

## IV. Свіжий погляд на давні тексти

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### **Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: multiple roles, narrative complexities and moral inconsistency**

***Коттеріл Роуланд. «Троїл і Крессіда» В. Шекспіра: численні ролі, нарративні труднощі та моральна непослідовність.***

*У статті аналізується одна з найпроблемніших п'єс Шекспіра «Троїл і Крессіда», яка не має собі рівних за складністю взаємин між дійовими особами та нарративною щільністю. Досить детально розглядається, як саме Шекспір опрацьовував історичний матеріал під час створення п'єси. Особлива увага приділяється численним героям, яких можна назвати головними, якщо враховувати кількість відповідних рядків або ж оцінювати ступінь присутності чи їхню значимість у розгортання драматичного нарративу. Двадцять чітко окреслених, необхідних і взаємопов'язаних персонажів п'єси, що стають відомі глядачеві, виконують певну нарративну функцію та/або несуть сюжетне чи моральне навантаження. Відзначається надзвичайна віртуозність, яку демонструє драматург, узгоджуючи колосальну кількість ролей.*

*У «Троїлі й Крессіді» розгортаються щонайменше чотири значущі сюжетні лінії, які з часом перетинаються одна з одною в загальній мережі подій. Велика кількість окремих дійових осіб створює в п'єсі надзвичайно складну та багатогранну групу, що керується мотивами, які подекуди суперечать один одному. Серед численних персонажів, чия непослідовність (між шляхетною репутацією і ганебною поведінкою, між моральними обітницями і*

реальним вибором) можна звести до любовної або політичної суперечливості, роль Гектора – вірного чоловіка й лідера троянців – бачиться як випадок особистої поразки та моральної необачності.

У «Троїлі й Крессіді» величезна складність драматичних дій успішно співіснує з цілком зрозумілими і навіть захоплюючими особистими стосунками та загальною невизначеністю, що зумовлюється як відкритістю фіналу шекспірівської п'єси, так і її драматичною формою.

**Ключові слова:** Троїл і Крессіда, сюжет, роль, складність оповіді, характер, непослідовність.

Critics have found many problems with *Troilus and Cressida*. Its genre is unclear: early editions would support its assignment equally to “Comedy” as to “History”, while its placing in the First Folio would allow it to be read as “tragic” – an uncertainty arguably inevitable given the play's ostensible double focus, on Trojan love-affairs and Greek machinations, Greek “realism” and Trojan “chivalry”. This double focus has in turn led to uncertainty on a rather basic question; who are the play's main characters? Though the longest role is that of Troilus, the weighty speeches of Ulysses, and the glamour arguably attaching to the roles of Hector and Achilles, have often concentrated the attention of audiences and readers more powerfully than either of the titular lovers. Yet in the presentation of these and other main characters, bearing names familiar from ancient epic and medieval “historical” romance, the drama has often been felt to emphasize not so much faithful or unhappy love, moral or physical heroism, as a damaging set of inconsistencies – between high reputation and low behaviour, between moral professions and actual choices. Above all, *Troilus and Cressida* has been felt – surely a crucial and exceptional fault in any Shakespearean drama – to be, simply, boring. Barbara Everett put the point baldly; *Troilus and Cressida* has no story, or is as near to having none as a Renaissance play can be... No one finds it easy to understand how the play's action develops, if indeed it does develop: or to decide who its chief

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characters – the protagonists – actually are.<sup>1</sup>

A. Dawson, in the introduction to his 2003 Cambridge edition, remarked that “(t)he plot is inconclusive, trailing off without the kinds of resolution we are used to from most of Shakespeare's work”, added that “(t)he characters are both unsympathetic and inconsistent”, and asked “Does [*Troilus and Cressida*] even have an identifiable main character or pair of characters?”<sup>2</sup> D. Bevington, introducing his 1998 Arden edition, found that “Shakespeare's dramaturgical techniques are those of disillusionment”<sup>3</sup> and that “Trojan chivalry is subjected to sceptical deflation in Shakespeare's play”.<sup>4</sup>

A more encouraging attitude was expressed by Brian Morris: “Shakespeare has to create a dramatic structure out of two rather static stories...But the problem is not so difficult as it has sometimes been made to appear.”<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Palmer, noting that “most of the play deals with inaction”, emphasized that “once action begins, then change occurs, in men [sic] and in situation”; he concluded that “Shakespeare has designed an Aristotelean 'action', seizing upon a period of crisis in the [Trojan] war, and admitting no more material than will suffice to embody that action”<sup>6</sup>.

In this article I aim to confront some of the problems located by critics in this wonderful masterpiece – which I take to be both central in Shakespeare's oeuvre and, in its

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<sup>1</sup> Everett B. *The Inaction of Troilus and Cressida* / Barbara Everett // *Essays in Criticism*. – 1982. – Vol. 32. – Issue 2. – P. 119 (p. 119-139).

<sup>2</sup> *Shakespeare W. Troilus and Cressida* / William Shakespeare / Ed. by Anthony B. Dawson. *New Cambridge Shakespeare*. – Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2003. – P. 3, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Shakespeare W. Troilus and Cressida* / William Shakespeare / Ed. by David Bevington. *The Arden Shakespeare. Third Series*. – Walton-on-Thames : Nelson, 1998. – P. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* – P. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Morris B. *The Tragic Structure of Troilus and Cressida* / Brian Morris // *Shakespeare Quarterly*. – 1959. – Vol. 10. – P. 483 (p. 481-491).

<sup>6</sup> *Shakespeare W. Troilus and Cressida* / William Shakespeare / Ed. by Kenneth Palmer. – London and New York : Methuen, 1982. – P. 40, 66, 90.

relational complexity and narrative economy, unsurpassed. First, I set out some of the basic choices demonstrably made by Shakespeare in his overall dramatic treatment of the play's material; crucial here is the sheer number of major roles in the play, whether measured by numbers of lines, by stage presence or by indispensability to dramatic narrative. Secondly, I consider and aim to rebut claims that the play lacks action, arguing that, on the contrary, the uniquely large number of distinct agents within the play engenders an extraordinarily complex and many-stranded group of actions, driven by a set of explicit projects which develop into contention with one another. Thirdly, I discuss the commonly-voiced idea that, amidst many characters whose inconsistencies can be put down to amorous or political immorality, the role of Hector, loyal husband and Trojan mainstay, exhibits a particularly and significantly disappointing case of self-defeat and moral dereliction; I hope to represent, more fully and more sympathetically, the situation in which the play represents Hector as standing, and the character's own awareness of that situation.

*Troilus and Cressida* stages a very large number of major characters. They are major in virtue of their resonantly familiar names, and no less so because of their salient contributions to the structure of the play's narrative action. The first of these points is often concealed under the rubric of 'famous names satirised'; this idea is misleading. One consideration here should be obvious; the play's wide-ranging subject-matter involves the presentation of so many famous 'names' that an audience, for its powers of dramatic orientation and for the sake of its comfortable accommodation to highly prestigious narrative material, needs to feel, in its gradual absorption of the stage presence and weight of so many and such famous characters, familiarised rather than intimidated. A more important factor is Shakespeare's regular habit of offering, to his audiences and readers, a sense of historical

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agents through not only their own self-professions but the perceptions of other characters; we are shown, not so much Hector's or Achilles' heroism in action, Agamemnon's authority or Troilus' attractiveness or Cressida's various promises – not so much any of these characteristics or properties in themselves, but rather their perceptions by others. This is a standard technique, in drama and in Shakespeare; it invites, from audiences off and on stage, not critical or derogatory satire but well-considered judgement.

More generally, the large number of the play's dramatis personae simply, and crucially, corresponds to the range of characters, and hence of salient judgements by and of characters, to be found in the play's source narratives, heroic and amorous. If *Troilus and Cressida* deploys many intersubjective and often sharply-voiced responses, this is what one should expect from a drama whose narratives necessarily involved so many and such various encounters between distinct and individualistic characters. Troilus must persuade Pandarus to help in his wooing of Cressida; he must woo her and win her, she may woo and win him, and both must be separated by Diomedes, who in turn must make love to her and engage with her responses to him. Achilles must refuse his services to Agamemnon and must be persuaded, by Ulysses if nobody else, to return to active combat. Agamemnon must offer a show of authority, Nestor of age, and Ulysses of shrewdness. Hector must display heroic virtue and awareness of the plight at once of his city and his family under his father Priam. Paris and Helen must relate to each other (however else) memorably – and Menelaus must also appear, even if rather a background figure, as to some extent he already is in Homer, neither happy in love nor prominent in the counsels or the conduct of war. Patroclus, conversely, must be shown to matter to Achilles in some imaginably ultimate way.

The stagings of Aeneas, of Ajax and of Thersites might, compared with all this, seem like optional extras. Yet Aeneas

was, from Virgil's epic, universally familiar to an educated audience; Ajax, in respect of both his stature as fighter and his well-known outsmarting (after Achilles' death, in the disputes over the inheritance of his armour) by Ulysses, offered to any dramatist a challenge to distinctive treatment; Thersites, the only acrid and overt critic (in Homer's *Iliad*) of war as such, provided a unique and dramatically valuable perspective on the overall action. Three other characters, again with names and positions well-established in mythic treatments and more recent narrative reshapings, allowed a perspective upon events wider than that of immediate tactical considerations of love and war; Andromache embodies the claims, for herself and all Trojans, of sheer physical survival in the present and future, Cassandra voices an unargued yet plausible sense of Trojan doom, while Calchas, the renegade Trojan, appears at once as the representative of self-centred cowardice and, though negligible in his own person, the guarantor of ultimate Greek victory.

In respect of all these presentations, of characters and of relationships, Shakespeare's treatment, far from foregrounding any supposed emotional or intellectual negativity, merely preserves decorum. After all, these groups, Greek and Trojan, are at war with each other and, each in itself, internally at odds; why would one expect such heroic individualists to be, on the subject of each other, any more kind or tolerant, any less sharp-tongued or rhetorically empowered, in Shakespeare than in Homer or Chaucer? Moreover, why would one expect a dramatic – as against a narrative – treatment of these groups of characters to offer any merely vacuous embodiment of “traditional heroism” – whatever that might amount to? I find it hard to understand what possible alternative “positive” mode of theatrical embodiment is being valorised, as Shakespeare's putative and rejected alternative, by those who, like Bevington, find in *Troilus and Cressida* chiefly a “demystification of the heroes of ancient Greece” or who

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conclude that “[a] sense of a unbridgeable gap between expectation and performance haunts this play”<sup>7</sup>.

It is more fruitful, for an understanding of Shakespeare's dramatic achievement, to stress the extraordinary virtuosity with which he introduces, defines and sustains in sharp definition the colossal number of roles I have surveyed above. Twenty characters in the play bear familiar names and sustain roles of some narrative and/or thematic and moral salience; in Troy and among the Trojans, Priam, his daughter Cassandra, his sons Hector Troilus and Paris, the women – Andromache Cressida and (the Greek) Helen – with whom they are associated, the warrior Aeneas and the uncertainly-defined but highly memorable Pandarus; in the Greek camp, self-divided as it is, Agamemnon and his “loyalist” fellow-Princes and leaders Menelaus, Nestor, Ulysses and Diomedes, and the “dissidents” Ajax, Achilles and Patroclus, together with the critic Thersites and the renegade Trojan prophet Calchas.

In the play's *dramatis personae*, as these are listed in standard editions, there appear five other named characters (Deiphobus, Helenus, Antenor, Margarelon and Alexander, all Trojans) along with unnamed servants. The total cast-list, in a complete modern production, will thus run to scarcely fewer than twenty actors. In itself this number, though large, is not unusual for Shakespearean productions. What stands out, though, is the lack of options for any straightforward doubling of roles between actors; at most a Pandarus could, if it were really necessary, appear also as Menelaus and/or Priam, though little would be gained and something, I'd imagine, lost by such a choice. (I neglect here the fascinating doublings offered by the 2012 production of the play jointly by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Wooster Group, in which Agamemnon became Diomedes and Ulysses did a nice turn as Helen.) All this makes, another way, the same point;

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<sup>7</sup> *Shakespeare W. Troilus and Cressida* / William Shakespeare / Ed. by David Bevington... – P. 19, 76.

the play surpasses, by some way, every other Shakespearean drama – *King Lear* and *Cymbeline* approach it most nearly, but not very nearly – in the number of its well-defined, narratively necessary, and mutually interacting roles. By the same token, the play inevitably – and of course fascinatingly – offers a remarkably wide range of differing perspectives, embodied in distinct individual characters, and in the several different groups to which some but not all of them from time to time acknowledge loyalty, upon the play's ongoing action and upon the standpoints and active options adopted by its agents.

It is time now to turn to a consideration of that action – to make good on my claim, against ideas of inertia and/or confusion, for the play's high degree of narrative complexity, intelligibility and excitement. Dawson is representative among critics in his view that “[t]here are two plots, one devoted primarily to war, the other to love, just as there are two distinct groups of characters, Greeks and Trojans, and two contrasting locales, the Greek tents and the more luxurious mansions of Troy.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly such an analysis can be supported, but it tends towards over-simplification. It is more fruitful to follow closely the order in which the play's first five scenes (after the Prologue) introduce individual characters and groups of characters. It can be suggested, on this basis, that *Troilus and Cressida* deploys no fewer, and perhaps rather more, than four plots – that is, four distinguishable and dramatically significant projects for action which are to some recognisable degree developed and are in due course brought to bear upon one another so as to make up the play's overall network of causally connected events. The full demonstration of this claim would require more space than is available here, but a compressed account of the five scenes between 1.1 and 2.2 may be suggestive.

The first two scenes, 1.1 and 1.2, introduce what can

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<sup>8</sup> *Shakespeare W. Troilus and Cressida* / William Shakespeare / Ed. by Anthony B. Dawson... – P. 13.



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certainly be seen as a (if not “the”) love-plot – that which is highlighted by the play's title. Troilus loves Cressida but finds the prospects of his love uncertain, and tries to enlist Pandarus as his helper. Cressida is solicited by Pandarus on Troilus' behalf and, while giving Pandarus little grounds for encouragement, professes, when left alone, genuine love for Troilus coupled with a resolution to conceal it for the time being. A few points about this exposition attract attention; first Troilus, despondent about his prospects with Cressida (for no obvious reason), also finds tension or contradiction between his love and his role as warrior for Troy against the Greeks – “*Why should I war without the walls of Troy / That find such cruel battle here within?*” (1.1.2-3)<sup>9</sup> – while oscillating, in his preferences, between these supposed alternatives:

*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. (1.1.99-101)

Secondly, Cressida, valuing Troilus above the terms of Pandarus' praise for him, in turn professes to value (or so one might read her enigmatic lines) the flirtatious build-up to consummated love higher than consummation itself or its consequences:

Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing;  
Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing...  
(1.2.246-47)

Thirdly, unforgettable as is the stage presence of Pandarus, and brilliantly as his role is written, the need for his services, on the side of either lover, isn't at all clear; rather, Cressida will accept Troilus' love – it emerges – just when she chooses to do so and without any need of external recommendation.

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<sup>9</sup> All references to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* are taken from The New Cambridge Shakespeare edition, edited by Anthony B. Dawson (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2003)/

These unresolved points linger in the air, and in the minds of audiences and readers, until (and beyond) the later scene, 3.2, central to the play, in which the lovers first appear on stage together. Meanwhile attention moves to the Greek camp and, in 1.3, first to what, as matters develop, one can identify as its “loyalist” component – the four named “Princes”, Nestor, Ulysses, Menelaus and Diomedes, who centre themselves around Agamemnon. In this lengthy and multi-sectional scene, the Greeks sonorously set out the fact that “after seven years' siege yet Troy walls stand” (1.3.12) – that is, that the main ostensible Greek objective (as expressed in the Prologue), “*To ransack Troy, within whose strong immures / The ravished Helen, Menelaus' queen, / With wanton Paris sleeps...*” (Prologue 8-10), has not yet been achieved. In response to this lack of success they offer three lines of thought; one (Agamemnon's and Nestor's point) that it should not lead to melancholy or defeatism, since, as one might say, it simply serves to sort out the men from the boys – “*...In the reproof of chance / Lies the true proof of men*” (1.3.32-33); another (Ulysses's great speech on “degree”), that “*The specialty of rule hath been neglected*” (1.3.78), and that “*...the general's disdained / By him one step beneath*” (1.3.130-31); the third, from Ulysses again, that Achilles and Patroclus, specifically, having withdrawn themselves (as has also Ajax) from active fighting, profess to despise the rational conduct of warfare upon which Ulysses evidently prides himself and by implication his immediate audience:

*They tax our policy and call it cowardice,  
Count wisdom as no member of the war,  
Foretell prescience, and esteem no activities  
But that of hand...* (1.3.198-201).

The debate – if it is that – is interrupted by the arrival from Troy of Aeneas (briefly seen at the end of 1.1) with a challenge, to single combat, from Hector – so far seen, in 1.2, but unheard – to “a Grecian that is true in love”. The

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challenge is accepted by Agamemnon in broad terms; Ulysses and Nestor conclude the scene by arguing for the promotion, as Greek champion against Hector, of not Achilles – though they agree that Hector clearly has him in view and that he alone might defeat Hector – but Ajax. The reasoning seems to be that Achilles, if victorious, would merely become even more “insolent”, whereas Ajax, if defeated, would leave Achilles still in reserve and, if victorious, would “pluck down Achilles' plumes” (1.3.385) and chasten his insubordination.

Throughout this scene it is crucial for a reader to bear in mind – an audience is not likely to fail to realise – that the emergent focusses of concern to the “loyalist” Greeks, Ajax and above all Achilles (and also Patroclus) have not yet taken the stage; they have merely been represented by the powerful but demonstrably tendentious rhetoric of Ulysses. I say “demonstrably tendentious”; herein lies a major oddity of the thought and the plotting of the scene as a whole. Ulysses purports to boost the authority due to Agamemnon as “nerve and bone of Greece” (1.3.55); yet Nestor says, and Ulysses does not deny, that it is Achilles and he alone who might defeat, whether in a staged single combat or, one would suppose, in open battle, the Trojan mainstay Hector:

*...Who may you else oppose  
That can from Hector bring his honour off  
If not Achilles? (1.3.335-37)*

Ulysses' conclusion, remarkably, is that “...*therefore 'tis meet / Achilles meet not Hector...*” (1.3.356-57).

Thus Ulysses seems to place the maintenance of Greek subordination and “degree” higher than even the achievement of the goal of Trojan defeat; to put this another way, he neglects the plausible inference that any defensible claims about the importance of “degree” should, given Achilles' acknowledged excellence in battle, set Achilles above Agamemnon. This conclusion, which seems to escape Ulysses, should not escape audiences (though it figures rarely

if at all in the criticism of the play). One is left to wonder; do the Greeks most desire the ransacking of Troy, or the subservience required by their supposed leader(s)?

The next scene, 2.1, is short and noisy, full of interruptions and competing voices – where 1.3. was long and circumspect in its conversational turn-taking. Yet it is vital to the play's exposition of plot, for it stages the “dissident” Greeks who, in 1.3, were verbally represented but not seen. Above all it stages Achilles – who will, with Hector, increasingly occupy the centre of the play's action in its later Acts. The main issue of the scene, logically (though the bluster and horseplay between Ajax and Thersites may camouflage this) is: what might be Achilles' true reason for withdrawal, from active fighting and supposedly appropriate loyalty to Agamemnon? The clue to an answer comes – seemingly unnoticed by critical tradition though not, I think, by actors – at the end of the scene; Ajax (being perhaps illiterate) has asked Achilles the purport of Hector's challenge, and Achilles eventually answers him –

*That Hector by the fifth hour of the sun  
Will with a trumpet 'twixt out tents and Troy  
Tomorrow morning call some knight to arms  
That hath a stomach, and such a one that dare  
Maintain – I know not what – 'tis trash. Farewell.*  
(2.1.110-14)

Achilles does, in fact, know Hector's targetted opponent – “*He knew his man*” (2.1.116); that is, himself. Why does he break off his account of Hector's challenge? Because, I take it, he found himself indicated, precisely, by the terms of the challenge, which we heard from Aeneas directly in 1.3 – “a Grecian that is true in love”. A concealed but highly plausible inference follows; Achilles has ceased to fight because of his “true” (at this point) love for Patroclus. If he does not indicate that this is his reason then his reticence is, on many grounds, understandable (as might be, in turn, that of Ulysses, who

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appears, in 3.3, as likely to be aware of that love and of its salience for Achilles' position).

With, though not until, 2.1 the presentation of the “Greek camp” is complete; 2.2 rounds off and makes fully intelligible the complex network of issues requisite for the play's exposition, by its introduction, for the first time, of Hector – often seen as the play's true hero and main protagonist – and of the heart of Trojan political self-awareness, the royal household of Priam. (Aeneas, a mere warrior, though twice seen already, does not appear here, nor any character unrelated to Priam by blood.) It is regularly known as “the Trojan debate” and obviously invites comparison with 1.3, a scene full of Greek rhetoric and apparent argument. Where the Greek loyalists debated, at most, a choice of attitudes and means for the continuation of war, the Trojan royal family discusses, more fundamentally (as it seems) the very propriety of continued fighting; Nestor has brought a proposal that the return of Helen by the Trojans should end the war. Hector argues for acceptance of this – her retention has been and will continue to be unbearably costly in terms of Trojan lives, “...*she is not worth what she doth cost / The keeping*” (2.2.51-52) and “...*these moral laws / Of nature and of nations speak aloud / To have her back returned*” (2.2.184-86).

On the other side Troilus and Paris argue; Paris, that “...*your full consent / Gave wings to my propension and cut off / All fears attending on so dire a project ...*” (2.2.132-34); Troilus, powerfully though less succinctly, that natural and public law cannot speak where what is at stake is a personal willed preference for a partner in a committed relationship (2.2.61-96). Hector, at the end of the scene, yields to his younger brothers, offering a further consideration:

*My sprightly brethren, I propend to you  
In resolution to keep Helen still,  
For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence  
Upon our joint and several dignities. (2.2.190-93)*

He adds a concluding reference to his challenge, already sent, to the Greeks.

Hector's apparent change of mind has been seen, almost universally, as the main and controversial point of the scene – and I shall consider it shortly in more detail. But 2.2 has other functions too. It indicates the nature, and the processes of formation, of Trojan policy while under siege; it develops a sense of Troilus as not only lover and potential warrior but also policy-maker and, within his family, brother and son; and above all it reveals the deep-seated and probably terminal limits of possible Trojan agency in the play as a whole. It is to this point, and to its place within the counterpoint of the play's four actions, now initiated, that I'll first turn.

*Troilus and Cressida*, on the evidence of its first five scenes, is a dramatic narrative about a projected love-affair (between Troilus and Cressida) to be prosecuted under two general conditions; the obstacles posed, not by any lack of desire on the part of either lover, but by the fact of ongoing warfare, in which Troilus, in 1.1. and 2.2, acknowledges it to be his duty to participate; and the general consideration that “joy's soul lies in the doing” – that 'doing', or (what Ulysses will later call) 'things in motion' (3.3.183), are more attractive, to others, and, to the agents, the movers, the doers, more enjoyable than “things won” which are by that token also “done”. These conditions, which do not preclude physical consummation of love, raise the question whether consummation would be a welcome closure to love, or a closure in any way at all; and this question in turn invites curiosity, or suspense, as to the development of “Troilus and Cressida” after the lovers – as we may say – get together.

It is, further, a dramatic narrative about a Greek project, “to ransack Troy”, which is not obviously advancing towards the status of a “thing done” but which some of its main agents assertively refuse to abandon – on grounds less of public morality (the “rape of Helen”) than of self-respect, of

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perseverance and of sheer irritation with those other Greek agents who do in fact seem to have abandoned the project against Troy. Of those others, Achilles above all has (I have argued) been shown involved in a distinct project, which expresses at once (herein he resembles Troilus) love, self-identity (in which he will appear comparable to Hector) and sheer unfathomability. It can be argued – though there is no space for the argument here – that “love for Patroclus” is just one of several modes, or moods, between which, as Ulysses will put it, “Kingdomed Achilles in commotion rages (2.3.159); as Achilles himself later says “My mind is troubled like a fountain stirred” (3.3.298). On such a view Achilles' project, without lacking at all in energy, lacks determinate direction.

Thus the “loyalist” Greek plans, to arouse Achilles' martial and 'heroic' self-esteem, have projected at least one further 'subordinate' action – subordinate, that is, to the putative main aim of overthrowing Troy (and indeed to the other 'subordinate' aim, posited by Ulysses, of restoring 'degree' and due obedience). Indeed, within the unyielding and undiscussed determination, for ultimate victory, officially exhibited on the Greek part, not one but several sub-projects are shown to be dormant or emergent; alongside Achilles' disdain for battle stands Ajax's moodiness, open to the manipulations of Ulysses and Nestor but in its consequences generally unpredictable; later in the play the silence rather ostentatiously maintained, in 1.3, by Diomedes will issue in a moral condemnation of the cause of war (a woman, Helen) paradoxically subsumed into a vigorous prosecution of personal success in battle in the supposed cause of another woman (Cressida).

Finally, the “Trojan project” has been shown to involve a resistance, to Greek siege and warfare, to which no end, short of defeat and ruin, can be assigned. Unlike the Greeks, the Trojan royal family lacks the luxury of sub-projects or the

self-indulgence of mutual rivalry; they let Paris get them into this and they have to stand together with him whatever their mere feelings, or moral judgements, about the matter. It should be evident, by the end of 2.2, that the several actions, expounded separately across the first five scenes, raise, by their comparabilities with and distinctions from each other, the abstract structural question 'What is a (definable and completable) action?'; evident also, especially from 2.2 itself, that these lines of action are likely to converge upon a resolution, deferred and unpredictable in detail but generally probable – the defeat, if not yet the ransacking, of Troy. It should also seem likely that the problems attendant on love – both in its specific forms more or less directly staged in the play (between Troilus and Cressida, Achilles and Patroclus, and subsequently Paris and Helen and Hector and Andromache) and in its general imbalance (between closure and pleasure, “things done” and the joy in the “doing”) – that such problems, scarcely susceptible of resolution in themselves, may add to, and indeed empower, the tensions and energies focussed upon those characters who are staged, by Shakespeare's treatment, as lovers and warriors at once; Troilus, Hector and Achilles. (One might add Cressida.)

I hope this account of the play's exposition, in its necessarily rather full extent, may make the subsequent actions and systematic narrative procedures seem appropriately complex, to some extent intelligible, and capable of arousing, if not initially then in their initial implications, excitement. It is enough to add here that the several actions which I have offered to trace converge, eventually, in Act 4 scene 5. In this exceptionally various scene of staggeringly virtuosic dramaturgy, Cressida experiences, in more ways than one, “the doing”, Ulysses finds both the reward and the limitation of his “policy” towards Ajax and Achilles, and Agamemnon and Nestor find every reason to abide by their fall-back trust in mere “perseverance”; Hector, admired by



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all, finds his man; Patroclus has the time of his life and sees the end of his hopes for his love; and the man upon whom they both obsessively focus finds the time and place to say, at last, “I am Achilles” (4.5.234). From the discoveries of this scene, and the new mutual exposures to which it subjects almost all of the play's characters, develop the rapid violences and self-betrays of the final Act – its staging of consequences either unintended or undesired or at least, in detail, unplanned but, in their nature and power, supremely and fascinatingly comprehensible.

I would like, briefly and in conclusion, to return from these vistas of the play's concluding actions to a closer consideration of Hector's alleged 'change of mind', or moral inconsistency, or sheer failure of confrontational nerve, in Act 2 scene 2. Insofar as this 'change', or choice, concludes what I see as the play's long and complex exposition, it can be felt to amount also to its first decisive new action – or, differently put, the point where an overall situation first reveals one of its latent implications for an intelligible, if potentially tragic, closure. Insofar, again, as the play may have seemed to hesitate, in its generic implications, between romantic comedy (1.1-1.2.), politicised history (1.3-2.1) and tragedy (2.2), Hector would here emerge as a plausible protagonist for such a tragedy, at least supposing that his choice here could be made to seem, rather than merely weak-willed or capricious, at once regrettable and generally defensible.

Here I will put together, in summary form, several facts of the dramatic situation – some already surveyed, others also expounded, but with less emphasis, in the first five scenes. Troy, as long as it has to face unremitting Greek siege, depends upon Hector for its day-to-day survival. Hector's own survival, however strongly predicted by his excellence in battle, is necessarily and demonstrably uncertain. Ajax can, even if only once, defeat him in combat – as Alexander,

Cressida's servant, informs her at the start of her first scene (at 1.2.27-31). She does not reply – a token not of indifference, I would say, but of the reverse; at the end of the scene she herself warns us, as she has previously warned Pandarus, not to take at face value either what she says or what she seems systematically not to say. She does, though, remark to Pandarus, after the parade of Trojan fighters has passed across the stage, that “*There is amongst the Greeks Achilles, a better man than Troilus*” (1.2.210-11).

This remark deserves to weigh, in an audience's sense of Cressida's view of her projects and her situation, much more powerfully than Pandarus' tetchy dismissal of it may seem to allow. If Achilles were better than Troilus, if Ajax could get the better of Hector – and, then, if (as 1.3 shows that the 'loyalist' Greeks judge) Achilles outranks Ajax; given all these odious comparisons, what are Hector's chances against a mobilised Achilles? To this velleity must be added the fact, emphasized in both 1.3 and 2.1, that Hector's challenge, whether in its pointedly chosen terms (as I have argued) or as a matter of general probability and salience, has Achilles in view.

These facts and factors, then, are already available to the audience of Act 2 scene 2. How do they illuminate Hector's “resolution” at the end of the scene? Consider the matter in this way. Hector stands not alone but pre-eminent as champion of Troy while fighting continues. The fighting, as far as the Greek “loyalists” are concerned, will not cease, however seemingly unsuccessful its current progress, until Troy falls. To this I would add – though the point may not be staged demonstrably until Act 3 scene 1 – that any idea of “returning Helen” must remain, at best, moot, while it purports to ignore Helen's, no less than Paris', own wishes in the matter; that in any case the Prologue does not suggest that any such “return” would deflect the Greek “ransacking” project; and that Hector may and Troilus surely does, for the

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purposes of the Trojan debate, know all this. Hence it follows that Hector, and Troy with him, are doomed. If Ajax can defeat Hector, without generally being his superior in combat – if, that is, battle and war are matters of unforeseen consequences (like love) – then nothing can guarantee, to Troy, survival. Yet such survival is a *sine qua non* for its royal family, bearing as it does the whole burden of Trojan political self-legitimation, and for any new love-making, and new prospective familial bonds, within it (as between, say, a Troilus and a Cressida), must require. This being so – and, for one of Hector's intelligence as seen in 2.2, recognisably even though not declaredly so – Hector would, by sticking to his arguments for “returning Helen”, not only undermine the fraternal unity on which he, as much as his brothers (and sister, and wife) rely for even short-term survival; he would abandon to the Greeks, in Helen, one of the symbols of Trojan identity and one of the rewards of Trojan unified purpose, without any guarantee thereby of ultimate security.

Instead, by his challenge, as a fact and in its specific terms (“true in love”), he has flaunted what may well seem to him distinctive in Troy, as against the Greek camp – sustainable love. More pointedly, given the absence of women in the Greek camp whether “loyalist” or “dissident”, he has in effect challenged Achilles to come out into the open about his relationship with Patroclus. Or perhaps his relationship with Polyxena, with which Ulysses reproaches Achilles in 3.3? The issue here is complex – but, either way, Achilles is being provoked into a declaration of identity in relationship; that is, a declaration that, to him (if to no other Greek leader) something matters more than mere success in battle, more than a grinding total destruction of an enemy.

There are another couple of ways in which Hector's challenge and his concomitant “resolution”, to continue fighting, can be understood. One of these is fairly simple: he is a superb fighting animal and he flourishes, as much as in

council, on the fields of war; his challenge and his decision at the end of 2.2 evince just this. This, in fact, has earned him, where the point is seen, critical obloquy – not, this time, for inconsistency in argument or for overall characterological incoherence but for wanton self-interest. But a second point, lurking behind that, may finally – if this were desiderated – acquit Hector at least sufficiently to allow him the status of a tragic hero, failed but in many ways admirable.

Suppose the Greeks did put forward, against his challenge, Achilles; or suppose their actual promotion, instead, of Ajax were to provoke Achilles into action, out of pique (as Ulysses seems to hope) or (as seems to happen in 3.3. and 4.5) from more complex and obscure motivations. Suppose – again by the “chance of war” (Prologue 31) – that Hector, whatever the long-term balance of play between them, overthrew Achilles: suppose, that is, either that he were to kill him, or that Achilles, disheartened by defeat, were to opt openly for, beyond his own personal abstention from war, a general Greek withdrawal. If any of this were to happen – and in the course of the play, above all in 3.3. and 4.5, it comes close to happening (hence the immense dramatic excitement and suspense of those scenes in particular) – then Hector would have defended and saved Troy, in the only, and barely possible, way it could be saved and defended. He would have fulfilled, against all the odds, a task as minutely specified, as hard, and as demanding in momentary and responsive action, as Hamlet does in the killing of Claudius just when, and no sooner than, his mother cannot suffer from the consequences.

And if not? If Achilles were provoked, not into acknowledgement of local defeat or of a generally “better way” than endless war, but into the shame, or the vulnerability, or the hatred, to which his own complex emotional arrangements (around Patroclus and Polyxena, around Hecuba and Hector too) render him readily if

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unpredictably vulnerable? Then, still, Hector would have done all he could. This – on which I shall end – appears from his moving exchange with Ulysses in 4.5:

*...modestly I think  
The fall of every Phrygian stone will cost  
A drop of Grecian blood; the end crowns all,  
And that old common arbitrator Time  
Will one day end it. (4.5. 222-26)*

But – as the action of *Troilus and Cressida* continues, in and beyond this tremendous scene, to develop its irresistible but unpredictable momentum – it will be, not the chances of Hector's choices, but the uncertain balance of Achilles' loves and moods, that determines most, for both men, and for both parts, loving and strategizing, of both Greek and Trojan groups.

*...Dost thou entreat me, Hector?  
Tomorrow do I meet thee, fell as death,  
Tonight all friends. (4.5.268-70)*

It would need a separate article to survey, in relation to Achilles (and indeed to Cressida also, and to their strangely comparable encounters with love and its 'action') the ground I have covered, in this last section, with regard specifically to Hector as a possible focus of the play's action and its emergent themes. For now it will be sufficient to have suggested that, in *Troilus and Cressida*, an immense and often unperceived complexity of dramatic action coexists with, at once, a unique range of individuated characters, a set of intelligible and even admirable personal relationships, and a generic uncertainty which answers admirably to the uncertain closures, and the possible unexpected openings, at once of (the play's ostensible subject) the siege of Troy and (arguably its meta-subject) the possibilities of dramatic form.