

the order towards which he was struggling seems somehow indistinct. Yet his central experience—his sense of society as an ordered whole and man as a part of that hierarchy—has an important place in European literature and without him it would be incomplete. Of all the great masters Corneille is the most limited, but that he is a master we cannot doubt.

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## 'TROILUS AND CRESSIDA'<sup>1</sup>

**T***ROILUS AND CRESSIDA* is not, on any view of Shakespeare's work, a successful play ; on the other hand, it is among the most interesting of his failures. Shakespeare's greatness did not express itself in the effortless creation of flawless masterpieces. His development is irregular, fitful, sometimes even uncertain. Every now and then we are conscious in his work of the decisive impact of some fresh aspect of experience, which disturbs the measure of harmony previously attained and is only gradually assimilated into a more complex artistic form. At such critical moments, the language of the plays seems to be charged with obscure and even contradictory meanings and to fit uneasily into verse forms that were fully adequate only at an earlier stage of development. In this very artistic disproportion, however, the critic can often detect the dominating interests of a whole phase of Shakespeare's career which stand out more clearly, as it were, from the inequalities of the work ; in the case of *Troilus and Cressida* we may even say that the tragic sensibility of the mature plays is in process of attaining self-consciousness.

A certain ambiguity and a keen sense of the incongruous are well known to be characteristic of the play. Different and often contrasted sets of feeling lie in it side by side, and the artistic impulse to bring order out of the conflicting elements is over-

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<sup>1</sup>My debt to Mr. G. Wilson Knight's brilliant Essay on this play in *The Wheel of Fire* will be obvious to anyone who has read it. I also have to thank Messrs. Sands & Co. for permission to use certain portions from my book *Approach to Shakespeare*.

shadowed by verbal incoherence and a stagnant ratiocination. It is important to realize from the first that *Troilus* is not a poetic unity, like the best of the plays which preceded it and the great tragedies which it foreshadows. It shows, like *Henry IV*, a consciously critical attitude towards heroic pretensions and false military idealism ; but it also represents something which was in Shakespeare much less explicit—namely a tendency to associate this attitude with profound uncertainties and contradictions in his own experience. This uncertainty of purpose is already apparent in the Prologue, and especially in the peculiar mixture of Latin and vernacular elements in its vocabulary. The critical impulse of *Henry IV* is present behind the attempt to build up, with heavy rhetorical emphasis, a sense of the historical dignity of the conflict between Greeks and Trojans. We have ‘the princes *orgulous*,’ with their ‘crownets regal’ and their weighty ‘ministers and instruments of war’ ; we have the ‘strong *immures* of Troy’ and the ‘*correspansive* and fulfilling bolts’ with which war is carried on. This heavy and artificial grandeur is clearly lacking in conviction and destined for deflation. On coming to consider the speech more carefully, however, we find that Shakespeare is at least as much involved in the convolutions of his own rhetoric as conscious of its underlying inadequacy. Successful satire obviously demands detachment from the thing satirized, an objectivity in presenting the victim of ridicule ; but the pretentiousness of this verse is rather complicated than comic or grotesque, something neither accepted at its face value nor isolated previous to satirical demolition. Moreover, the vernacular elements of the speech, which might have been expected to convey Shakespeare’s satiric comment in contrast to the heavy epic style, are almost as indirect in their references and obscure in their implications as the rhetoric with which they seem to be contrasted. They seem less to make an effective comment than to provide a further discordant element in an already uncertain mood ; the possibilities of a telling contrast are distinctly compromised when the poet turns for a word meaning ‘enclose,’ not to current usage, but to ‘sperr up,’ an obscure borrowing from Chaucerian English. The general impression, in fact, is scarcely comic at all ; the satiric purpose, in so far as it exists, is less direct and objective than a reflection of subtle discords in the mood of the author.

This Prologue, then, conveys not so much an attitude of critical detachment and comment, as a deep-seated uncertainty of mood, in which the comic aim of *Henry IV* exists only as a single element modified by interests of a very different kind ; and these interests are not yet the subject of controlled artistic expression. Their nature is hinted at when the expectation of conflict on either side is described as ' tickling skittish spirits ' ; besides the obvious frivolity of the epithet, which is plainly a reflection of satiric purpose, there is in ' tickling ' a slight but definite suggestion of the restlessness of physical impulse.<sup>1</sup> This impression is confirmed in other parts of the speech. The Greek ships ' disgorge ' their crews at Tenedos, and the Prologue speaks of presenting as much as ' may be *digested* in a play ' ; it is notable that this play, in which the common Elizabethan association of ' appetite ' with ' blood ' or uncurbed desire is so prominent, should turn from the first to imagery drawn from the functioning of the digestive processes. Most prominent of all in this connection is the phrasing of the second line :

The princes orgulous, their high blood chafed.'

Here the ' literary ' and the vernacular elements in the vocabulary of *Troilus and Cressida* are seen in significant relationship. The strained rhetoric of ' the princes orgulous ' is immediately qualified by the ambiguity of ' their high blood chafed,' where ' blood ' can and does stand for lineage, but also represents in common Shakespearean usage the force of physical desire ; whilst ' chafed ' is scarcely adapted to convey martial pride of birth but suggests perfectly the promptings of the flesh against the curb of discipline. The deduction from all this is clear. Shakespeare is no longer presenting a political world with detachment and objective clarity in the light of his comic vitality ; he is using the discords and the meannesses which he finds in the Trojan war to convey profound contradictions in his own experience.

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<sup>1</sup>Compare Ulysses'—

O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,  
That give accosting welcome ere it comes,  
And wide enclass the tables of their thoughts  
To every *ticklish* reader. (IV. v.)

This change of attitude is reflected also in the structure of the play. The satirical approach is still apparent in the handling of the theme, but it remains as an inheritance from an earlier stage of development and is subordinated to new purposes. For Shakespeare, in the dramatic conception of *Troilus* no less than in the handling of its verse, is turning decisively away from the 'objective' presentation of incident and character and feeling his way towards the creation of a dramatic universe whose various parts are significant only in relationship to one another and to the interwoven threads of poetic imagery which bind them together; in other words, he is moving towards the 'poetic drama' of his maturity. Instead of a political conflict objectively studied and commented on by a character (such as Falstaff) who stands outside and transcends it, we have a personal issue—the story of *Troilus* and *Cressida*, two lovers of different and opposed parties—set in the context of the Trojan war. The situation of the two lovers, in whom the sensation of union and the consciousness of division seem, as we shall see, inextricably interwoven in a common experience, is closely connected with the cleavage between Greeks and Trojans; and it is Shakespeare's intention to establish this connection by describing the political conflict through imagery which suggests disruptive tendencies within a single way of feeling. In other words, *Troilus and Cressida* is primarily a dramatic statement of the emotional ambiguity whose resolution was to be the motive of the great tragedies.

This ambiguity is clearly connected with the interests that were finding simultaneous expression in the Sonnets. *Troilus and Cressida* is Shakespeare's first attempt<sup>1</sup> to express in dramatic terms the ambiguous attitude towards human passion that emerges from his treatment of the Sonnet form. Taking as his starting-point the conventional theme of the Renaissance sonneteer—the union with his mistress desired by the poet—Shakespeare's most individual sonnets convert this theme into an apprehension of the simultaneous fulfilment and destruction of human values by Time. Time, which brings passion to its consummation, implies also and equally its decline; for the union of love, the very desire for which is incon-

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<sup>1</sup>Although there are important anticipations of its mood in earlier plays—notably in *Henry IV*—Part II.

ceivable apart from its setting in Time, demands, as a necessary condition of happiness, an unattainable eternity. The desire for unity is inevitably preceded by the state of separation, and to this tragic separateness it equally inevitably returns:

Let me confess that we two must be twain,  
Although our individual loves are one. (XXXVI.)

The action of Time, which is thus at once simultaneously creative and destructive, which both makes love possible and destroys it, is the unavoidable flaw at the heart of passion. *Troilus and Cressida* aims at a dramatic presentation of this contradiction and attempts to unite a personal tragedy and a political issue by a common poetic imagery reflecting the poet's dominating mood.

This flaw introduced by Time into human experience is clearly present in the central situation of our play—the love of Troilus for Cressida. The love-poetry of this play, especially when Cressida takes leave of her lover before going to the Greek camp, is different in kind from anything in the earlier plays:

*Cressida* : And is it true that I must go from Troy? . . .  
Is it possible?

*Troilus* : And suddenly ; where injury of chance  
Puts back leave-taking, justles roughly by  
All time of pause, rudely beguiles our lips  
Of all rejoindure, forcibly prevents  
Our lock'd embrasures, strangles our dear vows  
Even in the birth of our own labouring breath ;  
We two, that with so many thousand sighs  
Did buy each other, must poorly sell ourselves  
With the rude brevity and discharge of one.  
Injurious time now with a robber's haste  
Crams his rich thievery up, he knows not how ;  
As many farewells as be stars in heaven,  
With distinct breath and consign'd kisses to them,  
He fumbles up into a loose adieu,  
And scants us with a single famish'd kiss,  
Distasted with the salt of broken tears. (IV. iv.)

The obvious verbal intricacy of this speech is related to the uncertainty and incoherence of the Prologue and helps to throw light

upon it. The experience behind it is tremendously rich, endlessly elaborate, but the ordering of it is not equal to the complexity. The adverse action of time upon the parting lovers is represented by an astonishing number of verbs—'puts back,' 'justles roughly by,' 'rudely beguiles,' 'forcibly prevents,' 'strangles'—but the emotion does not *develop*, does not acquire added coherence in the expression. It remains simply a long and acutely sensed effort to express a single moment of conflicting feeling. It belongs, in fact, to a period in Shakespeare's development in which the keenness of his apprehension of certain elements of experience was not accompanied by a corresponding sense of order and significance within the complexity of his imagery; for the attainment of that order and significance in Shakespeare's love-poetry we must wait until *Antony and Cleopatra*.

None the less, although unsatisfactory, the experience behind these lines is highly individual. In each of the verbs of parting which we have just collected there is an element of harsh and hostile physical contact. This laboured feeling is not accidental, not simply a product of inadequate poetic equipment struggling for expression; it is the product of a genuine conflict in the poet's experience and conveys its full meaning only in the light of the poignant thinness of the love-imagery in the same speech. Troilus, as in every other similar utterance of his, can only express his passion in images that are intense, but airy and essentially bodiless. Love is felt to be 'rich' and fit to be mentioned with the 'stars of heaven'; but it can be expressed only in terms of 'sighs,' of 'laboured *breath*,' in the hurried breathlessness of 'distinct *breath* and consign'd kisses,' and in the intensely palated but transitory delicacy of 'Distasted with the salt of broken tears.' Opposed to this 'airy,' pathetic passion we feel the full brunt of the senses in every phrase that stresses parting; 'roughly,' 'rudely,' 'forcibly,' time and hostile circumstances undermine the 'brevity' of love. Most noticeable of all, the 'locked embrasures' which should normally convey the intensity of physical union in love, are felt only as an effort to snatch a moment's union in the face of events which are forcibly drawing the lovers apart. Moreover, the keen nervous contrasts upon which the whole passage depends make us feel that the parting caused by external circumstance is only subsidiary to a certain weakness inherent in

passion itself. The ideal, which is perfect union, exists and is felt intensely, but is as light as 'breath' or 'air'; and the bodies through whose union alone this intensity can be gained are always, while they are united, 'labouring' against a tendency to separate. Their 'labour,' thus frustrated, issues in nothing more tangible than 'breath.' Throughout *Troilus*, the elements making for separation are too strong for those which desire union; and 'injurious time' is the process by which separation is born out of desired union.

*Troilus and Cressida*, then, is the product of a profound uncertainty about the value of experience. The manner in which this uncertainty grew almost imperceptibly out of something more conventional until it dominated the play is seen most clearly in the love-poetry of *Troilus*. This poetry is representative in that it does not reflect any clear-cut intention; it combines intensity of sensation with a peculiar weakness. Its distinctive quality consists above all in the penetration, incomplete and piecemeal, of conventional imagery with a new immediacy of sensation. It is a type of verse which takes us back once more to the Sonnets. The effect of some of the most individual of the sonnets depends upon a combination of conventional Petrarchan imagery with an intense sensual quality; the established image of the lily, to take an obvious example, with its associations of beauty and purity, is transformed by a magnificent juxtaposition of convention and intensity into the potent corruption of 'Lilies that *fester* smell far worse than weeds' (Sonnet XCIV). This type of verse, which obviously corresponds to an ambiguity of mood in the poet, is apparent in *Troilus*' first account of *Cressida*:

I tell thee I am mad  
In Cressid's love; thou answer'st 'she is fair';  
Pour'st in the open ulcer of my heart  
Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice,  
Handlest in thy discourse, O that her hand,  
In whose comparison all whites are ink  
Writing their own reproach, to whose soft seizure  
The cygnet's down is harsh, and spirit of sense  
Hard as the palm of ploughman. (I. i.)

The underlying convention here is clearly Petrarchan. It makes itself felt in the suggestion that *Troilus* is 'mad' for love, in the

strained use of 'pour'st' and 'handlest' to describe Pandarus' speech, in the comparison of Cressida's hand to the 'cygnet's down,' and in the introduction of 'ink' to bring out by contrast its superlative whiteness. But the conventional imagery is transformed, as it were, from within in a manner so intimately and closely bound up with the convention that it indicates perfectly this play's fundamental uncertainty of purpose. The transformation consists in giving deep sensuous value to the Petrarchan imagery, thereby conveying simultaneously an impression of intense feeling and an underlying lack of content. 'Handlest in thy discourse' is, as I have said, a far-fetched, almost an Euphuistic image; but it brings with it a notable keenness of touch which is developed in the contrast between harshness and the 'soft seizure' of the cygnet's down, between the hardness of the ploughman's hand and the almost unnatural immediacy of 'spirit of sense.' Yet the conventional note remains, and with it the feeling that Troilus' passion, for all its sensual intensity, has an inadequate basis, is vitiated by the weakness to which he confesses in the same scene—'I am weaker than a woman's tear.'

It is important to realize that this weakness, which is the central feature of *Troilus*, does not produce a tragedy of character, but of situation. The tragedy consists less in the personal suffering of Troilus than in the overriding influence exercised by Time upon human relationship and feelings. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, personal feeling has become strong enough to override mutability; in *Troilus* the supremacy of Time is never adequately questioned. The weakness of the characters in this play, which has given rise to so much irrelevant discussion about Cressida's motives and Shakespeare's attitude to her, is a reflection of the uncertainty of the mood which created it. Antony and Cleopatra, as lovers, are fully realized human beings, because Shakespeare felt, when he created them, that their love had a validity which transcended adverse circumstance and gave their emotions a full personal value; and conversely the complete realization as characters of Regan and Goneril in *King Lear* proves that Shakespeare felt himself able to distinguish, when he wrote that play, between the good and evil elements in his experience without falling into ambiguity and confusion. Antony and Cleopatra, Regan and Goneril have full reality as characters precisely because they proceed



from a clear realization in Shakespeare of the value of human experience as opposed to the evil elements which are implicit in it. *Troilus and Cressida*, in which Shakespeare presented his intuition of time as destroying passion, making it vain and transitory, is compatible with no such individuality of presentation ; for time, as Shakespeare sees it in this play, destroys personal values and makes them invalid. Cressida's falseness does not spring from a deep-seated perversity of moral character, or even from a positive attraction for Diomed, but from the mere process of events, from a flaw inherent in the human situation. Her tragedy, such as it is, derives from awareness of her helplessness ; we feel it in her pathetic appeal when Troilus prepares to leave her after their night together :

Prithee, tarry ;  
You men will never tarry, (IV. ii.)

and it is implied in the moment of self-knowledge in which she tells him :

I have a kind of self resides with you,  
But an unkind self that itself will leave  
To be another's fool. (III. ii.)

There is something in the very expression of this uncertainty, half punning and conventional, which is typical of the play and makes it difficult for us to conceive of Cressida as a fully realized individual. At most, she lives for us only in the mood of the moment, with scarcely a sign of that responsibility and consistency in action which is involved in the very conception of character. Any attempt to subject her inconstancy to a moral judgment fails because the spirit in which Shakespeare created her made it impossible for her to be really responsible for her actions ; and without responsibility there can be no moral evaluation. When she comments on her refusal, in the early part of the play, to reveal her feelings for Troilus :

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

her aphoristic lines are not a revelation of wantonness, but simply an expression of the sense, which constitutes the only true tragedy of this play, of the impossibility, the meaninglessness of constancy

in a world where time dominates human relationships, and where fulfilment and separation seem inevitable and connected aspects of a single situation.

This impossibility also dominates the poetry of Troilus himself and is there further developed. Troilus' passion is strong only in anticipation ; the very intensity of its sensations is conveyed in a refinement of physical feeling, in an attempt to embody in terms of the senses an insubstantial and incorporeal emotion :

I am giddy : expectation whirls me round.  
 The imagery relish is so sweet  
 That it enchants my sense : what will it be,  
 When that the watery palates taste indeed  
 Love's thrice repured nectar? death, I fear me,  
 Swounding destruction, or some joy too fine,  
 Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness,  
 For the capacity of my ruder powers :  
 I fear it much, and I do fear besides  
 That I shall lose distinction in my joys . . . (III. ii.)

The emotions of this passage are intense enough, but only in the palate and the senses ; they scarcely involve any full personality in the speaker. Troilus' emotions are concentrated on ' expectation,' on ' the *imaginary* relish,' and he feels that the ' watery palate ' will be too weak to sustain the actual consummation. The whole speech turns upon this contrast between the refined intensity of feeling which he seeks in ' Love's *thrice repured* nectar,' and the giddiness, the ' swounding destruction ' which is a confession of his weakness. The experience of love, it is suggested, is so fine, so ' subtle-potent,' that it surpasses the ' ruder powers ' of the body and remains an incorporeal aspiration which the senses strive vainly to attain. We can now see why Shakespeare makes such extensive use, in *Troilus*, of the imagery of taste, why Cressida, for example, says before she leaves Troy for the Greek camp :

The grief is fine, full, perfect, that I *taste*. (IV. iv.)

Taste is a sense at once luxurious, delicate, and transient ; also it can be connected, in gross opposition to Troilus' bodiless idealism, with digestion and the functioning of the body. For the weakness of Troilus' passion implies that it is patient of corruption.

Immediately above the speech just quoted there is a striking choice of verb in his appeal to Pandarus:

O, be thou my Charon,  
And give me swift transportance to those fields  
Where I may *wallow* in the lily-beds  
Proposed for the deserfer. (III. ii.)

The ideal aspirations of Troilus remain abstract, intangible; their very intensity derives from their subjection to time, from their awareness of their own transitory nature. But this impermanence makes them bodiless, so that the sensual instincts, unable to associate themselves fully with the insubstantial ideal of union in a mutual passion, express themselves at once weakly and basely, ' wallowing ' in what would be, if it were more forceful, a corrupt satisfaction. Similarly, the refined imagery of taste given to the Trojans, and especially to Troilus, expresses a bodiless ideal which becomes, in the mouths of the scurrilous Thersites and the Greek cynics, a series of clogged, heavy references to digestion. Thersites has 'mastic jaws,' and Achilles calls him 'my cheese, my digestion,' whilst Agamemnon tells Patroclus that Achilles' virtues:

like fair fruit in an unwholesome dish  
Are like to rot untasted. (II. iii.)

In fact, that sense which expresses the related intensity and lightness of Trojan passion becomes, in the Greeks, a symbol of inaction and distemper, out of which issue the boils, ' the botchy core,' of Thersites' disgust.

In this way we pass from the individual to the general issue, from the love of Troilus and Cressida to the war between the Greeks and Troy. The two parties, like the two lovers, are differentiated by divergences within a common type of imagery. The Trojans share the fragile intensity of Troilus. They are deeply concerned with the value of honour and with an idealistic view of love, whilst Hector shows the virtues of war which are so noticeably absent from the bulky Ajax and the graceless Achilles. Typical of them is the speech in which Troilus explains the case for the continuation of the war:

But, worthy Hector,  
She is a theme of honour 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. (II. ii.)

Yet the lightness and grace of this idealism obviously covers a certain artificiality. The verse itself is insubstantial and the expression vague and highflown. It reads, at this stage in Shakespeare's development, like a survival from earlier plays set against the contortions and involutions of so much of *Troilus*. This should remind us that Falstaff, in the First Part of *Henry IV*, had already given clear expression to Shakespeare's view of 'honour' as a suspicious abstraction based on no sufficient motive; and, indeed, Hector's reasoning in the same scene (II. ii.) shows clearly that the arguments advanced by Troilus are as flimsy as their expression is tenuous. For all this 'honour' is directed to the defence of Helen, whose worth had been destroyed by the manner in which she had been stolen from Menelaus. Even Paris can only argue that the dishonour of her rape should now be redeemed by the heroism of her defence. The tone of the Trojan references to Helen is very noticeable. Paris pleads that he

would have the *soil* of her *fair* rape  
 Wiped off in honourable keeping her,

and Troilus, with a slight but unmistakable twist of conventional imagery, declares that Paris

brought a Grecian queen, whose youth and *freshness*  
 Wrinkles Apollo's and *makes stale* the morning.

The juxtaposition of 'fair' and 'soil,' 'freshness' and 'stale,' touches the basic weakness of Trojan idealism, and points to the way in which that idealism is organically connected in its expression with the sluggish heaviness of the Greeks.

The underlying nature of this Trojan weakness is most explicitly stated in the speech in which Troilus sets forth his argument for the continuation of the war:

I take to-day a wife, and my election  
 Is led on in the conduct of my will;  
 My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,  
 Two traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous shores  
 Of will and judgment: how may I avoid,

Although my will distaste what it elected,  
The wife I chose? there can be no evasion  
To blench from this, and to stand firm by honour. (II. ii.)

Troilus' terminology is indefinite and the expression of his argument, like so much of the discussion in this play, is far more complicated than its content. There seems at one point to be an opposition of ' will,' which we may define as sensual impulse, and ' judgment,' which should normally restrain and direct this impulse: the opposition, in short, of sensuality and moral control which became a little later the central theme of *Measure for Measure*. In that play the moral conflict is explicitly stated; in *Troilus and Cressida*, there is only an uncertainty, an uneasiness, which is reflected in the notable incoherence of the expression. The conclusion reached by ' judgment' is that affirmed by Hector—' value dwells not in particular will,' but rather in a weighing of alternatives in the light of the principles of reason—but the whole trend of Troilus' reply is to annihilate, or at least wilfully to confuse, the distinction between ' will ' and ' judgment,' to show that ' judgment ' is powerless and irrelevant once the sensual will has impelled man towards action. In other words, the basis of Troilus' honour is simply sensual impulse, and its weakness lies largely in its unwillingness to recognize this fact, and in the consequent abstraction and lack of content. Hector is significantly plain on the subject of Troilus' infatuation:

Is your blood  
So madly hot that no discourse of reason,  
Nor fear of bad success in a bad cause  
Can qualify the same?

Troilus—and in this he is typical of all the Trojans—refuses to recognize the weakness of his conception of honour, but it is implied in the very situation upon which the play turns; for the reality of Helen, as Hector points out, does not correspond to Troilus' embroidered and Marlovian description of her:

Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost  
The holding.

But this same lack of solid foundation is apparent in the undertones of Troilus' own poetry, where the unacknowledged sensual

basis of his idealism refuses to be entirely suppressed. Underlying the light and 'poetical' quality of Troilus' verse, there is a distinct strain of coarseness and inertia. It appears in the references, so typical of this play, to the 'soiled silks,' and the 'remainder viands' which are thrown away 'because we now are full.' Most typical of all is the Trojan reaction to reason:

Nay, if we talk of reason,  
Let's shut our gates, and sleep: manhood and honour  
Should have hare hearts, would they but *fat* their thoughts  
With this *crammed* reason: reason and respect  
Make *livers pale* and *lustihood deject*.

This insistence upon mental inertia and the obstruction of physical processes stands in significant contrast to the lightness and artificiality of Troilus' idealistic outbursts; but they are organically related to them. The Trojan devotion to honour, Shakespeare would seem to say, is devotion to an abstraction that has no sufficient basis in reason, to something that is, in fact, no more than an empty justification of impulse; but to abandon honour is to expose oneself to lethargy, to a rooted disinclination to act at all.<sup>1</sup>

The analysis of this important scene shows us how the contrast between Greeks and Trojans, which has often been noted by the critics, is modified by significant points of contact. This relationship, of course, is openly 'symbolized' in the combat between Hector and Ajax (IV. v.), when Hector refuses to carry on the duel with his 'cousin-german' and Ajax agrees to call a truce. But the contacts established by a common type of imagery are more important for an understanding of the play. In the Greek camp, we find fully explicit the staleness which Trojan honour had tried to ignore. Where the Trojans reject reason in favour of ill-considered action, the Greeks accept reason and are consequently reduced to inaction. Agamemnon's very first speech shows how inconclusive are the intellectual processes of the Greek leaders and how closely related they are to Troilus' views on 'crammed reason':

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<sup>1</sup>The relation of this to *Hamlet*, and in particular to the soliloquy 'How all occasions do inform against me' (IV. iv.) is worth careful attention.

Princes,

What grief hath set the jaundice on your cheeks?  
The ample proposition that hope makes  
In all designs begun on earth below  
Fails in the promised largeness: checks and disasters  
Grow in the veins of actions highest reared,  
As knots, by the conflux of meeting sap,  
Infect the sound pine and divert his grain  
Tortive and errant from his course of growth.  
Nor, princes, is it matter new to us  
That we come short of our suppose so far  
That after seven years' siege yet Troy walls stand;  
Sith every action that hath gone before,  
Whereof we have record, trial did draw  
Bias and thwart, not answering the aim  
And that unbodied figure of the thought  
That gave it surmised shape

(I. iii.)

Agamemnon's thought proceeds, not from point to point according to a clearly defined logical sequence, but by a series of indeterminate digressions which convey his incapacity to come to a conclusion. The laboured illustrations and the theoretical observations destroy the coherence of his argument; there is no recognizable development of thought to justify the complexity. The repeated doublings of words—'checks and disasters,' 'tortive and errant,' 'bias and thwart'—all lay emphasis upon obstruction, upon the speaker's struggle against obscure impediments which hinder the Greeks from successful action; the use of unusual and unassimilated Latinized words, such as 'conflux' and 'tortive,' produces a similar sense of resistance and difficulty. More significantly still, these obstructions are associated with disturbances and interruptions in organic growth. The prospects of hope 'fail in the promised largeness,' do not grow to their proper and anticipated stature; 'checks and disasters' are indissolubly intertwined with natural growth, and the very rising of the sap in the 'sound pine,' which is so eminently a natural process, produces infection and distortion in the growth of the tree. Most important of all, because it corresponds most closely to the spirit of Troilus, thought is 'unbodied' and its processes, separated from the actual course of events, find themselves equally separated from the sensual

immediacy which finds irresponsible expression in the comments of Thersites. The keen nervous quality which is so noticeably lacking from the theoretical observations of the Greek leaders breaks out significantly in Thersites' sweeping affirmations of anarchy and disorder ; in a similar manner, Troilus' idealism covers a sensual impulse which he refused to recognize.

It is only natural that this discrepancy in the Greeks between thought and action should be expressed in terms of physical disorder ; and here the link with the Trojans becomes more explicit. Thersites' boils and plague-spots are related to Agamemnon's laborious thoughts on authority and Ulysses' subtle contrivances just as Troilus' contempt for 'crammed reason' and his insistence upon soilure and physical obstruction are connected with his abstract idealism. The vital part in Shakespeare's presentation of the Greeks is this association of continual ratiocination with a complete overthrow of 'degree' in their ranks ; they are completely unable to turn council into united action. The position is briefly summed up by Thersites: 'Agamemnon is a fool to offer to command Achilles ; Achilles is a fool to be commanded of Agamemnon ; Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool ; and Patroclus is a fool positive.' (II. iii.). Whilst Agamemnon, Nestor, and Ulysses scheme and discuss, Ajax and Achilles 'fust' (the word is typical) out of action ; the hand that executes is out of touch with the '*still and mental parts*' that contrive the conduct of the war. Perhaps the point is most clearly made by Ulysses in his account of Achilles' pride :

imagined worth  
Holds in his blood such swoln and hot discourse  
That '*twixt his mental and his active parts*  
Kingdom'd Achilles in commotion rages  
And batters down himself. (II. iii.)

The conflict in Achilles between personal pride and duty to the Greek cause is stated here in terms of 'blood,' of sensual passion ; the implications of 'swoln and hot,' suggesting feverish disorder due to extreme intemperance, are unmistakable. The adjective 'kingdom'd,' like so many of the words which characterize the poetry of this play, is not fully explicit ; but it clearly refers the personal issue back to the general theme of 'degree.' The



individual warrior, like the Greek polity at war, should be a unity founded upon 'degree'; and 'degree' in the individual is an ideal correspondence between thought and action, between impulse and control, between 'blood' and judgment.<sup>1</sup> On both sides, this balance is profoundly disturbed. The 'cunning' of the Greek leaders is manifestly out of touch with practical considerations and expends itself in an activity completely disproportionate to the desired end: 'it will not in circumvention deliver a fly from a spider, without drawing their massy irons and cutting the web' (II. iii.). On the Trojan side, the infidelity of Cressida undermines Troilus' faith in 'honour' as a basis of action and leaves him dimly aware of the incompatible and contrary elements which underlie what he had assumed to be the indivisible simplicity of human passion:

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.  
Instance, O instance! strong as Pluto's gates;  
Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven:  
Instance, O instance! strong as heaven itself;  
The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolved and loosed:  
And with another knot, five-finger-tied,  
The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,  
The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics  
Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed. (V. ii.)

All the characteristics of the love poetry of Troilus can be recognized here—its tenuous and unnaturally refined expression, its subtlety in dealing with vast distinctions within an apparent unity, its sensuous thinness balanced by the imagery of disgust and

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<sup>1</sup>Compare *Hamlet* (III. ii.):

. . . blest are those  
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled  
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger  
To sound what stop she pleases.

repletion which connects it with the verse given to the Greeks and indicates the unifying factor in this play. For the ambiguous attitude towards experience which so deeply exercised Shakespeare in many of the sonnets is the determining factor in his presentation of both parties. Proceeding from his sense of the fatal disharmony introduced by time into the love of Troilus and Cressida, it expands to embrace the two parties in their fantastic and unreasonable conflict. The Trojans followed a false idealism, which deceived itself with talk of 'honour,' but was really based on 'blood' and ended in a pathetic and helpless realization of its own inadequacy; the Greeks elaborated endlessly a 'judgment' that was out of touch with the instinctive sources of action, so that Agamemnon's chaotic reasoning finds its proper comment in the distorted bitterness of Thersites' diseased sensibility.

The fundamental impulse of this play, and the link which binds together personal cleavage and political disorder is now clear. Ulysses' argument on 'degree' reduces itself finally to an intuition of self-consuming passion:

Then everything 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* (I. iii.)

The speech is saved from the charge of abstraction by this relation of 'degree' to the disorder introduced by passion or 'appetite' into the human organism. This disorder, which is present on both sides in the conflict between Greeks and Trojans, is the theme of the play. The Trojans sought to ignore the deficiencies of passion in a bodiless 'idealism'; the Greeks, quite incapable of idealism, are weighed down by all that the Trojans tried to forget. Both parties are bound together by the occasion of their quarrel; as Thersites says—'all the argument is a cuckold and a whore.' Troilus, in one magnificent phrase, sums up the crux from which the subtle contradictions of this play draw their interest:

'This is the monstrosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confined, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit.' (III. ii.)

The 'infinity' sought by the will is the idealistic love of Troilus, which neglects the wearing action of time and the related inability of passion to live up to purely abstract ideals of love and honour; and the very 'boundlessness' of the desire, when it encounters the limits imposed by time and the body to which it feels enslaved, turns to the clogged inertia of Achilles and the endless self-scrutiny of the Greek camp.

D. A. TRAVERSI.

## REVALUATIONS (XI):

# ARNOLD AS CRITIC

'AND I do not like your calling Matthew Arnold Mr. Kidglove Cocksure. I have more reason than you for disagreeing with him and thinking him very wrong, but nevertheless I am sure he is a rare genius and a great critic.'<sup>1</sup>

The note of animus that Hopkins here rebukes in Bridges is a familiar one where Arnold is concerned: it characterizes a large part of recorded comment on him. Raleigh's essay in *Some Authors* is (if we can grant this very representative *littérateur* so much distinction) a convenient *locus classicus* for it and for the kind of critical injustice it goes with. But one may be quite free from such animus or from any temptation to it—may welcome rather than resent that in Arnold by which the Raleighs are most antagonized—and yet find critical justice towards him oddly difficult to arrive at. He seems to present to the appraising reader a peculiarly elusive quantity. At least, that is my experience as an admirer, and I am encouraged in generalizing by the fact that the experience of the most important literary critic of our time appears to have been much the same.

In *The Sacred Wood*, speaking of Arnold with great respect, Mr. Eliot calls him 'rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic,' and I must confess that for years the formula seemed to me unquestionably just. Is Arnold's critical achievement after all

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<sup>1</sup>*The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, XCVII.