popularity of these two significant rhetorical speeches in theatrical adaptations. Yet a distinctive feature of this production, especially by comparison to the UK theatrical experiments discussed, was the selection of narrative episodes and speeches evenly distributed across the first five books, which included for example the siege and destruction of Plataea by the Spartans and the Thebans in 428/7 BC or the Athenian occupation of Pylos and Sphacteria two years later. Historiographic coverage and coherence were central aims of Lignades' adaptation, meeting the plan of a history lesson. The script was organized as a series of scenes-lessons taking place on stage, with an explicit intention of authenticity ('an original dramatization of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*', as we read in the rubric of the performance).<sup>51</sup>

The educational purpose of this production was unmistakable, advertised in its own title, resonating with Thucydides' purpose to create a useful and instructive historical narrative.<sup>52</sup> This production too was attended by audiences of school students, and all performances, for students and the general public alike, were introduced by specialists in the field, who provided background knowledge on classical Greece and the Peloponnesian war in short talks, before the start of the performance. The black-and-white set was a distinctive sensory-aesthetic feature of the performance. The actors' formal black-and-white costumes alluded to the formality of classroom teaching—perhaps also to the austere elements of Thucydides' work—and so did the white chalk with which the map of the Peloponnese was drawn on the black wall of the set, used as a blackboard at a lesson of history and military tactics. The shrinking of the humanities, classics in particular, in formal education is a global phenomenon. Its expression in Greece often revolves around the position of ancient Greek texts and language in secondary education curriculum which is an open debate, closely

<sup>46</sup> Gaveas 2018.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.megaron.gr/en/event/lessons-of-war/> [website]. Accessed 26 August 2025.

<sup>48</sup> <https://diazoma.gr/en/press-releases/thucydides-history-peloponnesian-war-theatrical-sensation-athens/> [website]. Accessed 26 August 2025. This production was followed by a further two, which completed the sequence of the theatrical adaptation of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), both directed by Dimitris Lignades and based on theatrical scripts by John Lignades: *Lessons of War II: Sicilian Drama* (<https://www.megaron.gr/en/event/lessons-of-war-ii-sicilian-drama-4/>. Accessed 26 August 2025) in 2019, drawing on Thucydides' Books 6 and 7; and *Lessons of War III: Athenian Dramas—Episodes from Xenophon's Hellenika* (<https://www.megaron.gr/en/event/lessons-of-war-iii/>. Accessed 26 August 2025) in 2020, drawing on Thucydides' unfinished Book 8 and the first two books of Xenophon's *Hellenika* (*Greek Histories* or *A History of my Times* in the 1979 Penguin Classics edition), which continue and complete the narration of the Peloponnesian War (411–404 BC).

<sup>49</sup> Fragoulaki 2019 (blog with image of the staging at the European Parliament).

<sup>50</sup> Aurora Marion, Caterina Patsiani, Vassilis Athanasopoulos, Costas Nikouli, and Andreas Kartsatos.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.megaron.gr/en/event/lessons-of-war/> [website]. Accessed 26 August 2025.

<sup>52</sup> Thuc. 1.22; Kallet 2006. Cf. Polybius 6.1, 9.9, on the useful and instructive purpose of history.

related to political and constitutional changes in the history of modern Greece.<sup>53</sup> The educational setting of Lignades' remaking, along with translation choices (see below), signposts the purposeful engagement with this question and the production's aim to promote classics.

The dramas of Greece's ancient past resonated with the political and social crisis of the present. In the humiliation and harsh treatment of the Plataeans by the Spartans in 428/7 BC or of the Melians by the Athenians in 416 BC, modern Greek audiences recognized the Greek economic crisis after 2010. Although in the UK productions discussed above war and politics were explored through more personal routes, in *Lessons of War* it was the collective dramas that were more pronounced, as in the ancient text. But in Lignades' version too there was room for personal introspection through mini-narratives that zoomed into the actors' life-stories, such as the emotive bilingual short biography of Aurora Marion, in French and Greek, or the injection of Albanian into Costas Nikouli's manic outbursts in the dramatization of the Pylos episode. These personal moments resonated with the refugee crisis and Greece's transformation into a much more multicultural and inclusive society. In the Greek political scene at the time the far-right political party 'Golden Dawn' was rising using a divisive and nationalistic rhetoric, taking advantage of the voters' anxiety about the future of their country and a sense of national humiliation in the global scene.<sup>54</sup>

Female agency and humour were further strategies in this modern remaking for the stage in line with all other productions. Both these elements were joined in the casting of a woman actor in the role of the Athenian demagogue Cleon, trying to climb a table in a tight skirt to make a preposterous proclamation about his/her ability to conclude the Athenian military operation at Pylos successfully and swiftly (the episode is narrated in Thuc. 4.28 and is one of the rare mentions of laughter in Thucydides). In the dramatic convention actors and audience were joined in a modern version of the Athenian democratic assembly, where women too could take part, mingle with men, evaluate political arguments and laugh at speakers. Lignades' script also included Thucydides' brief formulaic references to women as a collective entity, often at the end of a siege and the subjugation of a place: 'All women captured were sold as slaves', as in the last sentence of the 'Fifth Reading' (Ανάγνωσμα Πέμπτο).<sup>55</sup> Speech alternated with music (by piano and cello, that latter played by a woman actor), plainness with emotion, and bodily movement was interlaced with static moments, the latter mainly in the speeches. These changes in rhythm and mood evoked a multisensorial experience as a further strategy of the modern theatrical remaking.<sup>56</sup>

Lignades' translation was a blend of everyday language with older forms, including Thucydides' Greek. The blending of different chronological periods in the language of the play was related to its stance towards the position of classics in the Greek educational system, as mentioned above.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, by injecting 'strange' language forms from the past into the script, like the 'pearls' in Hannah Arendt's use of the Pearl Diver metaphor, discussed above, a poetic sense of historical time was evoked. In that sense Lignades' translation can be viewed as part of a political-national, cultural, and aesthetic agenda. Words and short phrases from Thucydides' text included in the script relied on the audience's ability to bridge the gap between the ancient and modern Greek meaning. Verses from modern Greek poetry were also included in the script as cultural intertexts, such as Milos Sahtouris' 'On the Nature of the Beast' and Odysseas Elytis' *Axion Esti*.<sup>58</sup> The poetic and intertextual element was signposted by words such as 'Stasimon' (Choral song in tragedy) for some of the scenes or 'Anagnosma' (Reading) (see note 55).

<sup>53</sup> Papamanoli 2020; Karadimas 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Alev Scott on *Lessons of War* and the Greek crisis, 'Why Greece's Syriza and Golden Dawn parties are feuding over the classics', *Financial Times*, 21 September 2018. The Golden Dawn plummeted in the 2019 Greek parliamentary elections and did not win any seats. O'Hanlon 2020, for theatre as a response to political, social and economic uncertainty.

<sup>55</sup> Lignades 2016, 59. 'Reading' (Ανάγνωσμα) in modern Greek evokes formal education, liturgical language, and the Gospels. Children, usually found side by side with women in Thucydides (e.g. 5.32.1, 5.116.4), are present elsewhere in Lignades' adaptation, e.g. p. 35, on the siege of Plataea.

<sup>56</sup> A theatrical expression of *enargeia* ('vividness'), Connor 2017: 217–222.

<sup>57</sup> For language blending as a political and cultural gesture in Venizelos' translation of Thucydides, see p. 6 in this article.

<sup>58</sup> Trans. Kimon Friar 1980. Lignades 2016, full theatrical script (in Greek). For Sahtouris and Elytis in Anglophone scholarship, see Beaton 1994: 182–183 and 209–213, respectively.

The poetry of Thucydides' prose in modern translations of the text was the specific focus of Sandra Rodrigues da Rocha's presentation at the Thucydides Global workshop. Rodrigues da Rocha looked at the balance between prose and poetry in Thucydides' modern translations, pursuing the oral/aural, poetic and performative features of Thucydides' style and examining whether these may or may not migrate into the modern translation.<sup>59</sup> Taking chains of participles in Thucydides as a test case and drawing on ancient and modern literary criticism, Translation Studies and modern poetry, such as T. S. Eliot, she argued that Thucydides' poetic potential has been underplayed or completely lost in modern translations. The suggested reason is the text's importance in political and intellectual environments and discourses, which consciously or unconsciously set rigid translation agendas that do not allow the exploration of the poetic and emotive potential of the text. Consequently, Rodrigues Da Rocha's discussion advocated for a more emotive, poetic, and performative approach in the translation process.

The poetic and emotive potential of the text in performative contexts of healing-through-dramatization was the theme of Peter Meineck's response at the Thucydides Global workshop. Meineck is a classicist and theatre practitioner. With the application of cognitive science as a theoretical tool his theory and practice have illuminated the performative experience of ancient drama and Thucydides as a tragic and dramatic text.<sup>60</sup> As founder of Aquila Theatre Company, he has toured American cities and Universities with classical theatre productions. The company's applied humanities programme involves educational and outreach activities where 'ancient literature and collaborative performance practices [are used] to create meaningful dialogue, foster healing, and build supportive communities'.<sup>61</sup> At the workshop, Meineck focused on Thucydides' dramatic quality (*enargeia*, 'vividness') and theatrical experiments which repurpose the text to elicit emotional responses in processing combat trauma. He shared his insights and experiences on his work with veterans of the Vietnam War (1955–75), one of the most traumatic experiences of the Cold War.<sup>62</sup>

At the round table of the Thucydides Global workshop, Meineck's performative Thucydides was in dialogue with the responses of Sara Monoson, classicist and expert in political theory from antiquity to the present and intellectual historian; Paul Cartledge, classicist and ancient historian who has engaged closely with the legacy of ancient Greece in modern politics and society (and was also involved as academic consultant in Greek theatrical adaptations of Herodotus by Lignades),<sup>63</sup> outreach, and civic mission; and †Dan Tompkins, a Thucydidean and a classical reception expert. The work of these scholars has illuminated the reception of Thucydides and other classical texts demonstrating the need for interdisciplinary and out-of-the box approaches.

The reception of Thucydides is an expanding and diverse field, generating new frameworks, media and uses of the text, which shift the focus from the text to audience-users and social interactions. In the era of digital media and technology, Thucydides' receptions, transformations and (mis)appropriations in public discourse on social media is an emerging field.<sup>64</sup> Who are the social media users of Thucydides and other ancient texts today? How do these texts inspire and interact with current notions of war, democracy, freedom, truth, citizenship, and heroism? What storytelling frames are mobilized in social media posts engaging with ancient texts?<sup>65</sup> These and similar questions create new dialogues across classics and ancient history, sociolinguistics, modern and popular history, memory studies, journalism, information technology and so on in academic, outreach, and creative environments.

<sup>59</sup> For translation as migration of the ancient text to different environments of reception, [Hardwick 2003: 1](#).

<sup>60</sup> [Meineck 2018, 2019](#).

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.aquilatheatre.com/about#what-we-do>. Accessed 15 May 2025.

<sup>62</sup> [Connor 1984: 7](#) 'Above all it was the shattering experience of the Vietnam War that made me reconsider the *Histories* [Thucydides]'.  
<sup>63</sup> [Herodotus Dramaticus: Thermopylae](#) <https://thf.gr/el/archaia-istoria-epi-skinis-irodotos-dr/> [website]. Accessed 26 August 2025.

<sup>64</sup> [Morley 2023](#) on Thucydides' (mis)use on Twitter.

<sup>65</sup> 'Tweeting the War', an interdisciplinary (ancient history and sociolinguistics) research and outreach project, collecting and analysing Twitter postings (now X) on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict after the Russian invasion of 24 February 2022, where Thucydides and Herodotus are recycled and (mis)used: <https://www.mahproject.com/tweeting-the-war> [website]. Accessed 12 June 2025.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, D., P. Christensen and P. Millett (eds) 2018: *How to Do Things with History: New Approaches to Ancient Greece*, Oxford.
- Allison, G. 2017: *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* Boston and New York.
- Arendt, H. 1958: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2nd edn (1st edn 1951)), Cleveland and New York.
- 1968: *Men in Dark Times*, New York.
- Austin, J. L. 1962: *How to Do Things with Words. The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, Oxford.
- Bassnett, S. and A. Lefevere. 1998: *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, Clevedon.
- Beaton, R. 1994: *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature*, Oxford.
- Bedford, D. and T. Workman. 2001: 'The tragic reading of the Thucydidean tragedy', *Review of International Studies* 27, 51–67.
- Bett, R. 2024: 'Doing things with concepts in Sextus Empiricus', in Betegh G., Tsouna V. (eds), *Conceptualising Concepts in Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 259–84.
- Bromberg, J. A. 2021: *Global Classics*, Abingdon, UK.
- Brook, P. 1968: *The Empty Space*, New York.
- Carabott, P. 1993: 'Politics, orthodoxy and the Language Question in Greece—The Gospel Riots in November 1901', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 3, 117–38.
- Carson, A. 2000: *Men in the Off Hours*, London.
- Čelutka, S. 2024: 'Hannah Arendt, Pearl Diving, and the Humanities', *Amor Mundi: The weekly newsletter of the Hannah Arendt Center*, 29 August 2024. Available from <https://hac.bard.edu/amor-mundi/hannah-arendt-pearl-diving-and-the-humanities-2024-08-29>. Accessed 27 August 2025.
- Coastall, A. and O. Dreier (eds) 2006: *Doing Things with Things: The Design and Use of Everyday Objects*, Hampshire and Burlington, VT.
- Connor, W. R. 1984: *Thucydides*, Princeton.
- 2017: 'Scale matters: compression, expansion, and vividness in Thucydides', in R. K. Balot, S. Forsdyke and E. Foster (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides*, Oxford, 211–24.
- Cordesman, A. H. 2023: 'China's Emergence as a Superpower: A Graphic Comparison of the United States, Russia, China and Other Major Powers', Revised and expanded, August 15, 2023. Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC. Available from [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-08/230811\\_Cordesman\\_China\\_Emerging\\_0.pdf?VersionId=..HHmddmPzOORBebR6scpJaS9fgVq23G](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-08/230811_Cordesman_China_Emerging_0.pdf?VersionId=..HHmddmPzOORBebR6scpJaS9fgVq23G). Accessed 12 June 2025.
- Cornford, F. 1907: *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, London.
- Crawley, R. 1910: 'Introduction, *Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War. Done into English by Richard Crawley*, London, Toronto, Vancouver, Melbourne, and Wellington, ix–xii.
- De Bary, T. W. M. 2013: *The Great Civilized Conversation*, New York.
- Dimaras, A. 2006: 'Modernisation and reaction in Greek education during the Venizelos era', in Kitromilides (ed.), *Eleftherios Venizelos: the Trials of Statesmanship*, 319–45.
- Fetzer, A. and D. Weiss (eds) 2020: *Doing Things with Quotes. Special Issue of the Journal of Pragmatics* 157, Amsterdam.
- Fragoulaki, M. 2019: 'Decomartmentalising Thucydides', Blog, 12 August 2019. Available from <https://theclassicalassociation.blogspot.com/2019/08/decomartmentalising-thucydides.html>. Accessed 12 May 2025.
- Friar, K. 1980: *With Face to the Wall: Selected Poems of Miltos Sahtouris*, Washington DC.
- Frieden, J. and S. Walter. 2017: 'Understanding the political economy of the Eurozone crisis', *Annual Review of Political Science* 20, 371–90.
- Gaveas, D. 2018: 'When Venizelos "met" Pericles' Funeral Oration' [in Greek], Huffpost. Available from <https://www.huffingtonpost.gr/kinonia/otan-o-venizelos-sinantise-ton-epitafio-tou-perikli/>. Accessed 26 August 2025.
- Giuseffi, F. 2023: 'Natality, the past, and the Pearl Diver: exploring Hannah Arendt's educational teaching', *Critical Questions in Education* 14, 182–96.
- Grace, L. 2020: *Doing Things with Games: Social Impact Through Play*, Boca Raton, FL.
- Greenwood, E. 2012: 'The Greek Thucydides: Venizelos' translation of Thucydides', in Harloe, K. and N. Morley (eds), *Thucydides and the Modern World: Reception, Reinterpretation and Influence from the Renaissance to the Present*, Cambridge, 157–77.
- 2015: 'On translating Thucydides', in Lee and Morley (eds), *A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides*, Malden, MA and Oxford, 91–121.
- Hardwick, L. 2003: *Reception Studies. Greece and Rome. New Surveys in the Classics* 33, Oxford.
- Hardwick, L. and C. Stray. 2008a: 'Introduction: making connections', in Hardwick and Stray (eds), *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, Malden, MA and Oxford, 1–7.

- Hardwick, L. and C. Stray (eds) 2008b: *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, Malden, MA and Oxford.
- Harloe, K. and N. Morley. 2012a: 'Introduction', in Harloe and Morley (eds), *Thucydides and the Modern World: Reception, Reinterpretation and Influence from the Renaissance to the Present*, Cambridge, 1–24.
- Harloe, K. and N. Morley (eds) 2012b: *Thucydides and the Modern World: Reception, Reinterpretation and Influence from the Renaissance to the Present*, Cambridge.
- Hermans, E. 2023: 'The Global Dissemination of Classical Learning', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 30, 1–8.
- Hodkinson, S. 2012: 'Sparta and the Soviet Union in U.S. Cold War foreign policy and intelligence analysis', in S. Hodkinson and I. Macgregor Morris (eds), *Sparta in Modern Thought: Politics, History, and Culture*, Swansea, 343–92.
- Hornblower, S. 1987: *Thucydides*, London.
- 2008: *A Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. III: Books 5.25–8.109*, Oxford.
- Hutchings, R. M. and M. J. Adler. 1952: *Great Books of the Western World*. Chicago. Encyclopaedia Britannica, University of Chicago.
- Iori, L. and I. Matijašić. 2025: 'Global Thucydides: editors, readers, translators', *Anabases: Traditions and Réceptions de l' Antiquité* 41, 357–62.
- Kallet, L. 2006: 'Thucydides' workshop of history and utility outside the text', in A. Rengakos and A. Tsakmakis (eds), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides*, Leiden and Boston, 335–68.
- Karadimas, D. 2025: 'The Position of Ancient Greek in Secondary Education' [in Greek], Esos.gr—Daily Online Journal of Education. Blog 4 August 2025. Available from <https://www.esos.gr/arthra/94643/i-thesi-ton-arhaion-ellinikon-sti-deyterobathmia-ekpaideysi>. Accessed 25 August 2025.
- Kitromilides, P. M. 2006a: 'Venizelos' Intellectual Projects and Cultural Interests', in Kitromilides (ed.), *Eleftherios Venizelos: the Trials of Statesmanship*, Edinburgh, 377–88.
- Kitromilides, P. M. (ed.) 2006b: *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, Edinburgh.
- Korsgaard, M. T. 2020: 'Pearl diving and the exemplary way educational note taking and taking note in education', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53, 1350–8.
- Lee, C. and N. Morley (eds) 2015: *A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides*, Malden, MA and Oxford.
- Lignades, J. 2016: *Thucydides Dramaticus. The Theatre of War. War, A Violent Teacher (translated title of Θουκυδίδης Δραματικός: Το Θέατρο του Πολέμου. Πόλεμος Βίας Διδάσκαλος)*, Athens.
- Llewellyn-Smith, M. 2021: *Venizelos: The Making of a Greek Statesman 1864–1914*, Oxford.
- Mackridge, P. 2004: "'Sie sprechen wie ein Buch": G. N. Hadjidakis (1848–1941) and the defence of Greek diglossia', *Kampos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 12, 69–87.
- 2009: *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976*, Oxford.
- Mahbubani, K. 2013: *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World*, New York.
- Makraki, L. 2001: *Eleftherios Venizelos 1864–1910: The Shaping of a National Leader [in Greek]. Trans. Takis Kirakis (Title of the Original: Cretan Rebel: Eleftherios Venizelos in Ottoman Crete)* (2nd edn with supplements), Athens.
- Martindale, C. 2006: 'Introduction: thinking through reception', in C. Martindale and R. F. Thomas (eds), *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, Oxford, 1–13.
- Meineck, P. 2018: *Theatrocracy: Greek Drama, Cognition, and the Imperative for Theatre*, Abington.
- et al. 2019: 'Introduction', in P. Meineck, W. M. Short and J. Devereaux (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Classics and Cognitive Theory*, Abington, Oxon, 1–18.
- Morley, N. 2012: 'Peter Handke's Thucydides', *Classical Receptions Journal* 4, 20–47.
- 2014: *Thucydides and the Idea of History*, London and New York.
- 2016: 'Any translation you like (so long as it's Crawley)', *Sphinx* blog, July 4, 2016. Available from <https://thesphinxblog.com/2016/07/04/any-translation-you-like-so-long-as-its-crawley/>. Accessed 9 June 2025.
- 2023: 'The society that separates its scholars from its keyboard warriors: tracking Thucydides on Twitter', in J. Bastos Marques and F. Santangelo (eds), *Authority and History: Ancient Models, Modern Questions*. London, New York, and Dublin, 109–26.
- O'Hanlon, D. 2020: *Theatre in Times of Crisis: 20 Scenes for the Stage in Troubled Times*. London. Methuen Drama Play Collections, with an introduction by Edward Bond, Methuen Drama, UK.
- Olesen, B. K. et al. 2013: 'Doing things with intellectual history: an interview with Martin van Gelderen', *Zeitenblicke—Online journal für die Geschichtswissenschaften* 12, 1–56.
- Orwin, C. 1994: *The Humanity of Thucydides*, Princeton.
- Panou, Y. 1981: *From the Mouth of the Old Remington [in Greek]*, Thessaloniki.
- Papamanoli, E. 2020: *Texts and Discourses for Ancient Greek in Education: Cuts and Regressions in Institutional Contexts (1976–2005)*, PhD Thesis (University of Athens) [in Greek, with translated abstract], Athens.
- Robinson, D. 2003: *Performative Linguistics: speaking and Translating as Doing Things with Words*, New York and London.

- Rutherford, R. 2007: 'Tragedy and history', in J. Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, vol. 1. Malden, MA, 504–14.
- Sanis, A. 2014: 'Thucydides in the manner of Pateraki' [in Greek], *O Anagnostis*. Available from <https://tinyurl.com/59ht4c2c>. Accessed 26 August 2025.
- Sawyer, E. 2015: 'Thucydides in the modern political rhetoric', in Lee and Morley (eds), *A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides*, MA, Malden and Oxford, 529–47.
- Stradis, A. 2015: 'Thucydides in the Staff College', in Lee and Morley (eds), *A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides*, MA, Malden and Oxford, 425–45.
- Tambakaki, P. (ed.) 2023: *Brill's Companion to Classical Reception and Modern World Poetry*, Leiden.
- Tassopoulos, I. 2006: 'The experiment of inclusive constitutionalism, 1909–32', in Kitromilides (ed.), *Eleftheros Venizelos: the Trials of Statesmanship*, Edinburgh, 251–72.
- Webb, E. A. 2023: *Audience Sensory Experience in Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War*. PhD Thesis, The Open University.
- Woolf, G. 2019: 'Annual Newsletter 2019', Institute of Classical Studies, London. Available from <https://ics.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/leaflets/ICS%20Annual%20Newsletter%202019-11-27.pdf>. Accessed 12 June 2025.
- Zachariadi-Holdberg, E. 1991: *Venizelos' Commentary on Thucydides [in Greek, Ta scholia tou Venizelou ston Thoukydidi]*, Athens.