

This volume is designed to offer a multifaceted exploration of the general theme of “Literature in Times of Crisis,” with the term “crisis” variously—and very broadly—defined. Like all the other volumes in the Critical Insights series, this one is divided into several sections. The introductory section consists of a flagship essay by a major scholar in the field—in this case, Rebecca Totaro, who has published numerous articles and books on British “plague literature” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this new essay—actually a documented “self-interview”—Professor Totaro explains how she came to be interested in this topic; outlines some of the characteristic themes of early writings about the plague; suggests some avenues for further research; and comments on the similarities between the challenges posed by the plague in the 1500s and 1600s and the impact of COVID-19 in 2020 and beyond.

Critical Contexts

The next major section of the book consists of four “Critical Contexts” essays—essays designed to explore the “literature of crisis” theme in several different ways: first from a historical perspective; next by providing an overview of some relevant secondary writings; then by adopting a specific “critical lens”; and finally by engaging in a comparative analysis involving two different authors and their works. Both the historical essay and the essay surveying secondary sources are by Matthew Thiele. His work builds nicely on Professor Totaro’s preceding work. His first essay examines Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* in light of plague literature from the early modern period, while his second essay surveys commentary on that literature as well as commentary on the more general topic of literature and life-threatening diseases such as cancer.

The final two essays in the “Critical Contexts” section are by Edwin Wong and Brandon Schneeberger. Wong’s “critical lens” essay offers an illuminating discussion of literary tragedies as “black swan” events—incidents that at first seem highly improbable but have major, often catastrophic consequences. Although Wong’s main concern in this essay is with ancient Greek tragedies, his ideas are quite relevant to tragedies from any other period, both in literature and in “real life.” Lastly, the “comparative” essay in the “Critical Contexts” section is by Brandon Schneeberger, who compares and contrasts writings by Samuel Johnson and C. S. Lewis dealing with crises wrought by war and other kinds of perilous events.

Critical Readings: I

The eleven “Critical Readings”—each with its own separate focus—are arranged in roughly chronological order, beginning with Fabian Horn’s detailed discussion of various crises involving the Trojan War in Homer’s *The Iliad*. Horn argues that “Achilles’s wrath”—the nominal focus of the poem—“results from a dramatic crisis in his own life, a bitter conflict over honor with Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek army, which then brings about another, more incisive personal crisis, the death of his best friend, Patroclus.” Achilles’s “desire for vengeance to restore his honor leads to one of the most significant crises for Troy as a whole: Achilles’s killing of Hector, the great and admirable Trojan prince.” Kenneth Kitchell, discussing “Crises in Sophocles’s *Antigone*,” examines the crises that face both the main character and her city as a whole as she deals with the critical situation of how to properly honor her dead brother, whose corpse the king has condemned to dishonorable treatment. Kitchell argues that the play demonstrates Sophocles’s “belief that some people will heroically rise to deal with any situation. This is the belief that allows the chorus’s ‘Ode to Man’ to coexist with the total devastation of the play,” separating “an Antigone from an Ismene, a Haemon from a Creon. Ultimately,” Kitchell writes, Sophocles shows that “heroism is not determined by what happens to a person but rather by how s/he reacts to the circumstances of his or her life, especially in times of crisis.”

Robert Evans, in an essay on “Crisis and Conspiracy in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*,” contends that Shakespeare’s play “illustrates not only a major—perhaps *the* major—crisis in the political history of Rome; it also illustrates how that crisis causes various other kinds of crisis in many diverse aspects of society.” These involve crises “between genuine friends; between political allies; between husband and wife; and between the so-called ‘ruling class’ and the so-called ‘common people.’ Ultimately,” Evans argues, “all these crises lead to a war which itself results in a whole new series of political, military, and social crises.” In the next essay, John C. Havard describes an intriguing pedagogical project in which he and fourteen students collaborated to explore the various kinds of crisis (personal, political, financial, medical, and others) relevant to a little-known text (“The Man at Home”) by the pioneering early American author Charles Brockden Brown. Havard and his students demonstrate the kind of collaborative work that can help provide new insights into literary works that deserve fuller discussion.

In the first of two essays, Brett Stifflemire offers a comprehensive overview of the rise of “post-apocalyptic” literature in European (especially British) literature of the nineteenth century. Whereas “apocalyptic” literature traditionally imagined the rise of a new and better world order after massive destruction, “post-apocalyptic” literature was much more pessimistic: “Temporal ambiguity, reversion to primitive existence, widespread death and cataclysm resulting from disease and war, and the fate of the Last Man are recurring themes,” Stifflemire contends, “in nineteenth-century literature that imagined possible futures in response to social, political, and economic crises. These texts challenged the traditional apocalyptic myth and established a foundation” for a darker, less hopeful genre.

Critical Readings: II

In an essay on the first of various twentieth-century texts, Robert Evans explores the crisis theme in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. Evans argues that this novel “brims with all kinds of crises—political, economic, social, and psychological, including

crises within the larger nation, within particular regions, within individual communities, between sociopolitical classes, within families and friendships, and within individual hearts and minds.” Evans particularly examines the chapter dealing with the death of Grampa Joad. He shows “how the Joads and some newly made friends cope, in various ways, with the multiple crises they face in this literal and figurative chapter of their lives.” Next, Stifflemire, in an essay on “Apocalypse and Post-Apocalypse in Fiction and Film, 1945–1970,” argues that stories “about apocalypse existed long before World War II; however, this war profoundly altered the public consciousness in relation to the very real possibility of worldwide cataclysm. The fiction of apocalypse became a reality in Nazi death camps and in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Because of these devastating atrocities,” he suggests, “the threat of the apocalypse has taken on a new meaning since the Second World War.” Such events, he contends, “caused many to experience disillusionment, psychic havoc, and ontological uncertainty—a cultural sensibility which found expression in the post-apocalyptic genre” in the decades immediately following the war.

Joyce Kelley, in an essay titled “The Crisis of the Archives: Susan Howe’s ‘Articulation of Sound Forms in Time,’” examines poems by one of America’s foremost postmodern writers to explore the various kinds of crisis Howe both describes and enacts in poems set in early American history. Kelley suggests that “while we intrinsically recognize crisis as potentially damaging, it also can bring necessary change. The shaking up of old systems, old beliefs, and old stories is often necessary for new beginnings. For the postmodern poet, new potential in language and meaning grows from moments of instability.” According to Kelley, Howe “stresses the importance of telling, even in chaos, and of listening, even if not fully understanding. If we as readers could put as much effort into making sense of the stories of the past, both central and marginal, as we do Howe’s poetry, the result,” Kelley concludes, “might reveal a very different conception of history.”

With another essay by Robert Evans, the present book makes its transition into the twenty-first century by focusing on an important

pair of works from the early 2000s: Margaret Atwood's novella *The Penelopiad* and, especially, the later adaptation, also by Atwood, of that novella for the stage. Evans argues that in "the play version of *The Penelopiad*, Penelope herself is treated far more generously than she is in the novella." In both works, Penelope bears some responsibility for the works' greatest crisis: the slaughter of some of Penelope's maids. But Evans contends that in the play, "she seems less obviously guilty of the maids' deaths than she may seem in the novella." By reviewing recent productions of the play and then examining the crucial scenes themselves, Evans asserts that the "play creates less of a crisis for Penelope's reputation than the novella does."

Turning to another kind of adaptation, Kelsie Kato next examines the broad range of critical responses to the film version of Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*. McCarthy's book is widely viewed as one of the most important "post-apocalyptic" works ever written, which is one reason Hollywood producers were eager to bring it to the big screen. Some commentators thought the book was "unfilmable," but Kato shows that although various reviewers did, in fact, consider the film a failure, many others had either mixed views or offered highly positive assessments of the movie.

Finally, the present volume closes with an essay by Maria Antonietta Struzziero that explores "Crisis and Crises in Homer's *Iliad* and Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*," a 2018 book by the distinguished English novelist. Struzziero claims that "Barker's novel partly emphasizes the crises faced by Briseis, the enslaved young woman whom Agamemnon demands from Achilles, the great Greek hero" in Homer's epic poem. "The battle of wills between these two men," she continues, "leads to a crisis within the Greek camp, especially when the embittered Achilles withdraws from battle and watches as his fellow Greeks are slaughtered by the Trojans. Only when Achilles's close boyhood friend, Patroclus, falls in battle does Achilles re-enter the fight." For Achilles, "the death of Patroclus is perhaps the most important crisis of his mature life. Briseis watches all these events unfold and, in Barker's novel, gives her own perspective on all the crises the narrative depicts."

Resources

The present volume closes—as all volumes in the Critical Insights series do—with a variety of “resources” meant to help readers continue their explorations of the topic at hand. These include an “Additional Works” section that lists numerous books that examine literature and crisis as well as a “Bibliography” that broadens the focus to literature and various kinds of catastrophes and other, related topics. Notes describing the editor and contributors offer additional bibliographical data, while a comprehensive index allows readers to search for many of the persons, characters, works, and topics discussed in the preceding pages.

Why Study Premodern Pandemic Experience?___

Rebecca Totaro

How did you first become interested in the idea of literature written in response to times of crisis?

As a student studying religion and anthropology at Whittier College, I took two powerful study abroad courses: Hindu Religion and Culture in South India and Dante's Art and Poetry, based in Florence, Italy. My attention to the synergies within and among cultures was ignited. Later, when studying at Yale and then at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, toward what became a PhD in English with a focus on early modern literature, I was asking questions that were outside of the bounds of what had been prescribed for the scholarly study of literature. New Historicism was just emerging, however, and this would fortuitously secure a foothold for my approach to literature via medical history. In reading for what initially was a dissertation related to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*—with its rich visual imagery that seemed matched only by the literal images on the walls of Southern India's temples—I began to encounter reference after reference to “the plague.” It was in that context, rereading Shakespeare's plays, that I wondered what audiences would have thought of lines like Mercutio's famous: “A plague on both your houses.” We would never, now (I reasoned then and still believe) substitute “cancer” for “plague” in Mercutio's line. My curiosity led me to conclude, through the study of medical history, that to hurl a curse was to change the environment, to charge it with harmful emotions and vapors. Representations of bubonic plague in early modern literature, and the lived experience those representations revealed, became the focus of my dissertation.

Pursuing this research revealed what COVID-19 has shown us all: *Every* facet of lived experience is impacted by a pandemic. Five

books on early modern English pandemic experience later, I see books upon books still to be written on the subject. I've highlighted, below, some of the scholarship I most admire. I hope many other scholars will join us, collaboratively too, in bringing to light the details, meaning, and individual stories related to this powerful, complex, and never-more-relevant early modern crisis. We have much to learn from our premodern forebears. As I'll mention below, and as the traces of their lived experience have taught me, early moderns cared for each other in many ways better than we do. They did not have science or Google, but they knew their own bodies, their neighbors, and their off-the-grid resources better than we do.

What kinds of literary works has your scholarship explored?

My scholarship has focused on the textual response to plague in early modern England, tracing what was at the time a new genre: plague writing. The genre has clear subgenres of plague literature: plague prayers; plague remedies; plague orders, which we would call a quarantine policy; and plague bills, which gave the weekly number of plague dead in each parish during outbreaks. My focus was on printed works, including cheap print pamphlets, but the most exciting scholarship being done now examines parish records, recipes, and household accounts.

In my own attention to printed literary texts, I drew together the essential Elizabethan sources listed above (in *The Plague in Print*). Of the examinations growing from that book came *The Plague Epic in Early Modern England*, which magnifies a set of miniature epic poems from 1603–1721. Poets, I found, had created a shareable narrative in which they turned England into an epic nation in need of multiple heroes to challenge its greatest enemy, the plague. It is interesting that in finding no single hero, the writers depart from typical epic tradition to tell stories of the individuals, families, and neighbors who rise up by way of truth-telling, respect, and mutual caretaking. In this effort, these writers, like the Church's clergy, refer regularly to the Bible's Job as a model for the local hero and to the biblical Nineveh as a model city.

CRITICAL
CONTEXTS

“Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she”: Inheritance, Reproduction, and Plague in *Romeo and Juliet*

Matthew Thiele

William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is set squarely in plague-time, a fact evident from several significant details in the play. The clearest evidence is Friar John’s account of his detention in a house suspected of being visited by plague in 5.2. He says,

Going to find a barefoot brother out—
One of our order—to associate me
Here in this city visiting the sick,
And finding him, the searchers of the town,
Suspecting that we both were in a house
Where the infectious pestilence did reign,
Sealed up the doors, and would not let us forth.
(5.2.5–11)

It is somewhat unclear from this passage whether plague is actually raging in Verona, but the response Friar John describes represents a real anxiety, and several significant details of his account suggest that plague is a threat in the play. The most significant plague reference is that Friar John is shut up by the searchers of the town. The plague orders of Elizabeth I and James I explicitly call for provisioning searchers among other emergency personnel. According to Richelle Munkhoff, whose essay on searchers in early-modern England is the only comprehensive study of their role, their responsibility was to “examine and codify diseased bodies” (1). Searchers examined the ill and the dead to determine plague cases, so they were only employed during plague outbreaks. That they are mobilized in the play at all would seem to indicate that there is a credible threat of plague in Verona.

Friar John's early release from quarantine has been cited as evidence that the threat of plague in Verona is not credible, but the matter is complicated. Barbara H. Traister downplays the significance of plague in Friar John's confinement, noting that he is, "released fairly quickly, without the usual period of quarantine," which suggests that "the diagnosis of plague was . . . inaccurate" (172). This must be correct, but to imply, as Traister does, that the plague was, therefore, not present in Verona, or not a serious threat, goes too far. What Friar John reports is something more than unfounded hysteria. Quarantines were evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and individuals could be released early for any number of reasons depending on their social standing or the judgment of the watchmen. Thomas Lodge advises in his learned 1603 tract, *A Treatise of the Plague*, "in regard of the time wherein the suspected and sicke, or rather those who frequented and served them, there ought some rule and moderation to be held. For whereas by ancient custome and observation they are wont to have the prefixed terme of fortie days given them, yet ought not this terme, equally and rigorously be observed in all" (45). Lodge's advice was not new or unique; Paul Slack notes that his treatise is a translation of a French document written forty years earlier (24), so it is clear that there was a good deal of leeway in England and the continent regarding how strictly to enforce quarantine. Officials were to exercise some judgment in determining who was to be shut in and for how long.

Plague is explicitly the source of Friar John's detention in Arthur Brooke's poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562, ll. 2488–500), Shakespeare's most immediate source for *Romeo and Juliet*, and Brooke's friar is detained in a way that is congruent with Italian practices for containing plague outbreaks. Paula Berggren notes that in Shakespeare, Friar John's mention of the doors being sealed up is a reference to Elizabethan (but not Italian) plague-time practice (158–59). Shakespeare alters the situation of Friar John's detention in *Romeo and Juliet* to bring it in line with Elizabethan practices that were designed to mitigate the impact of plague in England's urban areas. What this means is that there is concerted *Elizabethan* civic response to the plague underway in the entire city

of Verona throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, and Elizabethan audiences could not have failed to associate mention of a civic response to plague in Verona with conditions in London ca. 1592.

The position that *Romeo and Juliet* has been altered from its source to align it with Elizabethan plague-time realities is more credible given that the play is set in the middle of summer, when the plague would have been most active. In discussing Juliet's age, the nurse asks Capulet's wife, "How long is it now to Lammastide?" to which Capulet's wife responds, "A fortnight and odd days" (1.3.15–67). Lammastide is August 1, so the play takes place in the middle of July, when breeding conditions for the flea that spread the plague were optimal. Capulet also alludes to the season when he tells Paris of Juliet's fitness to be married, "Let two more summers wither in their pride / Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride" (1.2.10–11). Shakespeare would no doubt have known that the plague was worst in the summer, since associations between plague and summer have been made in literature since classical antiquity, and the 1592–93 epidemic, which must have influenced *Romeo and Juliet*, was most active in the late summer of 1592.

The history of England in the 1590s helps to explain the presence of plague in *Romeo and Juliet*. Although there is (slight) evidence that the play was written as early as 1591, most scholars agree that it was written and first produced either in 1594 or 1595. This date places the play in the aftermath of a very serious plague epidemic in England that began in 1592 and lasted into 1593. Slack estimates that roughly 11,000 died in London and the liberties during that period, which he designates as a time of crisis mortality (151). In fact, even a later date for *Romeo and Juliet* places it in plague time, as 1596–97 was also an epidemic period in London during which the death rate was about 21 percent higher than the national trend (Slack 58). Unfortunately, few details survive from either epidemic aside from the fact that they represented unusually high mortality that has usually been attributed to bubonic plague. Neither the 1592–93 nor 1596–97 plague visitations in London were as statistically significant with respect to mortality levels as those of 1563, 1603, or 1625, and as a result, they had less social and cultural

impact. Nevertheless, royal proclamations and plague literature from that period paint the picture we might expect to see of an epidemic. The evidence that survives concerning the response of Elizabeth I to the 1592–93 epidemic treats it very seriously indeed. In 1592, the Queen issues plague orders based on her earlier 1578 orders that are designed to prevent the spread of the disease, and she issues other orders that indicate the effect that the plague was having on the day-to-day operation of the government. On September 18, 1592, the Queen orders Michaelmas Term adjourned until the fourth return (see Berry; entry for October 27), then orders the remainder of the term held at Hartford Castle on October 21. She revises her position again on November 22, ordering that the remainder of Michaelmas Term be held at Westminster. She also issues an order on October 12, 1592, from Hampton Court restricting court access in order to, “bee the better preserved from the infection of sicknesse in this time” (*A Proclamation*, 1592). The orders make it explicit that the direct and sole cause of all this moving about was the plague, and it is clear that the plague disrupted the customary operations of the court. It may be inferred that life for individual Londoners was similarly disrupted.

The surviving plague literature indicates that that was indeed the case. Plague sermons such as William Cupper’s *Certaine sermons concerning Gods late visitation in the citie of London and other parts of the land. . .* (1592) were published, and tracts such as *A defensatiue against the plague. . .* (1593) by Simon Kellwaye and *Present remedies against the plague. . .* (1592, 1594), attributed to a “Learned Phisition,” were aimed at alleviating the impact of the plague on London’s inhabitants. The Church of England published standard forms for prayer to be used to express penitence during the epidemic under Elizabeth’s order (July 1593). Compiled by John Aylmer, Bishop of London at the time, the prayers are justified in a Preface, which states,

Nowe therefore calling to minde, that God hath bene provoked by us to visite us at this present with the plague and other grievous diseases, and partly also with trouble of warres: It hath bene thought meete to excite and stirre up all godly

people within this Realme, to pray earnestly and heartily to God, to turne away his deserved wrath from us, and to restore us as well to the health of our bodies by the wholesomnesse of the aire, as also to godly and profitable peace and quietnesse. (sig. A.2.r.)

The document goes on to lay out the elements that should be included in prayer services, recommends not only Sunday service but also Wednesday and Friday services, and includes a call-and-response psalm and three prayers to be said. The last page of the document includes requirements for Wednesday fasting by everyone between sixteen and sixty, excluding, “sicke folkes, and haruest labourers” (sig. B4.v).

Much has been made of the putative impact of the 1592–93 epidemic on Shakespeare’s career. J. Leeds Barroll calls the 1592–93 plague epidemic “the first great plague visitation of Shakespeare’s writing career” (90) and reports that officials closed the theatres for over twenty months from January 1593 to October 1594 (17). In *Ungentle Shakespeare*, Katherine Duncan-Jones provides a chapter entitled “1592–94: Plague and Poetry,” which makes the case for her assertion that “Plague was a defining context for all Shakespeare’s writing” (54). If all this is true, then we should expect to see evidence of the impact of the plague in Shakespeare’s plays in general, and in *Romeo and Juliet* in particular. Aside from the significant but brief mention of the plague in Verona as a minor plot point, however, the play would seem to have little to do with plague.

Even when it was used to refer to disease, it did not necessarily refer to bubonic plague, but could refer to disease in general or even natural disaster. Two mentions of plague in *Romeo and Juliet* are not properly plague, and this reflects common usage. Mercutio mentions earlier in the play that “oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues” (1.4.75) the lips of young ladies who dream of kisses. Mary Floyd-Wilson notes that this plague reference “does provide us with an early modern narrative of how infection spreads,” but also warns that “few early modern medical writers conceived of diseases as individual entities” (401). Capulet says to the guests of his feast that,

CRITICAL READINGS

Key Ancient Crises: Construction of Plot and the Story of the Trojan War in the *Iliad*

Fabian Horn

One of the most famous crises in the whole history of western civilization was the Trojan War—an event that was likely rooted in some real historical events, even if those events cannot be dated or defined with any degree of certainty and were magnified and mythologized over time. The War supposedly resulted not only in the complete destruction of Troy, one of the most important and magnificent cities of the ancient world—a city at the center of a flourishing civilization in a strategically important position at the Hellespont. But the Trojan War was also deemed to be one of the two major wars that brought about the destruction of the “Age of Heroes” (Hes. *Op.* 157–72), paving the way for the “Age of Iron.” The war also, of course, caused the often brutal deaths of many brave heroes, including Hector, the virtuous Trojan prince whose body, in one very famous account, was dragged in the dust around the walls of Troy so that his grieving widow, parents, and fellow Trojans could witness the humiliation. The war also resulted in the death of Achilles, Hector’s killer and the greatest Greek warrior besides Heracles. The death of Hector, in particular, reminds us that the Trojan War was not only a demanding and potentially lethal experience for the men who fought it, but was also a major crisis for the communities of the warriors on both sides. The war was most obviously a crisis for the residents of the fallen city, which was ultimately utterly destroyed and its women dragged away to slavery. But it also affected the families of the absent Greek fighters back in Greece. For example, one such crisis back home is narrated in Homer’s *Odyssey*, when the returning eponymous hero finds his wife and his household beleaguered by would-be usurpers of his marriage and his status in Ithaca. In every respect, then, the war was

a crisis of world-historical proportions, radiating through the whole eastern Mediterranean and causing the end of an era, at least in the accounts of later poets and historians.

The *Iliad*, the earliest surviving work of European literature, is literally the “poem of Ilium (i.e., Troy).” However, when readers today first encounter it, they are surprised that most famous and well-known episodes of the myth, such as the judgment of Paris and the subsequent abduction of the beautiful Helen, the death of Achilles by being shot in the proverbial “Achilles heel,” or the final sack of the city by means of Odysseus’s clever ruse of the Trojan Horse, are not actually narrated in the epic, even though all three were famous, pivotal moments, or crises, of one sort or another. Indeed, even though Homer’s *Iliad* (approx. eighth century BCE)¹ is the earliest extant source for the stories of the Trojan War, the poem does not narrate the war in its entirety but focuses on an episode of 51 days total in the tenth year of the war, of which only the events of seven days are treated in detail. The proem of the poem aptly names its topic as the “wrath of Peleus’s son Achilles” (*Il.* 1.1: μῆνιν . . . Πηληϊδῶδεω Ἀχιλῆος). Achilles’s wrath results from a dramatic crisis in his own life, a bitter conflict over honor with Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek army, which then brings about another, more incisive personal crisis, the death of his best friend, Patroclus. His desire for vengeance in order to restore his honor leads to one of the most significant crises for Troy as a whole: Achilles’s killing of Hector, the great and admirable Trojan prince.

The whole of the narrative, starting with the origins of the war and proceeding all the way to the homecoming of the victorious Greek heroes, was recounted in a series of epic poems known as the Epic Cycle, some of which have also been attributed to “Homer.”² The origins and first years of the war were narrated in the *Cypria*, the only epic preceding the *Iliad* in the sequence. The *Aethiopsis*, the *Little Iliad*, and the *Iliupersis* recounted the later events and battles, including the sack of Troy. All these poems, then, deal with crises of one sort or another for one of the parties engaged in the conflict, since every reprieve for the Trojans (i.e., the arrival of new allies such as Penthesilea, Memnon, or Eurypylus) constitutes a setback

for the Greek cause, and, in turn, every success of the Greeks brings Troy closer to ruin. Crises are a matter of perspective (though we might expect a Greek audience to root for the invading army), and these alternating vicissitudes ultimately extended the war to its mythological duration of ten years. The poems dealing with the war itself were followed by stories of the return journeys of the Greek heroes compiled in the *Nostoi* (“Homecomings”), with hardly any of the heroes returning home safe and sound (in some cases being slaughtered upon arrival, like Agamemnon, who is killed by his wife Clytaemnestra and her lover Aegisthus). The travails of Odysseus were treated separately in the Homeric *Odyssey* and its sequel and the finale of the Cycle, the *Telegony* (cf. e.g., Burgess 2001, Davies 2003). Unfortunately, only the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are extant in their entirety while nothing but scant fragments of the Cyclic poems survive. Nevertheless, we know their approximate content through the summaries of later mythographers (Procl. *Chrest.*, Apollod. *Bibl. Epit.* 3–7)³ and the subject matter has been reworked (and expanded) countless times in Greek literature of the following ages to ensure the continuity of the myth. All of these tellings and retellings deal with various kinds of tragic crises, almost all of them involving painful deaths, either of individuals, armies, cities, or all three. Notably, the Athenian fifth century tragedian Aeschylus was said to have described his tragedies as mere “slices from Homer’s great banquets” (Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 8, 347e: τεμάχῃ . . . τῶν Ὀμήρου μεγάλων δείπνων).

The importance of this mythological context is also evident in recent adaptations of the story of the *Iliad* and the Trojan War in literature and visual media from the early twenty-first century, such as (among others) Madeline Miller’s *Song of Achilles* (2011), Pat Barker’s *Silence of the Girls* (2018), Natalie Haynes’s *A Thousand Ships* (2019) as well as Wolfgang Petersen’s movie *Troy* (2004) and the Netflix miniseries *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018), which never confine themselves to the subject matter of the *Iliad*, even though they sometimes treat its story as a kind of centerpiece of the war narrative. Yet they invariably take a wider view of the myth by including other episodes surrounding the wrath of Achilles, with

almost all the added episodes dealing with crises of various kinds, either for the Greek or the Trojan side. This observation shows that

1. the *Iliad* required knowledge of the whole mythological context on the part of its audience as a backdrop to be able to start *in medias res* and treat only a small portion of fifty-one days of a war which lasted ten years (cf. Kullmann 1968). Since this knowledge cannot be presupposed for a modern audience, contemporary adaptations have widened their scope to provide this information. On the other hand, we may assume that Homer's audience was intimately familiar with individual heroes and their genealogical and mythological backgrounds. Furthermore, the narrative elements and general sequence of events in the story of the Trojan War must have been reasonably well-known, stable, and specific enough for the poet of the *Iliad* to draw on this tradition as well as for the original audience of the poem to be able to recognize traditional motifs and their original contexts.⁴
2. the plot of the *Iliad*, despite its "epic length" of 15,693 lines in 24 books, makes for only a rather short narrative regarding its central subject matter of the wrath of Achilles. Arguably already in Homer's poem only books 1, 9, and 16–24 are concerned with this main narrative while the other books provide complementary material that does not directly contribute to the development of the plot. Hence the *Iliad*, which develops only one episode from the story of the Trojan War, is more than twice the length of any other poem we have attested from the Epic Cycle despite the fact that they each must have contained several episodes.

Despite the rather narrow focus of the Homeric poem, the text frequently refers to mythological material outside its immediate scope in various forms and to different extents (Burgess 2001), such as *exempla* (e.g., Nestor's participation in the battle of Centaurs and Lapiths in *Il.* 1.260–74, Heracles's earlier sack of Troy, in *Il.* 6.638–42, the story of Melagros in *Il.* 9.527–602, or of Niobe in *Il.* 24.601–20), or genealogies (e.g., the story of Bellerophon in *Il.* 6.150–211). Yet the lion's share of references to events not contained within the poem obviously pertain to events that already happened in the course of the war, such as e.g., Odysseus's recollection of the prophecy of the seer Calchas made at the beginning of the expedition in Aulis in *Il.* 2.303–32.

External Analepses and the Traditional Story of the Trojan War in the *Iliad*

These references account for the fact that readers of the *Iliad* often feel that they have experienced a substantial portion of the Trojan War, and due to the poet's handling of his plot numerous elements have been incorporated into the *Iliad* throughout the narrative that might actually have originated from other parts of the war. After all, the battles continue when Achilles refuses to fight for the Greeks after being slighted by Agamemnon in *Iliad* 1 and continues to do so until *Iliad* 19 despite Agamemnon's offer of reparations (but conspicuously no apology) in *Iliad* 9. Given that none of the Cyclic poems was purported to encompass more than 11 books,⁵ the 'epic proportions' of the *Iliad*'s 24 books, of which the so-called 'battle books,' *Iliad* 5–8 and 11–17 focus on fighting, might well have been designed to recall the nine unsuccessful years of war preceding the *Iliad*, with some events distinctly alluding to, or recalling, the initial stages of the campaign: For instance, the famous "Catalogue of Ships" in *Il.* 2.484–760 might plausibly be taken to replicate the contingents of the Greeks at the beginning of the expedition in Aulis (Procl. *Chrest.*, *Cypria* 6), which has already been mentioned before in Odysseus's memory of "when the ships of the Achaeans were gathering in Aulis, bringing woes for Priam and the Trojans" (*Il.* 2.303–04: ὄτ' ἐς Αὐλίδα νῆες Ἀχαιῶν | ἠγερέθοντο κακὰ Πριάμῳ καὶ Τρωσὶ φέρουσαι). This is also particularly indicated by the references to heroes who are not with the army at this time of the story, such as Protesilaus, who notably was the first Greek to die immediately after he had leapt from his ship when he was slain by Hector (*Il.* 2.698–702; narrated in the Cyclic *Cypria*: Procl. *Chrest.*, *Cypria* 10), or Philoctetes, who was abandoned on Lemnos on the journey to Troy and will only be restored to the army at a later time (*Il.* 2.718–25; narrated in the Cyclic *Little Iliad*). Consequently, these references serve to bring to mind events from the beginning of the war as well as look ahead to later episodes. Similarly, the corresponding catalogue of the Trojans and their allies in *Il.* 2.809–77 evokes the original contingents pitted against the Greek invaders at the outset of the war. Along the same lines, the "Teichoscopy"

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