Between Anthropology and Literature: Liminality in William Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida"

Relatore
Prof. Rocco Coronato

Laureando
Anna Chiara Zambello
n° matr.2039092 / LMLLA

Ai viaggiatori che mi hanno accompagnata in questo cammino
chi con l'inchiostro, chi con i dadi in mano
chi con la parola e chi, scodinzolando vicino alla scrivania,
solo col pensiero.

Indice

Chapter 1 - Standing at the Threshold. Between Anthropology and Literature

The present dissertation aims to establish a dialogic, multidisciplinary framework of research, drawing from the domains of literature and anthropology to provide a critical analysis of *Troilus and Cressida* by William Shakespeare. The inquiry highlights the shared and diverging elements of these two disciplines, discussing the anthropological-in-the-literary and the literary-in-the-anthropological connotations of the play, in an effort to provide a thematically unified reading. In order to direct and further define its scope, the analysis is centered around the concept of liminality, its variations and representations. Being a transformative, fluid, dialogic condition of existence, liminality stands appropriately "between and betwixt" the two disciplinary contexts of reference, mirroring the shifting, uneasy relationship between literary and anthropological narrations. Liminality, moreover, has a prominent role in *Troilus and Cressida*, as the play displays marked meta-theatrical characteristics that rely on the collapse and displacement of narrative frameworks. Lastly, liminality is the key element underlying both sacred rituals and dramatic performances, two different types of cultural expression that Victor Turner examines in his seminal work From Ritual to Theater, discussing the post-industrial shift of ritual practices from the domain of the sacred to the profane context of entertainment — and the creation of so-called "liminoid" phenomena.

The first chapter of this thesis aims to introduce the reader to the broader context of reference: the long and at times contested relationship between literature and anthropology. The argument offered by Clifford Geertz in support of the shared purpose of both disciplines (to encourage confrontation and self-reflection, challenging cultural and social norms) provides the starting point for the main argument. The focal inquiry is then proposed.

In the second half of the chapter, the theoretical framework postulated by Victor Turner, who identifies performative dramas as catalyzing representations of everyday life — standing at the limit between ritual, play, and work — provides the motivations underlying the choice of a theatrical play as a case study for this thesis. Moreover, the reasons for choosing William Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* are further described: its nature as a derivative work, the critic, "borderline" situation it represents, and the specific use of language within the play.

Lastly, the chapter closes with a brief presentation of the overall structure of the dissertation and the contents of the next chapters.

1.1 *To wound complacency*: Anthropology, Literature and the Problem of Subjectivity

As his opening statement in *A Strange Romance: Anthropology and Literature,* Clifford Geertz addressed his audience directly, acknowledging their puzzlement at having an ethnographer, of all people, wrangling with his own perspective about the relevance of literature, its entanglement with anthropology and its functions in the grand scheme of the domain of human experience. The mere eventuality of pondering an appropriate angle from which to tackle the topic was troublesome, as it inevitably forced Geertz to confront the dreaded, personal perspective that scientific disciplines attempt to steer clear of. "Was this to be my own engagement with literature and the language arts as subjects of study? Or was it to be how my engagement with anthropology was itself literary — what role my involvement with my literary tradition?"[1] Should he be "professional ethnographer as amateur critic", Geertz wonders, "or amateur critic as professional ethnographer?"[2]

Geertz's musings appear as an appropriate the starting point of the present discussion precisely because the uncertainty he expresses in these lines — before continuing his argument by following his second line of thought, that is, his literary relationship with ethnography — is a poignant commentary on the obduracy with which the academic environment, at times, perceives the relationship between a "scientific" discipline and what may appear as a mere mode of cultural expression in a negative way, rather than a productive and fruitful interdependency.

To understand such qualms, it may be useful to contextualize Geertz's contribution to ethnography in an appropriate time frame; more specifically, the critical phase suffered by the discipline in the second half of the twentieth century, when "the profound modifications in the scientific status of knowledge, forced anthropologists towards a general rethinking of the aims and methods of their discipline"[3]. Such crisis was mainly ushered in by the growing need to confront the debt ethnography owed to the colonial impulses of the West, which, in turn, led the academic community to face the ethical conundrum of cultural representation. At the time, the influx of criticism and the perceived end of colonialism signaled, for some, the impending end of anthropology as a science — if just as a consequence of the shortage of "primitive" cultures that, for so long, had been taken for granted as the quintessential object of cultural studies.

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[1] Clifford Geertz, "A Strange Romance: Anthropology and Literature", *Profession*, (2003) 28–36.

[2] Ibidem, p.28.

[3] Roberto Malighetti, "The Work and Legacy of Clifford Geertz. An Essay on the Interpretive Turn in Anthropology", in *Bérose - Encyclopédie internationale des histoires de l'anthropologie,* (2020): 1-47.

Voices diverging from the predominant assembly of structural-functional scholars and researchers began to carve out a space for new theoretical approaches; many of these were the result of the slow, inevitable trickle of interdisciplinary contamination: philosophy, sociology, neurosciences, but also performative arts and literature provided new and much-needed insights. Such influences ultimately paved the way for cognitive studies, now a fundamental ground of scientific research; at the time, however, they were met with significant skepticism and reluctance by a community that had made data collection and comparative analysis its fundamental pillar. Geertz, on the other hand, was among those who called for significant changes in the disciplinary field, basing his approach

> on a radical questioning of the pre-eminent orthodoxies which gave rise to the modern conception of science: the myth of a univocal and fixed scientific method; the conception of knowledge as representation and of objectivity; the rigid separation between subject and object and between theory and "data"; the search for a perfect formal language, purified from subjective references; the mystical ideal of truth.[4]

This apparent unorthodox mindset stemmed, undoubtedly, from his background in humanities — a reason for scorn among some of his colleagues. Geertz's lack of formal education in anthropology (which he compensated by earning a Ph.D. at Harvard), and perhaps, even more, his initial aspiration to become a novelist, earned him no small amount of criticism, of which he makes no mystery in A Strange Romance. "What is a Flaubert manqué," he asks, "or, as someone has less kindly suggested, a faux Henry James doing in such a cold-fact discipline?"[5]

Despite the general tendency to refute the idea that literature may offer a commentary of anthropology (and vice versa, that it is demeaning, for an ethnographer, to take an interest in literary matters), to some degrees all scientific disciplines — not just those pertaining to the domain of humanities— depend on a variety of literary forms, whether to provide documentation or relate new studies to the extant theoretical framework. Narrations were and still are, after all, among the primary means through which humanity comprehends and interfaces with reality. Thus, throughout history, all cultures found themselves favorable — to different extents — to the idea of a "narrated world"[6]. But it was only from 1970 onwards that the notion shifted into an epistemological problem, forcing members of every scientific domain to question their reliance on literature to

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[4] Ibidem, p.1
[5] Geertz, p.29.
[6] Alberto Sobrero, "Il Cristallo e la Fiamma: Antropologia tra scienza e letteratura", Carocci Editore (2009)11.

encapsulate their findings; and, perhaps more significantly, the extent of literature's influence on their understanding of reality.

To anthropologists, the issue added yet another gradient to the ethical crisis already ongoing within the disciplinary field; one that was all the more keenly felt, as ethnographical practices make ample use of self-reflecting diaries and other forms of narration to relate what is experienced on the field. Traveling to tell, and telling about traveling are inherent parts of anthropology. More than that, if we were to examine these activities under the lens of shared elements, as Kai Mikkonen proposes, we may notice that both traveling and narrating rely on the same temporal and spatial cognitive structures. Experiencing a journey, start to end, allows for the understanding of a story, beginning to conclusion, to the point that "we have come to understand personal life and mental development as a voyage. The travel metaphor is therefore not only a way to think about a narrative; it also provides one with the means to think *through* a narrative."[7]

With this in mind, and returning briefly to the idea of the reliance on "narrated worlds" proposed by Sobrero, I would propose that the similarity between traveling and telling stories is not merely metaphorical or semantic: the experience of moving through life, across time and space, entails that we, as humans, are cognitively predisposed to tell about it; and, as Sobrero comments, concerning various illustrious ethnographers's well-attested reluctance to acknowledge the literary qualities of their works, it seems "strange to think that everything is narrated, except the narrator themselves."[8] Yet, the same traits and similarities that bridge the gap between anthropological research and literature production make the divide between a scientific documentation and a literary piece uncomfortably frail — a perpetration of subjectivity that could only be catalyzed and justified through the lens of an equally partial production, like a novel. "More recently, Vincent Debaene (2010) has pointed out that anthropologists in the French cultural tradition frequently wrote two books rather than one when they returned from their fieldwork," write Máiréad Nic Craith and Laurent Sebastian Fournier in *Literary Anthropology: The Sub-disciplinary Context; "*This was the case with prominent researchers such as Griaule and Lévi-Strauss for instance. The literary work appears to emerge from anthropological fieldwork diaries which can serve as the basis either for an essay or novel."[9]

[7] Kai Mikkonen. "The 'Narrative Is Travel' Metaphor: Between Spatial Sequence and Open Consequence." *Narrative,* 15:3 (2007): 286–305.

[8] Sobrero, p. 13-14.

[9] Craith, Máiréad Nic, and Laurent Sebastian Fournier. "Literary Anthropology: The Sub-Disciplinary Context" in *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 25:1 (2016):1–8.

A similar commentary is offered by Geertz — to return to *A Strange Romance*. Every researcher, he states, is haunted by their own "unyielding subjectivity"[10]. After all, all human beings rely on their own perception of the cultural other, who is equally aware and capable of perceiving in turn.[11] This perception provides us with the means to understand each other; yet, it also exposes us to the risk of relativism, generating "a cacophony of opinions"[12] that eschews the neat objectivism of the scientific method. Being aware of such risk does not lessen it; nor does it lessen the difficulty of understanding the deeper meaning behind some (at times) befuddling sensibilities.[13] And while in the end, the drive to know the cultural other (even as a means to glean more about one's self) turns the craft of the ethnographer into an act of mediation (or, as Geertz puts it, of reading "other other people' s text over their shoulder"[14]), we fear the cacophony; we fear uncertainty; we fear that "in entangling our own sense of life and its "classic representations" with ones more than a little at angles to it and to them, we will so weaken our convictions as to make us unable to sustain them and impress them with sufficient force on the world at large."[15]

The divergence between anthropological and literary disciplines, thus, is a matter far more delicate than may be perceived from a cursory glance. On one hand, the anthropological tendency to resist a perspective restricted by subjectivity allows ethnographical practices to remain unprejudiced and to resist ethnocentrically tendencies — whereas any literary piece, from memoirs to novels, rely on an authorial premise that not only encapsulates the stance of the writer, but influences the thematic resonance of elements throughout the entire work. On the other hand, that same resistance to subjectivity may lead towards an equally undesirable opposite effect, one which anthropologist Victor Turner deems "cognitive reductionism"[16]: an excessively restrictive approach to what should be considered, instead, an organic and shifting matter of studies. As a result, "whereas anthropology should be about, in D. H. Lawrence's phrase, 'man alive' and 'woman alive', this living quality frequently fails to emerge from our pedagogics, perhaps, to cite Lawrence again, because 'our analysis presupposes a corpse'."[17]

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[10] Geertz, p.30.

[11] Ibidem.

[12] Ibidem.

[13] To provide some examples of befuddling sensibilities, Geertz compares the study of ancient Icelandic burial rites and Balinese cockfights to Lionel Tilling's difficulty in teaching the worldview, values and beliefs of author Jane Austen to a puzzled class of modern college students.

[14] Ibidem.

[15] Ibidem.

[16] Victor Turner, "From Ritual to Theater: the Human Seriousness of Play", PAJ Publications, New York (1982):91.

[17] Ibidem, p.91.

"Man alive" may well be the element that anthropology and literature share. Despite their differences, these two disciplines are similar in their primary intent, as the purpose that underlies the perpetuation of both literary and anthropological studies is — according to Geertz — one and the same.

> Why do we teach Jane Austen, or Icelandic sagas, or Hindu funerals? Just that: to wound complacency. To make us a little less confident into and satisfied with the immediate deliverance of our here-and-now imperious world. Such teaching is, indeed, a subversive business. But what it subverts is not morality. What it subverts is bluster, obduracy, and a closure to experience. Pride, one could say, and prejudice.[18]

The cacophony of opinions that may result from a subjectively mediated perspective does not, in itself, pose a risk to the possibility of navigating, sharing in and contributing to the vast array of human knowledge. On the contrary, it offers precious variety, preventing a vision of the cultural world that would otherwise be overwhelmingly monotonous — and, more importantly, the chance to address, unravel and correct individual fallacies by means of comparison, debate and the establishing of meaningful connections. Both anthropology and literature require far more than mere adherence to tenets and theoretical frameworks in order to be fully understood and appreciated: they require individual investment, critical thinking and self-awareness.

Subjectivity calls the individual to willingly go beyond the limitations of their cultural and personal experience, to actively interact with knowledge rather than passively accept postulations and theories. In other words, to consider the flow of culture and its constant state of change, rather than conceiving it as a monolithic set of unchangeable structures and functions. An integral part of both anthropological research and literary productions, indeed, consists in investigating the dynamic trajectories and potential interactions of widely different elements and aspects of culture; and to perceive these correlations, at times, we must abandon our beliefs and change our point of view. By acknowledging the inherent state of flux in which we live and exist, anthropology and literature undermine and sabotage the exploitation of knowledge to sustain and justify dangerously absolutist visions of the world and of mankind — which often underlie the greatest human tragedies in history. This is the entropic, subversive potential of these disciplines: by reminding us the immense variety of human nature, they spur us to rebel against anything that would dehumanize us — obduracy and bluster, to return to Geertz.

A *Flaubert manqué*, as it turns out, would have plenty to say.

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[18] Geertz, p.33.

Rather than focusing on the irreconcilable divergences between literature and anthropology as a barrier, thus, it appears far more interesting and beneficial to consider the interstitial space between them as a threshold, from which to establish a constructive multidisciplinary dialogue. As such, literature may provide anthropology with productive contexts of references, to which anthropologists may return to and from which they may draw in order to "mediate" their observations on the field; and conversely, anthropology may provide useful insights to further analyze cultural expressions, representations and references appearing in literary works.

In this respect, recent developments in the anthropologic field have come to encompass the literary production of certain periods and areas, relying on literature to investigate not only the historical and cultural context in which it has been written, but also "the role of writing for anthropologists themselves"[19], involving questions such as "the extent to which the writings of anthropologists constituted literature"[20], the pertinence of ethnographies to a certain literary tradition, or the aforementioned emergence of literary works from fieldwork diaries[21]. The aim is to "acknowledge rather than 'conceal' the human nature of the anthropologist him or herself"[22]. Despite being relatively new, the subfield of literary anthropology and its focus on multidisciplinary research may count some illustrious predecessors, such as Victor Turner. In discussing the correlations between texts and contexts, the anthropologist determined that the former are procedurally inseparable from their surrounding circumstances, existing "within the systemic interactions"[23] underlying any culture and contributing to the "flux of negotiation from which derive the meanings of the actions of all participants"[24]. Investigating the imaginary dimension of literature — and, more in general, narratives — represents a precious opportunity to examine social dynamics and structures, instances of conflict and how these are handled in order to return to a state of equilibrium, but also to discuss aesthetic representations, symbolism and implicit meanings, and many other aspects of culture.

Much like Geertz's involvement in humanities and his resulting perspective on "culture as a text"[25], Turner's peculiar interest in multidisciplinary approaches stemmed from his own affinities with theater and drama, which he investigates extensively in his theoretical framework. Such performances act as receptacles and catalysts for instances of social crisis, ranging from war to

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[19] Máiréad and Fournier, p.3.
[20] Ibidem, p.4.
[21] Ibidem.
[22] Ibidem.
[23] Victor Turner, "Antropologia, Liminalità, Letteratura", edited by Massimo Bonafin and translated by Angelo Tumminelli, Morcelliana Editore, Brescia (2022), p.34.
[24] Ibidem.
[25] Geert, p.30.

dissent within a community, providing both behavioural models to which a social group can return in time of need, but also a critical image of the flaws and shortcomings of society. This capacity for self-reflection and social commentary derives from the nature of drama performances, which linger "between and betwixt" a number of different cultural domains — for instance the sacred and the profane, but also work and play, to provide some examples. As such, Turner's investigation not only falls within the gaps between anthropology and literature, creating interesting synergies between the two domains, but hinges on the very concept of liminal thresholds to provide a framework discussing and sustaining the interactions between different aspects of human cultures.

It appears appropriate, thus, to contextualize the present dissertation — which aims to establish meaningful dialogic connections between literature and anthropology — in the same state of flux and transformation that Turner, along with others, considers essential to cultural process. The arguments unfolding in the next chapters will take place in the liminal space between disciplines, with the very concept of the limit acting as a pivot.

1.2 A study in liminality: aims and scope of the research

We have to go into the subjunctive world of monsters, demons and clowns, of cruelty and poetry, in order to make sense of our daily lives, earning our daily bread. And when we enter whatever theatre our lives allow us, we have already learned how strange and many-layered everyday life is, how extraordinary the ordinary.[26]

In the previous segment, it has been determined that the space between literature and anthropology is dialogic and permeable; that one discipline lends itself well to comment and enhance the other, and vice versa; and, lastly, that encouraging this "strange romance"[27], as well as the flow of information between one domain and the other, may allow for an active, deeper engagement with the subject of both disciplines: human culture and its process of unfolding. Recent developments in the subfield of literary anthropology, as well as the past endeavors of individuals such as Victor Turner, point to the interstitial dimension between these two disciplines as a fruitful, if contested field of inquiry. Yet, as discussed before, the dialogic relationship unfolding between anthropology and literature cannot take place but in this liminal space, where the authority of well-established theoretical frameworks may intersect with the individual experience. As declared at the

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[26] Turner, p.122.
[27] Geertz. p.28.

close of the previous section, the present thesis aims to occupy that niche, as well as focus on the concept of liminal thresholds, both from an anthropological point of view, and from a literary scope.

In essence, the analysis unfolding within these pages is not unlike what monographic study courses may attempt to offer. The main purpose of this dissertation is to discuss and analyze a literary work, in search of topical thematic resonances between its narrative and structure and the theoretical framework developed by Turner on the concept of liminality — intended as a "transitional or indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of a person's life"[28], a condition intuitively recognizable to human beings, chiefly eminent in cultural rites, both sacred and profane.

At a passing glance, therefore, the dissertation could be allocated within the scope of literary anthropology, and more specifically within the sub-category mentioned before — the literary text as a resource for ethnographical work. The text chosen as the main case study for this thesis, however, could be considered atypical when compared to the array of examples that Craith and Fournier mention. Belonging to the literary production of early modern England, it is neither as recent as some of the texts taken into consideration by the scope of their investigation, nor does it claim to be particularly realistic in terms of its portrayal of reality. It is, in fact, a theatrical play by William Shakespeare: *Troilus and Cressida.*

As much as, due its inherent eccentricity, the choice to rely on a theatrical text as a case study may appear counter-intuitive, if not downright detrimental to the aims of an already precarious investigation, it is hardly casual. Theatrical plays, perhaps more than other genres, are liminal in nature. Whereas the interactions between a text and its reader are mainly one-sided and confined within a physical medium, such as a book, dramatic plays function on a wider array of structural thresholds, existing not only "between and betwixt" a stage and its auditorium, actors and audience, but also between different aspects of culture, such as the sacred and the profane, ritual and play, the written, imaginary world and reality — mirroring the latter while representing the former, to return to Turner's theoretical framework.

In his studies, most poignantly, Turner states that performative dramas occupy a specific niche in post-industrial societies, as a result of the process of secularization that gradually diminished the importance of ritual performances. As the rhythm of industrial production slowly began to influence

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[28] "liminality, n.". Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8491381982, last accessed March 4 2024.

the daily lives of the masses, creating a stark distinction between what is strictly work and what cannot be categorized as such, drama represents a peculiar kind of liminal experiences: leisure.[29]

Leisure is neither productive nor regulatory, making it non-work; at the same time, it may acquire playful connotations if participants so choose, therefore it can be perceived as non-serious, even playful. However, whereas playing (which, Turner states, returning to the extensive studies on liminality and rituality carried on by Arnold Van Gennep) is an activity that may reinforce rules and roles, which can then be applied to everyday life, leisure activities do not seek to embolden societal values. Leisure is inherently creative, individualistic, anarchic and inconclusive: it is, in short, subversive, as it harbors any activity that may question, mock, criticize or otherwise threaten the ergonomic order of the world. And theater, according to Turner, fits fully within this category:

> Acting, like all "simple" Anglo-Saxon words, is ambiguous - it can mean doing things in everyday life, or performing on the stage or in a temple. It can take place in ordinary time or in extraordinary time. It may be a way of working or moving, like a body's or machine's "action"; or it may be the art of occupation of performing in plays. It may be the essence of sincerity — the commitment of the self to a line of action for ethical motives perhaps to achieve "personal truth", or it may be the essence of pretense — when one "plays a part" in order to conceal or dissimulate". [30]

As such, the distortions and dissonances of theatrical performances induce a sense of much-needed self-awareness, enabling societies to change and renew themselves. And perhaps most importantly, as humanity appears locked in an ongoing, perpetual state of restlessness and disquiet, performative dramas provide us with the means to process existential anxiety and seek closure[31]. The true sedition of leisure, then, resides in its capability of exposing human nature, for the better or the worst, by pushing individuals to exercise self-reflection and examine themselves, the society they hail from and their view of the world at large; and to do so freely. As Turner points out, in fact:

> It is certain that no one is committed to a true leisure activity by material needs or by moral or legal obligations, as in the case with the activities of getting an education, earning a living, or carrying out civic or religious ceremony.[32]

Individuals, thereby, maintain the capability of moving organically from work to leisure and vice versa; just as well, the two dimensions influence each other, having been molded — as will be

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[29] Turner, p.36.
[30] Ibidem, p.102.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] Ibidem, p.37.

further explored in future chapters — by the gradual process of secularization occurring worldwide in urban societies. This free passage has not always been approved and welcomed. On the contrary, the growing importance attributed to work — peculiar to the Protestant milieu, which both Turner and Weber consider as favorable to the future values of capitalism — made leisure reviled and frowned upon, with profound consequences for the artistic and cultural production of the time. Citing the spread of Calvinist legislature in England, Turner comments that "making stage performances illegal cut twenty odd years from Ben Jonson's playwriting"[33].

In more recent times, the stigmatization of leisure is, according to the anthropologist, less pressing[34]. However, art in general, and particularly theatrical performances, remain, to this day, a powerful means of expression, dissent and social criticism. Subversiveness, creativity, self-reflection: all features of theatrical literature align with the aim of "wounding complacency" that Geertz ascribes to both literature and anthropology. As such, a play seemed to be an appropriate case study.

It appears hardly an exaggeration to claim that the theatrical plays by William Shakespeare have come to be globally recognized as quintessential representations of the "dramas of living" discussed by Turner: love, betrayal, war, travel, the nature of identity, relationships between parents and children, the moral and physical price of ambition, and death. The varying expression of these universal themes within the Shakespearean theatrical production, as well as the cultural and historical background underlying and influencing their representation, are matters of a wide and complex field of study; most importantly, characters, turns of phrases, expressions and even gestural expressions have come to be a fundamental part of the cultural context of reference of the West, from academia to pop culture, from the artistic to the mundane. The choice to use a work by William Shakespeare as a case study was, therefore, based first and foremost on the acknowledgement of this long-lasting and widespread diffusion, which corresponds to the "cultural model" function that Turner attributes to performative drama: a narrative to which to return to make sense of reality and society.

Troilus and Cressida, as will be discussed more fully in future chapters, poses somewhat of an interpretative riddle to literary critics for a number of elements, making it far less easily digestible than other works encompassed by the Shakespearean production and, consequently, less featured in literature courses. Due to several peculiar features, it appears to eschew categorization, standing somewhat at the limit between tragedy, historical play and comedy.

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[33] Ibidem, p.38.
[34] Ibidem, p.39.

First and foremost, the play is derivative in nature. *Troilus and Cressida* draws inspiration from the myth of Troy, as told in the Homeric epic of the *Iliad* and then perpetuated by countless authors throughout the centuries. The epic genre tends, by its very nature, to provide a continuous narrative throughout history, which is enriched over time with retroactive meaning[35]. As such, it stands neither in the past nor the future. On one hand, it may come to be perceived as a representation of the collective foundational values of a certain culture; on the other, it is the passage of time that reinforces its significance. As Turner notes, "the time lag between past deeds and later narration of those deeds is highly significant, for they raise most of the problems we have been discussing: reflexivity, the assignment of meaning, the influence of *Weltanschauunngen*, variation in the processual form of social dramas in different cultures, and so forth"[36].

The myth of Troy has come to reside so strongly within the collective imagination of the West that, in presenting its medieval variations and adaptations, Alex Mueller issues what seems a paradoxical challenge to the modern reader: to try and forget "the blind rhapsodist, the face who launched. Thousand ships, the Trojan horse, wily Greeks, epic similes, rosy-fingered dawn and dactylic hexameters"[37]. The fall of the walled city of Ilium and the strife of the ten-year-long war among heroes is perhaps the quintessential "social drama", comparable only to other epics. And yet, the very existence of *Troilus and Cressida*, itself part of a long and winding literary tradition that spans from classic antiquity to the present day, proves that even myths are not monolithic. The Homeric material has been — and will continue to be — molded and fashioned into new and diverging narratives, deeply imbued with the values and sensitivities of the cultural then-and-there. And, while this dissertation is uninterested in providing a direct comparison between the epic and Shakespeare's Troilus, this lingering state of ambivalence certainly establishes a first connection between the concept of limit and the nature of the play.

The difficulty underlying the categorization of *Troilus and Cressida* has been further compounded by the peculiar and oscillating use of language, resulting in a mixture of tragic, comical, epic and satirical elements and preventing a clear categorization of the play. More interestingly, however, this puzzling mix seems to offer, at times, a commentary on the traditional Troy narrative, with the cast of characters appearing subtly self-aware of the roles that should be congenial to them, and which they fail, cannot or refuse to cover. Reliance on puns, irony, stirring

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[35] "epic, n., sense 1.a". Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2959096484>

[36] Victor Turner, "On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience", The University of Arizona Press (1985):95.

[37] Alex Mueller, "Translating Troy: Provincial Politics in Alliterative Romance", Ohio State University Press (2013):3.

speeches and metalepsis contribute, in other words, to a sense of impending collapse of the narrative frames — which contribute to the pervasive sense of alienation of the play.

The dimension of limit is meant to be visited, rather than inhabited: but how do people behave when they find themselves within it for an extended amount of time, apparently without resolution? What may become of the values of society, such as honor, heroism, love and vengeance? While it is arguably improbable that it was written with this specific purpose in mind, the play does provide answers to these questions through its representations of characters and situations, the specific use of language and the structure adopted. And it is the combination of these characteristics that ultimately makes *Troilus and Cressid*a particularly appropriate as a case study.

1.3 Structuring the analysis: sections, chapters and contents

The aims of the present enquiry are threefold. Firstly, to provide an anthropological and literary framework of reference, in order to establish the premise to the dialogic analysis of the play. Secondly, to identify the transversal elements emerging from the dual reading of *Troilus and Cressida*, analysing their resonances, interactions and implications. Thirdly, to provide a unitary reading of a text that has mostly been approached on the basis of its dichotomies and discrepancies, discussing the instances of liminality represented therein, their moods of representation and their conceptual ramifications.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 pertain to the first and more general section of this thesis, which aims to provide a more extensive and detailed contextualization of the literary and anthropological material of references, so as to lay the foundations for the subsequent reading. Chapter 2 will discuss the historical and literary excursus of the Troilus narrative, beginning with the epic of the Trojan War and its westward migrations to Europe and England, and providing an overall view of the aforementioned variations and reinterpretations of the narrative over the course of the medieval period, up to the early modern age. A focus will be then offered on the story of lovers Troilus and Cressida, as treated within the sources presumably known to Shakespeare: *Le Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Troylus and Criseyde* by Geoffrey Chaucer and *Il Filostrato* by Giovanni Boccaccio. To conclude, a general overview of the Shakespearean play itself will be provided. Similarly, chapter 3 is concerned with establishing the foundations of the anthropological framework of reference. The concept of limit will be outlined and discussed, starting from the studies on rites of passage by Arnold Van Gennep, to those conducted by Turner within the scope of the so-called anthropology of experience; a number of additional authors, such as Hayden White

and Robert Schechner, will be addressed, as well as criticism gathered by Turner's theoretical framework.

The second section of the work will then actively engage with the text of *Troilus and Cressida* from both disciplinary scopes, in order to seek out resonating elements and reach a cohesive, thematically coherent reading of the play. Chapter 4 will thus offer a reading of *Troilus and Cressida* from the anthropological perspective, beginning with the critical application of Turner's polyphasic model of social drama to the greater and smaller instances of crisis represented in the play. Chapter 5, on the other hand, will delve more deeply into the literary context.

Lastly, the closing chapter of the thesis will include a summary of the observations made during the investigation and more personal reflections on the method used and any future developments.

Chapter 2 - From Homer to Shakespeare: variations and transmission of the Trojan War

It is now time to focus on the larger scope of the literary and anthropological material selected for discussing the representations of the liminal and the liminoid within *Troilus and Cressid*a. The first section of this dissertation is dedicated to a general, extensive overview of the sources, aiming to provide readers with a more contextualized grasp of both the Shakespearean play and the collective work on the liminal by Turner, so as to lay the foundation for the subsequent introduction of the play and the reading and analysis that will take place in chapter 4 and 5.

Exploring Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida entails, first and foremost, an acknowledgement of the literary influences that shaped the play, as well as the long process of transformation, reinterpretation and ri-elaboration underwent by the story of the Trojan war throughout history. Following its trajectory proves particularly interesting when considering the widely different genres, styles, aims and sensibilities of the texts pertaining to such an enduring tradition, attesting to the impact of the Troy narrative through the ages.

At times, however, the modifications and fluctuations are so pronounced that the original narrative of Troy appears nearly unrecognizable, even more so when compared to its purported "original" Homeric genesis. A modern reader attempting to compare the *Iliad* with some of the medieval literary works on the Trojan War would undoubtedly face some difficulties, finding in the latter some familiar elements taken from the Homeric epic as well as significant artistic licenses. Jon Solomon underscores this, contending that "the Trojan War has been relatively un-Homeric and even anti-Homeric for a large portion of the 2700 years since Homer seems to have composed the *Iliad*"[38]. Conversely, one would be surprised to find out how many of these elements, considered fundamentally quintessential to the story of the Trojan War, are in truth entirely absent in the original poem. The judgment of prince Paris, the wooden horse used to deceive the Trojans into letting their attackers within the walled city, the death of the hero Achilles and the dispute over his weapons — and interestingly, the character of Troilus himself, who only receives a brief mention in the *Iliad* — all find their origins in the expansive corpus of texts developed after Homer. The issue of dissonance, hence, is not limited to the variations between the Homeric epic and the medieval and early modern texts; perhaps most poignantly, it concerns the very idea of Troy, as what has been solidified in the collective imagination as "authentic" may, in fact, diverge from the original

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[38] Jon Solomon. "The Vacillations of the Trojan Myth: Popularization & Classicization, Variation & Codification." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 14:3-4, (2007): 482–534.

material. This "canonical" idea of the Trojan narrative, in turn, influences our criteria for evaluating some works as legitimate and faithful artistic reinterpretations and others as inauthentic and less effective. However, as Solomon points out, "there is no right or wrong here, only what exists artistically"[39]; the tradition of narratives that unfolds around the Trojan War has always been and remains multifaceted and layered, "a repetitious, cyclical process, one which contradicts thoroughly the received assumption that Homer's *Iliad*, because of its considerable reputation as a literary classic, became and persisted as the exemplar for subsequent artists to imitate and recast as slices of Homer"[40].

The cited survey by Solomon, which aims to analyze and discuss the trends in the variations of the story of Troy, as well as "the processes of classicization, popularization, codification, and variation"[41] that have taken place over time, has proven a particularly useful tool in guiding the approach to the texts presented and discussed in this chapter. Given the vast expanse of the literary tradition concerning Troy and the Trojan war, providing an exhaustive list of the entire corpus appeared not just unfeasible, but well outside the limited scope of this dissertation, whose main focus is the liminal and Troilus and Cressida. Thus, it has been necessary to choose which texts to present more summarily in this chapter and which ones to delve into more deeply, all the while maintaining awareness of the potential risk of cherrypicking. Basing this selection not on restriction (according to the adherence of texts to a presumed monolithic "canon") but rather on the diversity displayed by the transformations of the Troy narrative, from its emergence to the early modern period, should mitigate such risk. Moreover, it should provide additional points of reflection beyond the context of this dissertation and hopefully render the nature of *Troilus and Cressida* more comprehensible: a play rife of familiar names, famed events, yet dissonant voices and tones — at times, irreconcilable with our previous understanding of the fall of Troy.

Maintaining this premise, the literary survey presented herein will offer an array of "Troy-texts" following the chronological order of production. While the Ancient Greek times are not the main interest of this dissertation, it appears imperative to begin from the Homeric foundation of the story, both to establish the origins of the Trojan War narrative and to best illustrate subsequent differences arising over time. As such, the first section of the excursus is dedicated to providing a comprehensive overview of the *Iliad*, its characters and its thematic elements. The discussion will then move to the Hellenistic and Classical retellings emerging after Homer, with a particular focus

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[39] Ibidem, p. 488.
[40] Ibidem.
[41] Ibidem, p. 485.

on the poems of the Epic Cycle. As will be emphasized, from this particular point in time the interpretations of artists and poets begin to overlay the Homeric framework, providing nuanced insights into pre and post-war events and delving deeper into the characters' psychology. In this phase, moreover, the character of Troilus begins to emerge from anonymity. His tragic fate, only briefly alluded to in the *Iliad*, is further developed and expanded, becoming a recurrent theme of literary and artistic representations. Vase paintings, in particular, as pointed out by Piero Boitani[42] and M.L West[43] in their respective surveys about the Troilus narrative and the wide diffusion of the *Epic Cycle* in ancient times, provide an interesting source of elements that anticipate the medieval and early modern narratives about Troilus; as such, they undoubtedly warrant a brief inclusion in our overview.

Among the Latin adaptations of the Trojan narrative, it is almost mandatory to mention the *Aeneid*, an undeniable influence on later authors (particularly concerning the propagation of the *translatio imperii* phenomenon in the British context, due to an abundance of literary works on *Brut*, detailing the ordeals of a descendant of the Trojan hero Aeneas). Perhaps even more influential on later literary productions are the apocryphal "accounts" of Dictys of Crete and Dares Phrygius, latinized respectively as the *Ephemeris Belli Troian*i and the *De Excidio Troiae.* Despite their fictitious nature, these alleged testimonies of the war gained prominence between the *Roman* and medieval eras and were widely regarded as credible historical sources by later writers.

After identifying and discussing the most significant elements of the Dares and Dictys texts, the focus will shift on the medieval literary production, with a brief selection of works that derived their direct inspiration from these accounts, and prove particularly relevant (in terms of themes, stylistic choices and contribution) to the analysis conducted in the second part of the thesis. Among the selected authors are Benoit de Saint Maure, Guido delle Colonne, and naturally Geoffrey Chaucer, the primary influence on Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. To conclude, I will offer a description of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* in correlation with the cited literary influences, and attempt to provide a summary of its plot.

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[42] Pietro Boitani, "Antiquity and Beyond" in *The European Tragedy of Troilus*, Claredon Press (1989):1-19.
[43] Martin L. West, "The Epic Cycle: A Commentary on the Lost Troy Epics" Oxford Academic, (2013).

2.1 Archaic roots: the *Iliad*

"You already know the story. You will die. Everyone you love will also die. You will lose them forever. You will be sad and angry. You will weep. You will bargain. You will make demands. You will beg. You will pray. It will make no difference. Nothing you can do will bring them back. You know this. Your knowing changes nothing. This poem will make you understand this unfathomable truth again and again, as if for the very first time."[44]

The origin of the *Iliad* is a subject that has long sparked fascination, curiosity, and no small number of conjectures, continuing to engage the concerns of academics. Generally, the most accredited theory well into the nineteenth century saw the two main epic poems on the Trojan War as texts deriving from a long, collective tradition of oral poets, singers and illiterate bards that performed. This so-called Oralist approach, centered on a number of traditionally oral features of the *Iliad* (such as the formulaic language, the recurrence of events and the archetypical nature of the characters) tended to dominate discussions in the academic field in the modern age; as a consequence, over time the figure of Homer became more and more obscure — if not obsolete, at least widely romanticized. Yet the notion that the *Iliad* may have been the creation of a single individual, skilled in oratory, well-versed in the narrative forms prevalent at the time, and presumably accustomed to public performance, has never been utterly refuted. In more recent times, the Oralist approach to the *Iliad* began to subside, bringing the hypothesis of a singular bard-poet to the fore of the research once more.

The main clue pointing to a singular author, as M.L West considers, is the "detailed demonstration of the poem's organic unity"[45], a feature that a number of scholars had investigated in the past: Goethe and Schiller already took notice of the underlying thematic cohesion and structural stability of the *Iliad,* an idea further perpetuated by later intellectuals. Karl Lehrs advocated for the "unitarian" hypothesis by providing "systematic arguments, pointing to the abundant links connecting one book with another"[46] in his lectures at the university of Königsberg — a position further supported by Gregor Wilhelm Nitzsch, chief scholar in Homeric writing, as well as classicists John Sheppard and Engelbert Drerup. The "epoch-making *Iliasstudien*"[47] by Wolfgang Schadewaldt, consolidated the hypothesis by offering the most influential structural analysis on the *Iliad* of the time, highlighting "the threads of the narrative from book to book,

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[44] Homer,; *the Iliad*, translated by Emily Wilson, W. W. Norton & Company (2023):64.
[45] Martin L. West, "The Making of the Iliad: Disquisition and Analytical Commentary", Oxford Academic (2011):12.
[46] Ibidem.
[47] Ibidem, p.13.

bringing out the structural significance of each episode in relation to the whole and showing that throughout the poem, except for the *Doloneia*, the fulfilment of one train of action is bound up with preparation for a later one".[48]

While a conclusion has yet to be reached — and it is my personal belief that accomplishing one would hardly be fruitful; after all, the poet-figure behind the Iliad has been part of our collective imagination for centuries, turned into nothing short than a myth. I find exceedingly difficult to imagine what acknowledgements and honors could rival such an achievement — I am partial to the idea that the *Iliad* is the work of a single poet, in possession of a remarkable repertoire of poetic and narrative knowledge that allowed them to enrich their original motifs with consistent references to the myths and legends of their era. Traces of additions, modifications and overlays that remain in the *Iliad* may be, rather than telltale signs of the oral origin of the poem, the vestiges of a non-linear writing process. While not entirely excluding the idea of a preliminary phase of oral recitation, West argues that the mere fact that the text of the *Iliad* has reached us implies that the poet "had to be involved in the writing operation, whether he carried it out himself or dictated to another"[49]. How much time and what measures such a process might have required remains an unresolved question.

It is highly unlikely that the composer of the *Iliad* was actually an individual called Homer. West points out that the very name is problematic, as it is "not a regular Greek name and hard to account for as such"[50], since its use is no further attested in later periods. It is possible that it was a pseudonym; however, on one hand, the existence of guilds of rhapsodes like the *Homeridai* suggests that in ancient times the name Homer had already obtained an almost mythological recognition, being deserving of reverence and propagation. On the other one, the extensive time span between the *Iliad* and the *Odissey*, (that is, the two main works traditionally attributed to Homer, separated by at least a century) is quite significant; even more so is the absence of specific mentions of a precise authorship before the recurrent recitation of both epics established by Hipparchus[51]. West even questions the idea that the composer of the *Iliad* is the same hand behind the *Odyssey*, emphasizing that neither the length nor the diffusion of the latter should be considered as the only valid reasons to attribute both works to the same author. Just as well, the dating of the *Iliad* remains uncertain, as "the ancients had no reliable means of determining the date of 'Homer', and their datings diverged widely"[52] — not considering the fact that modern assumptions about the

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[48] West, pp 10-13.
[49] Ibidem, p.16.
[50] Ibidem, p.15.
[51] Ibidem, p.17.
[52] West, p.15.

oral\written nature of the *Iliad* also contributed to a larger perception of its cultural impact as a phenomenon coming in much later than the creation of the poem. Vase paintings, as mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, may help surmise an approximate date within the boundaries of the seventh century BC[53]. By the end of the century, "knowledge of the *Iliad* had spread beyond the Troad and the Aeolis"[54], and a slew of derivative works began subsequently to emerge. While the *Odyssey* remains perhaps the most renown of these, a growing number of poems introduced complementary material to the narrative of the Trojan War. Six of such works, which will examined below, have survived in fragments to the present day, coming to be considered the final section of what is known as the *Epic Cycle*, "a corpus of Archaic Greek epics considered as an ensemble that, if read in the due sequence, provide a more or less continuous account of the mythical history from the beginning of the world to the end of the Heroic Age"[55].

A note on the "main characters" of this dissertation, before moving on to the *Epic Cycle*. The Iliad dedicates very little space to Troilus, and has none at all for Cressida — who, as we will discuss in the sections dedicated to the medieval literary production, at this point in time simply does not exist. Her character comes from the mingling of Briseis, part of the achaean war booty and slave to Achilles, and Cryseid, another war prisoner, ransomed by her father Cryse. Forged to give up the latter to prevent the rage of Apollo (in the form of a spreading pestilence that is afflicting his men), Agamemnon claims Briseis as compensation. The arrogance and pettiness of his act result in Achilles' scathing refusal to fight in a war where he has absolutely no stakes, only being beholden by an oath sworn by his father, Peleus, to Menelaus, Helen's scorned husband and brother to Agamemnon.

Troilus, for his part, makes a passing appearance in book 24 of the epic. The murderous wrath of Achilles is all but spent: after clogging the river Xanthus with the bodies of slain Trojan soldiers, slaughtering Hector and avenging Patroclus, his fallen companion, the warrior has sunk back in his

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[53] Becoming renown and influential, the *Iliad* had a ripple effect in art and literature — West indicates that the process may have begun in the span of a generation from the emergence of the poem. As he points out, scenes that do not strictly pertain to the *Iliad*, but rather appear in the Epic Cycle have been documented on a variety of medium (mainly vases, but also cups, tripods and similar objects) from 700 onward, yet events drawn "unequivocally" from the *Iliad* tend to be absent until the end of the seventh century. Authors showing references or echoes to the *Iliad* were active approximately in the same period. Hence, "art and literature, then, suggest a *terminus ante quem* of about 630". As for the other end of the spectrum, West points out a number of elements that may help restrict an ideal time lapse for the creation of the *Iliad*. Among these, he cites the knowledge of Hesiod and other elegiac writers displayed by the *Iliad* poet, a geographical awareness of Egypt and (at least superficial) of the Black Sea, a connection between the design of Achilles' shield and the Cypro-Phoenician traditional forging art, richiami and finally some references to the Olympic games made by Nestor in the epic.

[54] Ibidem, p. 23.

[55] Ibidem.

grief. In Troy, King Priam is equally beleaguered by the loss of his progeny, lamenting the deaths of his sons and lashing out at his remaining ones:

> "He herded them off with his staff — they fled outside
> Before the old man's fury. So he lashed out at his sons,
> Cursing the sight of Helenus, Paris, noble Agathon,
> Pammon, Antiphonus, Polites loud with the war cry,
> Deiphobus and Hippothous, even lordly Dius—
> The old man shouted at all nine, rough commands:
> "Get to your work! My vicious sons — my humiliations!
> If only you'd all been killed at the fast ships
> Instead of my dear Hector…
> But I — dear gods, my life so cursed by fate! —
> I fathered hero sons in the wide realm of Troy
> And now, not a single one is left, I tell you.
> Mestor the indestructible, Troilus, passionate horseman
> And Hector, a god among men— no son of a mortal man,
> He seemed a deathless god's."[56]

There is no previous mention of Troilus anywhere else in the poem. In his translation, Robert Fangles chooses to hint at the prince's preference for horsemanship, perhaps suggesting his participation in battle. It matters little: by the time of Priam's expedition to Achilles' tent, in an attempt to sway the hero and obtain Hector's body, Troilus has already joined his siblings in death. We do not know how he died, or whose hand guided his demise.

2.2 Hellenistic retellings: The lost poems of the *Epic Cycle*

The only source detailing the scope of the Epic Cycle is attributed to Proclus, author of a treaty that, much like the poems of the cycle itself, has been lost to the centuries. Traces of it survive in commentaries penned by other authors, both contemporaries and posthumous. From these passing mentions, the nature of Proclus' work has come to be understood as a pastiche, compiling summaries of the poems from the Epic cycle and providing precious information about each work: content, length and name of the possible authors. It seems unlikely that Proclus personally studied every single poem of the cycle: the favored theory is that summaries of the works were already in circulation in his age, and he conveniently compiled them into a single format.

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[56] Homer, Robert Fangles, "The Iliad", translated by Robert Fangles, Penguin Classics, New York, (1998):339-340.

It is generally accepted that the so-called "Trojan sequence" (a name that West adopts to refer to the works that continue the narrative presented by the *Iliad*) would cover the last part of the cycle, depicting the last struggles of the Heroic age. The events of the *Cypria*, the *Aethiopis*, the *Little Iliad*, the *Iliou Persis*, the *Nostoi* and the *Telegony* either precede or follow those of the *Iliad*; though these poems have been almost completely lost, leaving only fragments, the summaries compiled by Proclus have reached us through manuscripts reporting the *Iliad*, such as the Venetus A. As for the works that may have placed between one poem and the other in the sequence, there remains no trace nor mention of them. Nevertheless, Proclus' *periochai* ("prose epitome") remains "the most important source of our knowledge regarding the poem's contents"[57].

It should be noted that the poems of the Epic Cycle were not originally conceived as a collective corpus, as corroborated by the many instances of overlapping events or repetitive mentions to the same episodes: an example of such repetitiveness is the madness and suicide of Ajax, appearing in both the *Aethiopis* and the *Little Iliad*. Interestingly, in his compendium, Proclus adopts a more streamlined approach, avoiding the repetition of the same facts. As West comments, this change may attest to a shift in the general public's interest from history (or what was conceived as such) to myth, to which Proclus was attempting to cater.

The cycle has ancient roots. Its themes may have originated around the twelfth century and later solidified around the eight, remaining primarily recurring motifs transmitted orally. Assuming that, as mentioned, each bard-poet performing for an audience maintained a personal repertoire of tales and lore to draw from, some of which undoubtedly included the initial proto-narrative about the fall of Troy. As such, it should not come as a surprise that poems touching on that same subject began to emerge around the seventh century, developing side by side with the *Iliad*. The main difference between the epic and these works is the latters' tendency to lack structural unity, as the goal of each poem — based on what has been derived through Proclus — was to narrate sections of the story of Troy that were absent elsewhere. The works are not, therefore, a homogenous sequence; as West points out, Aristotle argued that some of the poems (the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad* in particular) could contain multiple themes viable for just as many tragedies. And it is in fact Aristotle who ultimately codified, around the second half of the fourth century, the Epic cycle as an ensemble.

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[57] West, p.45

There remains the question of authorship. Proclus ascribes each poem to at least once, if not more, candidates, but it is widely assumed that the works of the cycle were simply attributed to these individuals posthumously — as mark of their poetic prowess or in recognition of their fame.

I will not to dwell on the *Nostoi* and *Telegony*, as the works, similarly to the *Odyssey*, address the return of the heroes of the Trojan War to their respective homes — a theme that, while fascinating, is not inherently relevant to the dissertation; conversely, it appeared necessary to offer an overview of the four poems revolving on the War itself, whose influence on the artistic and poetic production of the Hellenic age remains invaluable.

It seems ideal to begin from the *Cypria*, the contents of which are first attested in late seventh-century artistic representations, resurfacing later in the recurrent themes of fifth-century vase paintings. The poem was well known to authors of the classical period, from Pindar to Sophocles, from Euripides to Herodotus, appearing more prominently in a commentary penned by Aristotle in his *Poetics* due to its "episodic" nature. The focus of the *Cypria*, indeed, lies in the narratives preceding the War: among the passages mentioned by Proclus are the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, the Judgment of Paris on mount Ida, the embassy to Troy, and what Piero Boitani highlights as the first extensive appearance of Troilus, whom Achilles ambushes and slays[58]. Though straying from the convention of a strictly linear chronology of events, considered a marking features of the epic genre, the *Cypria* poet tackles an inherently epic theme[59]: the grand design of the gods, ordained to prevent a global crisis. As the world is distressingly encumbered with the weight of humanity, the Trojan War represents a bloodied solution willed by the Olympians, with the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon representing its climax. The numerous references to the divine (Zeus consulting with Themis, goddess of Justice, and Helen being born from Nemesis, marking her as a herald of strife) intertwine with scenes of a more unusual nature. Achilles' encounter with Helen, demigod to demigod, has long been regarded as the episode that may have given rise to the subsequent series of love affairs attributed to the hero in later works[60].

While the *Cypria* is concerned with events anticipating the War, the *Aethiopis* strings along a cohesive narrative from the deeds that follow the closing of the *Iliad*. The poem is believed to date back to as early as the sixth century on the base of vase paintings, with some of its episodes being depicted later on on the *Tabulae Iliacae*, a series of 22 stone tables from the Roman Era. The most

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[58] Boitani, p. 3.

[59] A quintessential instance of global crisis can be found in the Vedic Mahabharata, describing the strife between the five divine Pandava siblings and their evil cousins, the Kaurava; whereas the two sides compete for the kingdom of Hastinapura, culminating in the catastrophic battle of Kurukshetra, their battle is a reflection of the cosmic fight between good and evil, ushering in the final, darkest age of the world before renewal.

[60] West, p.60.

widely accepted hypothesis sees the *Aethiopis* poet incorporating into the narrative of the *Iliad* two works deriving from the earlier traditions of oral compositions: the *Memnonis* and the *Amazonis*. As the Cypria, the Aethiopis emphasizes the grandeur of battle, providing two glorious enemies to defeat before his own fall: Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons, and the titular Memnon, king of Ethiopia.

The death of the major heroes of the *Iliad* would lead to a gradual shift of focus from the war to its consequence. The *Little Iliad,* mentioned by Proclus, Hesychius and Milesius, focuses on narrating the events following Achilles' death and leading up to the sack of the city. As remarked in the Poetics, this appears as the most disjointed poem in the "Trojan sequence", with a brisk narrative and a tone that, at time, borders strangely on the humorous. After the madness and suicide of Ajax, Odysseus and his machinations become the pivotal point of the poem, from his decision to bring Neoptolemus to Troy to the theft of the Palladium, culminating in the stratagem of the wooden horse.

As the events depicted in the *Little Iliad* appear very similar to those contained in the *Iliou Persis*, it is entirely possible that the former can be dated very close to the latter. Though adhering to the single motif of the sack of the city, the *Iliou Persis* reverses the order of some events from the *Little Iliad*, relying on a darker, decidedly more grotesque tone — consider, for instance, the rape of Cassandra and the killing of Polyxena on Achilles' tomb. As such, these two poems could be considered complementary representations of the slow degradation of the Heroic Age, heading towards a progressively bleaker closure. The survivors heading home in the *Nostoi* and *Telegony* bring with themselves the parting sorrows of a decade-long war, most often than not finding inglorious ends waiting for them.

Before moving our discussion to the later Latin sources, it's worth dwelling a moment on the figure of Troilus. As previously mentioned, the Trojan prince only receives a passing mention in book 24 of the *Iliad*, but gains more and more prominence in the broader context of works derived from Homer and the Epic Cycle, evolving within the interstitial space between the Hellenic and Roman traditions. This progressive emphasis on Troilus occurs not in spite of, but due to his death, which leaves a deep impression both in classical and medieval arts. As Boitani highlights, "except for Robert Henryson, none of the authors [studied in the present volume] will ever forget Troilus' death,"[61] arguing that both the pervasive centrality of Troilus's death in classic sources and its interpretations by medieval authors may stem from the need to find meaning in the finality of all

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[61] Boitani, p.4.

things. Bearing a connection to the city in his very name, Troilus and Troy are intimately tied: if one falls, the other cannot but follow. Therefore, Troilus primary function is to die — and he must do so at the hands of the city primary threat: Achilles. Different authors time the prince's death differently. "Virgil, Quintus Smyrnaeus, Dares, Dictys, and Joseph of Exeter place Troilus' death towards the end of the Trojan War. In this manner, Troilus's end is no longer a 'sign,' an omen of Troy's future fall, but part of the very 'ending' of the city,"[62] states Boitani. Conversely, in the Cypria, where one of the earliest versions of this episode appears — as mentioned earlier — Troilus's death is instead one of the first tragedies of the War, making it a foreshadowing, an omen of what is to come. The timing of his death and the exact details matter little. What is important is that, though over time this characters shifts accordingly to the retellings of Troy, eventually becoming a warrior of his own right, a yearning prince confiding in a —at times malevolent — cousin about his troubled affection for Cressida and a betrayed lover, pushed by anguish into an almost suicidal wrath, his destiny remains fairly unaltered. To make sense of the end of Troy, "ancient Troilus must simply die"[63].

2.3 Latin bifurcations: *Aeneid*, *Ephemeris Belli* and *De Excidium Troiae*

Discussing the "third- and second-century B.C. Roman tragedians" that would take interest in the Hellenistic plays derived by the Epic cycle and Homeric material, Solomon notes that even then artists "only rarely dramatized events that fall within Iliadic parameters"[64]. An instance of this is the minimal sections of the *Bibliotheca* and *Epitome* devoted by Apollodorus to the actual "Iliadic" material when considering the wider scope of the production on the Trojan war (only eight, compared to the 41 describing "pre-Iliadic material" and 98 dedicated to post-ilicdic events, of a total of 157)[65]. Just as well, Roman visual arts portray with significant frequency scenes and events drawn from the Epic Cycle, acknowledging the widespread diffusion and influence of the lost poems discussed in this chapter: to provide an example of the Roman fascination with the Cypria and the Aethiopis, Solomon points to the frescoes of Pompeii and Hercolaneum, depicting Achilles on Skyros, the Wooden Horse and the sack of Troy. Still, the notion that the *Iliad* was, in no uncertain terms, the primary source informing the consequent bifurcations and metamorphosis of the Trojan war narrative, endured in the academic environment enough to leave a dent. "Despite their collective name," Solomon states, discussing the already mentioned *Tabulae Iliacae*, "only

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[62] Ibidem, p.9.
[63] Ibidem, p.10.
[64] Solomon, p. 500.
[65] Ibidem, p.502.

nine of the twenty-two illustrate *Iliad* scenes, while many of them depict the entry of the Trojan Horse, the escape of Aeneas and other scenes from the Sack of Troy"[66].

As it may be inferred, the cluster of stories about the Trojan War passed from Archaic and Hellenistic Greece to ancient Rome remained considerably vast. More poignantly, the predominance of artistic motifs and imageries drawn from the Epic Cycle and related works suggests, according to Solomon, a process of bifurcation between non-Homeric narratives and the *Iliad*: while the former gained substantial popular resonance, the epic became, in parallel, a subject of study and debate for a few. As the recurring tradition of public recitations waned, the prominence of the *Iliad* began to subside. Its void in the cultural milieu would be fulfilled in time, yet subsequent narratives from this point onward — such as the texts discussed in this section — would forge a distinctive trajectory further and further away from the Homeric material.

In addressing the Trojan War narratives throughout the Roman age, it seems inevitable to refer at least cursorily to the *Aeneid*, though assessing its contents and structure is far beyond the scope of the present discussion due to thematic and spatial costraints — as with the *Odyssey*. What does appear relevant to our literary excursus, rather than the events described by Virgil or the philological genesis of the epic, is the seed planted by the Aeneid in subsequent medieval approaches to the Trojan narrative — particularly in regards to the dynamic of powers and genealogies. First and foremost, to refer to the process of bifurcation that we have discussed above, it can be attested that the *Aeneid* hardly appears a popular work. Augustus' patronage notwithstanding, both the poet's stylistic emulation of Homer and the purposeful echoing of events from the Odyssey suggest[67] that Virgil assumed his audience to be knowledgeable not only with the Homeric epics, but also with the critical corollary. While this inherent assumption may provide us with a general idea of Virgil's target readership, most importantly it appears contextual to the propagandistic purpose of the work. The Aeneid aims to teach the Romans about their own past — a past that ties directly into the prophesied legacy of Troy, enduring the fall of the city and continuing elsewhere. Aeneas' journey is not a venture into the unknown, but rather a return to the roots, to a homeland that Virgil (quite extravagantly) attributes to Dardanus, the original founder of Troy. Thus, power does not dissolve: it merely migrates. And when Rome itself will begin its inexorable process of decline, power will again be transferred elsewhere. This process of westward migration

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[66] Ibidem, p. 502.
[67] Ralph Hexter, "On First Looking into Vergil's Homer, in a Companion to Vergil's Aeneid and its Tradition*"* Wiley-Blackwell, (2012):27-29.

will assume, in subsequent centuries, the name of *translatio imperii,* a propagandistic phenomenon widely visible in medieval texts by later thinkers and authors.

Although the Aeneid undoubtedly exerted the most pervasive influence over later sources, it is worth mentioning two more texts on the Trojan War, utterly unrelated to the narratives of the Epic cycle and other works examined so far, which began to gain resonance in the fourth century — becoming, in time, fundamental references for medieval authors. These are the apocryphal testimony of Dictys, a Cretan warrior and fellow companion of the Greek hero Idomeneus, allegedly written in Phoenician characters and buried with its owner; and the accounts of the Trojan war by Dares, a Trojan celebrant of Hephaestus. The wide dissemination of Latin translations of these works (respectively, as the *Ephemeris Belli* and the *De Excidio Troiae*), as well as their relatively simple and concise writing stile, meant that these account "were able to do what Homer's Greek masterpiece was not, and that is, survive the medieval period in Europe"[68].

I include these works among the Latin sources as the (alleged) Greek originals remain a *vexata quaestio*: papyri fragments of the original Greek account by Dictys were discovered only in 1899-1900[69], whereas there is no trace of the original text by Dares. The vast majority of information on the nature of these alleged first-hand accounts stem from the comparative analysis of their Latin translation with the existing corpus of sources, and the extensive influence they dictated on later texts.

To provide a brief contextualization of their contents, the *Ephemeris*, which, "with its first-person narrator and its pseudo-historiographical demeanor came to be the favorite source for the Trojan War on both sides of medieval Europe: Byzantine Empire and Western kingdoms"[70] , offers a pseudo-documentation of the War, deploying specific lexical and stylistic choices that lead the reader to make continuous comparisons with pre-existing narratives. The account of Dares, conversely, hearkens back to a first attack against Troy at the hands of the Argonauts, creating a precedent for the second fall of the city and creating a narrative that was particularly well received by alliterative poets and chroniclers of the later centuries. Among these defining features, both the *Ephemeris* and the *De Excidio* display marked patriotic undertones and emphasize the many facets of betrayal to homeland and factions: the love of Achilles for the Trojan princess Polyxena, the lust compelling Paris to claim Helen despite its ruinous consequences, and Antenor's treachery at

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[68] Solomon, p. 503.

[69] There are a total of four fragments. P.Tebt. II 268, P.Oxy. XXXI 2539, P.Oxy. LXXIII 4943, and P.Oxy. LXXIII 4944. Elisabet Gómez Peinado, "The Greek Ephemeris belli Troiani by Dictys Cretensis and its Latin and Byzantine Testimonies*",* in *Revival and Revisions of the Trojan Myth*, Georg Olms Verlag AG (2018):53.

[70] Mireia Movellán Luis, "Elements of internal cohesion in the Ephemeris belli Troiani: historiography, rhetoric and genealogy*",* in *Revival and Revisions of the Trojan Myth*, Georg Olms Verlag AG (2018):130.

opening the gates of Troy to the detested Greeks. The pseudo-historical tone of the eye-witness accounts, the underlying presence of romance and the marked absence of the pagan gods would later resonate effectively with an early-medieval audience. As posited by Solomon, both works "eventually replaced the now-lost poems of the Cyclic Epics, continuing to inspire numerous imitations and adaptations for centuries until the end of the Renaissance".[71]

Before continuing on to the medieval legacy of the Dictys and Dares account, it appears ideal to delve briefly into the literary production of Ovid, well-known to a large part of medieval authors and particularly relevant to the discussion on the Troilus-Cressida narrative threads initiated in the previous section. While we have mentioned Troilus and his archaic narrative, his feminine counterpart has been notably absent. She did not exist in works preceding the later romance tradition — at least, not as the Cressida that Boccaccio, Chaucer, Henryson and Shakespeare would refer to in their works.

Up to the Roman period, there existed two distinct characters, sharing a number of similarities that would eventually lead to their merging in a single figure. The first is Chryseis, daughter of the priest Chryses and part of the Achaeans' spoils of war in the *Iliad*, whose father's pleas at the altar of Apollo unleash a plague on the Greek camp, forcing Agamemnon to accept the ransom for the girl. The second is Briseis, captured in Lyrnessos by Achilles, whom Agamemnon claims to compensate for the absence of Chryseis as she is returned to her father in order to end the plague — resulting in the conflict between the two Achaeans chieftains. Whereas Chryseis is present in absence as a voiceless figure, Briseis laments the death of Patroclus, her only ally among her captors, who had promised to convince Achilles to take her as wife. As Sally Mapstone emphasises in her analysis of the Briseis\Chryseis narrative, Briseis' despair over her bleak future is only received by other women: "the Greek lords are gathered around Achilles, and he and they are oblivious to Briseis' speech".[72] Bridging the gap between the medieval figure of Briseida\Criseida and her "originally Homeric predecessors"[73] is, according to Mapstone, Ovid, who gives voice to the Iliadic Briseis in the collection of epistles between "separated or unhappy lovers"[74] known as the *Heroides*.

In a letter composed over her solitary captivity at the hands of Agamemnon, Briseis addresses Achilles, urging him to return to the battle. After having suffered profound grief in Lyrnessos, her

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[71] Solomon, p. 508.

[72] Sally Mapstone, "the Origin of Criseyde", in *Medieval Women - Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy,* Turnhout: Brepols Publishers (2000): 134.

[73] Ibidem, p. 138.

[74] Ibidem, p. 135.

only means to ensure herself a less painful, uncertain future is to remain by the man that destroyed her life. Her attempt to sway Achilles is both a sign of her sense of loss over her own self, but also of her constancy: she keeps alive her only remaining bond, the "disturbing and unresolved relation to the only male figure who can make sense of her life"[75], making her epistle appear out of place among those of the other lovers in the *Heroides* — being not the letter of a woman in love, but rather a dialogue that Briseis establishes with her own self, caught between the narrative that sees her deprived of agency and her own attempt, through her limited means, to write herself a future.

Though later authors would inevitably warp her constancy into unfaithfulness and willfulness, according to the "fallacies" of femininity, the self-awareness and profound capacity for self-expression of Ovid's Briseis survived in the Briseida\Criseida\Cressida figure represented in most medieval works on Troy — allowing Troilus, in time, to escape his doomed narrative as well, as will be discussed in the next section.

2.4 Medieval romances and chronicles: *Roman de Troie, Historia Destructionis Troiae, Il Filostrato, Troylus and Criseyde*

Starting from the end of the Roman era, vernacular translations of the Trojan narratives emerge in geographically distant regions across Europe: to provide a few examples, Solomon references the *Togail Troi*, adapted into Middle Irish, Joseph of Exeter's *Frigii Daretis Ylias*, *Der Gottweiger Trojanerkrieg* in Middle High German, and even the *Trójumanna saga* in Old Norse. The *Ilias Latina*, a translated version of the epic, was certainly among the works studied by scholars, but the primary interest of medieval authors largely revolved around the testimonies of Dares and Dictys. In the hands of poets and chronicles, ancient history and mythology would be shaped in different variations to suit equally diverse aims and needs. Throughout the lengthy course of the medieval age, the Trojan War served as a backdrop to epic poems extolling chivalric virtues and courtly love, where the exploits, motivations, and desires of ancient heroes were be reshaped to align with new-found values; at the same time, the fall of Troy would continue to be essential in the propagation of extensive and intricate genealogies blending myth and history, appearing in chronicles such as the *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. And again, the loss caused by the strife between Greeks and Trojan, deprived of elaborate metaphors and glorious

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[75] Ibidem, p. 137.

description, would be used as a moral example to admonish readers against the utter incapability of humankind to skew violence.

After the divergences of the Latin period, medieval works concerning the Trojan narrative manifest an astonishing diversity in genre, stylistic preferences, handling of antecedent material, and portrayal of characters, fostering an intricate dialogue among different works. The following array of texts aims to emphasize the elements that are passed on from one author to another, ultimately forming the foundation upon which Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* was plausibly created.

It appears most useful to begin from Benoit de Saint-Maure's *Roman the Troie*, one of the most prominent Old French forays in the genre of the *roman antique*, poetic works deriving their primary material from the Greek and Roman epic cycles, as well as episodes from the life of ancient leaders such as Alexander and Julius Caesar. Considering the environment in which Benoit wrote (most likely the court of Henry II Plantagenet, considering that the *Roman* is believed to have been dedicated to Eleanor d'Aquitaine), Mapstone suggests that Benoit drew extensively from Dictys and Dares, deriving from the latter the narrative of the first fall of Troy at the hands of the Argonauts; yet he must have been at least aware of the *Ilias Latina* and Ovid's works, as reflected by a number of stylistic choices and thematic elements.[76] The most prominent of such motifs is certainly the underlying presence of love: the tales of four sets of lovers are tightly woven through the *Roman*'s narrative of war, presenting a number of negative *exempla* of the dangers of untempered attraction. While both Dictys and Dares emphasized the threat posed by irrational love — which, being willful and unpredictable, may lead to treachery — Benoit expands the material from his primary sources with marvels, descriptions and quite a number of poetic licenses of which he is the sole creator. Among them, the first, explicit mention to the love triangle between Troilus, Briseida and Diomedes that Shakespeare would later portray in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Imagining archaic Troilus, "recalled by Dictys as the protagonist of a *casus miserandum*"[77] and presented in the first sections of this chapter as inevitably bound to his tragic fate, as an enamoured hero forsaking his chivalric values for the fickle affection of a woman, requires quite an effort. As commented by Roberto Antonelli, his transformation from one version to the other in Benoit necessarily involves the character of Briseida, "one of the very few female characters in courtly literature who have an autonomous existence (who are not, that is, the mere projection or

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[76] Ibidem, p. 136.
[77] Roberto Antonelli, "The Birth of Criseyde — An Exemplary Triangle: 'Classical' Troilus and the Question of Love at the Anglo-Norman Court", in *The European Tragedy of Troilus,* (1989):21.

schematic reduction of the male imagination, and thus non-existent)".[78] It is worth repeating that this Briseida is neither the afflicted Briseis from the Ovidian *Heroides*, nor the slave passed from one Greek commander to the other in the *Iliad*: rather, out of narrative necessity, Benoit makes his Briseida a lady of high rank, rode into exile from Troy to the Greek camp, perfectly worth of both Troilus and his Greek nemesis, Diomedes. Despite being set as a negative example of womanly fickleness — against which the narrative of the *Roman* spares no scathing remarks — Briseida is a fascinatingly dynamic character, not at all entirely negative. As Benoit needs to justify both Troilus and Diomedes' love for her, the author is forced to provide Briseis with a number of positive traits, including a sense of awareness of her own shifting mood — which appears directly inherited from Ovid's Briseis.[79] As Mapstone comments, despite the obvious divergence between Ovidian Briseis' constancy, Benoit's "untrewe" Briseida not only maintains the capability to investigate her own identity, but is also more than capable to express it through a number of monologues (another element that Benoit derives from Ovid). "The honesty of the self-reflection may well be unattractive," states Mapstone, "but it reacts against the more morally restricted role assigned to her by the narratorial commentary"[80].

The two most prominent Italian works that draw inspiration from the *Roman* significantly diminish Cressida's self-awareness. The first to be addressed in this section focuses on the purely historical aspect of the Trojan story, reducing the agency of the whole ensemble of characters drawn from Benoit's epic. Despite being a Latin translation of the *Roman*, Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* stands in stark contrasto to its primary source. Whereas Benoit embellishes his own work with marvels and detailed love troubles, Delle Colonne keeps strictly to the obligations prescribed for the quintessential medieval chronicler, assembling his testimonies (Benoit, Dares and Dyctis) into a factual account, as mush devoid of ideological inclinations at possible.[81] While Benoit writes to instruct his readers on the dangers of love, Delle Colonne aims to preserve the past for the benefit of posterity, and is particularly pessimistic concerning in mankind's capacity (or lack thereof) to control, understand and accomodate the broader design of fate.

Quite significantly, Guido's claim of realism, who "boasts his veracity and sneers at poetic fables", strips the *Historia* of the depth found in the Roman. By reducing his chronicle to an uninterrupted chain of actions and reactions, even the most virtuous heroes are reduced to pawns,

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[78] Ibidem, p.22.
[79] Ibidem, p.24.
[80] Mapstone, pp. 140-141.
[81] Carl David Benson, "The History of Troy in Middle English Literature. Guido delle Colonne's Historia Destructionis Troiae in Medieval England", Rowman & Littlefield (1980):7-12.

acting out with no personal reasons, motivations or desires. Though the *Historia* is openly pro-Trojan, even Priam and his besieged people appear needlessly vindictive, spiteful and greedy. Moreover, Delle Colonne confines even the more positive relationship to a single, fallacious model of human behaviour: that of violent conflict: even Hector, whose fierceness in battle "is matched by prudence, generosity, and a nature beloved by all"[82], reacts cruelly to his own wife and parents' plea to stay away from the battle, rebuking them for their concerns. "No shadow or twilight exists in the minds or relationships of Guido's characters, just as there are no friends across a battlefield"[83]: far from accounting for compassion, grief, loss and comraderie, the *Historia* is an escalating crescendo of despair, misery and tragedy.

As Benson comments, the work of Delle Colonne was immensely popular in Europe — yet, except for Lydgate's *Book of Troy*, which draws directly from the *Historia*, texts relying on Delle Colonne's chronicle tend to ignore the author's nihilistic view and shift from the historical to the poetic focus. From Guido, for instance, Chaucer will retrive both the inevitability of war and the pervasive presence of the unfathomable design of divine Fortune, yet he conveys both in a much less sanctimonious voice.

Boccaccio, as well, skews the historical focus of the *Historia,* returning to the poetical and didactic scope. In stark contrast with Delle Colonne's text, the *Filostrato* — whose title alludes to a state of love-induced prostration — is concerned with illuminating courtly readers on the dangers of fickle love, as well as providing a creative outlet to the narrator. In a prose preamble, the poet's persona mentions how recounting the tale of "Troiolo" and "Criseida" alleviates his own suffering at being parted from a noble lady, well-versed enough in the matters of love to recognize the story of the betrayed lovers (emphasizing, thus, the moral and philosophical importance of artistic endeavours). Being surely inspired by the poet's own experience, il *Filostrato* imbues the setting of the Trojan war with courtly values and imagery; as such, while not reaching the scathing tones of Delle Colonne, the poem maintains a significantly misogynistic stance again the strife of Criseida, despite introducing a number of interesting features. Boccaccio portrays her as a widow — a version later maintained by Chaucer — deserted by her father, Calchas, whom Apollo sent a vision of the ruinous destiny of Troy. Like the *Roman's* Criseyde, Criseida is also hesitant to reciprocate Troilus' affection, yet rather than being a sign of modesty, her reluctance stems from her single defining trait: indecision. Paradoxically, though she is granted far more freedom than most of her predecessors, Criseida appears utterly unable to commit — a feature, Boccaccio argues, typical of

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[82] Ibidem, p. 22.
[83] Ibidem, p. 23.

younger women. Once seduced by Diomedes, she shows swift disinterest towards the fate of Troy and the war at large, a stance that renders her indefensible in the eye of the narrative.

Boccaccio's treatment of Troilus is marginally more sympathetic, though in the end the prince appears as a victim of his own passions as much as Criseida is. Whereas his beloved is guided by inconstancy, Troilus is characterized by his incoherency, beginning as a young man befuddled by his love for Criseida, rushing to his end in a murderous rampage after receiving confirmation of Criseida's betrayal. Though his wrath is more akin to Achilles' suicidal hecatomb than archaic Troilus' feeble attempts to fend off his aggressor, ultimately Boccaccio's Troilus dies for nothing, unable to claim his revenge against Diomedes (he is, ironically, slain by Achilles, who reprises his archaic role). His anguish, at least, renders him worthy of empathy, evoking the pity of every man and woman familiar with the plight of love.

Being a direct retelling of *Il Filostrato*, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troylus and Criseyde* shares such sympathetic vision, while encapsulating the most salient elements of both the *Roman* and the *Historia.* From Boccaccio, the primary source behind his *Troylus*, Chaucer derives the main plot of his five books, following the phases of the relationship between his lovers (infatuation, courtship, consummation of the relationship, separation, betrayal) at quite a leisure pace. Again, Criseyde is bereft of her father, the priest Calchas, who flees to the Greek camp after receiving a premonition from Apollo; scorned by her fellow citizens — except for the ever compassionate Hector — she becomes the object of Troylus' affection. The prince, on his part, has become love-struck as a consequence of mocking the god of love, yet cannot win over Criseyde until Pandarus, here at his utmost deceiving and manipulative self, sways the woman into letting Troilus woo her. For all his affection, Troilus is unable or unwilling to prevent the hostage exchange between the Greek camp and the city of Troy: Criseyde is thus exiled among the enemy, where she ultimately accepts Diomedes as lover. When Troilus learns of this, he laments the cruel fate (receiving only a mild comment of shared concern from Pandarus), meets his end in battle and is elevated to the eight heaven. Criseyde's fate remains uncertain, though Chaucer, contrary to Delle Colonne, Benoit and Boccaccio, does not entirely condemn her. In fact, his portrayal of the woman is the most positive over all: Criseyde is more sincere and well-intentioned, showing a degree of pragmatism when convincing Troilus that eloping won't prevent their separation. Like Troilus, she too is in the hands of Fortune. The inscrutable design of fate is, of course, taken from the *Historia*, as well as the tragedy of war continuously looming in the background; Chaucer, however, adapts both elements in softer terms. As a result, the poem is not just syncretic in terms of the treatment of old and new material, but also in terms of genre: *Troylus and Criseyde* — as *Troilus and Cressida* will be, in

time — stands between tragedy and romance, adopting features from both contexts while standing as neither[84].

2.6 *Troilus and Cressida* by William Shakespeare

To conclude this extensive overview of the many iterations of the Trojan narrative, and to lay a foundation for the in-depth thematic reading of chapters 4 and 5, I would like to briefly introduce the play *Troilus and Cressida* by William Shakespeare and highlight its similarities and contrasts with the previous literary works. I do not intend to dwell longer than necessary on the finer details of the work, as I feel this is not the appropriate space to elaborate on themes, characters and plot; this last section should therefore be considered a commentary *en passant*, or even better, a launching point for the arguments that will be developed in subsequent chapters.

At a first glance, Shakespeare's 1609 iteration of the Trojan war appears to return — more faithfully than the *Filostrato* and the *Roman* — to its *Iliad* origins. In its prologue, "the princes orgulous (…) sixty and nine" (Prologue, 1-5) answer Paris' offense against Menelaus Atreides with a declaration of war, traveling to the far shores of Troy to sack the city and avenge Helen's abduction. In the seventh year of war, both sides of the conflict find themselves mired in a suspended, uneasy lull of action. On one side, the Greek commanders face the dangers of waning morales: the troops are disheartened and indolent, following Achilles' boorish refusal to fight. On the other, the besieged Trojan struggle to settle on a decisive mood: to give up Helen is a slight against the honors of Priam's warriors; yet, the blood price of Paris' actions appears hardly worth the lecherous "Nell" that appears onstage. While the conflict unfolds, two lovers — destined to be driven apart by the war itself — long for one another: prince Troilus and Cressida, daughter of the traitor Calchas.

The opening of *Troilus and Cressida*— with an armed prologue declaring that 'tis the chance of war, immediately followed by a set of parallel, symmetric scenes depicting the state of both camps — and, more poignantly, its grand, distinctive writing style, make this play resemble more the Homeric epic than the harsh, callous depiction of war of some of the later works, such as *De Excidio*. Lines like "to the field goes he, where every flower did as a prophet weep what it foresaw in Hector's wrath" (1.2. 11-13) seem to invoke the inevitable, looming sense of impending doom that permeates the *Iliad* — and Agamemnon, here, is just as fond in deeming his best warriors to be

[84] Barry Windeatt, "Classic and Medieval Elements in Chaucer's Troilus", in *The European Tragedy of Troilus*, Claredon Press Oxford (1989):115.

snarling dogs as his homeric counterpart. This callback to the poetic and evocative language of the *Iliad*, in turn, makes the pervasive presence of pun, irony, invectives and sarcasm all the more unsettling and jarring, dispelling the *gravitas* of the ancient past. This impression grows even stronger as we learn the cause of the ongoing stalemate — a far call from the war council that marks the beginning of the *Iliad*. Shakespeare's Achilles, simply put, is utterly and completely disinterested in fighting in Agamemnon's war, either because he believes himself to be far superior than the Greek generals and every other soldier on the field, or simply out of boredom. Even his motivations are vague, and Achilles does not bother providing a straightforward answer at all, only barely mentioning his commitment to the Trojan princess Polyxena once a duel with Hector draws near, stirring his interest for a brief moment.

The situation among the Trojans is equally perplexing. Troilus bemoans that his suffering heart is a battlefield of his own: he longs for Cressida to return his affection and has little interest for the fight — only to reveal himself the most stalwart support of the Trojan's cause the moment his love is reciprocated. Having been struck down by Ajax in the battlefield, Hector offers to duel with a Greek champion to mend his wounded pride under the pretense of chivalric rivalry, and though he speaks out against keeping Helen, he proves to be all too easily swayed by his younger brother's rousing speech. Even virtuous Aeneas, to whom London owed its legendary founding, makes a meager impression as he issues the challenge to the Greek leaders, lavishing praise on the mettle of his people before deferring to his hosts with false demure.

AGAMEMNON:
This Trojan scorns us; or the men of Troy
Are ceremonious courtiers.

AENEAS:
Courtiers as free, as debonair, unarm'd,
As bending angels; that's their fame in peace:
But when they would seem soldiers, they have galls,
Good arms, strong joints, true swords; and,
Jove's accord,
Nothing so full of heart. But peace, Aeneas,
Peace, Trojan; lay thy finger on thy lips!
The worthiness of praise distains his worth,
If that the praised himself bring the praise forth:
But what the repining enemy commends,
That breath fame blows; that praise, sole sure,
transcends. (1.3.237-250)

The contrast between the epic material and the sheer number of contradictions and differences may persuade readers that *Troilus and Cressida* is a comedic work or, at best, a romance — and indeed, the second main plot line of the play, the love story, draws quite evidently from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troylus and Cryseida*. The meddling of Pandarus, through which Troilus manages to woo his beloved, Cressida being forced into exile to join her father in the Greek camp, Diomede's seduction and the discovery of Cressida's betrayal, which sends Troilus into a spree of murderous rage, are all familiar elements. Harkening back to literary works falling of the same or similar category, Cressida displays the same level of self-awareness that she is granted in the *Roman*; her actions are tinged with reluctance, as she knows all too well that her worth as a woman is inherently filtered through the masculine gaze; by reciprocating Troilus' affection, she fears she will not only dampen her lover's interest in the romantic pursuit, but also in her personhood. To this end, she declares in no uncertain terms — astonishingly, for a characters deemed the quintessential liar and betrayer — the extent of her mistrust against words, and how she will protect herself from harm.

CRESSIDA:
Upon my back to defend my belly, upon my
 wit to defend my wiles, upon my secrecy to defend
mine honesty, my mask to defend my beauty, and
you to defend all these; and at all these wards I lie,
 at a thousand watches. (1.2. 267-271)

The love plot of the play festers with anxiety, ambiguity, fear and confusion. Whereas Cressida seeks love, but is unwilling to put herself in the vulnerable position a relationship would entail, Troilus makes no mystery of his woes and openly expresses his longing for his beloved, yet resorts to Pandarus' intercession to actually do something. From his very first words in the play, he reveals himself to be more of an idealist, preferring words to action, poetry to kisses. When he finally does take up arms, incensed with Cressida's love affair with Diomedes, the play denies him the hero's death that Chaucer and Boccaccio describe: rather than being put out of his misery by Achilles, Troilus stalks off stage as Troy crumbles, cursing Pandarus for all he has done.

Aside from the obvious lack of didactic purpose of the play— a common intent both in Benoit and Chaucer — the love plot of Troilus and Cressida is more a testament to the death of chivalry than a celebration of it. From the parodic military parade underneath the walls of Troy, where Pandarus struggles to point out Troilus to Cressida, to the overt and heavily remarked upon sexual

relationship between Achilles and Patroclus; from the depiction of Paris and Helen as a bawdy couple of degenerates, him a cuckhold and she a common prostitute, to Thersites wishing the Neapolitan bone-ache upon his favorite targets — love, in *Troilus and Cressida*, is more akin to the "expense of spirit in a waste of shame" of Sonnet 129 than an ecstatic experience of connection and mutual understanding: "lust in action, and till action lust (…) past reason hunted; and, no sooner had, past reason hated" (2-7). Love is war, and war is love, harbinger of social collapse and destruction. And though all characters seem to intuitively know the ruin that await them, "none knows well to shun the heaven that leads men to this hell" (13-14)[85].

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[85] William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 129" in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Folger Shakespeare Library, https://shakespeare.folger.edu/ . Last Accessed 27 February 2024.

Chapter 3 - Between and Betwixt: the Liminal and Liminoid in the studies of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner

There remains one theoretical framework of reference to discuss, in order to complete the general overview of the material underlying the present thesis. In this third chapter, the last of the introductive section of the work, the focus will shift from the literary domain to that of anthropological and cultural studies — which, as hinted in the first chapter, should nonetheless be considered as complementary, interlocked disciplines rather than completely separated fields. Considering the intermingling between these two contexts, I would like to introduce the topic of this chapter by revisiting a previous argument: the analogy between the act of journeying and that of narrating.

I have already mentioned, albeit in reference to a slightly different context, how both a journey and a narrative are endeavors unfolding though time and space, developing from one stage to another — be they physical or cognitive markers of progress. As human beings, we have a notion of a starting and ending point of a journey or a story, just as we can (at least intuitively) recognize the beats between them — and cultivate a certain sense of expectation towards the succession of events, making reality somewhat predictable. As we make our way through the world by means of voyaging or narrating, we acknowledge the unfolding of change, both external and internal, as journeys and narratives rely on transformation: the essence of becoming. I offer this argument again as to highlight that change is such an integral part of the human experience that it permeates not only our mundane, day-to-day life, but is intrinsic to our cognitive perception of the world. We are constantly moving in a state of metamorphosis. Yet, by the same logic of sequentiality that introduces order in the flow of events, we expect change to be circumscribed within recognizable boundaries. Change needs to be limited. And it is the limit — along with the particular condition of being that it defines — that will be the main focus of this chapter.

We will open our overview by investigating the etymology of the term "limit", to understand its conception and variations over time. A first section of the chapter will be dedicated to the use of the concept in Greek philosophy, focusing on its function as a threshold of knowledge opposed against the limitless (and, as such, unfathomable). This original idea of the limit undergoes a significant transformation once put through the lens of Kantian philosophy, leading to the emergence of a first and fundamental divergence between "limit" and "boundary". The Kantian

approach will significantly impact consecutive philosophical and sociological theories, as emphasized in the second section of the chapter.

Interrupting the continuation of this influence, Arnold Van Gennep's studies on the importance and meanings of the rites of passage introduced a significant turning point for the concept of limit in the context of ethnology and anthropology. In this section, we will examine the tripartite structure of the rite of passage, its phases, and its significance as a tool for social integration, laying the groundwork for the theories on the liminal that will later be developed by Victor Turner.

Turner's anthropology of experience—which considers liminal and liminoid cultural performances as interfaces through which humanity may relate to the world and reflect about itself—will be the final topic of the chapter. We will examine how such performances serve as receptacles and catalysts for the so-called "social dramas", and how the concepts of work, play, and leisure intervene in the perception of liminal experiences in pre- and post-industrial societies. To conclude, a brief reflection will be offered on the commodification of liminoid experiences of leisure and their future prospects.

3.1 Conceiving the limit: from Philosophy to Sociology

Since our words depict our perception of reality, it appears ideal to begin our overview from the etymology of the term "limit" and some of the many connotations it gained over time. Though some shades of its meaning have reached the present day almost unchanged, others reflect the influence of the most prominent Western philosophers, sociologists and intellectuals, as we will see further in this section.

As the main definition of the word "limit" as a noun, the OED provides the following: "any of the fixed points between which the possible or permitted extent, amount, duration, range of action, or variation of anything is confined; a bound which may not be passed, or beyond which something ceases to be possible or allowable".[86] As a verb, the same word describes the act ""to confine within limits, to set bounds to (rarely in concrete sense); to bound, restrict. Also: to prohibit (a person) from (something)." It could be said that the use of "limit" in the sense of "boundary" is the most widespread in a number of different contexts. In geographical terms, for instance, a limit marks the divide between regions or countries, while also defining the territory in which a body of law may

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apply its jurisdiction; yet it also applies to object quantification (defining the minimum or maximum), or to set rules to regulate behaviors — thus acquiring a legislative quality. In our modern perception, a limit defines what it contains by means of restriction: the same cannot be said for the latin term *limen,* from which — through a process of conflation with the Anglo-Norman — the word "limit" was derived. The primary meaning of *limen*, likely to indicate a structural part of doorways, is "threshold"; it does not point to a rigid boundary, but rather to an entryway or an access point, a place where one can see both ways. To stand at a threshold is to be neither here nor there, but between and betwixt, in a space that is purely transitive. Though acting as a divide, a threshold allows for contamination between different environments if only by virtue of its nature as passageway; as it cannot be truly inhabited, but only traversed, the time and space of a limit become quintessentially transformative. Liminality, hence, is the state of flux of all things changing, ambiguous and ever mutable.

As human beings, we experience liminality almost daily, as it is an integral part of all manners of societies and cultures around the world. From an anthropological standpoint, however, the concept of liminality is most prominent in two specific areas: religion, with its comprehensive and diverse array of beliefs, symbols and ritual practices, and cultural processes, that is the complex of modes and means of transmitting cultural practices, values from one generation to the next, as well as integrating and elaborating external influences. This chapter is concerned mainly with the former, specifically the studies on ritual liminality conducted by Arnold Van Gennep and, later on, Victor Turner; nonetheless, it would be counter-intuitive not to establish at least some brief premises on how the concept of limit was perceived and theorized before the onset of the anthropological disciplines — if only to provide a sense of how the concept changed over the course of history.

Arpad Scakolczai states that "while liminality should have been, but was not, one of the founding terms of modern anthropology, it actually was the very first word of philosophy"[87], appearing in the fragments of Anaximander. To the philosopher and cartographer, the limit, *peras,* stands against *apeiron*, "the boundless, imperishable, ultimate source of everything that is", and to which all must return after experiencing a brief existence.[88] The Pythagorean school further elaborated on this opposition, seeing *peras* as a positive influx — as only *peras* allows manking to conceive and know shapeless and intangible *apeiron,* both in mathematical and ontological terms. Their hostility towards the limitless influenced Plato's cosmology as well: "for the Greeks, the limit

[87] Arpad Szakolczai, "Liminality and Experience: Structuring Transitory Situations and Transformative Events", in *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books (2015)11-38.
[88] https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/infinity/v-1/sections/early-greek-thought

as a separating device was inseparable from the idea of actually *going through* the limit – implying the experience of being *on* the limit".[89] To know is to stand at the threshold of becoming, gazing into the endless while being finite.

With the ontological turn introduced by Kant's philosophy, the idea of the limit as a mean to perceive reality and interact with it, framing liminality as an instrument of experience, shifted.

"Kant," writes Stephen Howard, "is concerned with distinguishing not between meaningful and meaningless thought but between objects of possible experience, which can be cognized, and ideas of things in themselves, which can be merely thought".[90] As such, he is particularly concerned with the notion of limit and boundaries, though in the first *Critique* he appears to make no distinction between one and the other, using the terms interchangeably. In the *Prolegomena*, however, Kant develops entirely different definitions for each word, driving the concepts apart. In his perspective, a boundary is a positive entity, as it is intimately tied to what it contains: it can be known in relation to the space surrounding it and that enclosed within it:

> Boundaries (in extended things) always presuppose a space that is found outside a certain fixed loca- tion, and that encloses that location; limits require nothing of the kind, but are mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness.[91]

Moreover, as it stands between two or more domains, a boundary is pertinent to each and every one, yet doest not belong to any of them, being a "positive and unchanging line of distinction"[92]. On the other hand, limits exist by negating the space surrounding them. "They are not permanent and indeed cannot be, because they designate only the furthest point that a domain has reached so far, the current edge of its extension."[93]

This differentiation is vital, as it impacts the scope of human knowledge. Whereas mathematic and sciences can only recognize limits, continuing to push forward in their investigation   and finding new theorems, new laws or new objects of study, metaphysics — which concerns "the objects of experience, produced by the cooperation of sensibility and the understanding and which reason systematizes through principles, and the ideas of things in themselves, which reason and the

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[89] Szakolczai, p.151.

[90] Stephen Howard, "Kant on limits, boundaries, and the positive function of ideas*"* in *European Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2022): 64–78.

[91] Immanuel Kant. "Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to come forward as science*"*. Translated by Gary Hatfield, Cambridge University Press, (2004). 4:352

[92] Howard, p.65.

[93] Ibidem, p.66.

pure understanding (necessarily) produce"[94] — relies on the boundary between what can be perceived through the senses and what can be gleaned through reason alone. Such a boundary is based on "connection (Verknüpfung) and relation (Verhältnis)".[95]

Thus, the Kantian approach pushes towards a redefinition of the concept of limit, transferring the meaning of "threshold, passageway" to the term "boundary". It is also significant that the capability for transformation previously associated to the limit is not taken into consideration, in favor of a determinative quality, by which boundaries allow for "true" transcendental knowledge, in a world that would otherwise be impossible to cognize in itself.

"After Kant, it was immediately felt that something was missing from the system and that this had to do with the reality of human life, society, and experience; but the force of Kant's way of thinking proved practically irresistible"[96]. Attempts to shift the focus "beyond (…) the reduction of experience to objectivity"[97] were undertaken by theorists such as Dilthey and Nietzsche, signaling a shift of interest from philosophy to other disciplines, with psychology and politics being the most relevants. Yet, it was the founding fathers of sociology that ultimately returned to consider liminality as an experience — particularly in the contexts of "stressful periods of transition"[98] in human history. In *Sociology of Religion*, Max Weber investigates how a social phenomenon (such as a newly affirmed faith, or a political crisis) emerges, and what psychological processes may both uphold it and derive from it. While gleaning that such moment of crisis hold potential for individual and collective transformation, however, neither Weber nor his followers managed to provide a structural theory to fully explain the impact and influence of liminal episodes on social and cultural behavior. Such a task was, ultimately, both Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner's main endeavor, many decades later.

3.3 *Les Rites de passage*: Arnold Van Gennep, liminality and the tripartite structure of rituals

Although it represents an essential reference for the scope of ethnology and anthropology, at the moment of its publication in 1909, the seminal work by Arnold Van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage,* almost passed unnoticed. This was largely the consequence of the unpopular reputation of

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[94] Ibidem, p.68.
[95] Ibidem, p.69.
[96] Szakolczai, p. 144.
[97] Ibidem.
[98] Ibidem, p.145.

its author, who, while drawing from the theoretical framework established by sociologist Emile Durkenheim, had clashed with the Kantian-positivist approach of the latter. The disagreement prevented Van Gennep from gaining academic recognition, relegating *Les Rites* to relative obscurity until Van Gennep's rehabilitation in 1960, at the hand of Max Gluckman (later mentor to Victor Tuner) and his equipe, who dedicated *Essay on the Ritual of Social Relations* to him. The concurring return to the topic of rituals by Lévi-Strauss, in the context of the debate on totemism, marked a breakthrough in the matter of liminality as experience.

From an academic background in languages at the Sorbonne's École des langues orientales, Van Gennep took an interest in ethnology, only to abandon it in quite drastic terms at a later stage of his research in favor of folklore studies: the overarching complex of strictly geo-localized, "popular" cultural expressions including forms of oral narrations, fables, beliefs and many different types of sensorial and artistic performances. *Les Rites* acts as a linchpin between these different scopes.

Before delving into its context, it should prove most useful to touch briefly upon the definitions that Van Gennep borrows from Durkenheim — mainly that of *society*, as it will be quite relevant in the further discussions. As formulated by Durkenheim, Van Gennep relies on the assumption that any one society is, at once, defined both externally and internally; it differentiates itself from all others, while containing groups and subgroups that are also clearly distinguished. This entails that members of the same society need to coexist peacefully while maintaining a solid, collective sense of identity. The continuous act of balance between internal cohesion and external differentiation regulates both the relationships that unfold within a society and the ties and between different societies — a constant tension between division and aggregation.

From this theoretical backdrop, Van Gennep developed the theoretical framework of *Les Rites,* postulating that life is a constant act of transformation: from infant to adolescent, from unmarried to wed, from child to parent, from living to dead, each and every individual undergoes a ceaseless series of changes. Van Gennep compares the process to moving from room to room in a great house representing the social complex. For the sake of continuity and survival, all societies must account for these transformation; yet, change needs to be regulated to avoid compromising internal cohesion. The social and ceremonial mechanisms that rule over the material passage from one condition to the next are the rites of passages.

I find particularly poignant the observation by Maria Luisa Remotti, who states — in the introduction to the Italian edition of *Rites* — that rituality is not the mere reckoning of the biological processes underlying human nature, but rather the creation of social events thorough the

reference to such intrinsic organic and natural foundations; in other words, a ritual is a social language. Van Gennep focuses particularly on the religious and sacred connotations that this language may assume, noting that rites of passage align to the cyclical, seasonal rhythms in cultures that he considered "primitive" (that is, pre-industrial). In these cultures, moreover, the attachment to rituals was particularly strong, whereas it appears much more diluted in post-industrial societies. As Turner will discuss, rituals do not simply vanish in urban societies; rather, rituals change forms, contexts and modes of expression. Yet the focal element remains: the limit, crucial to the logic of aggregation and division that regulates the inner and outer workings of societies.

Much like social spaces (the rooms of the great house representing society that we have cited beforehand was a particularly helpful visual representation of this for Van Gennep), rites of passages unfold through a series of thresholds, each connecting the stages of a tripartite structure. In the *preliminary* phase, the individual undergoing change against distance from the rest of the community, separating themselves from their ordinary habit. Then, they move fully within the *liminal* space, inhabiting this state of flux for a while. It is a transient condition, in which individuals may behave in was that would not be tolerated otherwise (at times, these behaviors act as trials or mark the passage from one stage to the other). This condition is nonetheless temporary: in the last, post-liminal, the individual rejoins society, gaining a new role, new symbols and new meaning. [99]

From the standpoint of comparative analysis, the existence of rites of passage is evident — in an array of different forms — in every society; the contribution of *Rites* was particularly relevant, though not immune to criticism. By aligning with the tendency to accumulate and compile data (a method commonly adopted by Tylor, Frazer and Marett), Van Gennep risked becoming trapped by his own structural configuration, at times reaching conclusions that even his own rehabilitators[100], such as Gluckman and Mauss, deem more intuitive than grounded in a solid theoretical support. The major criticism against Van Gennep is the risk of incurring into over-simplification. Still, it should be taken into consideration that the main approach in ethnographical studies at the time was structural classification, a rigid method that did not eschew ethnocentrism —and was still influenced by Kantian philosophy. In this respect, *Les Rites de Passage* opened a path towards

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[99] Tania Zittoun's commentary in "Experience on the Edge: Theorizing Liminality" may help us understand how liminal spaces operate, first and foremost, in the context of semiotics. Zittoun draws from Donald Winnicott's observation of cultural experiences, among which artistic production, but also scientific writing and church-going; these actions suggest that the transformative power of experience manifests itself in the connection that is established between something (an event, an activity, an object) and its symbolic meaning, that is, the semiotic function that we attribute to it.

[100] Maria Luisa Remotti, "Introduzione", in I *riti di passaggio: passaggio della soglia - ospitalità - nascita - pubertà - fidanzamento - matrimonio - morte - stagioni*, Paolo Boringhieri Editore, Torino, 1985. pp 11-14.

different methods of approaching cultural and social phenomena, bringing a much needed change in the structural-functionalist outlook.[101] A change that Victor Turner, in the 1960s, would embrace in turn, while developing his own theoretical framework on rituals in pre- and post-industrial societies, their values as instrument of social integration and their intricate ties with performative arts.

3.4 Liminality as an interface: Victor Turner and the Anthropology of experience

In the introduction of *From Ritual to Theater: the Human Seriousness of Play*, Victor Turner muses how his "personal voyage of discovery from traditional anthropological studies of ritual performance to a lively interest in modern theater"[102] is, in a way, "a return of the repressed"[103]; without his own mother's involvement in theatrical production and an early exposure to performances, Turner "would not have been alerted to the "theatrical" potential of social life"[104], possibly foregoing the notion of cultural performances as both manifestation of liminality and social interfaces.

The comment appears particularly poignant if we consider Turner's academic background. Studying in Manchester, he was taught in Malinowski's favored method, *participant observation* — which involved observing a specific social group from within and up close, for lengthy period of time, an endeavor that Turner himself, as well and his wife and fellow anthropologist, Edith, would undertake. Yet this first-hand approach to ethnological research was accompanied by the teachings of Max Gluckman, meaning Turner was familiar not only with the plethora of Durkenheim's theory that we briefly discussed in the previous section, but also Radcliffe-Brown's approach to ethnological matters; from the latter, Turner would absorb the claim — well-founded, keeping in mind that structural-functionalism's obsession for data collection and comparative analysis was rampant, bringing with it a hefty number of problematic stances — that a culture cannot be investigated once it is severed from its context.[105]

Van Gennep is noticeably absent from this curriculum. In fact, "during his education and career in some of the most prestigious anthropology departments in Britain, Turner never heard about Van Gennep,"[106]; his studies on *Les Rites* and Van Gennep's liminal theory would come much later, once living with the Ndembu — a bantu population residing between Zambia and Angola —

[101] Szakolczai, p. 140.
[102] Turner, p.7.
[103] Ibidem.
[104] Ibidem.
[105] Stefano de Matteis, "Introduction". In *Dal Rito al Teatro*, il Mulino edizioni, Milano (2014):7-15.
[106] Szakolczai, p.142.

for research purposes. From this point onwards, Turner would find himself progressively dissatisfied with the theoretical approaches that had been taught, considering them inadequate to capture the many nuances of social life.

Around the 1950s, after all, "idiographic procedures (…) were pressed into the service of the development of laws. Hypotheses developed out of idiographic research were tested nomothetically, i.e., for the purpose of formulating general sociological laws."[107] Turner's main interest, on the other hand, lay in all things mundane: objects, events, relationships and behaviors considered "simple" to the point of being "imponderable"[108]; and among these, he was particularly concerned with the unfolding of small-scale instances of social crisis.

As he lived among the Ndembu, Turner annotated events happening in the village both in chronological sequence and as isolated entities. This allowed him to craft a highly dynamic framework of Ndembu society, leading him to observe how certain events made a recurring appearance during the community's developmental phases. He deemed these to be "social dramas": any situation where dissent disrupts the normal course of daily activities, introducing a significant change within social dynamics. Much like the rites of passage, social dramas follow a polyphasic pattern. From a breach of community norms and rules at the hand of an individual or a group (which Turner calls the "star players"[109]), a social drama progresses towards a disruption of the previously established social relationships. This disruption gives way to a full-out crisis phase, which needs to be resolved in order to prevent conflict from escalating beyond control. The final phase of social dramas does not necessarily lead to the reintegration of whoever broke off the norm first; sometimes, they can culminate in a schism or an irreconcilable division, and the progressive return to normal.

The primary and fundamental implication of the presence of social dramas, as well as their relevance in societal evolution, is that dissent is an integral part of the social process. Without crises, evolution would simply not be possible. Yet an unchecked crisis, as mentioned in the previous sections, can result in complete societal collapse. Thus, there needs to be an appropriate space and time to "digest" such episodes.

Turning to Van Gennep's studies and revisiting his musing on the transformative nature of the rites of passages (and, consequently, liminality), Turner came to determine that rituals represent *one* of the many cultural expressions through which humanity processes social crisis; moreover, "as our

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[107] Turner, p. 63.
[108] De Matteis, p.8.
[109] Turner, p. 69.

species has moved through time and become more dexterous in the use and manipulation of symbol, as our technological mastery of nature and our powers of self-destruction have grown exponentially in the past few thousand years, in similar measure we have become somewhat more adept in devising cultural modes of confronting, understanding, assigning meaning to and sometimes coping with crisis"[110].

From this perspective, the ultimate receptacle of semiotic transformation is, more broadly, the various mode of performances that serve as a "threshold" through which a society confronts its reflected, at times fractured image. From Old French *parfournir* — to bring to completion: performative expression, wether sacred or profane, is the culminating interface of human experience. We return to the Greek *peras*, comments Turner, considering the etymology of the term "experience"; performances are but a threshold, through which any one individual may gain cognition of themselves, the surrounding world and even come in touch with realities and contexts different from their own.

To this budding theoretical framework, which had already been enriched by the study of comparative symbology, Turner added notions from performance theory — particularly Richard Schechner's conclusion on the transformative quality of performances: "either permanently as in initiation rites or temporarily as in aesthetic theater and trance dancing, performers—and sometimes spectators too—are changed by the activity of performing."[111]

Among all modes of cultural performances, theater stands out — to Turner — as a particular "hypertrophy" of the ritual process, a sort of specialized domain with marked characteristics that allow it to quintessentially catalyze social dramas and render them a reflective matrix. A dramatic performance is staged according to the sensitivity of the socio-cultural and spatio-temporal context in which it is created, meaning it is always informed by lived experience. "Acting" in daily life means acting within structures "extracted from cultural performance", and "acting" on stage means embodying both the mundane and the crisis, bringing to light the underlying problems of society and putting them in plain view.

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[110] Turner, p. 11.
[111] Richard Schechner, "Between Theater and Anthropology*"*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia (1985):19.

3.5 From Liminal to Liminoids: the state of flux in post-industrial society

To sum the points of our overview, we have traced the evolution of the concept of the limit across philosophy, sociology and ethnology, culminating in Turner's eclectic and multidisciplinary approach to provide a structural framework to the experience of liminality — not as as a mere social function, but as an interface to perceive, comprehend and reimagine the world. Through cultural performances, societies confront their own reflection, transform, renew and metabolize crises. Among the array of performative expressions, theatrical and dramatic performances emerge as the most intensely connected to daily life.

Despite borrowing from one another's semantic and symbolic fields (a mingling that can be instinctively acknowledged, if we consider the incredibly diverse forms of expressions that go from on context to the other and viceversa) ritual and theater must diverge, else they would be one and the same. In examining the diversification of moods of cultural performances, Turner reaches another crucial distinction: the one between liminal experiences — as we have discussed in so far — and what he deems "liminoid".

As already mentioned, the more technologically advanced a society, the more peculiar and sophisticated the expressive forms typical of theatrical performance. This does not imply that performances in tribal societies are simple, crude or trivial (as Schechner acknowledges and Turner reinforces, the sensibilities of Western scholars tend to align predominantly with the moods of expression of Greek-Roman theater, which significantly shape the European perspective on techniques and methods). Rather, this entails that dramatic performances differ greatly in pre- and post-industrial societal contexts. Three are the main social factors influencing performative expressions: work, play and leisure; more specifically, "placing a different explanatory stress on each or any combination of these can influence how we think about symbolic manipulation sets and symbolic genres in the types of societies we will consider."[112]

In tribal or pre-industrial societies, where the rhythms of life are dictated by the cyclical passage of time, ritual is perceived as part of work. To provide an explanation, Turner brings attention to the term "liturgy" ("derived from the Greek *leos* or *laos*, "the people" and *ergon*, work"[113]): "the work of men is thus the work of the Gods"[114], with a necessary distinction between

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[112] Turner, p.30.
[113] Ibidem.
[114] Ibidem, p.31.

who creates and who is created. Here, the fundamental distinction is between the sacred and the profane spheres, not between work and leisure. " Sooner or later no one is exempt from ritual duty, just as no one is exempt from economic, legal or political duty"[115]. Though certain rituals may carry a playful connotation, this does not imply a lack of seriousness. On the contrary, as Turner emphasizes, in societies where ritual cyclically returns, play is transcendental in itself, uniting various domains and distinct existential levels, blurring the lines between them.

In post-industrial societies, the rhythms of life follow an arbitrary division. On one side, work, regarded as the "realm of the rational adaptation of means to ends, of objectivity"[116]; on the other, play, perceived as "divorced from this essentially objective realm, and in so far at it is inverse, it is subjective, free from external constraints, where any and every combination of variable can be played with"[117]. Taking part in a ritual is no longer perceived as (social) work, but rather a choice of activity with which individuals may fill their personal free time.

This free time represents, for Turner, both "a whole heap of institutional obligations prescribed by the basic forms of social, particularly technological and bureaucratic organization"[118] collectively, and "from the forced, chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office"[119] at an individual level: in other words, it is the opportunity to "recuperate and enjoy natural, biological rhythms again"[120] that work has forcibly molded and changed. Differently from the ritual, free time is not necessarily playful, nor strictly prescribed by society; neither it is considered productive — hence, it is often perceived as unserious. Its characteristics are always purely elective. Turner describes this interstitial dimension as leisure: the time and space of liminoid cultural performances.

In pre-industrial societies, the experience of liminality that emerges through cultural performances tends to strengthens existing bonds and offer resolutions to ongoing crises, even in the case of internal divisions; the collective emotions and perceptions of it generate what Turner calls *communitas[121]* — a sense of camaraderie among participants sharing in such an experience. Conversely, in post-industrial societies, what is undertaken as leisure is ruled only by the individual will: participating is not mandatory. As Turner muses, there is no moral judgement passed against individuals that choose not to go to the theater (it would only be their own loss). Taking active part or even merely observing a liminoid phenomenon entails the onset of what Turner, borrowing from

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[115] Ibidem.
[116] Ibidem, p.34.
[117] Ibidem.
[118] ibidem, p. 36.
[119] Ibidem.
[120] Ibidem, p.37.
[121] Ibidem, p. 47.

Cikszentmihalyi and MacAloon, calls *flow*: a sensation of total involvement where self-consciousness dissolves, allowing sensations to intensify and lowering the sense of inhibition. In this flowing state, a person is truly, intensely free.[122]

This stress on individuality entails that any cultural performance taking place as leisure, especially those that are considered purely for "entertainment purposes", manifests an explosive potential in terms of diversity and differentiation. "In industrial society, the rite of passage form, built into the calendar and/or modeled on organic processes of maturation and decay, no longer suffices for total societies. Leisure provides the opportunity for a multiplicity of optional, *liminoid* genres of literature, drama, sport"[123], which are to be considered "experimentations with variable repertoires"[124]; as liminoids are typically produced by specialized individuals (actors, poets, artists), they may appear more idiosyncratic than rituals.

Although more evident and abundant in liberal-capital societies, Turner suggests that the emergence of liminoid phenomena may have coincided with the onset of elaborate political systems: in city-states on the verge of transforming into empires, in territories dominated by feudalism, or geo-historical contexts in which the ideologies preceding and favoring capitalism (such as Protestant England, as mentioned in the first chapter).

Today, the liminoid experience of entertainment has become an integral part of our global reality, to the extent of becoming commodified itself; yet, the intensely personal and instinctive nature of theatre, literature, music means that individuals are perfectly able to decide for themselves the effectiveness of a cultural performance, to recognize if it is genuine or not. As Schechner states, even "spectators are very aware of the moment when a performance takes off. A "presence" is manifest, something has "happened.""[125] If that moment is not felt, the performance has no meaning. It is empty, and as such has no power to draw anyone in the flux.

At the time of writing *From Ritual to Theater*, Turner hints that modern industrial societies appear somewhat less hostile to leisure and liminoids, even contributing to their proliferation. The same cannot be said of the present time, as efforts to commodify something that cannot be utterly turned into marketable goods are all the more evident today: consider the persistent attempts to delegate artistic productions to the algorithms of AI, and to encourage — most significantly through social media — the tendency to consume narratives, performances and drama purely for the sake of accumulating and comparing. Having managed to weaken rituals and dissolve myths, capitalism

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[122] Ibidem, p. 83.
[123] Ibidem, p. 50
[124] Ibidem, p.50
[125] Schechner, p 25.

will attempt to get rid of liminoids, or, if unable to vanquish them, to assimilate them until all capacity for self-reflection is lost. Yet I want to believe that this won't be easily accomplished. However unfit and unsuited we may feel in everyday life, liminoid phenomena allow us to reclaim what is inherently human in us: that inexplicable, unreasonable, intuitive part of us that lets us glimpse ourselves in others, across epochs, spaces and the divide between cultures. After all, "entertainment is liminoid rather than liminal, it is suffused with freedom (…) Prospero realized this when he gave away his rod at the end of the Tempest."[126]

> Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
> And what strength I have 's mine own,
> Which is most faint. Now 'tis true
> I must be here confined by you,
> Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
> Since I have my dukedom got
> And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
> In this bare island by your spell,
> But release me from my bands
> With the help of your good hands.
> Gentle breath of yours my sails
> Must fill, or else my project fails,
> Which was to please. Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be relieved by prayer,
> Which pierces so that it assaults
> Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
> As you from crimes would pardoned be,
> Let your indulgence set me free.
> [*He exits*].
> (Epilogue, 1-20)[127]

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[126] Turner, p. 211.
[127] William Shakespeare, "The Tempest". Edited by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, Rebecca Niles Folger Shakespeare Library, https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/the-tempest/. Last Accessed 27 February 2024.

Chapter 4 - "Those scraps are good deeds past". *Troilus and Cressida* from an anthropological perspective

With the previous chapter, we may consider concluded the first and more general part of this dissertation, the focus of which was an extended overview of the theoretical frameworks of reference. In the second half of this thesis, I will adopt a more practical approach by offering a complementary reading and commentary of William Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. My goal is two-fold: on one hand, I would highlight how combining the anthropological and literal scope, in order to achieve a complementary reading, may provide a versatile, compelling and layered approach to the text — allowing readers to turn supposed "issues" related to the so-deemed problematic nature of *Troilus and Cressida* into valuable insights, rather than considering them as obstacles hindering the reception of the play. On the other hand, I would bring attention to and investigate instances of the liminal in the play, emerging both in macro-structures such as setting, structure, plot and language of the play and in micro-structures such as characters, recurring themes, dynamics and relationships: all elements that contribute to create the sense of a play standing "at the threshold" between comedy and tragedy, as well as between derivative influences and original production, theatrical and meta-theatrical, early modern and modern — "modern, that is, in the sense of displacing absolute truths with multiple and even paradoxical perspectives, like the modernist European Cubist canvases of the 1910s and 1920s."[128]

From a literary standpoint, to reiterate what I briefly mentioned in the introduction of this work, my "liminal" reading stems first and foremost from a personal dissatisfaction with a widespread tendency to read *Troilus and Cressida* in terms of binaries, emphasizing parallelism and dichotomies, as well as narrative foils. Focusing exclusively on these features— the contradictions, the juxtapositions, the apparent incoherencies of a work that refuses the constraints of an outside perspective, but rather invites the audience to step within it and look closely at its innards — is reductive, if not detrimental to the general understanding of the play as a cohesive work. Moreover, the idea that *Troilus and Cressida* is nothing but a confusing and disjointed heap of contrasting features, making it "neither duck nor rabbit"[129], has impacted the transmission and consideration of the play for an extended period of time. Offering a different perspective and attempting to

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[128] Jonathan Gil Harris, "A modern perspective: Troilus and Cressida", https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/troilus-and-cressida/troilus-and-cressida-a-modern-perspective/. Last Accessed March 4 2024.
[129] Ibidem.

investigate its nature as a play "betwixt and between" represents a challenge to maintain consideration of the underlying unity of the play, as well as a precious chance to emphasize how a literary work amounts to much more than the sum of its part.[130]

From the anthropological standpoint, I am particularly interested in how Turner's liminal studies, as well as his analysis of social dramas and liminoid form of expressions, may relate to the contents of *Troilus and Cressida* — that is, the types of crisis, social systems and interpersonal dynamics depicted therein. The siege against Troy is, of course, the most evident example of an ongoing crisis, always looming over the characters as they interact; even in a seemingly ordinary context, such as the prelude to supper in Priam's royal house. No matter how far removed from her Iliadic's namesake Shakespeare's Helen may be — and how meanly gossipy her goading of Pandarus — her very presence onstage reminds the audience of the "honor, loss of time, travel, expense, wounds, friends and what else dear that is consumed in hot digestion of this cormorant war" (2.2.4-6).

A number of smaller crisis take place over the course of the war, fueling and fueled by the conflict; these show closer affinity to Turner's definition of social dramas, as in these situations the dissent comes not with the clash with the opposite side, but from within the Greek and Trojan communities. In the former, the generals face an unprecedented surge of insubordination, at the root of which lays Achilles' indolent refusal to fight, as well as his and Patroclus' dangerous tendencies to mock and belittle the higher powers, dragging the general morale in the dust and eroding the soldiers' already frail respect for Agamemnon and the other warriors in chief. It falls on Ulysses to find a stratagem to trick the hero back into the fold without needless bloodshed, though the contempt of the general for their own troops never falters, never lets up. The strife reverberates

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[130] Although the following sources are not cited nor referenced in my analysis, consulting them has proved immensely helpful and stimulating to develop my stance and the arguments presented in these chapters. For an alternative, more traditional overview of *Troilus and Cressida,* thus, I would recommend the seminal work Robert DeMaria JR, Heesok Chang and Samantha Zachera, "A Companion British Literature Vol. I-II*"*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd (2014). In particular, for an historical and cultural contextualization of Shakespeare's body of work, I recommend the following essays, all collected within the volumes: Adam G. Hooks, "First Folios - Jonson and Shakespeare*"*; Tom Rutter, "*T*exts and Performances in the Age of Elizabeth"; Michael Payne, "Renaissance or Reformation?"; Jonathan Locke Hart, "Riding Westward: Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, and the Literature of Empire*"*). As for *Troilus and Cressida*, some of the most interesting essays dealing with thematic and literary interpretations include, but are not limited to: Michael G. Bielmeier, "Ethics and Anxiety in Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida'" in *Christianity and Literature*, 50:2 (2001):225–45. Douglas Cole, "Myth and Anti-Myth: The Case of Troilus and Cressida"*, Shakespeare Quarterly* 31:1 (1980):76–84. Gayle Greene, "Language and Value in Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida" in S*tudies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 21:2 (1981):271–85. David Hillman "The Gastric Epic: Troilus and Cressida", in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48:3(1997):295–313. Vernon P. Loggins, "Rethoric and Action in Troilus and Cressida" in *CLA Journal*, vol. 35:1 (1991):93–108. James O'Rourke, " 'Rule in Unity' and Otherwise: Love and Sex in 'Troilus and Cressida'" in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43:2 (1992):139–58. Vanda Zajko "Affective Interests: Ancient Tragedy, Shakespeare and the Concept of Character" in *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 25:2 (2017):53–78. Edward Wilson-Lee, "Shakespeare by Numbers: Mathematical Crisis in 'Troilus and Cressida'" in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 64:4 (2013):449–72.

from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy, finding an outlet in Thersites' aggressive tirades against anyone and anything.

The situation is slightly different, but no better within the walls of Troy; though the sons of Priam appear to be somewhat more united than the Greeks, their resolution in seeing the war through and keeping Helen waxes and wanes. Among them, Troilus is perhaps the most fickle, depending on the stages of his love story with Cressida. At first he is a stark advocate of the cause, swaying Hector into keeping Helen; later, once he witnesses Diomedes' seduction, his stalwart defense of honor turns into a vindictive rage against the Greeks. Though it may appear inconsequential in the greater picture, the love plot further inflames the conflict; as I will discuss later in the chapter, it even comes to be exploited by some of the characters to move the action forward and exacerbate the deadlock of war into full-out conflict. Besides discussing the dynamics of these outbursts of social drama, moreover, I want to explore the moods and forms in which characters from both sides absorb, digest and express the ongoing crisis. Just as Achilles and Patroclus show a penchant for theatrics, Troilus' poetical exploits, Cressida's tendency to shield herself behind the use of rhetoric (despite her fear of being betrayed by her own words, warped beyond recognition), Ulysses' Machiavellian plot and grand proclamations and even Thersites' morbid obsession for sarcasm and sexual puns appear as fully fledged "liminoid" dramatic performances, as defined by Turner. Investigating these instances represents yet another opportunity to reflect on how the literary scope interacts with anthropology and, viceversa, how anthropology lends itself to providing us equally interesting and consistent interpretative means and insights.The literary and meta-literary perspective will be the focus of the last chapter of this thesis, acting as a complementary perspective to the — mainly anthropological — arguments presented in the present section.

In this chapter, I will focus on the portrayal of social drama in *Troilus and Cressida.* Relying on Turner's theoretical framework, I will address the instances of major and minor crisis among the Trojans and Greeks and attempt to identify the so-called "star players," that is, characters playing a prominent role in triggering the conflicts. I will then discuss the perception of power and the structure of society, to conclude with an overview of the concept of time, space and movement between one place to another. Of course, as the main focus of the thesis is a fictitious representation of the clash between two societies, the approach I will deploy is not an application *verbatim* of Turner's theories on social drama — but rather a comparison between what he formulated and what can be observed in the play. I am much more interested in establishing a dialogue between the two

areas, in an attempt to find both coherent and diverging elements, that may serve in equal measure as point for reflection and further study.

4.1 *'Tis but the chance of war*: crisis and social conflict in *Troilus and Cressida*

In chapter two, to conclude the general overview of narratives on the Trojan War, I provided a brief account of the two overarching plot lines of Troilus and Cressida: the war story and the love story; at a first glance they may appear neatly separated, but the opening lines of the play reveals straight away that there is very little difference between one and the other, alluding to their inevitable merging.

> TROILUS
> Call here my varlet; I'll unarm again.
> Why should I war without the walls of Troy
> That find such cruel battle here within?
> Each Trojan that is master of his heart,
> Let him to field; Troilus, alas, hath none. (1.1.1-5)[131]

The heart of a tormented lover is as the battlefield shaking with clamor. As Turner remarks, "to play at love" and "to play at war" are different connotations of the same act — and in this case, with "play" we allude of course to the performance that is *Troilus and Cressida*. Here, Eros and Thanatos are one and the same: an engine of social crisis, setting in motion the action that unfolds on the stage, but also the continuous streak of consequences that inflames the narrative until its catastrophic collapse in act 5.

Love is at the root of the war between Trojan and Greeks; both the forbidden passion that led Paris to breach societal norms and steal Helen away from her legitimate husband, and the cuckoldry that plagues Menelaus are continuously mentioned throughout the play by characters from both sides. The latter appears to be frequently reminded of the blood price of his wife's betrayal even off-stage, as he laconically asks Hector not to mention Helen in his presence and seems overall too defeated to rebuke the puns and comments of his fellow soldiers.

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[131] All citations refer to William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida: Revised Edition,* ed. David Bevington, the Arden Shakespeare Third Series, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, (2015)

Yet love is also what initially prevents Troilus from following his brothers into the battlefield, too overcome with feelings for Cressida, despite being as vicious as a "jealous lover"(4.5.123). Achilles' fondness for Polyxena, likewise, forbids the best of the Greek to join the fight.

> ACHILLES
> My sweet Patroclus, I am thwarted quite
> From my great purpose in tomorrow's battle.
> Here is a letter from Queen Hecuba,
> A token from her daughter, my fair love,
> Both taxing me and gaging me to keep
> An oath that I have sworn. I will not break it.
> Fall, Greeks; fail, fame; honor, or go or stay;
> My major vow lies here; this I'll obey. (5.1.38-45)

He also makes no attempts whatsoever to thwart the rumors of his love affair with Patroclus.

> PATROCLUS
> No more words, Thersites. Peace.
> THERSITES
> I will hold my peace when Achilles' brach
> bids me, shall I?
> ACHILLES
> There's for you, Patroclus. (2.1.120-116)

Although we may think that love is a tamer influence than rivalry, nonetheless, both fighters are sent spiraling into violence as a result of the loss of their own loved ones — Troilus due to betrayal, Achilles to the violence of the battlefield.

Love fuels war, as much as war provides unexpected opportunities for creating or discovering connections between individuals. If it was not for the war, Diomedes would not have the chance to bring the exiled Cressida to the Greek war camp; there would be no betrayal of Troilus' trust. And it is war that brings Hector face to face with Ajax, recognizing in the enemy a kinship of blood that forbids him from fighting him to the death.

> But the just gods gainsay
> That any drop thou borrow'st from thy mother,
> My sacred aunt, should by my mortal sword
> Be drained. (4.5.140-150)

It is war that leads the Greek leaders to enforce their own definitions of power, order, hierarchy in a time of insubordination, emphasizing the hypocrisy of their relationships with their own soldiers — and most importantly, with themselves.[132] The tangle of love and war, thus, may well be *the* major crisis of our case study from an anthropological point of view, that is, our main social drama. We may even attempt to trace its phases according the model offered by Turner to determine the progressive stages: breach of the norm, disruption of the previously established social relationships, full-out crisis, resolution. In discussing the similarities between the polyphasic model of social drama and the events of the play, I am referencing both the third chapter of this dissertation and chapter 2 of *From Ritual to Theater.*

In the case of *Troilus and Cressida*, it is the prologue — putting us seven years into the war, as the play "leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils, beginning in the middle, starting thence away"[133] — that ushers the audience well past the first phase. Considering that the general public would be at least familiar with Helen's kidnapping — and, of course, keeping in mind that the chain of events follows the strict economy of spaces and times determined by the rules of theater — the play foregoes the breach of societal norms entirely and opens at the cusp of the second stage. As the armed prologue states, the war has become mired in standoff:

> Now on Dardan plains
> The fresh and yet unbruisèd Greeks do pitch
> Their brave pavilions. Priam's six-gated city—
> Dardan and Timbria, Helias, Chetas, Troien,
> And Antenorides—with massy staples
> And corresponsive and fulfilling bolts,
> Spar up the sons of Troy.
> Now expectation, tickling skittish spirits
> On one and other side, Trojan and Greek,
> Sets all on hazard. (Prologue, 13-22)

The spirits and expectations of both Trojans and Greeks are high, but the action on the field is stagnating and relationships in the Greek camp are growing strained. Insubordination stirs whereas the will to fight on dwindles. Likewise, behind the walls of the city, the Trojans are disquieted and uncertain: after much tarrying, they are facing no substantial difference in the state of things; not

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[132] The scene of the Greek war council taking place in act 1 is particularly effective in showcasing how the instance of war redefines and dictates relationships and hierarchies within the Greek camp, with Ulysses' speech illustrating a clash between pragmatism and the heroic, outdated ideals of Agamemnon and Nestor. I will discuss this more in depth in section 4.3 of this chapter.

just Troilus, who doesn't feel a hint of reciprocation from Cressida, but also Hector, losing his patience at his wife Andromache and beating his own armourer out of impatience. In this state of unease, an outbreak of minor — if equally poignant — social crisis begins to catch on. Cassandra pleads her own brothers to heed her: if the rot will be allowed to take root, Troy will be destroyed.

> Cry, Trojans, cry! Practice your eyes with tears.
> Troy must not be, nor goodly Ilium stand.
> Our firebrand brother Paris burns us all.
> Cry, Trojans, cry! A Helen and a woe!
> Cry, cry! Troy burns, or else let Helen go. (2.2.115-119)

This second stage stretches out for the most part of the play. The actual full-out crisis phase is triggered only in the second half of Act 5, as violence once again erupts on the scene. From Cressida's betrayal, Troilus plummets from the height of his reputation as "second hope of Troy" (4..5.110) to a single-minded need for revenge; regardless of the consequences, his speech strengthens the Trojan side's conviction in fighting to the last, spurring even Hector to take up arms again — and sealing his fate.

> TROILUS
> For I presume brave Hector would not lose
> So rich advantage of a promised glory
> As smiles upon the forehead of this action
> For the wide world's revenue.
> HECTOR
> I am yours,
> You valiant offspring of great Priamus. (2.2.212-216)

From the moment the fight resumes, it consumes the rest of the play; no side is spared. For all the talk of honor, justice and morality flaunted in the previous acts, the last part of Troilus and Cressida holds no display of virtue: significantly, the only character that somewhat manages to survive is Thersites, declaring himself a bastard through and through to avoid fighting against a half-blood son of Priam. Most of the characters are unaccounted for or vanish by the end of the play, making the resolution phase even more brief than the previous one; some threads of it may be gleaned from the prophetic dream of Cassandra and Andromache — once Hector is slain, Troy will burn — but the fate of survivors and stragglers both is left to the imagination of the audience. Only

Pandarus remain, declaring his impending death and wondering how his helpful meddling has come to be so detested by the bereft Troilus.

As previously mentioned, the shadow of this war born of love (and this love born of war) harbours a number of smaller, seemingly more fickle turmoils and conflicts. Some of the situations appear lighter than the looming threat of the siege, as they are presented in a flourish of irony and humor — or, conversely, conveyed through the language of poetry and affectionate yearning. They are no less relevant than the major crisis; in fact, they may adhere even more closely to the definition of social drama provided by Turner, as they are harboured within the two respective communities.

In the Greek side, the war council is struggling with a bout of indolence that keeps soldiers from the field, and higher ranking warriors from deferring to the minds behind the conflict: Nestor, Agamemnon and Ulysses, respectively the savviest and oldest warrior among the Greek, the self-proclaimed high king and the silver tongued, scheming prince of Ithaca. The general reluctance to take the war seriously (or rather, as seriously as the three generals would like their troops to) stems from Achilles, who once again refuses to fight, uncaring of dragging alongside the rest of the army. As I will discuss more extensively in the following section, Achilles embodies the main voice of dissent in the Greek camp — Thersites, despite spouting a near constant streak of inflammatory rants, hardly constitutes as one: he favours chaos for the sake of destruction and rejects all forms of alliances or hand extended in solidarity, stubbornly making himself a one-man faction against the rest of the world — as he pointedly belittles and demeans the standing hierarchy.

> THERSITES
> After this, the vengeance on
> the whole camp! Or rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache!
> For that, methinks, is the curse depending
> on those that war for a placket. I have said my
> prayers, and devil Envy say "Amen." (2.3.18-22)

The fact that he acts out of arrogance and self-absorption does not change the fact that there is, indeed, an issue with the top of the chain of command; although they resort to grand speeches and are quick to bestow praise on their peers, the Greek commanders fail to see that they are as corrupted, hypocritical and as their own detested troops.

On the Trojan side, I would again return to the idea of "playing at love". Despite a lingering feeling of anxiety at the prospect of being betrayed by her own words, Cressida acknowledges that

being chased by Troilus does give her a pleasant feeling; on the other hand, Troilus may as well grow impatient at not being reciprocated by his beloved, yet he preserves his identity as an idealist, earnest and at times naive. Ulysses will define him as one of the most decent men on the field:

> The youngest son of Priam, a true knight,
> Not yet mature, yet matchless, firm of word,
> Speaking in deeds and deedless in his tongue;
> Not soon provoked nor being provoked soon calm'd:
> His heart and hand both open and both free;
> For what he has he gives, what thinks he shows;
> Yet gives he not till judgment guide his bounty,
> Nor dignifies an impure thought with breath;
> Manly as Hector, but more dangerous;
> For Hector in his blaze of wrath subscribes
> To tender objects, but he in heat of action
> Is more vindicative than jealous love:
> They call him Troilus, and on him erect
> A second hope, as fairly built as Hector. (4.5.110-124)

Of course, considering the prince of Ithaca's ambiguity, one may doubt that the description is genuine; the events of the play, however, prove Ulysses' impression to be true. Troilus' transformation from Troy's second hope to the first inciter of war, goading Hector in abandoning the idea of returning Helen for good, is far from inconsequential to the rest of the community drawn around him. It is ruinous to himself, his family, his city and whomever has the misfortune of being caught in the onslaught. Interestingly, the instigator of that particular social drama — Pandarus — is the only one left standing; whether as a warning to the public or as a living criticism to the audience's appetite for drama will be discussed briefly in the next section, and more extensively in the next chapter.

To conclude this segment with some notes on my approach, I found that overlaying the polyphasic model of social drama with the events of Troilus and Cressida was particularly effective, providing a solid example of the connection between social drama and performative drama that Turner discussed. Relating the phases of crisis to the beats of the play, moreover, allowed me to understand what Turner meant by stating that performative drama is an hypertrophy of social drama. The events in Troilus and Cressida are not homogeneous and do not necessarily follow the structures and conventions of the theatrical context, yet every phase is clearly recognizable.

The love plot appears slightly more difficult to contextualize as social drama, since — as stated before — it is presented, for the most part of the play, as a private matter of little consequences. In this case, considering the derivative elements that *Troilus and Cressida* inherits from its literary antecedents proved particularly helpful to understand how the love plot actually impacts and influences the larger scope of events in the play. Moreover, this initial difficulty provided an interesting chance to understand the general tendency of literary and critical commentaries to focus on the dichotomies of the play. War and love seem to be one of many instances of thematic pairs, which justifies the widespread focus on juxtaposing elements offered by many sources. Yet, from the perspective of my approach, these two elements resonate to the point of blurring the lines separating them, providing a sense of thematic unity. As gaining a unitarian scope of the play is one of the aims of the present discussion, I am particularly interested in assessing whether this effect proves to be *una tantum* or permeates the text as a whole.

4.2 Strutting performers and pandering meddlers: star players in *Troilus and Cressida*

The term *star players* — the most prominent individuals within a community and, according to Turner's definition, those who tend to ignite the conflict at the root of social drama[134] — fits particularly well the men and women that express their dissent through antics, words and declarations, setting in motion the major and minor crisis in *Troilus and Cressida*. On one hand, characters from both sides appear to be intensely aware of who, among them, represents a danger for the rest of the community. On the other one, considering the frequency with which war and love are likened to a sport, a game or a performance, we may consider all individuals involved in the narrative as players, somehow collaborating to move the narrative forward — even by mean of opposition. Although the portions of community appearing onstage are limited by the constraints and principles of theater, we may still attempt to identify who embodies the disruptive force of dissent on each side.

Perhaps it is easier to begin from the Greek side, as their military camp is ruled by a limited number of people attempting to enforce a rigorous hierarchy, making unruly individuals quite noticeable at a first glance. Moreover, the play hails its homeric roots from the prologue, relying on the audience's familiarity with the Iliad to create a sense of expectation about the strife within the

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134 Turner, p.68-69.

Greek army. We are hardly surprised to discover that Shakespeare's Agamemnon is facing backlash from his own troops; even less surprising is the fact that, once again, his main source of grief is Achilles. Yet, as mentioned in chapter 2, *Troilus and Cressida* subverts those same expectations almost as soon as it introduces the war council in Act 1, Scene 3. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon is abusing his position to demand Achille's war prize, a claim born out of scorn for a king younger than him and the humiliation of losing face before the army, more akin to a form of punishment than mere rivalry. In retaliation, the goddess Athena suggests a cruel and pragmatic solution to Achilles: to discredit Agamemnon by refusing to fight, showing that he values his pride fare more than his own soldiers — making him a poor king and a poorer war leader, something that even a rogue like Thersites comes to realize.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, the quarrel is more one-sided: although a woman is still involved (as Polyxena, through Hecuba, curbs Achilles' interest in being Hector's opponent in the duel), Achilles is simply disinterested in anyone beside himself and Patroclus, whom company and penchant for theatrics he enjoys in privacy, and appears quite nonchalant about being beholden to his duty.

> *(Enter at a distance Agamemnon, Ulysses, Nestor,*
> *Diomedes, Ajax, and Calchas.)*
> ACHILLES
> Patroclus, I'll speak with nobody.—Come in
> with me, Thersites.
> *(He exits.)*
> THERSITES
> Here is such patchery, such juggling, and
> such knavery. All the argument is a whore and a
> cuckold, a good quarrel to draw emulous factions
> and bleed to death upon. Now the dry serpigo on
> the subject, and war and lechery confound all! (2.3.74-80)

Even Thersites' jabs elicit only a tepid response from him — Patroclus, by comparisons, is far quicker to shift from a measure of sympathy and curiosity to anger against the rogue.

> PATROCLUS
> Then, tell me, I pray
> thee, what's Thersites?
> THERSITES
> Thy knower, Patroclus. Then, tell me, Patroclus,
> what art thou?
> PATROCLUS

Thou must tell that knowest.

ACHILLES

O tell, tell.

THERSITES

I'll decline the whole question. Agamemnon
commands Achilles, Achilles is my lord, I am
Patroclus' knower, and Patroclus is a fool.

PATROCLUS

You rascal!

THERSITES

Peace, fool. I have not done.

ACHILLES, to Patroclus

He is a privileged man.—Proceed,
Thersites. (2.3.49-60)[135]

Whereas Ajax is excessive in body and emotions, making him dangerously unstable even in the most rigorous circumstances, Achille is a threat to the Greek army because his complacency holds a mirror to the hypocrisy and corruptness of the war council. The only possible cure to the "fever" afflicting the Greek camp is reigning him in before other begins to emulate him.[136]

It is quite poignant that Achilles (and Patroclus)' dissent is conveyed and expressed through theatrical impersonation of the Greek generals. As Ulysses tells the council, both warriors are hidden away in their tent, with Patroclus putting on a performance "like a strutting player" (1.3.155-156) for his lover. His impersonations greatly exaggerate the distinguishing features and traits of the officers in chief, touting equally booming laughter from Achilles — who risks breaking a rib out of amusement.

ULYSSES

And in this fashion,
All our abilities, gifts, natures, shapes,
Severals and generals of grace exact,
Achievements, plots, orders, preventions,
Excitements to the field, or speech for truce,
Success or loss, what is or is not, serves
As stuff for these two to make paradoxes.(1.3.181-187)

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[135] Thersites, here, is playing with a double entendre, hiding a sexual allusion (to know in the biblical sense, that is, to have carnal knowledge of another) in plain sight (to know as in to hold knowledge of something or someone).

[136] To return briefly to *From Ritual to Theater*, Turner states that public punishment is a common practice during social drama; a scapegoat needs to be "sacrificed" for the benefit of the community, usually at the hand of a leading member of the group. I see a consonance between this comment and the act of degradation that Ulysses suggests inflicting to Achilles.

In the *Iliad* Achilles spends most of his time away from battle playing the lyre and singing — harmonic activities, inherently tied to the concept of order, and for this often associated with kings and rulers — while soldiers clash and fall on the battlefield, highlighting the needless suffering imposed on the Greeks by Agamemnon's incompetence as a leader and emphasizing the emotional juxtaposition between chaos and order. This is subverted in *Troilus and Cressida*: the act of pantomime is, in itself, the source of discord. Its effects ripple across the camp, undermining the hierarchy of ranks — which, as we will see in the next section, represents the staple of functional society — to the point that even Thersites, a slave, feels encouraged to belittle this pointless war war, as Nestor admits:

> NESTOR
> And in the imitation of these twain,
> Who, as Ulysses says, opinion crowns
> With an imperial voice, many are infect:
> Ajax is grown self-willed and bears his head
> In such a rein, in full as proud a place
> As broad Achilles; keeps his tent like him,
> Makes factious feasts; rails on our state of war,
> Bold as an oracle, and sets Thersites—
> A slave whose gall coins slanders like a mint—
> To match us in comparisons with dirt,
> To weaken and discredit our exposure,
> How rank soever rounded in with danger. (1.3.189-201)

Perhaps more significantly, the theatrical exploits of both Patroclus and Achilles change the social language of the context, shifting it from epic to comedic. Through their mockery, the heroic figures and the sheer scale of the conflict are deflated into poor caricatures. Ridicule is a far greater danger than any riot: languages, like diseases, thrive through contagion, and sooner or later the entire camp will speak in tongue.

It is no wonder that the generals struggle to reframe the semantic of war in their favor; both Agamemnon and Nestor show a great deal of difficulty in identifying the root of the problem, let alone address it or solve it — they are lost in translation. In the end, Ulysses offers a stratagem that deploys the same tactics used by Patroclus and Achilles: to play along the charade and simply give the role of best Greek warrior to Ajax, much like a stage director handing out scripts to his actors.

ULYSSES
Let us like merchants
First show foul wares and think perchance they'll sell;
If not, the luster of the better shall exceed
By showing the worse first. Do not consent
That ever Hector and Achilles meet, (1.3.367-370)
(…)
No, make a lott'ry,
And, by device, let blockish Ajax draw
The sort to fight with Hector. Among ourselves
Give him allowance for the better man,
For that will physic the great Myrmidon,
Who broils in loud applause, and make him fall
His crest that prouder than blue Iris bends. (1.3.382-388)

Thersites is frequently mentioned as a social agitator. Before shifting the focus on the Trojan side, I feel necessary to specify why he does not fit the role of star player, although he adopts the same "performative" language as Achilles and Patroclus and often goes even further in his use of sarcasm, irony and puns. First, the formers tend to keep their act to themselves; anyone coming in contact with their insubordination is dragged along by emotional contagion. "Beef-witted" Ajax, for instance, who utterly lacks theatrical finesse, simply follows Achilles' example on a whim. Thersites, on the other hand, offers a near constant commentary of the war and the people participating in it, never letting up — not even when he is threatened with a beating from his master or facing off an enemy on the field; in fact, he manages to escape certain death by outright stating that, as a "bastard begot, bastard instructed, bastard in mind, bastard in valour, in every thing illegitimate" (5.7.16-18), he has no reason to fight one of Priam's halfblooded sons. He sees well beyond the facade of social structures and into its rotting core.

Secondly, while Achilles is enamoured with his own self-image (at least superficially; much like Cressida, he is quite anxious that his worth is inevitably tied to the opinion of others, hence his constant need for praise), Thersites includes himself in the endless streak of blasphemy and curses against society and its members. In stating that he is the worst of all, he is far from being ironic: he is merely telling the truth. Lastly, whereas Achilles has Patroclus at his side, and we can at least imagine that he exerts a considerable influence on others (otherwise, the generals would not be overly concerned with him), Thersites has no one. He supports neither factions nor individuals, spares neither men nor women and is nihilistic to the point of self-harm, if his goading Ajax into beating him bloody can be considered as such.

THERSITES
 Ay, do, do, thou sodden-witted lord. Thou
hast no more brain than I have in mine elbows; an
asinego may tutor thee, thou scurvy-valiant ass.
Thou art here but to thrash Trojans, and thou art
bought and sold among those of any wit, like a
barbarian slave. If thou use to beat me, I will begin
at thy heel and tell what thou art by inches, thou
thing of no bowels, thou.
AJAX
 You dog!
THERSITES
 You scurvy lord!
AJAX
You cur! *(Strikes him)*
THERSITES
Mars his idiot! Do, rudeness, do, camel, do, do. (2.1.44-55)

All Thersites offers is the depraved, tarnished clarity of a jester figure or a madman, announcing and inviting societal collapse rather than transformation.

Identifying potential star players within Troy is substantially more difficult, both because the social dynamics among members of the Trojan side appear less obstructive and hostile and because the narrative tension is mainly sustained by the love plot between Troilus and Cressida. Helen and Paris may fit the definition, as their affair triggered the war; yet if we consider the reaction of the Trojan community to their elopement, we mostly find begrudging support. Even characters that criticize the growing death toll, like Hector, are unwilling to forsake them; Priam ironically states that Paris inherited honey while his brothers had nothing but gall, yet he still tolerates the former in his city. Even Troilus appears morbidly fascinated by the correlation between the sheer scale of the conflict and Helen's value as a woman, as it suggests not only she must be incommensurably precious — but that she, being a "theme of honor and renown"(2.2.199-201), can "canonize" the Trojans as valiant and magnanimous. Their future fame, as well as their fate, hinge on her:

TROILUS
Why, there you touched the life of our design!
Were it not glory that we more affected
Than the performance of our heaving spleens,
I would not wish a drop of Trojan blood
Spent more in her defense. But, worthy Hector,

73

> She is a theme of honor and renown,
> A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds,
> Whose present courage may beat down our foes,
> And fame in time to come canonize us; (2.2.203-211)

This leads me to a second observation: Helen — and Hector, in smaller measure — cannot constitute a star player because, in the eyes of the other characters, she can hardly be considered human at all. Once we meet her in Act 3, prodding Pandarus to glean the details of Troilus and Cressida's affair, we find ourselves almost disappointed to discover she is an empty icon, a pretty vessel for the immoral, wanton femininity that Ulysses will later accuse Cressida; yet hers is still the face that "hath launch'd above a thousand ships"(3.1.82). She is simultaneously "the mortal Venus, the heart-blood of beauty, love's invisible soul"(3.1.32-33) and the "whore" Thersites rails about. She is monumental in her paltriness and utterly incapable of escaping the role that has been bestowed upon her by the narrative; her declaration — "this love will undo us all"(3.1.110) is no less prophetic than Cassandra's warnings. In the resounding absence of the gods that permeates Troilus and Cressida, Helen comes closest to achieving a degree of divinity, as golden as she is rotten.

Cressida may be another candidate to fit the role: there is little doubt that wherever the narrative leads her, inner turmoil — if not outright conflict — follows along in her footstep. The scene of her arrival at the Greek camp is particularly telling; as each general greets her with a kiss, Cressida acts and speaks accordingly, now coy, now haughtily demanding. Later, once Troilus and Ulysses observe her and Diomedes, she is shown to be quick to pivot around the latter's reactions, cajoling him as Diomedes grows frustrated, only to act bashful as he proves willing to stay. She proves contradictory and indecisive at best, and deceitful and immoral at worst; yet, as shown by her words to Pandarus:

> Upon my back to defend my belly, upon my wit to defend my wiles,
> upon my secrecy to defend mine honesty, my mask to defend my beauty, and you
> to defend all these; and at all these wards I lie,
> at a thousand watches(1.2.167-171)

She is merely following her own principles. Being aware that the perception of the men surrounding her will affect her worth and image, she plays the roles expected of her: gentle lover with Troilus, alluring stranger with Diomedes, blunt with Pandarus. Her fluctuations appear, rather

than an expression of dissent, an elaborate survival strategy in a society that makes themes, silks and pearls of its women.

Both Helen's insistence at being entertained and Cressida's declaration draw attention to the one individual that, for all his protests, cannot help but meddle. Pandarus, uncle to Cressida, is the most likely star player on the Trojan side. He could be deemed as the instigator of conflict both because of his involvement in the love plot and his role as an intercessor between the stage and the public at the end of the play.

> PANDARUS
> If ever you prove false one to another, since
> I have taken such ⟨pains⟩ to bring you together, let
> all pitiful goers-between be called to the world's
> end after my name: call them all panders. Let all
> constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids,
> and all brokers-between panders. (3.2.200-205)

Pandarus' invocation, and the pun it contains, provides both a self-fulfilling prophecy and a comment that falls in line with the frequent occasions in which the character is described in mercantile terms. Pandarus is a trader by nature, ferrying intents, desires, words, deeds and offers from one character to another. Cressida is only accessible to Troilus through the intercession of her uncle:

> TROILUS
> What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we?
> Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl:
> Between our Ilium and where she resides,
> Let it be call'd the wild and wandering flood,
> Ourself the merchant, and this sailing Pandar
> Our doubtful hope, our convoy and our bark. (1.1.100-105)

Trade routes are meant to connect; Pandarus is eager to celebrate the union between his niece and the prince — another scene rife with terms drawn from the mercantile context. On a surface level, he appears to bring concord, harmony or at least self-fulfillment; that is, to act in service of members of the community. But if we return to his foreboding words, as well to Helen's equally unsettling affirmation ("love will end us all"), we may surmise that Pandarus' endeavor was doomed from the start. As love fuels war and war is exacerbated by love, his meddling only ushers in Troy's ruin all the faster. Naturally, he may have acted in good faith, without considering or

foreseeing the consequences; yet the epilogue of the play suggests otherwise. After Troilus leaves the stage for good, with Hector dead and Troy lost, Pandarus turns to the audience. He laments the prince's ingratitude and curses all those who require pandering to achieve their ends — mostly sexual in nature. In announcing his own death, he reveals to be no less than a pimp, trading in entertainment and performances. These could be interpreted as allusions both to the going-ons of a brothel and to the play itself.

PANDARUS
O traitors and bawds, how earnestly are you set
a-work, and how ill requited! why should our
endeavour be so loved and the performance so loathed? (5.11.39-42)

By setting in motion the love plot (and, with it, the crisis it represents), Pandarus brings to the audience a deplorable spectacle of corruption, war and decadence; though he does not derive any personal advantage from this enterprise, he at least helps to catalyze the social drama unfolding within the Trojan community and the war as a whole; moreover, as he addresses the public as an assembly deriving pleasure from witnessing suffering and chaos, he is in a way propagating his own malaise — his inability to avoid meddling. Both actions, though transcending the context of the play and bordering on the meta-commentary, provide the audience with a measure of self-reflection, mirroring and highlighting the similarities between the tragedy of Troy and the going-ons of society. I will delve deeper into Pandarus' function as an entrepreneur in the next chapter; for now, I will merely state that he fits the role of star player better than any other on the Trojan side.

Much like stated in the previous section, comparing Turner's concept of star players with the dissident characters of *Troilus and Cressida* provided an array of interesting insights, which allowed me to reflect on their portrayal and develop a substantial discussion on their respective roles. As before, more difficulties surfaced in finding the star players among the Trojans, as they generally lack the internal social tensions displayed by the Greeks. Of course, as characters mainly embody roles and narrative functions, it cannot be said that the distinctions between star players, agitators and collaterals are as clean-cut as they might realistically be.

The use of satire and performances as an expression of dissent taking place in the scenes discussed at length here, nonetheless, appears particularly interesting, as it connects well with Turner's statement on the inherently subversive nature of performative drama. Pandarus' role as a trader of entertainment, however, is what led me in turn — in the next chapter, more than in this one — to pay closer attention to how performances, as a whole, are represented in *Troilus and Cressida.*

The impression of the events of the play being set up for the amusement and entertainment of an audience (which, in smaller measure, could be mirrored by Ulysses' management of the Greek "main actors") suggests a more elaborate layer of interpretation that borders on the meta-commentary, and evoked Turner's observations on the commodification of liminoid performances. As this appears to be a matter for reflection closer to the literary scope (in terms of a potential thematic reading of the play), this topic will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

4.3 Artifices of degree and visceral unity: hierarchies of power in *Troilus and Cressida*

Star players act within a social system and react to its rules; even by contrast and juxtaposition, the formers define the latter.[137] Analysing social systems, in turn, may provide insights into the subdivision of role, social ranks, individual and collective identity, relationships and conflicts, as well as reveal precious information about the perception of more abstract concepts: space and time, the presence of the divine, gender identity and expressions, symbols and metaphors, of course, liminality — all topics that will be taken into consideration in the following sections.[138] Before exploring those, then, it appears appropriate to discuss the manifestations of social authority and hierarchy within *Troilus and Cressida.*

The war council in Act 1, scene 3 represents an excellent case study, as it occurs early in the play, both setting the background context of the war plot — presenting the situation in the Greek camp — and setting it in motion by introducing Hector's request for a duel. As the fighting spirits of the princes wanes, Agamemnon and Nestor attempt to rally their companions, reminding them that obstacles are but a test of mettle. Their speeches are mostly ineffective: both Nestor and Agamemnon rely on the rhetorics of epic, whereas the rebelliousness in the camp stems from mockery. The language of the general and their calls to the gods are simply too far removed from the situation. Nestor, in particular, echoes closely the language of the Iliad, despite the fact that the mythological figures he refers to are utterly absent in the reality of war:

> NESTOR
> But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage

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[137] Turner, p. 70.

[138] As stated in chapter 3, referencing Zittoun's statement in *Experiences on the Edge: Theorizing Liminality,* the sense of liminality operates first and foremost on the semiotic ties between a signifier and its symbolic meaning. Of course, as the play — like all literary works — cannot be separated from its socio-cultural background, I do not expect the representations of power therein to mirror the reality of pre-Classic Greece.

The gentle Thetis, and anon behold
The strong-ribbed bark through liquid mountains cut,
Bounding between the two moist elements,
Like Perseus' horse. (1.3.38-42)

From the band of warriors, a far more pragmatic voice asks for permission to speak: Ulysses, prince of Ithaca, whose tactic approach to the conversation appears particularly meaningful. At first, Ulysses defers to the authority of the other two, though his platitude have a subtle, ironic undercurrent. In praising the might of Agamemnon and the wisdom and experience of Nestor, he reaffirms what the audience already knows about the characters (and reinforces the expectations about them), but also reinforces the ridicule of Achilles and Patroclus pantomime, which he describes mere moments later. This, in turn, persuades the Greek leaders to heed him closely and support his plan. In short: to extend him the mantle of authority:

ULYSSES
Agamemnon,
Thou great commander, nerves and bone of Greece,
Heart of our numbers, soul and only sprite,
In whom the tempers and the minds of all
Should be shut up, hear what Ulysses speaks.
Besides th' applause and approbation,
The which, (to Agamemnon) most mighty for thy
place and sway,
(To Nestor) And thou most reverend for ⟨thy⟩
stretched-out life,
I give to both your speeches, which were such
As Agamemnon and the hand of Greece
Should hold up high in brass; and such again
As venerable Nestor, hatched in silver,
Should with a bond of air, strong as the axletree
On which heaven rides, knit all the Greekish ears
To his experienced tongue, yet let it please both,
Thou great, and wise, to hear Ulysses speak. (1.3.56-73)

On one hand, this tactic may be considered a prelude to the idea of power and hierarchy conveyed in Ulysses's speech about cosmic order shortly thereafter: ranks exist to put a limit to the spread of chaos, else mankind would eat itself. On the other one, it is particularly interesting that Ulysses puts great care into masking both his goal (to be taken seriously enough for his solution to the war's stalemate to be accepted) and his belief (power is unrelated to meritocracy) under the

pretense of valuing what is morally good, mighty and noble, as it tells a great deal about the heads of the Greeks' hierarchy and the general state of the camp.

Ulysses wastes little time in addressing the problem: Troy is still standing and Hector yet lives because the "specialty of rule hath been neglected"(1.3.81) — an act that goes against nature itself:

> The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
> Observe degree, priority and place,
> Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
> Office and custom, in all line of order;
> And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
> In noble eminence enthroned and sphered
> Amidst the other; whose medicinable eye
> Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,
> And posts, like the commandment of a king,
> Sans cheque to good and bad: but when the planets
> In evil mixture to disorder wander,
> What plagues and what portents! what mutiny!
> What raging of the sea! shaking of earth!
> Commotion in the winds! frights, changes, horrors,
> Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
> The unity and married calm of states
> Quite from their fixure! O, when degree is shaked,
> Which is the ladder to all high designs,
> Then enterprise is sick! How could communities,
> Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
> Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
> The primogenitive and due of birth,
> Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
> But by degree, stand in authentic place?(1.3.89-112)

Notably, some of the entities called upon by Ulysses (spheres, planets) are positively associated with quintessentially artificial concepts (degree, priority, place, insister, course, proportion, form, office, custom) whereas others are negatively connotate by the occurrence of natural phenomenon like earthquakes and storms. Even the Sun is eminent and glorious not by virtue, but by design of rank, as its position allows it to "keep a medicinable eye"(1.3.95) on the rest of the solar system. In other words, it is the imposition of rank that establishes the categories of meaning. Hierarchy protects institutions and trade, preserves the right of primogeniture and the privilege of old age, and allows monarchies to stand. Yet, moral goodness, fairness and nobility are all consequences of rank: "degree being vizarded, th'unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask"

(1.3.87-88). All Ulysses is implying is that a consolidated order is profitable; those who hold power and those who do not are, in fact one and the same. Should that order collapse:

> Then every thing includes itself in power,
> Power into will, will into appetite;
> And appetite, an universal wolf,
> So doubly seconded with will and power,
> Must make perforce an universal prey,
> And last eat up himself. (1.3.122-127)

The only reason Achilles and Patroclus' mockery cannot be tolerated, thus, is the threat it poses to the general survival of the camp. Agamemnon and Nestor are quick to applaud the prince, failing to realize that according to Ulysses' logic, by nature they are no better than the boorish "Sir Valour"(1.3.180) and his undignified companion, just as excessive as boisterous as monstrous Ajax, as vile and rotten as Thersites: meritocracy and morality simply bow to the pressure of profitability, just as hierarchy — being artificial — bends to the occasion. Ulysses displays enough flexibility to propose a lottery to find a contender for Hector, only to immediately suggest to rig the vote in favor of Ajax, as the warrior has already beaten the Trojan hero once.

Power dynamics, then, are based on mere opportunism. As Vernon Loggings suggests, the public conduct of many characters in *Troilus and Cressida* depends on their private concerns[139]; in the case of Ulysses, "this disparity between what he publicly says in the Greek council and what he privately plots to do — and, indeed, does — demonstrate his desire for private gain at public expense. The cost is war, which is necessarily brutal and remorseless"[140]. On this note, the general impression derived from the war council scene, and later amplified throughout the rest of the play, is that the Greek camp is caught in a vicious cycle, feeding a tendency for abuses and selfishness while cutting off the possibility for change. Every behaviour that strays from the norm, and more importantly, cannot be exploited *by* the norm, is simply intolerable.

The Trojan side appears to be at least superficially more cohesive and less inclined to cannibalistic tendencies, if only because Hector, Troilus, Aeneas, Paris and the other princes share family ties. Their bloodlines sustain the city of Troy (in the figure of Priam, who relies on Hector, in particular, like a "crutch"); the very name *Ilium*, borrowed from the Latin, has a visceral quality[141]

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[139] Vernon P. Loggins, "Rethoric and Action in Troilus and Cressida", in *CLA Journal* 35:1 (1991):93–108.
[140] Ibidem, p. 104.
[141] Historically indicating "the third portion of the small intestine", as well "the parts of the body beneath the ribs on each side; the flanks", being consolidated as "the anterior or superior bone of the pelvis, the hip-bone". Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "ilium (n.)," last accessed February 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3706066139.

that is intensely meaningful, considering the tendency of the Trojan characters to move between the walls and the core of the city.[142] There seems to be a "rule in unity" (5.2.170) — the loss of which Troilus bemoans once he spies Cressida's fling with Diomedes — that is far more organic and harmonic in nature than the artificial, forcibly imposed hierarchy we have discussed in the previous paragraphs. Yet the Trojans are afflicted with the same self-interest of their Greek counterpart, making the disparity between their outer facade and their inner desires all the more evident.

Trojan characters fumble to cover their private concerns with virtuous proclaims. Syphilitic Pandarus masks his illness until the end of the play, all the while attempting to bring Troilus and Cressida together. Paris suffers from an excess of honey, while the other children of Priam have none:

> PRIAM
> Paris, you speak
> Like one besotted on your sweet delights.
> You have the honey still, but these the gall.
> So to be valiant is no praise at all. (2.2151-154)

Hector "wears himself out chasing the Greek in sumptuous armor, only to find that within all of the beauty lies a putrefied core"[143] — mere moments before becoming a corpse himself. The purity that Cressida would preserve at all costs (women are "angels, wooing", only as long as they are not ensnared by the desire of their lovers) is swiftly offered to Troilus, once the lovers are brought together. Cassandra, whose body is ruined and violated by Apollo in the original myth, is deemed mad by her own brother as she tries to warn of the imminent catastrophe (paralleling Thersites, who also tells the truth about the war and is considered just as insane). And Troilus, lastly, makes himself sick first with lust, then with the thought of revenge. The words with which he anticipates his night with Cressida may provide an example of the juxtaposition:

> I am giddy; expectation whirls me round.
> Th' imaginary relish is so sweet
> That it enchants my sense. What will it be
> When that the wat'ry palate taste indeed
> Love's thrice-repurèd nectar?
> Death, I fear me,

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[142] The editor's note of the Arden Shakespeare edition of the text, my main reference for this work, emphasizes that Shakespeare seems to distinguish between the walls and Ilium proper.
[143] Loggins, p.107.

Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,

Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness

For the capacity of my ruder powers. (3.2.17-24)

This may be contrasted with the harshness with which he scorns Hector's propensity for pity, after discovering his lover's betrayal:

HECTOR
 O, 'tis fair play.
TROILUS
 Fool's play, by heaven. Hector.
HECTOR
 How now? How now?
TROILUS
 For th' love of all the gods,
Let's leave the hermit Pity with our mother,
And when we have our armors buckled on,
The venomed Vengeance ride upon our swords,
Spur them to ruthful work, rein them from ruth. (5.3.46-50)

If the Greek camp is corrupted, the Trojans are diseased with a rot that runs bone-deep; their fantasies and anxieties, as will be discussed in the last   section of the chapter, are rife with references to mingling fluids, disjointed bodies, promiscuity and ambiguity. By the end of the play, Troy's virtue and unity are but funeral masks, cast on the rotten corpse of a dead city.

Before moving onto the next section, I would like to offer a reflection on the marked lack of the divine element in *Troilus and Cressida*. Despite being frequently called upon by both sides of the war, the same gods that stalked the battlefields in the *Iliad*, descending among mortals to favor one army or the other, are notably absent. Both the artificial ranks of the Greek army and the organic unity of the Trojans, after all, leave little space for them. They are nothing more than metaphors, empty names for empty beliefs. For all the silence of Olympus, however, one supernatural, overwhelmingly inhuman presence looms over the play, devouring the "scraps of the good deeds" (3.2.189): time, which, along with space, will be the topic of the next section.

The void left by the gods highlights the glaring absence of rituals of any kind in *Troilus and Cressida.* Actions and values are mired in the exceedingly physical dimension of the profane, which, in turn, entails that liminal experiences connected to rituals are either missing or have been transferred to different domains of the profane context. Having observed the emphasis placed on the idea of performing and entertaining, the latter interpretation appears more likely. Liminality, as

argued in the last section of this chapter, is far from absent — the very definition of rank Ulysses provides, notably, hinges on the need to limit mobility within clearly differentiated categories; it is merely expressed through other means and symbols, which, as Turner argues, is typical in urban societies. In *From Ritual to Theater,* Turner places the Renaissance among the historical hot spots in which ritual liminality ebbs and liminoid phenomena flourish.[144] Considering this, the thematic angle I discussed previously — *Troilus and Cressida* as a "performance about performing" — seems more plausible, and all the more interesting to explore.

4.5 *What is past and what is to come*: perceptions of time, space and movement in *Troilus and Cressida*

As stated before, the ideation and perception of power and rank moulds social structures, institutions, roles and dynamics; its influence also extends to the individual and collective relationships with the environment at large. Rigid social boundaries may imply an equally strict partition of spaces — public and private, clean and contaminated, sacred and profane, owned and free. Likewise, belonging to a ruling bloodline or genealogy may bring characters to identify with a city, a palace, a temple, or viceversa, to see them through an anthropomorphic lens. Troy, for instance, is eminently feminine, weak, wanton and fond in Troilus and Cressida, and the prince who bears her name describes himself as similarly unmanned as he laments his fondness for Cressida.

> AENEAS
> How now, Prince Troilus? Wherefore not afield?
> TROILUS
> Because not there. This woman's answer sorts,
> For womanish it is to be from thence.
> What news, Aeneas, from the field today? (1.1.107-110)

The same can be stated for the perception of time, which in turns impacts a number of other cultural aspects: as discussed in chapter 3, there is a steep differentiation between cyclic and arbitrary time spans, which influences rituality, the notion of work and play, art and leisure, and much more. Time can be personified as a judge figure, a tyrant or a thief; a boundary against which the very nature of humankind rages and dwindles. It can take up the cataclysmic features of a tidal wave or an eruption, or even the fathomless inscrutability of the divine.

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[144] Turner, p. 50.

As no text is created in a vacuum, *Troilus and Cressida* is inevitably tinged with the socio-cultural impressions and perceptions of its author, making the interpretation of these elements particularly delicate. Given my interest in liminality, however, my reading would be incomplete without investigating how the play represents time and space and their distortion, physical movement and psychological dynamism, transience and liminality, as well as hospitality and hostility, often in ways that resonate intensely with the sensibilities of modern readers.

The Prologue represents perhaps the most prominent instance of a space betwixt and between, acting as a point of entry in the general context of the play. In a formless no man's land, presumably the same battleground that Troilus observes from the walls of the city in the first scene, we are granted glimpses of Troy and the Greek encampment, as described by the the nameless soldier. He announces that we are standing between thresholds. One is represented by the "brave pavillions" (Prologue, 15) pitched by the Greeks. Another is the collective of the six gates of Troy, "Dardan and Timbria, Helias, Chetas, Troien and Antenorides" (Prologue, 16-17) that the citizens have hurriedly barricaded. A third threshold is the theatrical stage itself. As such, the Prologue does not only connect the two sides of the war, but also abstraction and concreteness, remote antiquity and early-modern present,— and, most poignantly, Greek myths and the British national genealogy. As discussed in chapter 2, "the British traced their ancestry all the way back to a Trojan Brutus (…) Monmouth, who claims he is translating from an older source, claims that Brutus and his men— known as Britons—came to "Albion" to found "Troia Newydd," or New Troy, which later became London (perhaps through Lud's town)"[145]. As the play begins, the old and new Troy overlap, seeping into one another: heroes of old walk the stage, yet anachronisms bleed into their speeches: references to the "Neapolitan bone-ache"(2.3.19) and the "gallèd goose of Winchester"(5.11.57) go hand in hand with invocations to the gods and elegies.

As nothing there is fixed and everything is on the verge of mingling and transforming, like we discussed in chapter 3, liminal spaces are permeated by the latent power of change and a deep-set uncertainty. Neither the characters nor the audience can linger here for long (the armed Prologue is an exception because, as pointed out, he is the embodiment of a narrative function: he does not exist as a human being and does not possess personhood in the form of a proper name). The dramatic action needs to take place somewhere else, where it can unfold within safe boundaries. However, any movement between stable, "safe" places remains negatively perceived, as it is rife with risk:

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[145] Evrim Dogan Adanur, "The Uses of Anachronism in Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida", *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences* (2017):1048-1056.

leaving the camp or the city means to face the danger of death, not only physically, but also in terms of social recognition and identity.

"The roots of liminality (…) are found not so much in discursively accessible contents but in the felt movement between these various universes or finite provinces of meaning, worlds, existentially problematic situations, and so forth."[146] Characters who act as mediators, such as Pandarus, are not safe; in talking with Calchas, Agamemnon addresses him as "Trojan"(3.3.17), despite the fact that the latter's loyalty now lies with the Greeks; Helen, ferried across the sea to the "strong immures"(Prologue, 8) of Troy, has generated a full-scale conflict. And Cressida, once gone from Troy, is forever lost to Troilus, rendered utterly unrecognizable.

> TROILUS:
> This she? no, this is Diomed's Cressida:
> If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
> If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
> If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
> If there be rule in unity itself,
> This is not she. (5.2.166-171)

It is quite clear, however, that the so-called safe places are hardly so: both the city and the camp fester with the consequences of stagnation. The stability of "feminine" Troy has become as brittle as her old king, and behind her facades of statuary virtue she hides a morbid tendency to accomodate excesses — of lust, of pride, and other humorous imbalances — whereas the provisional situation of the Greek encampment makes men wary of one another.

Its most basic unit, the tent, lacks the intimate quality of a house and the sturdy protection of proper walls, too flimsy to confine the private going-ons that take place within. The two environments are equally vulnerable to the danger of contagion and pollution, a danger that spills over from the spatial context at large to the individual body. This, in turn, negatively influences the concept of gaining access to a certain place or to the body of someone else, and tinges the idea of hospitality with the sinister undertones of a threat. For instance, let us consider the first scene of Act 5, in which Hector is invited to a brief respite among the Greeks.

The preamble to this episode is, in itself, quite violent: though he refuses to fight Ajax to the death out of respect to his Trojan blood, Hector proclaims that, would that he could, he would have no qualms in ripping away the Greek side of his opponent and save the rest.

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[146] Robert Innis , "On/at the Edges of Liminality: Analytical Extensions Betwixt and between Thresholds", in *Experience on the Edge: Theorizing Liminality*, Springer Nature, (2021):66.

HECTOR

Were thy commixtion Greek and Trojan so
That thou couldst say "This hand is Grecian all,
 And this is Trojan; the sinews of this leg
All Greek, and this all Troy; my mother's blood
Runs on the dexter cheek, and this sinister
Bounds in my father's," by Jove multipotent,
Thou shouldst not bear from me a Greekish member
Wherein my sword had not impressure made
Of our rank feud. But the just gods gainsay
That any drop thou borrowd'st from thy mother,
My sacred aunt, should by my mortal sword
Be drained. (4.5.140-150)

Ajax, perhaps moved by the fact that for the first time someone recognizes him as kin, rather than a brutish, disproportionate giant, invites his newfound "cousin" to stay a while longer:

AJAX

If I might in entreaties find success,
As seld I have the chance, I would desire
My famous cousin to our Grecian tents. (4.1.167-169)

Ajax appears genuinely touched and even awkwardly benevolent. On the contrary, Diomedes, who lends his immediate support to the entreat, is far less reassuring:

DIOMEDES

'Tis Agamemnon's wish; and great Achilles
Doth long to see unarmed the valiant Hector. (4.1.170-171).

It is clear that the invitation has very different implications for the rest of the Greek warriors: to them, Hector is simultaneously host and *hostis*, an invading force from the other side of the battlefield. His presence in the camp requires a negotiation between "the contradictory states of hospitality and hostility"[147] to which even Achilles must adhere. Thus, hospitality becomes a chance to fantasize about the annihilation of the enemy as if to neutralize him, a prelude to slaughter:

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[147] Sophie Emma Battel, " '[L]ike a fountain stirred': Impure Hospitality in Troilus and Cressida", in P*rofane Shakespeare – Perfection, Pollution and the Truth of Performance*, 33 (2018). https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.2383 last accessed March 4 2024.

ACHILLES

I'll heat his blood with Greekish wine tonight,
Which with my scimitar I'll cool tomorrow.
Patroclus, let us feast him to the height. (5.1.1-3)

Wanting to further explore the underlying implications of hospitality, the other most prominent episode in which a member of the other side is invited to join the Greeks may be taken into consideration: the fifth scene of act 4, in which Cressida is brought to the encampment by Diomedes. It is particularly interesting that in her case there is no mention of fancies occurring to her hosts, but rather a swift transition from words to action. As Ulysses suggests that " 'Twere better if she was kissed in general" (4.5.23-24), the soldiers simply invite themselves to her body. Cressida, just like Hector, behaves accordingly to the societal expectations placed on her, yet her compliance does not save her neither from Ulysses' disapproval — "In a misogynist critique of Cressida's body language – which collapses any distinction separating hostess from prostitute – Ulysses accuses her of being unduly hospitable in a manner that implies loose morals. Cressida's participation in the social rituals of hospitality exposes her to allegations that she is operating within the far seedier economy of prostitution."[148]

The murderous intents targeted at Hector and the kisses directed at Cressida are different enactment of the same matrix: the need to neutralize a foreign threat. What changes is the method: whereas killing coincides with the irreversible spillage of blood, kissing implies the mingling of fluid. Hector will not renounce his identity as Trojan and, as such, must be destroyed. Cressida, on the other hand, can be claimed and "merged" within the social structure of the camp. This, however, is still not enough: as Ulysses comments, "her foot speaks. Her wanton spirits look out at every joint and motive of her body" (4.5.65-66). He feels threatened by her movements, but more importantly, by the fact that in moving through the fixed space of the camp, Cressida introduces entropic change to the system.

The danger posed by movement is not limited to spatial displacement, but also by the passing of time, the ultimate agent of dissolution, amalgamation and equalization. Time exerts a uniform effect on both the Greeks and the Trojans, sweeping everything in its wake. Some characters attempt to exorcize its effects by pitting their own ideals against the passing of time; others express, with nonchalant pessimism, visions of a decadence that is already in motion.

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[148] Battel.

For Troilus, time is a thief, doing harm without fully realizing how or why, restless in its voracity. It merely follows its nature, without reason or rhyme. "Injurious time, now, with a robber's haste crams his rich thievery up, he know not how" (4.4.44-45); what the prince does not realize is that the self-same definition he bestows upon time is a negative mirror of his own less desirable traits. Troilus, too is overeager, impatient and all too hasty, wrecking damage on the people surrounding him by following his broken heart, without truly realizing the extent of his action. If "the will is infinite and the execution confined (…) the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit" (3.2.82-83) then the suffering inflicted by time is but a revelation, a preemptive demonstration of what can be done by the "monstruosity of love" (3.2.81).

Ulysses, on his part, deems time a monstrosity; not a merchant, but rather a beggar continuously seeking alms, never satisfied with neither noble endeavors nor good deeds. The comment chips momentarily at his mask, revealing what perhaps underlies the opportunistic approach of the Ithacan prince — the knowledge that, in the face of time, nothing is ever enough.

> ULYSSES
> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
> A great-sized monster of ingratitudes:
> Those scraps are good deeds past; which are devoured
> As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
> As done. Perseverance, dear my lord,
> Keeps honor bright. To have done is to hang
> Quite out of fashion like a rusty mail
> In monumental mock'ry. (3.3.155-158)

The only possible outcomes are the small death of being forgotten or that, much more insulting, of being made into an *exemplum*, an outdated trophy, forever tied to the evaluation of future generations. From his words, the former appears slightly more desirable than the latter. And maybe this is what Ulysses is truly afraid of: once gone, no human being — neither kings nor rogues — have a degree of control on the memories passed on in time.

Cressida, too, appears to confide in oblivion, though her words paint — as usual — a different kind of wish. When Troilus declares that he hopes to be immortalized as the quintessential embodiment of a faithful lover, Cressida answers:

> If I be false or swerve a hair from truth,
> When time is old ⟨and⟩ hath forgot itself,

> When water drops have worn the stones of Troy
> And blind oblivion swallowed cities up,
> And mighty states characterless are grated
> To dusty nothing, yet let memory,
> From false to false, among false maids in love,
> Upbraid my falsehood! (3.2.186-193)

At a first glance, this seems to echo Troilus' desire. Yet the future Cressida speaks about is so far removed that it may as well be the past: a time beyond civilization and memory, where all that remains is dust and void. As always, Cressida is protecting herself: even if she did betray her lover, she has nothing to fear from a time that forgets itself. In a much more sinister spin, however, she is unknowingly foretelling the imminent fall of Troy, towards which the play is heading. Cressida will be declared a traitor earlier than the end of the play; yet her wish will be granted, as her reputation as an unfaithful, morally loose woman will be perpetuated far beyond the end of the war itself.

We may be wonder, then, if there is any point in distinguishing the historical past from an hypothetical future, and from the present that keeps manifesting scene by scene: after all, "what's past and what's to come is strewed with husks, and formless ruin of oblivion" (4.5.164-165). Agamemnon's declaration echoes the time of myths: a displaced, eternal narration that dismantles the boundaries between eras and civilizations. From this perspective, it appears particularly ironic that it is Hector, doomed in every iteration of the Trojan war, the one reminding all that in the end, time is the storyteller *par excellence* — the only one penning the final words to any play.

> The end crowns all,
> And that old common arbitrator, Time,
> Will one day end it. (4.5.245-247)

To conclude this chapter, I will offer the sum of my observations concerning the approach adopted in this analysis, as well as a few expectations for the next part of the analysis.

Over all, as stated at the end of each segment, the critical application of Turner's theoretical framework to the events and characters of *Troilus and Cressida* provided insights that could be overlooked otherwise. With the necessary critical thinking and further development, a multidisciplinary approach to the text proved enriching and stimulating. Of course, much of my interpretation is built on my perception of the text, which inevitably led me back to Clifford Geertz's words on the perceived danger of subjectivity — and how literature tends to hinge on the individual reception of the text, whereas anthropology favours less self-centered perspective. The

experience, overall, has been quite illuminating in terms of understanding the difficulty of threading the limit between the narrative and ethnographical scope.

The main cues gleaned from this reading (the absence of ritual, the presence of liminoid forms of performance, "playing" a role, Pandarus as peddler of entertainment, Ulysses as a stage director) appear to point toward a potential reading of Troilus and Cressida as a performance about performing; hence, my aim in the next chapter will be to examine the play from this perspective.

Chapter 5 - "Fair play, fool's play". A reading of *Troilus and Cressida* from a literary and meta-literary perspective

Chapter 4 approached the text of Troilus and Cressida through the lens of Turner's framework on liminality. Coherently to Turner's studies on the correlation between social crisis and theatrical performances, the events of the play mirror the polyphasic model of social drama, proving that the former is an hypertrophy of the latter. The observations drawn from this comparison provided some useful clues on the sovversive nature of theater, as well the self-reflecting commentary it offers in representing instances of crisis and strife. The play also displayed a pervasive absence of rituals and references to the domain of the sacred, the lack of which suggests that liminal experiences are translated to other aspects and features of *Troilus and Cressida*. Among these, temporal-spatial dynamism is imbued with the sense of unease characteristic of transitory, liminal experiences, which make characters wary when interacting with individuals or things encroaching from the other side of the war. Liminal spaces, however, appear at the beginning and at the end of the play: in the prologue, when the audience is invited to Troy (which overlays with London), and in the epilogue, when Pandarus addresses the spectators with his speech. Both instances see a collapse of the narrative framing, which — paired with a number of performative expressions staged by characters over the course of the play and the aforementioned lack of ritual liminality — hint at the self-reflective nature of Turner's liminoid performances. As a literary work emerging at the onset of an urban, pre-capitalistic society, *Troilus and Cressida* can be interpreted as a play describing and commenting the experience of enacting in a theatrical production — in other words, a play about playing.

The fifth and final chapter of this dissertation builds on this premise with the aim of commenting what this meta-theatrical connotation entails, highlighting and discussing the instances and manners in which *Troilus and Cressida* threads the line between performance and meta-performance, questioning the difference between role and identity and implying that the world is a stage and the stage, in its own ways, is a world. The performative representations of the play's *dramatis personae* will be the main focus of the discussion, taking into consideration both their appearance and physical projections, as well as the symbolism behind them, and their language. I will analyse rhetoric devices that may suggest or imply a breach of narrative framings. As in chapter 4, I will rely on a critical approach, tracing the ties between the anthropological hints collected in

the previous analysis and what may emerge from the literary scope, in order to provide a thematically coherent and homogenous reading of the play.

Before delving into the analysis proper, I will provide an introductory note concerning the specific terminology of this chapter, in order to distinguish between the notions of identity, personality, and individuality. After that, the first section of the investigation will deal with the symbolism of body images in the play: I will discuss the implications of embodying the "matter of Troy", as well as rhetoric devices relevant to the present reading. The argument will then shift to the difference between identity and dramatic persona and role playing, role distance, with a specific focus on the protagonists of the play and their performative moods. The last section of the chapter will deal with the "peripheral" characters of *Troilus and Cressida* — covering the roles of commentators, meddlers and narrators.

5.1 Differentiating between identity and personality: a note on terminology

The analysis developed in this chapter deals extensively with the concepts of identity, personality and individuality. As the three terms are not interchangeable and their different connotations are, in fact, intensely relevant to the arguments presented herein, a clarification is in order.

The word "identity" will be used in this chapter to refer — according to its derivative meaning from the Latin *idem* — to the array of individual features that project a unifying, homogenous image of a character. This concept will be relevant in section 5.3 and 5.4, as the matter of identity appears inherently related both to body representations (which, as anticipated in chapter 4, is markedly disjointed and unbalanced) and behavioral coherence.

The word "persona", in reference to Turner's observations[149], is inextricably connected with role playing. In tracing the etymology of the term, Turner points out that a "persona" was initially the mask worn by a performer, evolving over time into a euphemism to indicate the actor themselves. From a sociological perspective, a person is "the sum of roles and status of an individual, representing its duties in a socio-structural system"[150]. A persona, thus, is a medium between the inner and outer world. This notion will prove crucial to discuss, in 5.4, dramatic roles, role distance, the dissonance between identity and persona and performative expressions.

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[149] Turner and Bonafina, p.220.
[150] Ibidem.

Lastly, the world "individual" — in accordance with Turner's commentary on Durkenheim — refers to the minimal, inseparable entity that can be recognized as a singular human being. Whereas, in discussing identity, the emphasis falls on homogeneity, an individual is defined by its cohesion[151]. Likewise, "the person valued is able to rate him or herself differently from the valuation attributed by another; and the individual, as distinct from an object, is capable of opposing his own estimation of his value to that of an outside observer, and has the authority of self-esteem or self-distrust to do so."[152]

The differences between these terms and concepts rely in no small part on the sense of (abstract) spatial collocation and displacement between the elements. For instance, an individual may adhere to their persona while distancing themselves from their identity for a variety of reasons, ranging from self-preservation to negotiation strategies. Other times, different individuals attempt to conform to the same perceived sense of identity, but remain unable to do so. Whether it is by choice or by necessity, the distance between identity, individuality and personality is dynamic and transformative. During the analysis in chapter 4, movement and dynamism appeared as instances of deep and unsettling liminal experiences. It seems appropriate, then, that the reading in this chapter should take into consideration how this "state of flux" between person, identity and individual is represented in *Troilus and Cressida*, and consider which narrative expedients are used to do so — such as rhetoric strategies and devices relying on displacement, movement or translation within the frames of references — in other words, all practical instances through which the sense of liminality is communicated.

In the previous chapter, through the lens of the anthropological perspective, the characters of *Troilus and Cressida* have been considered and observed as individuals, with the aim of examining their uniqueness, social standing, relationships and authority. In this chapter the focus will mainly be on identity and persona, as well as the juxtapositions and synergies of the two — as the play develops its thematic resonance on these elements.

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[151] Ibidem.
[152] Cedric Barfoot, "Troilus and Cressida: 'Praise us as we are tasted.'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988):45–57.

5.2 *Let thy blood be thy direction till thy death.* **Body representations and narrative metalepsis in** *Troilus and Cressida*

The analysis conducted over the course of the previous chapter relied on the premise of treating the characters of *Troilus and Cressida* as individuals, acting and moving in accordance to their needs and goals in a specific social context. Albeit fictitious and maladaptive, the communities we have examined in chapter 4 have proved to be quite realistic, even with their own contradiction and social issues. While discussing at length the hierarchy, social dynamics and environmental reception, the analysis omitted an element that appears rather frequently in literary criticism on the play: the body.

There is no straightforward definition of what a body may be. Depending on the individual perspective, a body may be considered the sum of its parts, or an indivisible, unified entity. It may be juxtaposed with the notion of a soul or a spirit, acting as a vessel for the self; likewise, its external characteristics may be conceived as projections of one's inner nature, a truth that would otherwise remain hidden and inaccessible. A body may also be a medium, an instrument through which we attune to the world; yet its perceptions remain imperfect and severely limited, to the point of working against us — as nothing that is filtered through the senses is truly objective. It may be viewed as a victim of its own impulses and vices, its failings defining humankind as lacking and helpless. And lastly, it may be considered as a threshold, from which — by clashing or joining — we may encounter others, and glimpse ourselves.

Each of these descriptions merely represents the different connotations (typically informed by our own cultural background) attributed to a physical subject. The "body" entity is always accompanied and defined by an array of symbolic interpretations, to which we are intensely susceptible. In the context of cultural performances (dance, drama, ritual, play, but also literature), where symbolism plays an intensely prominent role, we — as spectators and readers — become eager to read between the lines and glean the implicit connotations of body representations. As mentioned in chapter 3, the perception of liminality stems first and foremost from the semiotic ties between signifier and meaning[153]; it appears appropriate to begin the symbolic analysis of *Troilus and Cressida* from the play's modalities of depicting bodies, their symbolic meanings and what impressions they may elicit in an audience — in particular, those that may convey transformation, hybridisation and translations, which are intrinsic to the liminal experience. In an attempt to

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[153] Tania Zittoun "From Liminalities to Limbo: Thinking through Semiotic Elaboration", in *Experience on the Edge: Theorizing Liminality*, Springer Nature (2021):45-58.

highlight the pointed use of symbolic language to convey liminal feelings and instances, the rhetoric devices deployed in the text will be discussed as well.

Considering the derivative nature of *Troilus and Cressida*, the analysis should begin with a fairly simple observation: the bodies onstage are new incarnations of the so-called "matter of Troy". Concerning the term "matter", David Hillman highlights that the word appears in the play no less than 24 times[154], and is used to indicate not just the subject of the ancient epic, but also organic matter, flesh and bones. By the time of Shakespeare's theatrical production, the heroes of the Iliad had long become idealized figures, more closely related to the realm of abstraction than to the notion of tangible human beings. By depicting the war of Troy anew, Shakespeare provides these abstract revenants with tangible vessels, effectively embodying them.[155] Yet, as discussed in chapter 2, the epic material from which *Troilus and Cressida* derives its spirit is far from pristine, but rather the product of a centuries-long process of reiterations; the images of the newly-embodied heroes that Shakespeare depicts are far from flattering. Indeed, as mentioned in chapter 3, the characters of Troilus and Cressida are corrupted to the bone, displaying diseased values and appetites out of proportion:

> PARIS
> He eats nothing but doves, love, and that breeds
> hot blood, and hot blood begets hot thoughts, and
> hot thoughts beget hot deeds, and hot deeds is love.
> PANDARUS
> Is this the generation of love? Hot blood,
> hot thoughts, and hot deeds? Why, they are vipers.
> Is love a generation of vipers? Sweet lord, who's
> afield today? (3.1.127-133)

On a primary level, the general sense of bloating that characterizes their outward projection may correspond with the illusion of the past epic grandeur. "The play 'sounds out' the Homeric idols, the epic heroes at the very source of European culture; it finds at the center of their beings little more than disease and raw appetite, representing them all, more or less, as 'idol[s] of idiot-worshippers' (5.1.7)."[156] At the turning of the age, all that remains to the ancient heroes and champions of the Trojan war is fame — which they strenuously grasp:

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154 David Hillman, "The Gastric Epic: Troilus and Cressida", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48:3 (1997): 295–313.
155 Ibidem, p. 296.
156 Ibidem.

ACHILLES

What, am I poor of late?

'Tis certain, greatness, once fall'n out with fortune,

Must fall out with men too: what the declined is

He shall as soon read in the eyes of others

As feel in his own fall; for men, like butterflies,

Show not their mealy wings but to the summer,

And not a man, for being simply man,

Hath any honour, but honour for those honours

That are without him, as place, riches, favour,

Prizes of accident as oft as merit:

Which when they fall, as being slippery standers,

The love that lean'd on them as slippery too,

Do one pluck down another and together

Die in the fall. (3.3.80-93)

Considering Hillman's commentary, one may wonder if the source of the bloating in *Troilus and Cressida* is the epic genre of some of its predecessors — which glorifies the worst tendencies of humankind — or rather, as they have passed from one iteration of the war to another, the characters themselves have been diluted beyond recognition. Both interpretations may be valid, as the sense of liminal unease that permeates Troilus and Cressida stems (as stated in chapter 4) in the implicit threat of standing between extremes. As for the representations of engorged bodies, two types stand out through the play.

The first kind of bloating derives from an imbalance of bodily fluids, in reference to the theory of four humours. Appearing in the treatise *The Nature of Man* by Hippocrates and postulating that "the nature of man consists of four humours (…) each humour predominating in the season which shares the same nature: blood, hot and wet (…) yellow bile, hot and dry (…) black bile, cold and dry (…), and phlegm, cold and wet",[157] the Hippocratic hypothesis of humors was the most prominent among many others theories. According to this hypothesis, a healthy body displays an equally harmonious balance of its internal humours; on the contrary, a body in which one humour exceeds the others may be prone to sickness, showing outward signs of the inner state of imbalance.

Through Galen's commentary on *The Nature of Man*, the theory of humours became more elaborate and renown over the course of centuries. Humours were believed to influence the workings of the body, but also the defining characters of each individuals; any sign of "distemper"

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[157] Jouanna Jacques and Neil Allies, "The Legacy of the Hippocratic Treatise The Nature of Man: The Theory of the Four Humours*". Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers*, Brill (2012): 335–360.

corresponded with an overabundance of blood, pleghm, choler (yellow bile) or black bile. The inner imbalance, moreover, became intrinsically tied with the influence of the celestial bodies, establishing a connection between the individual and the cosmos surrounding them. Thus, a saturnine disposition implied a tendency for melancholia and depression, as well as an excess of black bile, whereas a preponderance of blood corresponded with a jovial character and outbursts of impulsivity:

> ULYSSES
> And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
> In noble eminence enthroned and sphered
> Amidst the other, whose med'cinable eye
> Corrects the influence of evil planets,
> And posts, like the commandment of a king,
> Sans check, to good and bad. But when the planets
> In evil mixture to disorder wander,
> What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,
> What raging of the sea, shaking of Earth,
> Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors
> Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
> The unity and married calm of states
> Quite from their fixture! (1.3.93-106)

Naturally, the theory of humours typified a broad range of behaviors and outwards appearances; yet an early modern audience had little difficulties in recognising each temperament in the characters of a play. Playwrights knew how to take advantage of these "archetypes" for comedic purposes: over the course of the seventeenth century, Ben Jonson and George Chapman had popularized the "comedy of humours", a genre in which the mannerisms, personality and temperament of characters were informed by their predominant humour[158].

In *Troilus and Cressida*, there is no scarcity of mentions of the "humorous predominance" (2.3.137-140). Stating or implying that the epic heroes of the Trojan war suffer from an excess of humour, thus, imparts an inherently comedic overlay to the illustrious "matter of Troy": the greater the excess, the more ludicrous the effect:

> THERSITES
> I would fain see them meet, that that same young

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[158] "Comedy of humours". Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/art/comedy-of-humours. Last accessed 18 February 2024.

> Trojan ass that loves the whore there might send
> that Greekish whoremasterly villain with the sleeve
> back to the dissembling luxurious drab, of a sleeveless
> errand. O' th' t'other side, the policy of those
> crafty swearing rascals—that stale old mouse-eaten
> dry cheese, Nestor, and that same dog-fox,
> Ulysses—is proved not worth a blackberry. They
> set me up, in policy, that mongrel cur, Ajax, against
> that dog of as bad a kind, Achilles. And now is the
> cur Ajax prouder than the cur Achilles, and will
> not arm today, whereupon the Grecians ⌐begin⌐ to
> proclaim barbarism, and policy grows into an ill
> opinion.(5.4.5-18)

Achilles, for instance, shows a sanguine temperament, boisterous and prideful. It is interesting that Ajax, who — as Thersites emphasizes in the passage quoted above — likewise suffers from an overabundance of pride, proposes bloodletting to cure Achilles of his condition. On one hand, this was considered a traditional cure to balance an excess of blood; on the other one, ironically, it is the same treatment that Achilles would reserve for Hector (5.1.1-3), as he plans to warm his blood the night before killing him:

> ULYSSES
> We saw him at the opening of his tent.
> He is not sick.
> AJAX *(About Achilles)*
> Yes, lion-sick, sick of proud heart. You may call
> it melancholy if you will favor the man, but, by my
> head, 'tis pride. But, why, why? Let him show us a cause.— (2.3.90-95)
> AJAX *(about Achilles)*
> I'll let his humorous blood. (2.3.221)

Age is also relevant, as a child, a young man and an elder may display very different imbalances of humors compared to one another. While the younger heroes show sanguine tendencies, for instance, Nestor, through Patroclus' imitation, is implied to suffer from an overabundance of pleghm — a humour generally associated with old age, befitting the most elderly of the generals. Pleghm also coincides with the tendency to launch long winded tirades, which, in the case of Nestor, are usually elaborate recollection of his youth. This shows, moreover, that

without being cured, the imbalance of humours does not simply disappear over time, but may evolve and transform:

> ULYSSES
> And then, forsooth, the faint defects of age
> Must be the scene of mirth—to cough and spit,
> And, with a palsy fumbling on his gorget,
> Shake in and out the rivet. (1.3.176-179)

The effect of unbalanced body humours may also be enhanced or diminished by imbibing, tasting or otherwise consuming other fluids[159]. Troilus, who deems himself "weaker than a woman's tear" (1.1.9) longs to be reinvigorated by "Love's thrice-repured nectar" (3.2.20), a far stronger liquor than the watered-down fantasies of Cressida he has consumed insofar. Yet, "the fluid mechanics of strong "spirits" corrupt as easily as they fortify"[160]: just as "the salt of broken tears" (4.4.47) corrupts the kiss between the separated lovers, Troilus — after his single night with Cressida — is irrevocably set on the course of disappointment and denial, showing an utter incapability of discerning the truth from his own delusions:

> TROILUS
> If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
> If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
> If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
> If there be rule in unity itself,
> This is not she.
> (…)
> The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,
> The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics
> Of her o'ereaten faith, are bound to Diomed. (5.3.145-167)

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[159] Although comparative analysis between Troilus and Cressida and other Shakespearean plays is not the purpose of this thesis, it is particularly interesting the commentary offered by Karen Raber in "Fluid Mechanics: Shakespeare's Subversive Liquors", *Culinary Shakespeare: Staging Food and Drink in Early Modern England*, Duquesne University Press (2016):75-94. "Borrowing Galenic medical theory about the dry, hot nature of liquor, Falstaff makes the case that sack can invigorate the necessary courage for war in a soldier like himself, can muster his wit, raise the temperature of his blood, and so free the circulation of both bodily fluids and acquired skills." Raber's commentary on Henry IV is comparable with Achilles' plan to warm Hector's blood with Greek wine, enhancing his battle spirits (5.1.1-3). Poignantly, Falstaff, like Achilles in Troilus and Cressida, is a "bad soldier whose role in defending English interests comes second to his maximization of pleasure, suggesting a link between his indulgence in sack and his indulgence in near-treasonous incompetence": despite the common tendency to self-satisfaction, the heroics of war appear to be, in both situation, barely tolerable without wine.

[160] Raber, p.96.

As Battel comments, Troilus' incapability to discern the (arguable) falsity of Cressida makes him quite similar to Menelaus, who "is said to be similar to a drinker whose palate is so indiscriminating that he would consume even the "turbid sediment at the bottom of a wine cask that is broached and left open for so long that the wine has gone flat" (4.1.63-64)"[161]. Yet Menelaus is not the only victim of Helen's deadly influence:

> DIOMEDES
> She's bitter to her country: hear me, Paris:
> For every false drop in her bawdy veins
> A Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple
> Of her contaminated carrion weight,
> A Trojan hath been slain: since she could speak,
> She hath not given so many good words breath
> As for her Greeks and Trojans suffer'd death. (4.1.74-80)

In commenting the association between the introduction of liquors in Renaissance England and the perception of a progressive deterioration of English moral and cultural values, Raber argues that "each investment in foreign lands, foreign goods, and foreign liquors becomes a sign of appetites out of control, further opening the national body to substances, behaviors, and desires outside its usual, healthful, strictly delimited boundaries."[162] Helen's deadly bitterness, thus, affects the "national body" of Greeks and Trojans alike just like an excess of humor would influence a human body, with harmful effects. To conclude, besides its undoubtedly caricatural effects, representing the imbalance of humours in *Troilus and Cressida* suggests not only the symbolical corruption of the epic material and the nullification of its homogeneity, but also the inherent capability of narratives to adapt to the vessel into which it is transposed — for instance, from a genre to another.

The second type of bloated body image in *Troilus and Cressida* further enhances this idea, playing on the notion of a grotesque body, halfway between animal and human, assembled with spurious parts. Such is the case of Ajax, defined by an excess of disjointed and disharmonious virtues.

> ALEXANDER
> He is as valiant as the
> lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant, a

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[161] Battell.
[162] Raber, p. 96.

man into whom nature hath so crowded humors

that his valor is crushed into folly, his folly sauced

with discretion. There is no man hath a virtue that

he hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attaint

but he carries some stain of it.(1.2.24-30)

In the case of Achilles, the hero's ties with his epic identity are used to reflect his excessive pride (for instance, in his monologue during the war council, Ulysses refers to him with progressively more solemn and ridiculous titles: "large Achilles" (1.3.166), "god Achilles"(1.3.173), "Sir Valor" (1.3.180). The same technique is used for Ajax, as Shakespeare cites mythological figures to convey the ironically disproportionate nature of the hero.

He hath

the joints of everything, but everything so out of

joint that he is a gouty Briareus, many hands and

no use, or purblind Argus, all eyes and no sight. (1.2. 31-34)

Both the creatures cited in this passage have generally positive roles in classic mythology. Briareus is an Hekatoncheires, blessed with a thousand eyes and hands, spawn of Gaia and Uranus. In the *Iliad*, Thetis tells Achilles of how she brought Briareus to Mount Olympus to intervene as the gods conspired against Zeus — preventing the latter from being dethroned. Argus, on the other hand, is the slayer of Echidna, mother of monsters. In both cases, the giants' monstrosity corresponds with their extraordinary capabilities, allowing these two figures to safeguard the general order of things. Being but a diseased reflection of both creatures, Ajax embodies chaos, irrationality and lack of self-awareness instead. He is also a mere imitation of Achilles, in the eyes of the generals. In this respect, Ajax is a champion of the leaders' own making:

ULYSSES

If the dull brainless Ajax come safe off,

We'll dress him up in voices; if he fail,

Yet go we under our opinion still

That we have better men. But, hit or miss,

Our project's life this shape of sense assumes:

Ajax employed plucks down Achilles' plumes.(1.3.389-394)

Besides representing "the condition or fact of being repulsively unnatural or outrageously or offensively wrong"[163], monstrosity often encapsulates the anxiety of a specific time and place, as well, the crumpling of systematic structures and the failure of natural qualities of characters, morals and appearance. In a modern study of the monstrous body, Jerome Jeffrey Cohen postulates that, by holding an active and bilateral relationship with what is perceived as "normal", monsters preserve cultural boundaries and precepts by embodying what is forbidden, or what has been lost when it should have been preserved[164]. Thus, combined with the previous commentary on "body vessels" for the epic material, Ajax' monstrosity could be interpreted as a warning sign that all the bodies represented on stage are, in fact, unnatural and unreal. An elaborate *façade* to cover a shattered sense of identity[165] — for, as Ulysses reminds us, we are watching but a group of performers re-enacting their epic predecessors:

> With him Patroclus,
> Upon a lazy bed, the live-long day
> Breaks scurril jests,
> And with ridiculous and silly action,
> Which, slanderer, he imitation calls,
> He pageants us. Sometime, great Agamemnon,
> Thy topless deputation he puts on,
> And, like a strutting player whose conceit
> Lies in his hamstring and doth think it rich
> To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
> 'Twixt his stretched footing and the scaffollage,
> Such to-be-pitied and o'erwrested seeming
> He acts thy greatness in; (1.3.150-162)

This instance, in which we are offered a description of a pantomime — with a clear focus on the performative intent that drives it — breaks, if only for a moment, the immersion of the play, reminding the audience that those onstage are, in fact, professional actors, embodying *dramatis personae*. The numerous allusions to imbalanced, artificial, monstrous bodies, then, can be re-contextualized as continuous reminders of the fictitious nature of the play. In respect of the thematic

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[163] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "monstrosity (n.), sense 2.b", https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1519860676. Last accessed 18 February 2024.

[164] For a complete reading of the features of the monstrous body, I recommend Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Theory: Reading Culture*",* University of Minnesota Press (1996).

[165] As mentioned in the introductory section of the chapter, with "identity" I am referring to the complex of defining features that provide the sense of a unified, coherent and homogenous nature.

reading of *Troilus and Cressida*, this is, to me, a clear instance of narrative metalepsis. This rhetoric device can be defined as:

> the shift of a figure within a text (usually a character or a narrator) from one narrative level to another, marking a transgression of ontological borders. This procedure makes the reader or addressee aware of the fictional status of a text and ensures the maintenance of a specifically aesthetic distance, thereby counteracting any experience of immersion in the literary work. At the same time, it can be used as an effective instrument for producing *enargeia* (vividness), and through its sudden and surprising character it can also create strong effects of pathos as well as comedic effects.[166]

Gérard Genette's definition of metalepsis describes it as an act of trespassing the borders of the narrative, either from the outside (when the narrator invades the diegetic universe of the literary works, at times interacting directly with characters and events) or from the inside (a character takes notice the fictitious nature of his literary context, attempts or manages to evade from the diegetic universe and interacts with the real world)[167]. As Liviu Lutas emphasises, "narrative levels are less conspicuously transgressed through the literary device of the voice of the narrator. They are more clearly transgressed by a represented physical meeting between two characters that are not supposed to exist in the same world" [168]. Ulysses' passing mention of strutting players appears to fall more appropriately in the second category; as "metalepsis makes us aware of our role as recipients"[169], the distance between the narrative of *Troilus and Cressida* and our reality is suddenly breached. As we become aware of the interstitial distance between reality and performance, we take notice of the discrepancy between the actor and their persona, of the act of dynamic, continuous mediation between one and the other, and — in extremis — of the dialogic relationship that is established between the narration and its recipients. In other words, we gain the transversal sense of awareness that we might gain during the liminal phase of a rite of passage; this occurrence merely takes place in a profane context.

The "ritualization" of the act of narration appears coherent with the displacement of rituals from the (absent) realm of the sacred to facets of the profane, which was discussed in the previous chapter, over the course of the anthropological analysis of Troilus and Cressida. Moreover, it resonates with the derivative process — the shift occurring from ritual to theater — described by

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166 Peter Möllendorff, "Metalepsis," Oxford Classic Dictionary, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/ 9780199381135.013.8231. Last accessed 18 February 2024.
167 Gérard Genette, "Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method", translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1979):234–235.
168 Liviu Lutas, "Metalepsis in Different Media", in *Beyond Media Borders Volume 2*, Palgrave Macmillan (2021):149.173.
169 Ibidem, p.154.

Turner. From this perspective, the literal "embodiment of the matter of Troy" discussed at the opening of this section may call to mind the cultural practice of "embodying spirits" by way of a medium. As a spirit medium intercedes, by providing vocal and gestural performances, between the spiritual context and the physical domain, an actor does the same by embodying — for the duration of a play — the "spirit" of a character. Both figures rely on highly codified language, which falls within a definite set conventions, and may be shunned by the rest of society, as the act of mediating is inherently tied with the uncertainty of the liminal. In the context of theatrical performances, there may even be — in present times, like in antiquity — instances in which the actor finds themselves at the center of a so-called "cult", with solemn connotations, as they are reputed to be the appropriate "mask" for a certain kind of characters.

The peculiarity of Troilus and Cressida and its pointed choice to stage the act of narration is that, by portraying it in a contradictory, ironic, paradoxical light, the solemnity of the ritual is contradicted and even inverted. By revealing the artifices of theatrical illusion and the imperfect, excessive bodies of its actors, whose only task is to provide entertainment for the audience, the act of narrating the War of Troy is divested of its gravitas: it becomes non-serious, almost parodic. This, in turn, devalues both the active medium (the actors) and the mythical spirit of the original epic.

It is particularly interesting that the ironic, paradoxical effect is achieved through the use of rhetoric devices relying on spatial displacement and repetition or the collapse of framings — like metalepsis, which, as will be discussed, can be achieved through an array of other figures of speech and techniques. By offering meta-theatrical insights, these rhetoric strategies pull the audience's perspective in the interstitial"between and betwixt" that unites fiction and reality. It could be said that *Troilus and Cressida* makes use of the language of liminality to subvert the ritualization of narration, thus creating an "anti-ritual": as a result, the play seems to suggest that nothing — not even the act of profane mediums — is truly sacred.

As the commentary on liminality by Zittoun proved crucial to steer the investigation in the direction of language analysis, highlighting the dynamics between the characters' *personae* and identities, it appears appropriate to continue in this direction and delve deeper into their performances and moods of expressions. Thus, whereas in chapter 4 the analysis considered how theatrical performances are instruments of social dissent, the following section will explore how the notions of identity and persona (which are normally referred to in the context of social interactions) are used to subvert, evade and break the narrative in the context of theatrical play.

In terms of analyzing the aforementioned rhetoric devices, as Möllendorff suggests that metalepsis can be achieved through a variety of techniques, the analysis will take into consideration

anachronisms, ekphrasis and mise en abyme[170], all figures that contribute to break immersion and jar the perceptions of readers. Finally, as the definition of metalepsis implies the presence of a narrator, it will be interesting to consider whether some of the characters that have already shown metaleptic tendencies may embody this particular function.

5.3 *The voice of lions and the act of hares*. Role playing, role distance and ekphrasis in *Troilus and Cressida*

The previous segment discussed the symbolic meaning of body representations in *Troilus and Cressida*, determining that the play conveys the notion of the body as a performative vessel for the matter of the epic. Recurrent images of bloating and deformity, either induced by an excess of fluids or by a grotesque blend of body parts, emphasize the artificial nature of the characters of the play, whose lack of homogenous identity is hidden in plain sight behind their *dramatis personae*. Lastly, analysing Ulysses reference to strutting players (1.3.157), the pointed use of narrative metalepsis was highlighted, suggesting that the resulting breach of narrative framing is not only deliberate, but indicative of *Troilus and Cressida*'s underlying theme (theater and dramatic performances) and the corresponding connotation of an "anti-ritualized" act of narration.

As the use of narrative metalepsis proved a particularly interesting clue of the play's meta commentary on theater, by way of allowing readers and spectators to access the interstitial dimension between fiction and reality, identity and persona, it appears appropriate to continue the investigation accordingly. In this section of the chapter, thus, the focus will be on the performative moods of the characters, investigating whether the *dramatis personae* of the play posses the same degree of self-awareness Ulysses demonstrates and how they relate to their roles. Taking into consideration the literary antecedents of Troilus and Cressida, I will attempt to establish whether the characters' sense of identity is located within the play — that is, if their identity and persona coincide — or rather displaced to the long-standing literary tradition of the Trojan narrative, creating other liminal instances. The analysis will point out and consider any technique or rhetoric device that may support the reading of *Troilus and Cressida* as a "play about playing" that inverts the rituality of theater against itself, by relying on the symbolic language of liminality.

The two protagonists of the play have been chosen as case studies for this part, as they aptly represent the two "halves" of the play. The discussion will begin with Cressida, who appears far

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[170] To avoid confusion, I explain each of these rhetoric device as their occurrence emerges in the text — and, in turn, in the present analysis.

more indicative of Shakespeare's interest in portraying "the experience of being reiterated"[171] than her male counterpart.

> PANDARUS
> Let all
> constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids,
> and all brokers-between panders. (204-206)

Cressida is not directly derived from the *Iliad* and the poems of the Epic Cycle, but rather acquires her archetypical features over the course of later literary works — most of which, as discussed in chapter 2, begin to diverge from the original genre of the Trojan narrative. Having a relatively briefer literary journey, Shakespeare's Cressida appears more coherent with her precedent namesakes, as her identity is decanted from works tonally and thematically more similar to the play. Her identity, thus, is far more solid than the fragmented embodiment of the Homeric heroes; yet such consistency appears paradoxically, when considering that her role in Troilus and Cressida is to represent the epitome of falsehood. The general picture emerging from *Troilus and Cressida* is that of an adept actress, a woman who "masters affect control, the lack of which she condemns in others, and employs various roles in her play with Troilus and Diomedes (…)"[172].

> CRESSIDA
> Guardian! Why, Greek!
> DIOMEDES
> Foh foh! Adieu. You palter.
> CRESSIDA
> In faith, I do not. Come hither once again.
> ULYSSES
> *(aside to Troilus)*
> You shake, my lord, at something. Will you go?
> You will break out.
> TROILUS
> (*aside*)
> She strokes his cheek! (5.2.56-61)

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[171] Linda Charnes, "So unsecret to ourselves': Notorious Identity and the Material Subject in Troilus and Cressida", *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*, Harvard University Press(1993):70–102.
[172] Roland Weidle, "For They Are Actions that a Man Might Play" Role Play, Role Distance, Ego Identity and the Construction of Shakespearean Tragedy", *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 29:2 (2004):173-197.

As discussed in chapter 2, a recurring and consistent feature of Cressida's character —
particularly in the *Roman*, the *Filostrato*, and *Troylus and Cryseida* — is a degree of consciousness,
which allows her to acknowledge her moral fallacies. Without it, she would be utterly irredeemable
to the eyes of readers, which would in turn make Troilus appear exceedingly foolish in falling for
her.[173] Shakespeare's Cressida retains the same sense of self-awareness, which allows her to
maintain the measure of distance necessary to preserve herself while switching roles.

A dialogue with Pandarus offers further insight on this. As they survey the battleground,
Pandarus comments that Cressida, in typical feminine fashion, would result incomprehensible for
any man (1.2.263). Cressida responds by stating that she would preserve herself in every possible
way, lying "a thousand watches" at every ward she sets for herself. The double entendre on lying —
as in telling lies and physically lying down — is a passage that has garnered much attention; the
most interesting part is the following:

> PANDARUS
> Say one of your watches.
> CRESSIDA
> Nay, I'll watch you for that; and that's one of the
> chiefest of them too: if I cannot ward what I would
> not have hit, I can watch you for telling how I took
> the blow; unless it swell past hiding, and then it's
> past watching.
> PANDARUS
> You are such another!

Cressida, here, is acknowledging that she cannot prevent being seduced; she knows, however,
that she can look at Pandarus — the meddler *par excellence* — to determine how to act next ("I can
watch you for telling how I took the blow"), at least until her seduction becomes known to others
("swells past hiding"). When that becomes noticeable, it is "past watching" — turning to Pandarus
to protect herself would no longer be useful her. To which her uncle answers: "you are such
another". Whether he means different from other women or different from the rest of the less
socially adept characters, it is unclear; the former could be excluded because of Cressida's frequent
comparison with Helen, and the latter seems unlikely to me as other characters (besides Troilus)
appear unaware of the inner workings of Trojan society. Taking into consideration the notion that
we are witnessing "strutting players" at work, however, this interaction can be read differently.

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[173] For a discussion on Cressida's self-awareness as her redeeming quality, see *2.4* in this thesis.

Since Pandarus is the chief enactor of the love plot between her and Troilus in almost all iterations, it seems that Cressida is not only aware of her own role, but also of the roles of other players. As she lies her thousand watches, she knows well what is expected of her. Should this new iteration of her story wander off from the set narrative, she knows that she can look to Pandarus — to whom her persona is inextricably tied — for clues.

In discussing Pandarus' penchant for the enterprise of performative entertainment in chapter 4, it was stated that he appears far more concerned with offering a spectacle to the audience than the fate of Troy. This impression is enhanced by his behaviour in the scene where his labour comes to fruition. As the lovers finally meet in the orchard, Pandarus acts like a stage director. From the start, he feeds Troilus' giddiness at the prospect of meeting Cressida (and, to a certain extent, he seems to instruct Troilus on how to act accordingly in her presence):

> PANDARUS
> She's making her ready; she'll come straight.
> You must be witty now. She does so blush and
> fetches her wind so short as if she were frayed with
> a spirit. I'll fetch her. It is the prettiest villain. She
> fetches her breath as short as a new-ta'en sparrow. (3.2.29-33)

Once Cressida appears on the scene, Pandarus's directions become more frenetic. He moves the lovers about, positioning them to the (at times voyeuristic) benefit of the audience. There is a noticeable emphasis on terms related to the context of theater: Cressida's veil is a "curtain" to be drawn up, showing her "picture":

> *(Cressida offers to leave.)* What, are you gone again?
> You must be watched ere you be made tame, must
> you? Come your ways; come your ways. An you
> draw backward, we'll put you i' th' thills.—Why
> do you not speak to her?—Come, draw this curtain
> and let's see your picture. (*He draws back her veil.*)
> Alas the day, how loath you are to offend daylight!
> An 'twere dark, you'd close sooner.—So, so, rub on,
> and kiss the mistress. (*They kiss.*) (3.2.42-50)

Once Pandarus' intrusions dwindle, Cressida appears set on playing her part, no matter how distasteful it may be. In order to remain faithful to her literary identity, she maintains her role. This results in another interesting passage:

TROILUS

 What offends you, lady?

CRESSIDA

 Sir, mine own company.

TROILUS

 You cannot shun yourself.

CRESSIDA

Let me go and try.

I have a kind of self resides with you,

But an unkind self that itself will leave

To be another's fool. I would be gone. (3.2.144-151)

Taken at face value, the last words from Cressida appear no less than prophetic: despite her willingness to remain with Troilus, she is destined to become "another's fool"[174]. Remaining within the perspective of the thematic reading of the *Troilus and Cressida*, however, Cressida seems to be explaining her part to Troilus, and by extension to the audience; in order to remain true to herself, she will play false with him. Ironically, it is Troilus — apparently unaware of the subtext — to suggest that Cressida cannot shun herself, perhaps unknowingly contributing to her decision to remain "in character" to the end of the performance. Her narrative purpose, just like Pandarus', is to "leave all as I found it, and there an end" (1.1.90). And indeed, after her betrayal, (that is, once she has fulfilled the audience's expectations) she disappears from the narrative, leaving Troilus alone to carry on the play to its end :

Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart.

Th' effect doth operate another way.

 Go, wind, to wind! There turn and change together.

He tears up the paper and throws the pieces in the air.

My love with words and errors still she feeds,

But edifies another with her deeds. (5.3.119-123)

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[174] Just as Pandarus' theatrical reference to the stage curtain, this term appears loaded with double meaning. In Troilus and Cressida, the role of Shakespearian fool falls on Thersites — the only character who is licensed to tell the truth, no matter how unpleasant. Cressida's words may hold a number of different implications. She is expressing her fear that love will make her act foolishly. She is warning Troilus that she will be unkind, as she won't be faithful to him; she is telling the audience that at the close of the play, she will play her role at the hands of another writer. She is stating that if she were to renounce to her mask, her identity will be undermined. As long as they remain unexpressed, all these statements are simultaneously true.

A previous passage of the play offers some pointed insights on the subject of Cressida's insincere words. As the lovers' idyll has come to an end, Cressida is rudely woken by Pandarus and forced to join Calchas in the Greek camp:

CRESSIDA
O you immortal gods! I will not go.
PANDARUS
 Thou must.
CRESSIDA
 I will not, uncle. I have forgot my father.
I know no touch of consanguinity,
No kin, no love, no blood, no soul so near me
As the sweet Troilus. O you gods divine,
Make Cressid's name the very crown of falsehood
If ever she leave Troilus! Time, force, and death
Do to this body what extremes you can,
But the strong base and building of my love
Is as the very center of the Earth,
Drawing all things to it. I'll go in and weep—
PANDARUS
 Do, do.
CRESSIDA
 Tear my bright hair, and scratch my praisèd cheeks,
Crack my clear voice with sobs, and break my heart
With sounding "Troilus." I will not go from Troy.
(They exit.) (4.2.110-116)

What matters here is not Cressida's masterful use of dialectics, reinforcing the sense of a narrative from which she cannot be removed ("Make Cressid's name the very crown of falsehood\ if ever she leave Troilus!" 4.2.108-107) but rather her reliance on ekphrasis in the last part of her speech. This rhetoric device "refers to the literary and rhetorical trope of summoning up—through words—an impression of a visual stimulus, object, or scene"[175].

Ekphrasis makes an appearance in Ulysses' summation of Achilles and Patroclus' antics, in the scene of the war council, enhancing the comical image of their pantomime. Its deployment by Cressida, on the other hand, emphasizes that her grief is told, rather than shown: she describes a set of quintessential, iconic manifestations of despair (tearing her hair out, stretching her cheeks, crying), proclaiming she will enact it out of sight. On one hand, as her words ring contrived and

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[175] Michael Squire, "Ekphrasis," Oxford Classic Dictionary, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.2365. Last accessed 18 February 2024.

excessively pathetic, Cressida achieves a parodic effect, much like Ulysses in the previously discussed scene. On the other one, displacing the action offstage serves as a reminder to the audience that what they are witnessing is only a performance. Cressida's pain is artificial, and she is merely playing. Ekphrasis, thus, creates yet another breach between narrative framings, eliciting a feeling of alienation as the audience experiences once more the distance between identity and persona.

By providing a description of something visual, the use of ekphrasis offers an alternative to the typical staging techniques of theater. In this situation, Cressida's verbal depiction of a series of codified gestures that invoke her grief — while she does not actively perform her suffering — give the scene an insincere, almost contrived sensation. A statement by Troilus from his encounter with Cressida may allow us to gather a few insights on the juxtapositions of describing intents and acting on them:

> TROILUS
> O, let my lady apprehend no fear: in all Cupid's
> pageant there is presented no monster.
> CRESSIDA
> Nor nothing monstrous neither?
> TROILUS
> Nothing, but our undertakings; when we vow to weep
> seas, live in fire, eat rocks, tame tigers; thinking
> it harder for our mistress to devise imposition
> enough than for us to undergo any difficulty imposed.
> This is the monstruosity in love, lady, that the will
> is infinite and the execution confined, that the
> desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit. (3.2.75-84)

In discussing the nature of love, Troilus relies on two euphemisms. The first, "Cupid's pageant", aligns with the plethora of theatrically-related terms used by Pandarus in the same scene. Paradoxically, Troilus sees nothing abnormal in the dazzling spectacle of love itself. What is abnormal (monstrous) is the fact that, when in love, we promise more than what we are realistically able to do. Having commented on the nature of monstrosity before, Troilus' use of the word may be considered in a similar manner: it is an implicit warning. Declaring an intent and actually managing to make good on them are simply incompatible actions, as the human being is severely limited by itself. Hence, relying on the use of ekphrasis allows the play to be as honest as possible. In

reference to her proclamation of grief, since "act is a slave to limit", Cressida is simply content to describe the impossible, rather than enacting it.

Troilus' observations may provide the impression that he too, like Cressida, maintains a level of self-awareness concerning his dramatic role. The rest of the fragment, however, suggests the exact contrary. In response to the prince, Cressida comments:

> They say all lovers swear more performance
> than they are able and yet reserve an ability that
> they never perform, vowing more than the perfection
> of ten and discharging less than the tenth part
> of one. They that have the voice of lions and the
> act of hares, are they not monsters?
> TROILUS
> Are there such? Such are not we. (3.2.85-91)

In light of Cressida's awareness of the fictitious nature of the play, this passage appears incongruous, as if the discussion among the two characters is running on parallel lines of thoughts. Cressida makes an overt comparison between lovers and actors, suggesting that a performance — much like Troilus commented shortly before — will always be less true than reality. As they are both actors and lovers, by logic, their actions are part of an elaborate theatrical illusion. Troilus, however, does not seem to grasp the implication and affirms that they are not as other lovers (and by the same logic, they are not actors, either):

> Few words to fair faith: Troilus
> shall be such to Cressid as what envy can say worst
> shall be a mock for his truth, and what truth can
> speak truest not truer than Troilus. (3.2.96-99)

Roland Weidle includes Troilus among the Shakespearian protagonists that he deems "inept players"[176]. These characters move about "in a dramaturgically saturated world of policy and deception"[177], maintaining an "holistic, undifferentiated view of the self"[178] that leads them, from a disappointment to another, to break under the pressure. Troilus' words prove that he is incapable of distinguishing between "a kind and an unkind self", between his selfhood and his role. To him,

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[176] Weidle, p. 184.
[177] Ibidem, p.186.
[178] Ibidem.

"identity is synonymous with an indivisible soul (…) trying to divide the indivisible is like thinking the unthinkable"[179]. Indeed, when Cressida proves unfaithful to him, Troilus becomes stranded in a logical conundrum. To recognize that the woman betraying him is his beloved Cressida would imply the fallacy of all womankind, and most importantly, a lapse in his judgement (5.2.130-135); yet he cannot deny witnessing Cressida and Diomedes together, nor the sleeve that the Greek takes from her to lure out her previous lover:

> CRESSIDA
> *(giving the sleeve)*
> Here, Diomed. Keep this
> sleeve.
> TROILUS
> *(aside)*
> O beauty, where is thy faith?
> ULYSSES
> *(aside to Troilus)*
> My lord—
> TROILUS
> *(aside to Ulysses)*
> I will be patient; outwardly I will.
> CRESSIDA
> You look upon that sleeve? Behold it well.
> He loved me—O false wench!—Give 't me again.
> *(She snatches the sleeve from Diomedes.)*
> DIOMEDES
> Whose was 't?
> CRESSIDA
> It is no matter, now I ha 't again.
> I will not meet with you tomorrow night.
> I prithee, Diomed, visit me no more. (5.2.79-88)

Faced with his own shortcoming and the unambiguous proof of her infidelity, Troilus spirals from denial to paralysis, then anger and violent ideations. In a cathartic outburst, he intuitively acknowledges the divergence between identity and personhood:

> TROILUS
> O madness of discourse,
> That cause sets up with and against itself!
> Bifold authority, where reason can revolt

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[179] Ibidem.

Without perdition, and loss assume all reason

Without revolt. This is and is not Cressid.(5.2.171-175)

Weidle rightly comments that this moment represents the peak of Troilus' growing sense of awareness throughout the play. His discovery of Cressida and Diomedes marks a shift in his "growing understanding of his strategic insufficiencies"[180], as he acknowledges for the first time the "strategic potential of role play"[181]:

TROILUS
(aside to Ulysses)
Fear me not, my lord.
 I will not be myself nor have cognition
 Of what I feel. I am all patience. (5.2.74-76)

Despite his newly found awareness, however, Weidle argues that Troilus still lacks role distance, the fundamental prerequisite that instead allows Cressida to move fluidly, maintaining coherency between her self and her mask[182]. Despite his epiphany, Troilus' attempt to detach from his identity is born out of an objective need: he is "all patience" to protect himself from the pain of betrayal, just as he was truth incarnate in swearing love to Cressida. What is significant is that in this scene, he seems to begin to suspect that the diegetic world of his narrative surrounding him is not real:

TROILUS
Within my soul there doth conduce a fight
Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate
Divides more wider than the sky and Earth,
And yet the spacious breadth of this division
Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
As Ariachne's broken woof to enter. (5.2.171-181)

Troilus' suffering is born from the intuition that he cannot escape his role. Whereas Cressida has made her peace with her mask, Troilus slams against the divide between reality and narrative framing with no hopes of finding a way out. His story is both labyrinth and spiderweb: he cannot play his part to the end, even though he has been played. From this point onward, he noticeably

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[180] Ibidem.
[181] Ibidem, p.187.
[182] Ibidem, 188.

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becomes more jaded, even impatient when confronting the characters that appear to be still "deluded":

> HECTOR
> O, 'tis fair play.
> TROILUS
> Fool's play, by heaven. Hector.
> HECTOR
> How now? How now? (5.3.46-48)

Perhaps with time Troilus would manage to come to terms with his newfound knowledge; unfortunately for him, the play comes to an end much sooner than that, and denies him the chance to reach Cressida's level of understanding. By the end, Troilus is profoundly damaged, reverting to the same language of his fellow unbalanced heroes: violence.

> TROILUS
> O traitor Diomed! Turn thy false face, thou traitor,
> And pay ⌐the¬ life thou owest me for my horse!
> Diomedes
> Ha! Art thou there?
> AJAX
> I'll fight with him alone. Stand, Diomed.
> DIOMEDES
> He is my prize. I will not look upon.
> TROILUS
> Come, both you cogging Greeks. Have at you both! (5.6.7-12)

From this juxtaposing perspective, the lovers represent the two complementary halves of the play: since Cressida, representing the dramatic persona, is what Weidle deems "the catalyst, the point of friction, through which Troilus' understanding of identity is tested"[183], Troilus symbolizes identity itself, sincere to a fault. It could also be said that they represent each the two fundamental elements of a play: on one hand, the performer; on the other, its audience, giddy and filled with expectations, yet quick to vilify the former as soon as the theatrical illusion is dissipated. Without

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[183] Ibidem, p.186.

the tension between one and the other, a dramatic play would not be possible at all.[184] Hence, by deconstructing the "legend of Troilus and Cressida," Shakespeare "reconstructs theater and drama as a new site not for representing 'identity' but for staging 'kinds of selves.'"[185]

The meta-theatrical aspect of *Troilus and Cressida* introduces some retrospective considerations to the analysis of dramatic performances conducted in chapter 4, where these acts were discussed as an act of subversive expression against the social system.

Through the scope of the anthropological perspective, the pantomime enacted by Achilles and Patroclus appeared to be the main source of conflict within the Greek Camp, as it provided the intensely felt risk of undermining authority and subverting the ranks. As commented, this conflict is never solved in the play, but rather circumnavigated, by adopting an alternative solution — the one that allows the generals to preserve the social order and the hierarchy with minimal risks. Moreover, as the pantomime aimed to ridicule the generals by providing a parody of their authority, it entailed a shift of language that resulted in a sense of incommunicability between the subversive and authoritative elements. From the perspective of social crisis, thus, drama performances appears as irreconcilable acts of subversion, characterized by a general difficulty or impossibility to communicate clearly and resulting in division. From the standpoint of literary interpretations, *Troilus and Cressida* further confirms this interpretation. As discussed in this segment, the play shows the ambiguous and discordant dynamics between one's mask and one's identity, a relationship fraught with misunderstandings and strife. Despite their genuine intentions, Troilus and Cressida never manage to establish an entirely honest connection. Their performance, as well as Achilles and Patroclus's pantomime, also reveal the true danger of mockery. As drama allows for swifts and uncontrollable changes of perspective, our individuality, our identity, our intents are revealed to be fragile, easily undermined by the laughters of whomever is watching and judging.

This is the inherent danger (and greatest power) of the "unserious" liminoid phenomenon. By mirroring society, it can, at any moment, reveal its faulty, unstable, artificial nature. It offers an alienating perspective into what we perceive as otherwise monolithic concepts — such as social order and status — by allowing us to slip in the interstitial space between ourselves and our masks.

From this perspective, the obsession for social order and harmonious unity displayed by the characters of Troilus and Cressida appears like an extensive ekphrasis. Whereas the play offers

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[184] Another peculiar trait of Troilus is his tendency to believe wholeheartedly in his own idealized version of Cressida, despite her repeated warnings. This too resembles the kind of behavior that may be expected from a spectator who finds out they cannot control the narrative. Troilus' unwillingness to recognize that Cressida may deviate from his own imaginary version of her is similar, and his consequent rage when what that inevitably happens, are reminiscent of the complaints of a disappointed audience — which makes the play incredibly modern.

[185] Charnes, p.70.

lengthy description of social consensus and uniformity (the restoration of which, as Turner describes, is the aim of rituals) the "anti-ritual" Troilus and Cressida stages and visually represents the triumph of chaos, disruption, social stagnation and aphasia.

5.4 *Leave all as I found it, and there an end. Mise en abyme* and peripheral characters in Troilus and Cressida

At the end of the first segment of this chapter, the discussion touched upon a variety of rethoric devices, the use of which may result in a total or partial instance of narrative metalepsis, thus providing "practical instances" of liminality. Anachronisms, as discussed in the previous chapter, provide the jarring feeling of encountering a familiar entity out of its habitual place and time. Ekphrasis, as mentioned in the previous segment, introduces some distance between what is observed and the observer, with the person describing the former acting as a medium; the resulting effect can reinforce the narrative framing, but also render them more noticeable to the observer. There remains to consider the use of the *mise en abyme*, which, following André Gide's definition, entails "to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work"[186]. A concept drawn from heraldry and later elaborated upon by Gide, the *mise en abyme* is the reflection or repetition of a whole on a single internal element or component. In the literary context, this may be achieved by way of citing a work that resonates to the plot or characters of the "vessel" piece, or depicting a situation that is identical or similar to the events of the narrative[187]. The resulting effect amplifies the thematic resonance, but it can also reveal the artificial nature of a narration. In both cases, there is a metalepsis.

A *mise en abyme* may force us to confront a disquieting ontological question, as it suggests that if a literary piece can contain or mirror another, the possibility that we — readers and spectators — could be the unknowing characters of a play exceeding our perception, under the scrutiny of unknown audience, is not as remote as we would like it to be. Following this line of thought, we may ask ourselves what is our role and what is our identity, and whether we are aware of our part or not, like Cressida, or if — like Troilus — we are utterly unaware of being surrounded by masks. And if we are but players, who is the narrator?

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[186] André Gide, "Journal 1889–1949", translated by J. O'Brien, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1978):30.
[187] An instance of this may be observed in Hamlet. In 2.1, *The Murder of Gonzago* resonates with the murder of Hamlet's father. In this case, Hamlets hopes to determine the truth of the ghost's story, and judge Claudius' guilt or innocence.

To round off the analysis of role playing, performative moods, rhetoric artifices and breach of the narrative framing, it appears coherent to elaborate on the question introduced in section 5.3, by shifting the focus on the peripheral characters of Troilus and Cressida. In this final segment of the chapter, the discussion will target those, among the *dramatis personae* of the play, who act as stage directors, commentators, narrators and mediums, allowing reality to seep within the confines of the theatrical illusion, and fiction to mirror the real world.

The first character fitting this description, as mentioned in chapter 4, is the armed Prologue who introduces the audience to the field between the Greek camp and Troy. To reiterate what previously discussed, the most salient features of the Prologue are his explicit overlay of ancient Troy and London, the space — reminiscent of a modern no man's land — and his declaration: "beginning in the middle, starting thence away to what may be digested in a play" (Prologue, 28-29). It appears, then that the Prologue seems to be conscious of his *persona*:

> And hither am I come,
> A prologue armed, but not in confidence
> Of author's pen or actor's voice, but suited
> In like conditions as our argument,
> To tell you, fair beholders…(Prologue, 22-26)

Whereas the named characters are sustained by a clearly defined authorial intent — even those whose identity is in shambles — the Prologue is merely the embodiment of a narrative function, hence his lack of "confidence". By declaring what he represents, the soldier introduces the audience to the new "embodiment" of the matter of Troy, as well as inform spectators that what they will witness is limited to "what may be digested in a play. Like or find fault; do as your pleasures are" (29-30). We are reminded, in short, that *Troilus and Cressida* will play out to appease our appetites. The prologue, in this case, acts as a living mise en abyme, mirroring the entirety of the play in a few lines. We will bear witness to a condensed version of the Trojan narrative; we will see the fallacies of fumbling heroes, whose newly minted bodies are defected and unruly, rendering their authority utterly ineffective. We will see those characters' authority waver and break. And we will consume the performance (the implications of "what may be digested", here, provide an eloquent commentary on the quality of the dish) for the pure satisfaction of our entertainment, just as the characters in the play will consume one another for the sport of love and war.

The concept of entertainment, as discussed in the last section of chapter 3, stems from the idea of holding something "between" something else[188]. It appears coherent, then, that characters acting as "entertainers" tend to align, much like the Prologue, with the middle line between the diegetic narrative of the play and the edge of reality.

Ulysses may be included in this category, being the one that explicitly points out the main "play within a play" element with his description of Achilles and Patroclus' pantomime. As commented in chapter 4, moreover, it is Ulysses that opts for substituting Achilles with Ajax, much like a stage director would swap a pretentious actor for a lesser known, but more suitable one. Seeing the conclusions on narrative metalepsis, the long discourse on rank held by Ulysses gains another level of interpretation. By stating that rank is the foundation of order, he reinforces the separation between the narration and reality. Boundaries define role; should they be overlooked or trespassed, "th' unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask" (1.3.88). And yet, it is through Ulysses' nod to "strutting performers" that the narrative frames collapse and the fictional nature of the play reveals itself:

> O, when degree is shaked,
> Which is the ladder of all high designs,
> The enterprise is sick. (1.3.105-107)
> (…)
> so every step,
> Exampled by the first pace that is sick
> Of his superior, grows to an envious fever
> Of pale and bloodless emulation.
> And 'tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot,
> Not her own sinews. To end a tale of length,
> Troy in our weakness stands, not in her strength. (1.3.135-141)

Ulysses appears to consciously set boundaries which he fully intends to break because of necessity. It is the artifice of dramatic performance that the legend of Troy lives on. With his last metonymy, Ulysses states that the Trojan narrative survives not because of its merit, but through the myriad, imperfect iterations of its original plot. Of course, these pale imitations of the epic will never stand comparison to the original material. Yet, as the survival and transmission of the latter depends on the former, the authority of the epic and its solemnity are inconsistent at best, and worthless at worst:

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[188] For an expanded commentary on the etymology of "to entertain", see *3.4 - Liminality as an interface: Victor Turner and the anthropology of experience* in this thesis.

And in this fashion,

All our abilities, gifts, natures, shapes,

Severals and generals of grace exact,

Achievements, plots, orders, preventions,

Excitements to the field, or speech for truce,

Success or loss, what is or is not, serves

As stuff for these two to make paradoxes. (1.3.182-188)

Having dedicated much attention to Ulysses in the previous chapter, it seems appropriate to turn the focus on another "peripheral" character: Thersites, "a slave whose gall coins slanders like a mint" (1.3.76). Thersites has the dubious honour of wearing the mantle of the Fool, whose role is defined by three main characteristics: the first is the "so-called license of speech. It permits the fool to tell the truth (no matter how bitter it is) straight in the face of his master, whether it be a nobleman or the king or the queen themselves."[189]

For that, methinks, is the curse depending

on those that war for a placket. I have said my

prayers, and devil Envy say "Amen."—What ho,

my lord Achilles! (2.3.20-23)

The second requirement, essential to allow all members of the audience to grasp said truth, is dialectics: the Fool needs to be understood by everyone, simply relying on linguistic flexibility and expressiveness. Lastly, the Fool needs to be aware that his license of speech puts him in danger of retribution — usually of the physical kind. Tolerated by Achilles and often mistreated by Ajax, considered as a nuisance by the rest of the camp, Thersites satisfies all three conditions. Like a dissociating Greek chorus, he provides a nearly endless commentary on the events of the play, often recurring to anachronisms:

He beats me, and I rail at him. O worthy

satisfaction! Would it were otherwise – that I could

beat him, whilst he railed at me. 'Sfoot, I"ll learn to

conjure and rise devils but I"ll see some issue

of my spiteful execrations (…) (2.3.3-7)

After this, the vengeance on

the whole camp! – or, rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache!

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[189] Aneta Wadowska. "Thersites the Ironist (Shakespeare the Jester)." *Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature* (2014): 44–58.

for that, methinks, is the curse depending

on those that war for a placket. (2.3. 18-19)

In her analysis on the figure of the Shakespearian fool, Wadowska lingers on a comment that Achilles levels at Thersites ("Why, my cheese, my digestion, why hast thou not served thyself in to my table so many meals?", 2.3.44-46), linking it to the Renaissance tradition of appreciating the company of a fool during meals, in order to render digestion more enjoyable for the guests. In this instance, Wadowska states, Achilles is referring to the same tradition[190]; to elaborate on this, let us return to the mention of the "digested" narrative issued by the Prologue. In the context of what was previously discussed, the correlation between a healthy process of digestion and the Fool's humor acquire another meaning, as Thersites' railing is functional to the audience's reception of the play. In this, we can see another *mise en abym*: Thersites, a fool, offers an ironic commentary to help us digest an ironic re-enactment of the Trojan War:

PATROCLUS

Why am I a fool?

THERSITES

Make that demand of thy creator. It suffices me thou art. (2.3. 70-71)

The deviant, states Turner, represents a cognitive stimulant to those surrounding him.[191] "By exercising his sharp sense of humour permeated with sarcasm on anyone who acts out of his ignorance or "tries to be more than he [or she] is", Thersites exposes their folly in front of his listeners, giving them a chance to correct it."[192]

Thersites is well aware of his role within the narrative; in fact, Thersites' function appears to be so specific to the play that, despite being conscious of his own moral deformity, he never denies himself, owning up both his identity and his mask.

To be a dog, a mule, a cat, a fitchew,

a toad, a lizard, an owl, a puttock, or a herring

without a roe, I would not care; but to be Menelaus, I

would conspire against destiny!

Ask me not what I would

be, if I were not Thersites, for I care not to be a louse of

a lazar, so were I not Menelaus. Hey-day! Sprites and fires! (5.1.165-166)

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[190] Ibidem, p.44.

[191] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to theater*, p.227.

[192] Wadowska, p. 47.

Thersites' willingness to embrace the part of the Fool may stem from the simple fact that, compared to the rest of the Homeric characters, he has more to gain than to lose. Whereas in the *Iliad* Ulysses beats him into silence, in *Troilus and Cressida* he is allowed to bare every inch of despicable truth that the play attempts to dress in artifices.

We come at last to Pandarus — aptly, as his is the task to provide an epilogue after Troilus leaves the scene. His closing speech to the audience is the final and most overt narrative metalepsis of the play, one that tears down the barrier between the spectators and the scene. As mentioned in chapter 4, his words provide the hints for self-reflection that allow us to muse on the events occurring onstage, and to draw a specular comparison with the going-ons of society. In the previous chapter, as the approach remained within the anthropological scope, it has been said that Pandarus has very little to gain for his meddling in terms of social benefits: in fact, it is precisely for his meddling that he is ultimately shunned and abandoned, with his social death preceding his physical demise. From the angle of the meta-theatrical commentary offered by the play, however, Pandarus has the most to gain from ensuring that *Troilus and Cressida* runs its course. His portrayals in subsequent retellings of the Trojan narrative consolidate his image as an interfering, malicious busybody. His identity is inherently tied to the story of the lovers: without *Troilus and Cressida*, he would simply cease to be Pandarus. Much like Cressida needs to play false with Troilus to remain true to herself, Pandarus plays the meddler — ensuring Troilus and Cressida is enacted again and again — to comply with his nature:

> TROILUS
> I'll haunt thee like a wicked conscience still,
> That moldeth goblins swift as frenzy's thoughts.
> Strike a free march to Troy! With comfort go.
> Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe.
> *(Enter Pandarus.)*
> PANDARUS
> But hear you, hear you!
> TROILUS
> Hence, broker, lackey! Ignomy and shame
> Pursue thy life, and live aye with thy name! (5.11.30-36)

Thus, we owe Pandarus the merit and crime of staging *Troilus and Cressida*, and like Troilus, we are ready to shun him for it. Unfortunately for us, however, a play without an audience is no play at all — which is Pandarus' ultimate reminder.

Why should

our endeavor be so loved and the performance so

loathed? What verse for it? What instance for it?

Let me see:

Full merrily the humble-bee doth sing,

Till he hath lost his honey and his sting;

And being once subdued in armèd tail,

Sweet honey and sweet notes together fail.

Good traders in the flesh, set this in your painted

cloths:

As many as be here of panders' hall,

Your eyes, half out, weep out at Pandar's fall;

Or if you cannot weep, yet give some groans,

Though not for me, yet for your aching bones. (5.11.43-53)

Although a play may divert the attention of the audience, when the frames collapse and we are left standing in the world, we realize we are players too; our bodies no less fluid, no less monstrous; our roles no less laughable, pitiful or wretched. We too, actors on the stage of the world, all too accustomed to laughing at tragedies and comedies alike, have been played.

The observations of this last section, combined with the emphasis on the meta-theatrical element that underlies the entirety of *Troilus and Cressida*, allow to draw some final commentary on its reading as "anti-ritual" and the function of liminality within it.

In the previous segments, it has been noted that *Troilus and Cressida* divests the act of narration from its "sacred" connotations, depicting the original material, its *mise-en-scène* and the actors through which it is staged in a demeaning, crude light. Whereas a ritual aims to unify, regulate and restore social equilibrium, moreover, the play — as an anti-ritual — emphasizes the subversive nature of dramatic performances, representing the chaos, discord and the inversion of social norms that may result from them. Lastly, by highlighting the audience's complicity in the thorough execution of the play, it forces spectators to confront the hypocrisy of denying their own participation and their appetite for pleasurable — if scandalous — activities. These elements, with the last being the most poignant, ultimately define the divergence between "ritual" narrations and entertainment. The former stems from a sense of duty, the latter from a sense of need. One is to be appreciated for bringing conformity, unity and harmony; the other is to be reviled, as it debases itself, those who narrate, and those who watch.

Unsurprisingly, this judgement appears coherent with the general cultural background of early modern England, at the onset of what Turner defined as pre-capitalistic ideologies, such as Puritanism. Only work and otherwise similarly "serious" activities are worth pursuing; anything non-productive is a waste of time (a waste of shame, it could be said). *Troilus and Cressida* seems to corroborate and even support this stance. Yet it does nothing to pinpoint the source of the judgement. Is the play imitating life, merely offering a reflection of the going-ons of the world and the beliefs that permeate it? Or is it reality that, if only by reacting to the incendiary contents of *Troilus and Cressida*, inevitably shapes itself around the theatrical illusion?

However we might scour the play for an answer, we will find that it does not provides one. What it provides is possibility: it simultaneously makes its audience aware of the exploding potential of narration and its divisive danger. It shows that anyone — us, first and foremost — can lie by telling the truth, and tell the truth by lying. It warns us against merchants that would profit from selling stories, yet declares that the market holds space for them precisely because we demand to be entertained (a warning that seems almost Baudlerian. "You know him, reader, that refined monster, — Hypocritish reader, — my fellow, — my brother!"[193]). It shows us everything, yet leaves to us the responsibility of deciding what to do with it.

Nowadays, expressing a moral judgement on the narratives we consume and experience has become the last step in the process of commodification of entertainment that was discussed in chapter 3 — a process that, as commented before, is becoming increasingly aggressive. The modern efforts to capitalize on entertainment have led, among other things, to the onset of generative AI, mass production of entertainment "goods", mass reliance on "storytelling" techniques to tailor experiences to our personal preferences; creative involvement is slowly being delegated, shifting from an individual effort to business practices. Much like ongoing trends require us to take a picture of a meal before eating it — we are encouraged to make a spectacle of our moral judgement on entertainment. Yet we are also expected not to get too involved with what we consume. Narrations should revolve around us, not involve us. But this is simply impossible. As stated in chapter 1, the narrator cannot exclude themselves from the narrative. Neither can we. Yet our vision — the play implies — is irremediably flawed, unable to encompass the whole picture unless we observe it from a specific threshold: the limit.

In the anti-ritual that is theater, liminality is not a state of being removed from the world, but as the only stance we can purposefully take in order to see things clearly. In the betwixt and

between, in the state of flux, we can see the dynamic shifts of the physical and cultural world: where they come from, where they are headed, and their — and ours — process of becoming.

Chapter 6 - Conclusions and final considerations

Having reached the end of the analysis of *Troilus and Cressida*, the present dissertation, too, approaches its final considerations — what could be rightly deemed, in light of the arguments developed in the previous chapters, its conclusive "self-reflective" phase. As such, this sixth and final chapter will provide a general overview of the thesis as a whole and discuss the results of the inquiry. Lastly, it will attempt to evaluate the method applied throughout the course of the reading and offer a commentary on its functionality, its benefits and drawbacks, and on the experience as a whole. Before delving into the overview, however, let us briefly return to Victor Turner one last time.

In chapter 3 of *From Ritual to Theater*, Turner recounts the peculiar epiphany that occurred to him as he was invited to take part in "what was called 'an intensive workshop' to 'explore the interface between ritual and theatre… between social and aesthetic drama"[194], and other limina between the social sciences and performing art". The workshop took place in "an upper room in the Performing Garage, a theater in Soho" and the usual gathering place where Schechner's company, the Performance group, prepared for a variety of drama performances. Noticing that, over the course of the rehearsal, "a bricolage of such gestures, incidents, renderings of not-self into not-not-self would be put together and molded artistically into a processual unity"[195], Turner mused on the dialectic relationship between performing and learning — "One learns through performing, then performs the understandings so gained"[196]. All too often, he comments — and we can imagine the scandal with which this statement was received — "alienated students spend many tedious hours in library carrels, struggling with accounts of alien lives and even more alien anthropological theories about the ordering of those lives"[197], rarely having the chance to experience first-hand the applications and implications of their studies, and even less frequently engaging in creative multidisciplinary approaches — such as the one proposed by Victor and Edith Turner over the course of Schechner's workshop. In an attempt to study ethnographies from a different angle, an heterogeneous group of anthropology and dramatic art students gathered at the Performing Garage and, under Turner's supervision, improvised an adapted version of the Ndembu ritual of "name inheritance"[198].

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[194] Turner, p.93.
[195] Ibidem.
[196] Ibidem, p.94.
[197] Ibidem, p.90.
[198] Ibidem, p.94.

Turner concedes that the experimental dramatic enactment of the ritual obtained a less than perfect results. Despite demonstrating a great deal of flexibility and proactivity in coming up with creative solutions to represent and arrange the elements of the ritual, the students focused on details and meanings of the performance that members of the Ndembu culture, as Turner knew, would have conceived very differently. Undoubtedly, if such an attempt was to be repeated nowadays, it would raise concerns and perhaps elicit disapproval, if not an outright accusation of cultural appropriation. Yet, as Turner remarked, the workshop never claimed the goal to offer an authentic experience, nor to bypass the obvious constraints of the students' cultural background. The aim was simply to acknowledge and involve the students affective cognition, rather than negate it. Indeed, the workshop — imperfect as it was — allowed the group to gain a deeper awareness. Discussing the performance for "several hours [the students] agreed that the enactment of the Ndembu ritual was the turning point which brought to them both the effectual structure of social drama and the tension between factionalism and scapegoatism, on the one and, and the deep sense of village 'belonging together' on the other"[199]. The kinesiological and dynamic aspect of the ritual, moreover, provided them with a chance to be utterly involved in the learning experience. A session of "passive" study would have hardly transmitted as effectively the perception of the ritual as something created, performed and transmitted by real human beings.

"Cognitive reductionism has always struck me as a kind of dehydration of social life," writes Turner. "Sure, the patterns can be elicited, but the wishes and emotions, the personal and collective goals and strategies, even the situational vulnerabilities, weariness, and mistakes are lost in the attempt to objectify and produce an aseptic theory of human behavior (…) feelings and desires are not a pollution of cognitive pure essence, but close to what we humanly are; if anthropology is to become a true science of human action, it must take them just as seriously as the structures which sometimes perhaps represent the exhausted husks of action bled of its motivations".[200]

The present dissertation, with its attempt to establish a multidisciplinary dialogue between anthropology and literature, and provide an in-depth reflection on the awareness that may be gained when dwelling in the transitive flux of liminality, ideally stems from the same resolution underlying that workshop and shares its experimental spirit. Although a critical evaluation of the method adopted over the course of the investigation is more than warranted, to ignore or overlook the importance of the experiential component of this thesis would defeat the purpose and the efforts of the arguments developed herein. Such component, thus, will be taken into consideration in

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[199] Ibidem, p.96.
[200] Ibidem, p.91.

providing a critical commentary on the advantages and disadvantages of the approach, as well as its gains and shortcomings.

With this premise, let us now focus on the general overview of the work.

As stated, the present dissertation attempts to establish a dialogic, multidisciplinary framework of research, drawing from the domains of literature and anthropology to provide a critical analysis of *Troilus and Cressida*. The inquiry highlights the shared and diverging elements of these two disciplines, discussing the anthropological-in-the-literary and the literary-in-the-anthropological connotations of the play in an effort to provide a thematically unified reading. In order to direct and further define its scope, the analysis was centered around the concept of liminality, its variations and representations. Being a transformative, fluid, dialogic condition of existence, liminality stands appropriately "between and betwixt" the two disciplinary contexts of reference, mirroring the shifting, uneasy relationship between literary and anthropological narrations. Liminality, moreover, has a prominent role in *Troilus and Cressida*, as the play displays marked meta-theatrical characteristics that rely on the collapse and displacement of narrative frameworks. Lastly, liminality is the key element underlying both sacred rituals and dramatic performances, two different types of cultural expression that Victor Turner examines in his seminal work *From Ritual to Theater*, discussing the post-industrial shift of ritual practices from the domain of the sacred to the profane context of entertainment — and the creation of so-called "liminoid" phenomena.

The aims of the enquiry were threefold. Firstly, to provide an anthropological and literary framework of reference, in order to establish the premise to the dialogic analysis of the play. Secondly, to identify the transversal elements emerging from the dual reading of *Troilus and Cressida*, analysing their resonances, interactions and implications. Thirdly, to provide a unitary reading of a text that has mostly been approached on the basis of its dichotomies and discrepancies, discussing the instances of liminality represented therein, their moods of representation and their conceptual ramifications.

In the opening chapter of the thesis, after discussing the contested, yet intensely felt similarities between anthropology and literature, the query was introduced alongside the structure of the dissertation. The first section, dedicated to the introduction of contextual framework of reference attempted to answer to the first aim of the research, presenting readers with both a general overview of the Trojan narrative over the course of centuries, and of an array of anthropological studies conducted on liminality. The second section of the work then actively engaged with the text

of *Troilus and Cressida* from both scopes, in order to seek out resonating elements and reach a cohesive, thematically coherent reading of the play.

The second chapter traced the many iterations of the Trojan War narrative across the centuries, from its Homeric origins to the early modern retellings, emphasizing the different perspectives and stances of the authors that contributed to the propagation of the original epic. As these stances subsequently shaped and molded the narrative, corroborating some of its aspects while downplaying others, the story of the Trojan War slowly and steadily transitioned between genres, with the legend of the lovers, Troilus and Cressida, beginning as an off-shoot of the epic and growing into an almost independent narrative. Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* appears to draw extensively from its literary predecessors, relying on the known iterations of the story to provide specific connotations to its act of embodying once again the matter of Troy.

Chapter 3 introduced and explored liminality, in an overview that covered the development of this concept from Greek philosophy to sociology, and its further relevance in the context of anthropological studies. Being initially considered a transformative threshold, the concept of the limit became the core of Arnold Van Gennep's studies on rites of passages, which the anthropologist deemed quintessential transformative experiences, allowing individuals to move from a status to another without breaking or subverting the social norms of their surrounding community. Victor Turner resumed Van Gennep's theories to further elaborate on the transformations that liminal experiences underwent at the onset of post-urban, capitalistic societies. Stifled by the arbitrary differentiation of time between work and non-work, the sense of rituality slowly transitioned from the context of sacred practices to the hybrid "liminoid" forms of entertainment and leisure. Such performances serve as receptacles and catalysts for the so-called "social dramas", instances of crisis that allow the continuous renewal of human society. As such, liminoid phenomena — particularly theatrical representations — allow for the spontaneous, subversive and non-productive development of creativity, individuality and awareness.

Having concluded thus the preparatory section of the thesis, chapter 4 delved into *Troilus and Cressida* from the standpoint of the anthropological studies discussed in chapter 3, beginning with the critical application of Turner's polyphasic model of social drama to the greater and smaller instances of crisis represented in the play. The analysis continued with the identification of the so-called star players in the play — individuals that, according to Turner's model, figure most prominently within a community as influential social agitators — with the pantomime staged by Achilles and Patroclus representing a quintessential example of the subversive function of dramatic performances. The focus then switched to social structures and power dynamics. As the lack of

sacred rites became evident, it appeared that liminal instances had indeed been transposed to other aspects of the play — mainly surfacing in the movement of characters between the city of Troy and the Greek encampment, but also in their performative moods and expressions.

Further exploring the shift from ritual to theater, the investigation in chapter 5 switched to the literary context, examining the rhetoric and linguistic elements that communicated the transfer of liminal instances from the domain of the sacred to that of the profane. By relying on rhetoric expressions that make ample use of fragmentation, dislocation and collapse of narrative framing, the pervasive meta-theatrical theme in *Troilus and Cressida* led to the contextualization of the play as an "anti-ritual". From this perspective, liminality manifests as a mean for the audience to achieve critical awareness, but also to gain distance from the imposition of making a spectacle of social and moral judgements. To conclude, thus, liminality allows individuals to truly experience creative and cultural freedom.

To establish the most poignant elements emerging over the course of the enquiry, the dual reading of *Troilus and Cressida* offered a number of insights. First and foremost, an in-depth perspective on how the derivative nature of the play affects its representation of liminal and meta-theatrical instances — in other words, how the literary predecessors of *Troilus and Cressida* impact the characters' performative expressions, defining their individuality, their sense of role playing and their role distance. Secondly, the transition of liminal instances from the context of ritual to that of entertainment pointed out in chapter 4 led to a thorough investigation of the practical applications of language — in the form of rhetoric devices — to convey the sense of liminality, highlighting the development of this concept from the anthropological scope to the literary domain. Lastly, considering *Troilus and Cressida* as an anti-ritual — as a consequence of its reliance on meta-theatrical elements — led to a unified, complementary, coherent vision of the play, balanced "between and betwixt" the two disciplinary domains of reference. The experience as a whole may thus be considered a successful, alternative approach to actively engage the text of a Shakespearian play from a multidisciplinary perspective.

The enquiry did not rely on a *verbatim* application of the anthropological or literary concepts to the text, but rather an analytical and critical approach on the analogies and differences between the two disciplines, in order to elaborate further on the shared elements and reflect on their implications. This approach simplified and expedited the emergence of cues, influencing and steering the unfolding analysis. The two readings aptly complemented each other. For instance, the investigation of the rhetoric devices of chapter 5 was directly derived from the displacement of liminal instances noted in chapter 4; on the other hand, as many liminal instances in the play rely on

the literary predecessors of *Troilus and Cressida* to inform the notions of characters' identity and *personae,* the literary overview conducted in chapter 2 was particularly useful to further investigate liminal and liminoid phenomena in later parts of the discussion.

Most significantly, reading Troilus and Cressida through the combined lens of the anthropological and literary scopes provided an invaluable chance to engage critically with the respective theoretical frameworks and actively produce a comprehensive and coherent interpretation of the text.

Naturally, this particular approach appears well suited to a text with strong derivative influences; results may be different if the same method was to be applied to a play with more subdued connections with the past literary productions. Although narratives are inherently informed and intuitively shaped by the cultural background of origin, *Troilus and Cressida* does constitute a remarkable example of re-elaboration of a long standing myth. It may be argued that the approach of this research, thus, was specifically tailored to the text elected as case study, which would in turn invalidate further attempts to apply the same method in a more general and widespread fashion.

Another criticism that may be moved against this method is the fairly limited section of anthropological theories considered for the purposes of the argument, which — although necessary to steer the enquiry within reasonable boundaries — may provide a biased perspective on the concepts discussed within these pages. This, in turn, leads us back to chapter 1, and to the danger of subjective that, as Clifford Geertz commented, spurred many academics to refuse the affective implication of ethnographical studies. The perspective offered by this dissertation may indeed appear subjective and biased; compared to the tendency to embrace "cognitive reductionism" that Turner discusses in From Ritual to Theater, however, the limited and undoubtedly partial vision presented in this thesis appears as the lesser evil.

As previously stated, the experiential component that unfolded over the course of this research is invaluable in its own right, as the organic process (including seeking out and weaving the connections between starkly different theoretical frameworks, pushing the discussion beyond platitudes and clichés, considering the reverberating implications of meta-theatrical interpretations, and so on) required that I, as Turner would say, "learned through performing and performed what I learned".

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