Corrigenda.

p.29, l.19 : in IV.v,
p.70, l.6  : provoking,
p.106, l.3 : reason
p.136, n.1, l.3: Professor Marsh
p.142, l.21 : Polyxena
p.150, l.12 : problems too.
p.159, l.14 : Timon
p.167, l.12 : against themselves
p.169, l.12 : emphases
p.170, l.15 : Marat/Sade
p.177, l.12 : he - like most
p.177, l.13 : differs
Joy Ann Phillips
Australian National University.

SHAKESPEARE'S 'TROILUS AND CRESSIDA'.

I have used this edition exclusively because it is the only one widely available in Australia. Where I have had occasion to question its validity — lines 6 and 7 in the Prologue have, for instance, been transposed — I have used the early Arden, the Penguin and the Everyman editions for cross-reference.

Thesis presented in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

August, 1967.
PREFACE

I wish to thank the English Department of the Australian National University: Professor A.D. Hope and Professor G.H. Russell for their interest and help; Miss Diana Cooper for the typing; and, above all, my supervisor, Mr F.H. Langman, for his patient support and stimulating criticism. I wish to thank the University too for the scholarship I held in 1965.

The text to which I refer throughout is Daniel Seltzer's edition in the Signet Classic Shakespeare series, New York, 1963. I have used this edition primarily because it is the only one widely available in Australia. Where I have had occasion to question its validity - lines 6 and 7 in the Prologue have, for instance, been transposed - I have used the early Arden, the Penguin and the Everyman editions for cross-reference.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Love Story.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The War Story.</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conclusions.</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dramatic Affinities.</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Bibliography.</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Troilus and Cressida is a highly ambiguous and unsettling play. It is marked by a peculiar bitterness and openness. The bitter flavour of the play is established through the pervasive imagery of disease and taintedness, the corruption manifest on both sides, the commentary of rank Thersites, and Pandarus's bitter 'epilogue'. This bitterness is a quality recognised by most critics. The openness of the play has received much less attention, and it is this quality that I shall be particularly interested in examining. I use the term 'openness' to suggest the play's sustained and unresolved ambiguity, an ambiguity that arises from its multiple ironies, its continual shifts and contrasts, its challenging of audience response, and its tendency throughout to raise rather than to settle issues.

The action continually raises questions: questions about the possibility of honour and glory in love and war, about the bases of heroism, about will and value, about
the meaning of triumph and defeat. These questions are assessed from many sides. One event comments obliquely on another; one character's interpretation contrasts with another's; parallels are organised so that ironies cannot be overlooked. With unusual narrowness and directness attention is focused on the abstract issues as such. There is no central dominating hero in whose fate one is absorbed. The questions themselves seem to dominate. And the effect is to unsettle, to make an audience unsure how to regard both characters and events. The very number of directives bewilders; characters are neutralised, easy sympathy denied; no firm standpoint is allowed; no conventional resolution takes place. About the openness of Troilus and Cressida there is a deliberate, provoking quality that relates it to the 'black comedies' of today. The pronounced interest of twentieth-century critics in this play seems to spring from familiarity with its kind.

To bring out more particularly what I mean by this openness, I shall examine the Prologue in some detail: it epitomises much that is characteristic of the spirit and method of the play as a whole. Before doing so, I should perhaps meet the objection raised recently by Professor
Professor Coghill claims that, because there is some doubt that the Prologue and 'epilogue' belonged to the original 1602-3 version of the play (even though there is no doubt that they belong to the final 1609 version), they should not be included in an interpretation of the play. One might want to question the sacrosanctity of original versions and even the validity of Professor Coghill's 'proofs', but, above all, the marked lack of incongruity between the Prologue and 'epilogue' and the rest of the play makes full answer to his objection. Their very pointedness - they point up characteristics that are undeniably, though less obviously, present throughout the play - suggests that they may well be later additions, but, whether this is so or not, they are, as I shall attempt to show, integral to the play in its final version, and it would seem to me very rash to base an interpretation on their exclusion. Their removal would not make the play the 'straight tragedy' of Professor Coghill's claims.

In the Prologue, one attitude or set of values is played off against another with no simple victory achieved,
no easy vantage-point allowed to viewers. Simple appreciation of war as a 'theme of honour and renown' is the first attitude to emerge. The grandeur of phrases like 'princes orgulous, their high blood chafed' and 'fraught with the ministers and instruments' works with the slow majesty of the rhythm and the dignity of the syntax to suggest this attitude in the first four lines. But there is a sudden undercutting at the beginning of the fifth. 'Of cruel war' forces an awareness of a second attitude: a disturbing insight that beneath the majesty lies the grimness of suffering. 'Cruel' takes strong stress, not only because of its dominant position in 1.5 but because it is the unexpected climax towards which the measured dignity of the opening lines has been leading. One becomes aware that this second attitude has in fact been latent from the start. 'The princes orgulous, their high blood chafed, ...': 'orgulous' says something more than 'proud' or 'splendid': its archaic inflation has an almost self-mocking ring. Similarly, 'high blood chafed'

1 The Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. VII, N-Poy., 1933 has this note on the archaism of the word: Orgulous, orgillous [...Used once by Shaks., and retained in the 1634 modernization of Malory's Morte Arthur, but app. obs. from 16th c., until employed as a historical archaism by Southey and Scott, and affected by late 19th c. journalists]. Proud, haughty.
criticises itself. 'High blood' can be something other than 'noble blood': an excitable instability can be implied, a meaning that accords well with 'chafed' with its suggestion of fretting and fuming and its reference to a superficial - and physical - irritant. It accords too with a medical usage of 'orgulous', meaning 'swollen, violent', current at the time.¹ These allusions to the physically over-heated and corrupt, however veiled they may seem here, cannot but appear significant to anyone familiar with the play as a whole. The culminating phrase 'of cruel war' brings these background suggestions to the fore.

This darker undercurrent continues beyond the fifth line: the inflation of 'corresponding and fulfilling bolts' mocks itself as did 'orgulous'; 'tickling skittish spirits' makes even more obvious the criticisms implied in 'high blood chafed'; the strongly stressed 'wanton', 'ransack' and 'disgorge' - this last particularly, re-emphasising as it does the physically corrupt - arrest

¹ Ibid. Orgulous, orgillous [... ...]a. proud, haughty. b. fig. Splendid. c. Swelling, violent. 1610 Barrough. Meth. Physick, VI, iii. (1639) 363. These most orgueilous and extreme paines are caused of a very moist and maligne vapour.
attention even more markedly that did 'cruel' in the earlier line. The suggestion is that heroism may well amount to nothing more than unhealthily inflated and unstable pride, the 'glory' of war to suffering and destruction.

But, although this critical, censorious element is strongly present — as contrast with the Prologue of Henry V would, I suggest, support — it does not cancel out the simpler belief in heroism and the honour and glory of war. These darker hints remain hints: 'deep-drawing barks' retain something of their majesty even while they 'disgorge'. War, the first part of the Prologue suggests, both is and is not glorious.

'And hither am I come...' (1.22) marks a change in tone, a change anticipated by 'And that's the quarrel' in 1.10. The off-handed briskness of the latter part of the Prologue tends to make one question the viability not only of simple glorification but also of simple distrust. This briskness distances: it makes one aware of the complexity and diversity of the reality of war and casts doubt on simple views of it, whether sentimental or cynical. It also conveys a certain impatience, suggesting quite
strongly that the spectator may never find it within his power to comprehend such unresolved complexity. His favour is certainly not being courted. The Prologue ends on an ambiguous note, ingratiating yet disdainful:

Like or find fault; do as your pleasures are; Now good or bad, 'tis but the chance of war.

Before the play actually starts, then, the audience is made aware that there are at least two possible attitudes to the war, that one does not necessarily cancel out the other - contradictory though they may seem - and that neither may ultimately be viable, although nothing more tenable is offered in their place. The spectator has little reason to feel secure.

This demand upon an audience to hold in balance many factors, often contradictory, before making judgements constitutes an important part of the play's openness. It is a quality that distinguishes not only the Prologue but, as I shall go on to argue, the play as a whole. The spectator is required to see that war is and is not glorious, that Troilus is and is not heroic, that Cressida is and is not sluttish, and so on. If he cannot see both sides of each question, if he cannot rest content with the paradoxes involved, then he can expect to be dismissed
with the brisk indifference displayed at the end of the Prologue.

Sustained ambiguity is hard to tolerate. On the whole, people prefer to know where they stand, to see things in black and white, to be able to discriminate quite clearly between 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong'. Melodrama is reassuring and comfortable. Troilus and Cressida is determinedly non-melodramatic. It unsettles and disturbs, allowing no such simple dichotomies. But, although the play does not allow these dichotomies, critics have laboured to establish them. Many (Professor Coghill is only one example) have taken great trouble to try to iron out the perplexing ambiguities, to present arguments for particular sides. Very few have been willing to consider that the play rests on paradoxes, or to give these paradoxes their proper place in interpretation and judgment. If the playwright has made no attempt to resolve them, surely it is not part of the critic's function to try to do so. The need to 'order' experience, to differentiate clearly between 'good' and 'bad' is understandable. This play shows how very well Shakespeare understood it, or rather, how very well he understood the conditions of experience that not
only create the need but also determine its almost inevitable frustration. The play is above all a reflection of this frustration. It is with bitter sharpness, however, that awareness has been translated into drama. Playwright and audience seem to be in opposite camps. The play, I would contend, indirectly attacks, provokes and frustrates that ordering, categorising, black-and-white cast of mind which, the play tempts one to think, showed itself in the audience of the time, and has certainly shown itself, abundantly and ironically, in the critical writings on the play.

For, on almost every major issue, there are two or more opposing schools of thought. Critics, it seems, have felt the need to side into camps over Troilus and Cressida. On Troilus, for instance, one finds, on the one side, judgments such as these: 'a prince of chivalry'¹, 'a type of the poetic nature'², 'active goodness'³, 'Troilus possesses the qualities that are at the heart of Shakespeare's conception of nobility'⁴. And, on the other side, are verdicts of this kind: 'a sexual gourmet'.

and 'chaotic personality', 'moral delinquency', 'unstable', 'a disorder-figure'. His love is described by Professor G. Wilson Knight as 'throughout hallowed by his constancy, his fire, his truth', and by Professor Una Ellis-Fermor as 'ideal', but by Professor Oscar J. Campbell as 'lustful' and by Mrs Barbara de Almeida as 'corrupt'. Professor Wilson Knight interprets his survival at the end in this way: 'All the fires of human nobility and romance yet light Troilus to the last'. But Professor G.I. Duthie calls it the triumph of disorder, and Professor Albert Gérard claims that Troilus, at the end, is 'actuated by the basest of motives - a new Menelaus'. Is Troilus's a 'love-tragedy' as Professor Wilson Knight argues, or does he 'deserve to be pursued to the last by scornful laughter', as Professor Campbell maintains? Consideration

10 loc. cit., p. 154.
of the critical literature on the play would seem to lead us to this point, a point of choice: he is either this or that. But it has not been shown that the play itself must lead us to this point. After making due allowance for the tendency of critics to inflate and even falsify their already falsely simple positions, one needs to acknowledge the problematic nature of the play, its essential openness. As I shall go on to show, Troilus both is and is not heroic, contradictory though this may seem, uneasy though the paradox may make one feel.

Divergence of critical opinion is by no means restricted to Troilus. It typifies discussion of almost every major character, event and issue. It extends too to debates about the play's formal structure. Professor Wilson Knight, for instance, insists on the primary importance of the division between Greeks and Trojans. On this issue, he has many supporters: Mrs Winifred Nowotny, for example, sees the play as the opposition of 'two large masses', one headed by Troilus, the other by Ulysses. Terms vary, but Professor Wilson Knight's 'intuition v. intellect', Mrs Nowotny's 'value v. opinion', Dr Terence

1 Loc. cit., p. 282.
Hawkes's 'intuition v. reason', and Professor John F. Danby's 'idealism v. realism' all bear witness to a similar belief that the play's structure and meaning are largely determined by the opposition of Trojans and Greeks. But against this view may be set the telling demonstrations of parallels and similarities between the two sides, offered by such critics as Mr A.S. Knowland, Professor Gérard, Professor Duthie, Professor R.A. Foakes, Dr E.M.W. Tillyard and Mr D.A. Traversi. Mr Knowland's detailed refutation of Professor Wilson Knight's position deserves particular attention. It draws attention to what Dr Tillyard has called Professor Wilson Knight's 'drastic simplification'. It is more exact and thorough than Professor L.C. Knight's 'correction' which again over-simplifies - this time in an effort to accommodate Professor Knight's preoccupation with appearance and reality.

In fact, more often than not, Professor Wilson Knight's opponents have themselves been given to over-simplification. Professor Jan Kott and Professor Campbell are notable examples here. Very few have been able to keep the balance.

4 Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, (1964); O.J. Campbell, op. cit.
of Mr Knowland or of Professor Foakes who claims that 'Both Trojans and Greeks are displayed in their virtues and faults'\(^1\). Trojans and Greeks are alike and unlike. The linking of imagery is strong but no stronger than the dramatic contrast drawn between the Greek and Trojan council scenes. Once again, unwillingness to accept the uneasy compromise, the desire for a simple, orderly view has led to falsification and extreme divergence among the critics.

The genre controversy again reflects both the ambiguity of the play and the critics' unwillingness to accept this ambiguity. Professor Campbell insists that the play is a 'comicall satyre'; Professor Gérard sees it as a satire but with very little of the comical in it; he calls it 'sarcastic to the point of nihilism'\(^2\). But Professor W.W. Lawrence denies that a satirical spirit controls the play\(^3\), and so too does Mr Knowland who claims it is 'a compassionate human study', not cynical but intensely sympathetic.\(^4\). Professor Wilson Knight also opposes the

---

2 Loc. cit., p. 150.
notion of satire. He insists that the play is a tragedy: he speaks of its 'tragic philosophy' and calls the play as a whole 'Troilus's love-tragedy'\(^1\). Others who take this view include Dr Hawkes who describes Troilus as 'tragically vulnerable'\(^2\), Mr Brian Morris who refers to the play's 'tragic inevitability'\(^3\), Mrs Nowottny, Mr John Russell Brown, Mr D.A. Traversi, Mr William B. Toole and Professor E. Davis. If Professor Campbell has gone too far in one direction, Professor Wilson Knight seems to have gone too far in the other. There have been few willing to compromise. Dr Tillyard, however, is one: he claims that the play is both tragic and satiric\(^4\). Some critics have sought new terms: Professor Foakes calls it 'an heroic farce'\(^5\), Professor Kott 'a tragi-comedy'\(^6\), Professor Oates 'problem tragedy'\(^7\), and Professor R.J. Kaufmann 'an inquisition'\(^8\). It has become usual now to classify it as a 'problem play', more to avoid the problem than to solve it. For, of course, the problem involves

---

5 Loc. cit., p. 280.  
something more complex than the finding of an apt term. What the confusion points to is a great uncertainty about how to see the play, about where the spectator should take his stand. Professor Knights and Dr Tillyard are among the very few who have shown some awareness of the peculiar relationship that exists between playwright and spectator in this play\(^1\), but neither has worked out the implications in any detail. That the critics are, despite all appearances, very unsure is reflected once again in the diversity of their response. For the same play to be proclaimed by one as compassionate, by another as cynical, by a third as sarcastic, a fourth as comic, a fifth as tragically ironical, a sixth as cruelly grotesque\(^2\) leads one to suspect that the confidence with which such conflicting assertions are made is ungrounded and forced, that in each case perception is limited, and that the play is indeed many-sided and enigmatic.

On the value of the play, divergence is, not surprisingly, again evident. And once again, despite assertions to the contrary, it is unsureness that seems to be

---

1 L.C. Knights, op. cit., p. 78; E.M.W. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 56.
2 These judgments belong, respectively, to: A.S. Knowland; K. Deighton; A. Gerard; O.J. Campbell; T. Hawkes; Jan Kott.
betrayed. Those who proclaim its success usually speak in unconvincingly abstract terms of its form and style. 'Victory of form', 'rounded fullness of style and structure', 'many-voiced music', 'superb ring of the verse', 'powerful unity of idea' are fairly representative phrases used to ring forth its praise. They are, as reference to context would show, relatively meaningless: hyperbole all too often is offered as a substitute for supported argument. They are made to seem even less meaningful when placed beside significantly similar phrases used to pronounce its failure: its verse 'lacks the surpassing thrill', 'full of weaknesses of design', 'much of the language is a failure', 'hard to find a central unifying theme'. Mr Traversi exemplifies a tendency that is all too common and leaves one with no great faith in the conclusions reached. He begins with the deceptively firm statement that 'Troilus and Cressida' is not, on any
view of Shakespeare's work, a successful play\(^1\), but his essay consists almost exclusively of reasons (not all valid) for regarding it as a success. Weaknesses, relative though they may be, receive very little attention.

But grounds for mistrusting conclusive verdicts about the value of the play—both praise and dispraise—go very much deeper than objections to generalisations and inconsistencies of the kind just mentioned. Narrowness and over-simplification, a failure of response to the essential openness of the play, give greater cause for concern. Much criticism is an attempt to elucidate through simplification. Some works lend themselves more readily to this treatment than do others. *Troilus and Cressida* seems almost to flout it. Because every issue is open to a number of interpretations and because critical response has, with very little exception, been too simple and narrow, summarising generalisations about the value of the play carry very little weight.

In this study my chief interest is in the pattern of sympathy and recoil, involvement and alienation, succeeding each other from moment to moment and from scene to scene,

---

\(^1\) See D.A. Traversi, *'Troilus and Cressida*', *Scrutiny*, VII, 1938, pp. 301-319.
which seems to me to shape and animate the play. At the outset, I should acknowledge a general debt to Mr J.L. Styan\(^1\), who, although he has published nothing specifically on Shakespearean drama, offers an approach that seems particularly helpful for Shakespearean criticism. His work has suggested to me not only an approach but a critical tool. Mr Styan defines drama as 'a structure of shifting relationships between character and spectator':\(^2\)

The quality in a play that distinguishes it is its animation - not of actors acting and speaking, but of our imaginative impressions. If we can understand how these move in time, flex and vary, develop, lend themselves to exploitation, we shall come closer to knowing how effective drama arises. A play is not an art of words, any more than a film is an art of pictures: it is the art of exercising them. The \textit{Playboy of the Western World} cannot be flatly summarized as 'a satire on human perversity': how fixed and solid this sounds! The play is alive like gossamer, and it teases and woos us towards its discoveries.\(^3\)

\textit{Troilus and Cressida} cannot be flatly summarised as 'a comedy of vice'\(^4\) or 'a satire of folly'\(^5\) or 'an ironical

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{1} J.L. Styan. \textit{The Elements of Drama}. Cambridge University Press, 1963 ed.
\bibitem{5} O.J. Campbell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 185.
\end{thebibliography}
copy of Homer'\(^1\) or 'a tragedy of love un-at-home in time'\(^2\). It too is 'alive', but not 'like gossamer': its energy is more nervous, taut. It provokes and thwarts rather than 'teases and woos'. It exercises words with peculiar force, deliberately withholding easy discoveries.

To find out how this play acts on, or is potentially likely - even calculated - to act on, an audience is my chief concern. Such a concern is not bound by how actual audiences (including, or mainly critics) have reacted. It does, however, involve me in assumptions about a normal, or even an ideal, audience.

Throughout this study, I refer to 'the spectator' or, in the plural, 'the audience'. I might have referred to 'the reader' for the quality of attention demanded by a Shakespearean play is the quality of attention demanded by a dramatic poem. And it is unrealistic to imagine that more see Shakespearean drama now (I claim to speak only for audiences of today) than read it. I have chosen, however, to speak of the spectator because I see a distinct need for the drama critic to ensure

---

2 G. Wilson Knight, op. cit., p. 68.
that his insights are relevant and accessible to an actual or potential audience at an actual or potential performance. The ideal - perhaps even the normal - audience for Shakespeare today has read and thought before it sees. It is a coterie. Although the reader may in fact never have the chance to see, in order to read well he must think of himself as seeing. Similarly, the critic must concentrate on a potential performance, although in fact he addresses the spectator necessarily by way of the reader. He must guard against a tendency to treat a play as a series of poems 'united' by a principle of his own construction. (In discussing Troilus, Professor L.C. Knights and Mr Traversi have distorted thus 1.) He must try to give some account of its life as a play. While analysing the qualities of individual passages, he must be constantly aware of the relation of these passages to others, of continual flux, development and change, of larger patterns and rhythms, and of the relation of these passages to the (often complicated) responses which they control.

Because I have endeavoured to keep these things in mind, I make no apology for the number of times I shall

slow the action down to allow for closer analysis. In each case my main interest is in determining how the play acts on its audience and how the audience's reactions form part of a pattern in the whole. *Troilus and Cressida*, with its defiant openness, can, I would contend, be better understood by this approach than by any other.

The analysis that follows is in two main sections: the first on the love story; the second on the war story. In a third section I shall draw some conclusions relating to the play as a whole. In my final chapter I shall endeavour to set the play in its appropriate contexts, both within and without the Shakespearean canon.
CHAPTER II

THE LOVE STORY

PANDARUS

Because Pandarus plays such an important part in the love story, it seems worthwhile to clarify his position at the start. It does need clarifying for, here as elsewhere, critics have differed widely. At one extreme lies a judgment such as Professor K. Deighton's: (Pandarus is a) 'filthy, prurient, self-appointed fool who revels in garbage'\(^1\). At the other might be set Professor Wilson Knight's comment: 'Pandarus's fussy interest is delightful ... his humour like health-giving sunshine'\(^2\). How corrupt is Pandarus? What basic attitude towards him does the play seek to encourage in the spectator? Both Pandarus's corruption and his humour need investigation.

Pandarus is assuredly corrupt. In the opening scene, his cake metaphor makes a forceful – and far from winning – impression. 'To have a cake out of the wheat' gives crude, if sharp, expression to Troilus's hopes as a lover. In the following exchange, the effect of moral crassness

seems to be heightened by the regulated precision and fervour of his prose:

**Troilus:** Have I not tarried?

**Pandarus:** Ay, the grinding; but you must tarry the bolting.

**Troilus:** Have I not tarried?

**Pandarus:** Ay, the bolting; but you must tarry the leavening.

**Troilus:** Still have I tarried.

**Pandarus:** Ay, to the leavening; but here's yet in the word 'hereafter' the kneading, the making of the cake, the heating of the oven, and the baking. Nay, you must stay the cooling too, or ye may chance burn your lips.

Pandarus seems to be not only 'chafing' Troilus but whetting his own perverted appetite. The strain of overheated physical corruption first suggested in the Prologue - 'high blood chafed', 'tickling skittish spirits', and 'disgorge' - is continued here. And Pandarus, the complacent, gleeful Pandarus, is shown to be an agent. His 'fussy interest', however 'delightful' it may seem to Professor Wilson Knight, is perverted as any 'broker's' must be. In his determination to keep Troy pure, Professor Wilson Knight has ignored evidence of this kind.

But, if Professor Wilson Knight is wrong to disregard Pandarus's corruption, Professor Deighton's epithets -
'filthy' and 'garbage' - still do not seem right. Pandarus's imagery is common and belittling - of the kitchen or the farmyard usually - but it is not filthy and rotten: it does not 'seethe' as Thersites' does. Pandarus seems less corrupt and decidedly less repellent than his Greek counterpart. There is a sense in which Professor Wilson Knight is right. For, compared with Thersites, Pandarus is a comic figure. In a light, breathless way, he very often amuses even while he disturbs. His wit and prosaicness relieve Troilus's romanticising in I.i.; in I.ii. his enthusiasm seems harmlessly comical; his bustling, good-humoured presence quite often seems to lighten the play. 'Health-giving sunshine' would seem a wildly extravagant term, but the comedy Pandarus provides does influence the spectator's reaction quite importantly: it tends to lessen the seriousness of his contempt. Professor Deighton's stern, rigid disapprobation is not the attitude encouraged by the play. It would seem then that, although both critics have overstated and oversimplified, there is an element of truth in each of their statements, opposed though they are. Pandarus is corrupt but one's response is not one of simple disdain or revulsion, as it is more clearly for Thersites.
Some leniency - an amused tolerance almost - seems to be urged by the play itself. Indeed, it is necessary if contempt is not to rule out all sympathy for Troilus.

At the very end of the play, however, when Pandarus rounds on him to deliver his vicious 'epilogue', the spectator may well smart under the savagery of the attack. For he seems at the close to be upbraided for the very leniency that the play's humour has controlled. He is to learn in the end that there is nothing funny and nothing forgivable about Pandarus's corruption: Pandarus addresses him as a fellow bawd, bequeathing him his diseases. All others have left. The audience, alone to share Pandarus's world, seem the target of bitter contempt. Assaults of this kind, where the spectator is attacked for a position that the play has urged, even manoeuvred, him to hold, characterise the procedure of the play. This one, though harsher than most, is typical of many, as I shall go on to show.

CRESSIDA

The presentation of Cressida is very similar to that of Pandarus. Throughout most of the play, she is an ambiguous figure: both attractive and unattractive. But, at the end, this ambiguity, necessary to the flow of the
drama to this point, is suddenly and harshly removed: Cressida is revealed as a plain slut. Once again, the spectator seems to stand convicted for a response that was encouraged from the start.

Critics who call her simply 'a connoisseur of lust'\(^1\) or 'a crafty coquette'\(^2\) are allowing what they finally learn to colour their whole response, just as Professor Deighton and others have done for Pandarus. By simplifying in this way, they exclude themselves from the contempt that seems levelled at us all. But they do not adequately characterise the Cressida whom we see throughout most of the play. For this they in turn stand convicted.

From the start, Cressida is indeed pert, ribald, prosaic and unrefined, participating far too readily in shallow, bawdy repartee:

Pandarus: You are such a woman a man knows not at what ward you lie.

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.

(I.ii.270-76)

---

1 A. Gérard, loc. cit., p. 146.
2 Terence Hawkes, op. cit., p. 78.
But sympathy for her is not entirely alienated. The lively cleverness of her wit, the neat incisiveness of her prose, interest even while her toughness repels. She is without her uncle's smarmy complacency, his most alienating trait. Her crispness too comes as something of a relief after Troilus's romanticising.

But one of the most telling pieces of evidence in her favour is the soliloquy after Pandarus's exit in her opening scene (I.ii. 294-307). There is a change in tone and tempo here. The languishing inactivity of most of the first scene has modulated into the background activity and swift foreground repartee of the second. The irony that underlies each - the uninvolved intensity of the first matches the uninvolved commotion of the second - has gained in momentum. The ribald love in the background, matched by ribald wit in the foreground, has made a mockery of highflown romantic protestation, of both involvement and uninvolvement in the war. The audience's critical faculties have been sharpened and brought increasingly into play. A spirit of comic irony promises to inform the play. But, with Pandarus's exit, there comes a still point. Cressida, without romantic inflation, without saucy, prosaic wit, is allowed to
address the audience alone. Irony is still there, but more serious, even pathetic, than comic. The change is underscored by the sudden transition from prose to verse:

Words, vows, gifts, tears, and love's full sacrifice
He offers in another's enterprise;
But more in Troilus thousandfold I see
Than in the glass of Pandar's praise may be.

(I.ii. 294-97)

The tone is not quite unambiguous, but the simplicity of the diction, the mature balance of the rhythms, the wistful resignation that is at least part of the tone, make these lines at least as convincing as any of Troilus's elaborate protestations in the scene before. For this brief but quite important time, Cressida, alone and serious, commands a considerable degree of sympathy. The cynicism that follows in this soliloquy is saddening, not repelling: her limited concept of love seems inevitable, 'true' in the light of the world she is in; her conclusions follow logically from it.

In a later section¹ I shall offer further proof of Cressida's essential ambiguity. Throughout most of the play, she is not just 'shallow, hard and lascivious', as

---
¹ The love-scenes are discussed pp. 39-55.
Dr Tillyard has called her\(^1\). Nor is she 'detested and condemned', as Dr Johnson has claimed\(^2\). It would be extravagant to call her 'a fair, pure and true woman'\(^3\), or to indulge in the excesses of Professor Kott\(^4\), but one does need to realise that, until she appears among the Greeks in IV.v. she is curiously sympathetic and attractive despite her obvious flaws. And one needs also to recognise that, when she does appear in the Greek camp, an abrupt change in her characterisation has taken place. Ambiguity is removed: she is simplified and hardened to a plain 'daughter of the game', a 'sluttish spoil of opportunity'. It may be significant that, from this time on, she never occupies the forefront of the stage. Professor William Empson, Mr Knowland, Professor Tucker Brooke and Sir Edmund Chambers have been right to draw attention to the change, and to note that, up to this point, Shakespeare's attitude to Cressida has been much less censorious than Ulysses' is to be. When, in IV.v. the action suddenly gives Ulysses' verdict

---

4 Professor Kott (op. cit., pp.66-67) claims that 'Cressida is one of the most amazing Shakespearean characters, perhaps just as amazing as Hamlet'.
clear support, one may well cast about for explanation. In Professor Coghill's opinion, 'the suddenness of the fall' is merely 'a matter of fitting material to medium'.

This seems to me a less than satisfactory explanation, for Professor Coghill is unwilling to take the next step: to infer that, if this is so, a basic weakness in the structure of the play as a whole makes itself apparent at this point. This is a possibility that cannot be ignored. But an alternative view seems to me more plausible, chiefly because it is so consistent with the spirit and procedure of so much else in the play. As I suggested earlier, the abruptness of the simplification of Cressida's character seems to be of a kind with the abruptness of the simplification of Pandarus's character in his 'epilogue'. It is related too to changes that take place in the portrayal of several other major characters, as I shall demonstrate later. This change in Cressida seems to share the deliberate, provoking spirit that characterises the play.

TROILUS IN THE EARLIER SCENES.

_Troilus and Cressida_ is very much concerned with 'weighing' and 'valuing'. The Trojan debate is centred
on problems of value and draws on images of evaluation:

'Every tithe soul.../ Hath been as dear as Helen' (II.ii. 19-20), 'To guard a thing not ours nor worth to us/...the value of one ten' (22-23), 'Weigh you the worth and honour of a king/...in a scale/ Of common ounces?' (26-27), 'Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost/ The keeping.' (51-52), 'What's aught but as 't is valued?' (52), '...she is a pearl/ Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships' (81-82), '...Why do you now/...Beggar the estimation which you prized/ Richer than sea and land?' (88-92). Agamemnon and Nestor uses images from weight and weighing: 'And what hath mass or matter by itself/ Lies rich in virtue and unmingled' (I.iii. 29-30). Aeneas urges us to 'Weigh him (Hector) well' (IV.v. 81). Ulysses warns Achilles lest he 'overhold his price so much' (II.ii. 135) for Achilles, he claims 'grows dainty of his worth' (I.iii. 145). Diomedes equates Paris and Menelaus thus: 'Both merits poised, each weighs nor more nor less' (IV.i. 65), decrying the 'costly loss of wealth and friends' (60). Cressida's lament is that 'Men prize the thing ungained more than it is' (I.ii. 301); Troilus's that 'We two, that with so many thousand sighs/ Did buy each other, must poorly sell ourselves (IV.iv. 39-40).
the play. For the audience, evaluation of characters and events is no simple matter but it is one in which they must clearly feel themselves involved.

Before discussing Troilus, I have tried to show something of the ambiguity of both Pandarus and Cressida because to weigh him in the balance is to weigh them too, particularly Cressida. If one is to feel any sympathy for Troilus, one must be able to see qualities in Cressida, other than her blatant sensuality, that might attract him, and reasons for his failure to respond to Pandarus with unmitigated disgust.

Some critics, as I mentioned earlier, have found Troilus quite unsympathetic — Heinrich Heine called him 'a lout', 'a puppy'¹, Brandes 'a simpleton'² — but they are in the minority. They are no more wrong, however, than those who respond with unqualified sympathy and praise. Most critics have failed to give due weight both to the ambiguity of his characterisation from the start and to the continual changes and development that take place in its throughout.

¹ Quoted in A. Gérard, loc. cit., p. 145.
² Ibid., p. 145.
For the first part of the play, Troilus is more unheroic than heroic. He tends to attitudinise; the spectator tends to criticise. The mood of his first scene tends to that of comical satire. After the clamour and flourish, even the grimness, portended in the Prologue, there is bathos in the sight of the lovesick youth dallying on the sidelines with an uncooperative pimp. His first words distance rather than win:

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.

(I. i. 1-5)

'Why should I war without the walls of Troy...?': the prettiness of the alliteration is inappropriate; it is not engaging. Nor is the petulant tone, the querulous self-justifying of a spoilt child. 'Cruel battle' with its rising stress sounds hollow, merely excitable and extreme, after the grave weight of the corresponding phrase in the Prologue.

The Troilus of the first scene is weak, weak and rather unstable. His unquestioning reliance on Pandarus,
his romanticising, his absorption in his own hopes and pains, his volubility and self-indulgence, his sensuality and his changeableness inhibit sympathy and respect. It is weak in him not to fight: he knows this himself (110-11). And the spectator knows it too, despite the questioning of the value of fighting in the Prologue and despite Troilus's suggestion that the honour of love may be asserting a superior claim. Troilus's petulance informs him. And so too do the doubts he is encouraged to hold about the soundness and honour of the love Troilus is so voluble about, so desperate to enjoy. Troilus's passionate protestations of love convey less and more than Troilus presumably supposes: less of love and more of weakness. Having been prepared by Pandarus's fervent, gleeful exposition of the 'cake' analogy, by the hints the Prologue gave about 'skittish spirits' and 'wanton' Paris, by suggestions of immature romanticising in Troilus himself¹, the spectator is alert, as Troilus is not, to the sensuality and insubstantiality of his love:

Troilus: O Pandarus! I tell thee, Pandarus

When I do tell thee, there my hopes lie drowned,

Reply not in how many fathoms deep

They lie indrenched. I tell thee I am mad

In Cressid's love; thou answer'st she is fair,

---

¹ See, for instance, 29-33; 36-42.
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 plowman. This thou tell'st me,
As true thou tell'st me, when I say I love her;
But, saying thus, instead of oil and balm,
Thou lay'st in every gash that love hath given me
The knife that made it.

(I,i, 50-65)

The vividness of the poetry makes an immediate impression —
I shall return to this point shortly — but one marks the
excessiveness of the conceits, the breathless rush of the
rhythms, the tumultuous energy and curiously public, self-
conscious tone. And one is struck too by images that are
intensely and corruptly physical: 'the open ulcer of my
heart', 'every gash that love hath given me'. 'Handlest'
shocks in a similar way. It sullies even the apparently
innocent and beautifully articulated eulogy to Cressida's
hand. Troilus's easy association of love with the phys-
ically repugnant and corroded is indeed disturbing. It
would seem that Pandarus's 'handling' of this love affair
cannot but leave its mark.

A little later, as his restless soliloquy quietens,
his satisfaction in the image of himself as a 'merchant'
sailing in Pandar's bark to Cressid's 'bed of India'(105-08)
again perturbs. The connotations jar: after all the romantic protestations, Cressid is, in Troilus's eyes, just a piece of choice merchandise, a rich source to be exploited. The 'India' image is more exotic, more glamorous - more sensual too - than Pandarus's 'cake', but it is not significantly different in kind. Troilus's concept of love is not very noble. It is alarmingly close to Pandarus's.

Nor is his attitude to the war noble or heroic. When he does eventually rush off to the battle, it is for the sake of the 'sport', for the excitement, for, with Pandarus gone, the possibility of 'sport' in love seems to have been removed (117-20). It is significant that he can equate war and love thus. 'High blood chafed' and 'tickling skittish spirits' spring to mind. It is significant too that he does not see the disparity between his words and his deeds (or lack of them), his vivid style and insubstantial matter, his idealised love and its pragmatic mediator, and between his own attitudes: the outburst against Helen (93-97) supplies the reason for neither his consent nor his refusal to fight. Comic irony keeps the spectator distanced.
Professor Wilson Knight and others - including Professor Ellis-Fermor and Professor Danby - have entirely overlooked evidence of this kind. Troilus is not the simple hero of their claims. But those who take an opposite view - Professor Campbell and Professor Gérard, for instance - have been just as blind to evidence of another kind. For although Troilus inspires little respect or admiration in the opening scene, sympathy is not estranged from him altogether. The vibrant intensity of Troilus's language - inappropriate though it sometimes is - makes an immediate and favourable impression. Typically, it is delicately and fastidiously patterned, highly alliterative and mellifluous, with splendid, vivid imagery. Even when one criticises its inaptness (as, for instance, in 'Why should I war without the walls of Troy...?') or its excess ('Let it be called the wild and wandering flood...') or even its vitiated sensuality ('Pour'st in the open ulcer of my heart'), one has to admire its vividness and grace. The most splendid poetry in the play is, with little exception, Troilus's. Even in the midst of his initial outpourings before Pandarus (the least sympathetic of circumstances), an audience may marvel at the sensuous vividness and delicate patterning of lines like these:

1 Consider, for instance, the 'injurious time' speech (IV.iv. 33-48), discussed p. 51 of this study.
0, 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 plowman.

(I.i. 57-61)

Sensitivity, refinement, heightened imagination and passion
are suggested. The intensity and elegance of Troilus's
language imply a sensibility that, although corruptible,
is not itself corrupt. One sees why Mrs Nowottny calls
him 'a type of the poetic nature'. His vibrant poetry,
contrasted as it is with Pandarus's terse prose/elevates
him. It seems set to charm an audience out of censure,
to invite full sympathy.

But, as I have pointed out, sympathetic involvement
is inhibited by other tensions at work. Troilus, denied
a hero's entrance, a hero's maturity and associates, is
not to command a hero's sympathy. The spectator is dis-
tanced, but he is not alienated entirely. Extenuating
factors exist: Troilus's youth is emphasised; his
shallow environment glimpsed, his language surpasses all
others'. Like Cressida and Pandarus, he too is an am-
biguous figure. An audience cannot be sure how he will

2 Pandarus's story of the white hair upon Troilus's chin
(I, ii, 113-174), while it continues to distance one from
Troilus, does emphasise both his youth and the shallowness
of his background.
turn out: he may be nothing more than an extravagant, self-dramatising sensualist, content to drift along with the likes of Pandarus, but the hope is not ruled out that he may yet prove to be something more. The potential would seem to be there. The point to note at this stage is that, although the spectator is more inclined to criticise than to sympathise, the play discourages both simple condemnation and simple praise.

THE LOVE SCENES

For a whole Act, the scene switches from 'love' to 'war', but, at the start of Act III, Pandarus's bustling entrance into Paris and Helen's boudoir seems a natural consequence of his bustling exits from Troilus then Cressida in Act I. It is significant that the first love-scene in the play is between the 'firebrand brother' and the Grecian queen. The tawdry glitter of this scene is a visual symbol of the corruption at the centre of the play. It obliquely but sharply criticises the stand that triumphed in the Trojan council scene - Troilus's stand - and sets the tone, raising stringently critical questions and creating the momentum for the scene that follows: the first love-scene between Troilus and Cressida.
Titillation of the senses is the prime concern of Paris and Helen's 'love': 'love's bow...tickles still the sore', sings Pandarus (III.i. 117-19), recalling 'tickling skittish spirits', Troilus's 'open ulcer', and the images of 'chafing' that run through the play. The 'love' in this scene is tawdry and corrupt: extreme in its sensuality and excitable instability. The doubts a spectator has been encouraged to hold from the start about the quality of Troilus and Cressida's love - doubts about sensuality and mere excitability - are raised again, rather ominously, here. Just 30-40 lines before their first love-scene begins, one is startled by a precise formulation of the troubling questions that the play raises about the kind of love it presents:

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?

(III.i. 127-33)

---

1 See, for instance, Prol. 2; I.ii. 172-73, 183-84; I.iii. 139; II.i. 26-31; II.ii. 59, 63, 169; II.iii. 175, 202, 223; III.i. 119; III.iii. 44; IV.ii. 109; IV. iv. 19; 33-38; IV.v. 159; V.i. 1-2; V.ii. 55; V.iii. 17; V.v. 32; V.x. 55-56.
In the sticky, honey-sweet setting of risqué laughter and song, Paris - the 'wanton' Paris, who, through his very passion, has started the war - playfully tosses off this definition of love. Pandarus appears to heed it for a moment, startled, before dismissing it cheerfully. The spectator, lured by the lively tempo of the exchange, the gaining momentum of the scene, the comic mood, may be tempted to dismiss it too. But Pandarus's pause directs him to catch his breath. For the definition brings into focus the suggestions of overheated corruption that began in the Prologue; it recalls Hector's accusation about 'the hot passion of distempered blood' and 'raging appetites' (II.ii. 169, 181) and Ulysses' condemnation of the 'swoln and hot discourse' 'imagined worth' holds in Achilles' blood (II.iii. 175). With considerable daring, the playwright seems to be throwing these central questions directly at the spectator, almost challenging him to toss them off with Pandarus's complacency or Paris's besotment. This kind of direct and aggressive contact with the audience - it is clear that the questions are set primarily to trouble and stir the audience, not the speakers - is a feature of the play. The questions disturb, forcing the spectator to consider the morality of the love of the two principals in the light of the issues they raise. Troilus's
famous 'wallow in the lily beds' speech follows shortly after.

The first love-scene between Troilus and Cressida (III.iii.) is strange indeed. For the reasons already discussed, the spectator is, or ought to be, distanced from the 'hero' and 'heroine', prepared to be more critical than sympathetic, his feelings for each neutralised to an unusual degree. Interest is, above all, in the kind and quality of their love, as a general state, as a reflection of the temper of their background, and less in their particular response to each other, in witnessing the development of their passion, in responding to them as individuals. The decelerated tempo and general nature of their first conversation - its prose medium, its concern with abstract questions - tend to keep the spectator's interest at this level, and tend too to maintain the distance that separates him from them.

Troilus's opening speeches in III.ii. have received detailed attention elsewhere. Mr Traversi, for instance, has commented perceptively on the insubstantiality of Troilus's passion, noting that the sensations, though intense, are felt 'only on the palate and through the senses':

1 Loc. cit., p. 310.
Troilus: 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 palates taste indeed
Love's thrice-repured nectar? Death, I fear me,
Sounding 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,
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps
The enemy flying.

(III.ii. 17-28)

Once again, although the poetry is vividly sensuous, eloquent and sweeping, an attuned ear detects sheer sensuality in its intensity, excess in its apparent discrimination, giddiness in its rhythms. 'Hot thoughts anticipating hot deeds': is Troilus's love, light and sweet though his language may be, 'viperish' at core? The question has gained momentum from the previous scene.

The corruption of his love is suggested in several ways. The opening images of his first speech:

...I stalk about a door
Like a strange soul upon the Stygian banks
Staying for waftage. ...

(III.ii. 8-10)

make a connection between love and Hades: Pandarus is to be his Charon, ferryman of the dead; death and destruction are enlisted later (21-28). The breathless plangency of these opening speeches, the sweetness of the alliteration,
the romance of the allusions, beguile—beguile Troilus especially, it would seem—but the concept of love is itself unhealthy. 'My heart beats thicker than a feverous pulse', Troilus goes on to say (36), the word 'feverous' directly answering to the charge of 'hot thoughts...hot deeds' and the earlier accusation of 'distempered blood' (II.ii. 169). Troilus's love, his concept of love, is tainted. It belongs with the tainted pride, the tainted bitterness and indulgence, the many-sided corruption with which the play is concerned.

But the scene as a whole is not remarkable for its taintedness. On the contrary, in spite of Troilus's excessive sensuality, Pandarus's belittling vulgarities and Cressida's probable craftiness, and in spite of the leading, crucial questions that seem to be answered with damaging pointedness, there is, paradoxically, something refreshing, hopeful, even healthy and sweet about this scene. It stands in obvious contrast to the one that precedes it. The staleness of the sensuality there, the grotesqueness of the 'sweetness', the shallowness of the titillation, are not repeated here.

There is much that puzzles in this scene. The ambiguity of Cressida's behaviour is only one of the problems
raised. It is perhaps one of the simplest and most comprehensible. Gressida herself seems set to explicate: she suggests that perhaps she shows more craft than love (154-56); and that perhaps she shows two different faces, one to Troilus, another to the rest of the world (149-51). Her behaviour bears out the kind of dualism that she suggests about herself: she seems to have 'angled' for Troilus's kiss and confession. But for what end is her 'craft', if it is solely craft? It would seem that, in his presence at least, she is moved by genuine feeling. (The soliloquy at the end of I.ii suggested that her feeling endures even in his absence.) And, although her general attitude is cynical — it is Troilus who makes the romantic protestations (75-100) — she shows little brittle coarseness. She is no 'Nell' of the previous scene. Yet it seems certain that a spectator is meant to be keenly aware of the irony of her cry against possible falsehood, just as he seems meant to credit without hesitation Troilus's avowals of truth. But the very speech in which Cressida makes this cry has a moving dignity and sweeping richness that seem to remove it from the false and brittle:

1 Such instances as 'blabbed', 1.126, are conspicuous for their rarity and mildness.
If I be false or swerve a hair from truth,
When time is old and hath forgot itself,
When waterdrops 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!

(III.ii, 186-92)

It is as if Cressida has felt, more fully than he, the force of Troilus's assertion that the monstrosity in love is its finiteness (82-85). The ironies of this speech move one to sympathy, concern. They are closer to being tragic than comic: waterdrops are doomed not to wear the stones of Troy, yet mighty states, characterless, will be grated, with or without war; love will end, with or without parting. In this scene there is some pathos in the discussion of the tragic finiteness of life and love,¹ but, except for this one unexpected (and not unambiguous) instance, the irony that informs it scarcely strikes one as tragic. It is essentially an irony that distances, not one that, awakening strong pity and fear, involves.

"As true as Troilus", "as false as Cressida": these are the simplifications with which the scene closes. Truisms though the familiar background story has made them, an audience may tend to doubt them both when they come in the play. They may tend to discredit Cressida when she

¹ See Cressida, 185-92; Troilus, 82-85.
suggests that she may be false: the very fact that she suggests it tends to disarm. And they may tend not to believe Troilus when he says that he is true: again, the very fact of his saying it may lead them to doubt. The two have been contrasted throughout the scene, but the contrasts have not worked towards these simple ends. Troilus has shown himself to be both idealist and sensualist, both fresh and tainted. While one does not think of him as a hypocritical monster, neither does one believe, as he does, in the 'winnowed purity' of his love. He yearns for the infinite, but, even more, for the limited act. After voicing his longing for the love of a woman 'with a mind / That doth renew swifter than blood decays' (163-64), he says a solemn 'Amen' to Pandarus's 'bargain' and moves off to 'press to death' the bed that Pandar provides. He does not see the incongruity, but an audience must. He is both innocent and spoilt. Nor is Cressida much less ambiguous. She appears to be both crafty and sincere, capable of both poetic intensity and flat pragmatism. The paradoxes exist and are not resolved by the prophetic aphorisms with which the scene closes. These an audience may tend to doubt, knowing at the very time of doubting that there is sense and stupidity in
doing so: sense because the play has led them to this point, and stupidity because they know, even now, that the story as it unfolds will prove them wrong. The insistence of the repetitions at the close of this scene seems flouting: the audience seems to be being mocked for the impasse in which they are caught. They seem to be mocked for taking seriously what has been presented as, at least in part, serious; for listening to and being swayed by the vividness of Troilus's poetry and Cressida's apparent seriousness; for heeding the rhythms and tempo that seem to shape the scene. This may well be another instance of the provocative manoeuvring, noted already in discussions of Pandarus and Cressida.

The news that Cressida is to return to the Greeks brings the love-story to a point of crisis. In their reactions to it, Troilus and Cressida are again contrasted. And again, the contrast works in no very simple way: Troilus is not simply 'good' and Cressida 'bad'. Even before they learn of this climactic news, they are contrasted in the brief morning scene after their night of love (IV.ii.). It is Cressida who entreats now; Troilus

1 pp. 25, 30.
finds himself summoned by 'the busy day'. A spectator can have no simple response to the attitude of either. Troilus seems far more mature and balanced than he was earlier in the play, but his business-like brevity is cryptic: it could not have been predicted and it is hard to know what value to place upon it. Cressida's self-reproval:

Prithee, tarry;  
You men will never tarry. 
0 foolish Cressida! I might have still held off, 
And then you would have tarried. ...  

(IV.ii. 15-18)

is not attractive: a great many similar experiences are implied. But it is true enough, and rather sad, for, whether she deserves better or not, it would seem that Troilus's passion is of no greater depth or nobility than that of any other of Cressida's acquaintances, and that, in a sense, he and such as he have made her what she is. One is caught then thinking that he should both stay and go.

This enigmatic quietness of Troilus's contrasts too with the wildness of Cressida's outbursts at the news of their severance (IV.ii. 98-111). Her excessiveness, like his quietness, was not really predictable: such extravagance
has been more typical of him than of her. Without the benefit of hindsight, or even of foresight, it is not easy to interpret here. Unpredictable fluctuations of tempo and rhythm heighten the spectator's bewilderment, stressing the crisis that is at hand. One interpretation that cannot, at this point, be lightly dismissed is that Cressida's outbursts point to some depth of real passion, a passion that succeeds in breaking through her more customary pragmatic calm and cynicism. The fact that such an interpretation is to be proved wrong, suddenly and harshly, does not cancel out its force at this point.

When, in IV.iv., Troilus and Cressida meet to part, each claims a fineness of love that is pure and unqualified. A spectator can have full faith in neither's claims, for both have by now given proof of the excess of their sensuousness. Cressida's 'The grief is fine, full, perfect that I taste' (IV.iv. 3) answers to Troilus's earlier fears about losing distinction in his joys (III.ii. 25-26). But this is not 'the fretful dialogue of two sated sensualists', as Professor Campbell has called it. There is a poignancy about the scene, a poignancy that could not

1 IV.iv. 24-27; 9-10.
exist had one no faith in either's claim. This poignancy has, I would contend, very little to do with the substance of Troilus's famous speech on 'time' (32-49), although the quality of Troilus's poetry, here perhaps more than anywhere else, influences one to sympathetic attention. This speech is deservedly famous. Its imagery is extraordinarily rich and compressed ('justles roughly by', 'crams his rich thievery up', 'fumbles up into a loose adieu'); its rhythms patterned with sensitive force to stress the powerful activity of the verbs, ('justles', 'strangles', 'crams', 'fumbles', 'scants'). These verbs, alive in their metaphorical suggestiveness and freshness of diction, are balanced tautly against their passive counterparts ('locked', 'consigned', 'famished', 'distated') to convey with passionate energy a keen awareness of man's dilemma in time. But this speech's fame is as a set-piece, out of context, a splendidly vivid poem. It epitomises much that is important - and critical - about Troilus's intensity and values: sensuality is there; and so too, despite imaginative engagement, is an unperceived incongruity between manner (fresh, dynamic) and matter (lament), between situation (Pandarus is present throughout) and response (intense, rarefied). It is, nevertheless, hard
to see how this speech fits in with the flow of the drama. An incongruity exists there too. The speech stands out as a set-piece, a rich insertion, having little to do, fundamentally, with the dramatic situation in which it occurs. Its control of its own tempos is assured, but those tempos are not consistent with the larger rhythms of the scene. In context, it is essentially static. Some of the richest speeches in the play impress one in this way, a point I shall take up later in this study.

When the lovers prepare to part, emblems and vows being exchanged, it is revealed that 'injurious time' is not in fact to 'scant' them with 'a single famished kiss', for Troilus is to give Cressida 'nightly visitation' (as much, one has reason to think, as she could have expected - or he wished for - had she stayed in the Trojan camp). Troilus's modesty is winning in this exchange. He speaks with an artless simplicity that matches his protestations and fears:

In this I do not call your faith in question
So mainly as my merit. I cannot sing,
Nor heel the high lavolt, nor sweeten talk,
Nor play at subtle games - fair virtues all,
To which the Grecians are most prompt and pregnant;
But I can tell thee that in each grace of these
There lurks a still and dumb-discoursive devil
That tempts most cunningly. But be not tempted.

(IV.iv. 84-91)
Only fifty lines earlier, however, Troilus, in the 'injurious time' speech, had shown himself to be indeed 'swelling o'er with arts and exercise', well able to 'sweeten talk', and the spectator finds himself even more confused. The simple, artless lad, whose plain speech tells of a pure heart, has not been created for him, except in these parting speeches now. He has little more than Troilus's word to go by, and this has not always proved reliable.

Nevertheless, Troilus has changed during the course of the play - and for the better. He is masterful now: in command of himself and of the situation; his childish, petulant self-consciousness seems largely to have disappeared; he seems at times to have achieved maturity and balance\(^1\). One is more convinced now than one has been at any previous stage during the play that he does love in a real, if limited, way: his love is not just the fatuous dream of himself as lover that it seemed at first to be. But there is still something slightly unreal about his attitude: he romanticises both himself and Cressida still\(^2\).

\(^1\) Note, for instance, his restraint, 30-32, 60-67, and his mature resignation, 94-97.
\(^2\) See 24-27, 121-29.
It is Cressida whose silence and neutrality are cryptic now. There are hints about what her behaviour will be on returning to the Greeks - Diomed's ambiguous 'To her own worth/ Shall she be prized'; the very insistence of Troilus's entreaties - but she herself gives no indication. Her sudden, unequivocal wantonness in the next scene comes as a shock. As I have already noted, her behaviour here warrants Ulysses' harsh verdict (IV.v. 54-63). But the preparation that the play provides has been ambiguous to the point of being deliberately misleading. One can read back and find clue after clue - some of them blatant - that point to this change, but few of these has the play encouraged a spectator to pursue.

In the actual love-scenes, then, there is little that is closed and clearcut. They are distinguished, above all, by ambiguity and by a tendency to focus attention on the abstract issues involved, distancing an audience from the lovers themselves. Troilus's love is not 'idealistic and constant', 'ideal', 'mystical', as critics who see the

---

1 pp. 29-30.
3 Una Ellis-Fermor, op. cit., p. 59.
4 J. Arthos, op. cit., p. 119.
love-story as 'wholly tragic'\textsuperscript{1} claim. But nor can it be dismissed simply as 'sensual' and 'unhealthy'\textsuperscript{2}, 'no profound passion'\textsuperscript{3}, 'the exemplification of lust'\textsuperscript{4}, with Troilus and Cressida as no more than 'strangely degraded copies of Romeo and Juliet'\textsuperscript{5}. There is some truth in both sets of judgment, but the whole truth is in neither.

**TROILUS IN THE FINAL SCENES**

Because Ulysses' judgment on Cressida is so patently true when it comes in IV.v., one heeds his verdict on Troilus:

> Ulysses: 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 calmed; 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 impare 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. Thus says Aeneas, one that knows the youth Even to his inches, and with private soul Did in great Ilion thus translate him to me.

*(IV.v. 96-112)*

\textsuperscript{1} The phrase is Dr Tillyard's, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{2} G.I. Duthie, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{3} A. Gérard, *loc. cit.*, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{4} O.J. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{5} H. Fluchère, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
Ulysses' (indirectly Aeneas's) judgment bears out what Troilus has been telling the audience about himself: that he is free, open, 'plain and true'. But it does not really answer to the Troilus the audience have seen, to the sensual, romantic lad, whose active heroism they have yet to see tested, whose words have far exceeded his deeds. It may well, however, answer to the Troilus who is to come. The perceptiveness of Ulysses' reference to Hector (105-06) lends his pronouncement further weight. And it is true that the portrayal of Troilus has never been static or fixed. The possibility of his ultimate heroism has never been ruled out. He is capable of manliness¹ and he is Troy's 'second hope'. Ulysses' verdict here, in a manner familiar through the play², phrases the issues, points the spectator to what is to come, prepares him for what could be a natural development in Troilus. It does not, with abrupt definitiveness, describe a change that has already taken place.

Such then is the preparation for the climactic, and beautifully managed, scene of Cressida's betrayal (V.ii.).

1. This is clear even in the dubious opening scene. (See his manly, forthright analysis of his own weakness, I.i. 110-12).
2. Cf. Prologue, discussed pp. 2-7 and Pandarus's questions, III.i. 130-33, discussed pp. 40-41.
There seems little doubt that an audience's sympathies in this scene are quite clearly assumed to be with Troilus and against Cressida. The very strength of the assumption almost succeeds in making it so. But puzzles remain from earlier scenes, puzzles that Ulysses' and Troilus's testimonies alone cannot dispel. Cressida's descent has been too sharp and Troilus's purity too flimsily established. Neither has been well substantiated by the action of the play. The character of each seems to be simplified in a way that the ambiguity that seemed quintessential has not led the spectator to expect. The brilliant management of forefront and background in this scene cannot quite do all that it seems set to do here.

The scene aspires to the tragic in many ways: for the first time, Troilus is given the full hero's position in the centre and forefront of the stage; he is the innocent sufferer; the audience is set to witness all through his eyes, to feel for him without reserve; he has the sympathetic support of the shrewd Ulysses, and even of the grudging Thersites whose biting comments are directed at the betrayers, not at him. Cressida is removed, not only technically, but by the unambiguous wantonness of her deeds and by the direction of Thersites' commentary.
The scene seems to be organised so that Troilus, as tragic hero, dominates interest and sympathy. It is his disillusionment rather than Cressida's betrayal that it is set to portray. And one does feel for Troilus: he has been wronged. He is now more clearly in the right than he has been at any previous stage during the play. The passionate brevity of his comments, his determined effort at self-control, his incredulity, engage one's sympathies. The swiftness of the scene, the counterpointing of action and reaction, the emotional intensity, the gathering momentum, keep the spectator's interest forward, and, on the whole, in him.

But the scene does not stand alone, and it is hard to be fully involved with a character from whom one has been at least partially distanced for almost the full length of the play - just as it is hard to be fully distanced from a character with whom one has been at one stage fully involved. Macbeth, at the end of his play, has an audience's full attention, and even sympathy, although he is atrociously wrong. Troilus now, for suddenly being innocent and right, cannot engage one fully. And Cressida, for being suddenly the villain banished, cannot cease entirely to interest. At this point, interest in her vies with interest in him. So the scene does not seem
fully to succeed: it falls short of tragic depth to which it seems to aspire.

There are other reasons too for only partial success. Troilus's anguish at the end of this scene, after Diomed and Cressida have left, is undoubtedly offered as the climax: rhythms sweep through to this point. His first speech after their exit is, however, curiously anti-climactic:

Ulysses: All's done, my lord.

Troilus: It is.

Ulysses: Why stay we then?

Troilus: To make a recordation to my soul
    Of every syllable that here was spoke.
    But if I tell how these two did coact,
    Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?
    Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,
    An esperance so obstinately strong,
    That doth invert th'attest of eyes and ears,
    As if those organs had deceptive functions,
    Created only to calumniate.

(V.ii. 112-21)

It is not the sudden slowing-down that makes it so. That is effective: it conveys well the sense that he is stunned and labouring to find the meaning of the experience he has just undergone. The broken phrasing of the opening interchange, leading into the tight statement and quite simply-worded question that begin Troilus's speech, works well here.
What is odd, however, is the Latinity of the speech, especially as it proceeds. The diction - 'credence', 'esperance', 'invert', 'attest', 'deceptious', 'calumniate' - recalls no one so forcibly as Nestor: a most incongruous association at this point. It is not impossible to find an explanation for this freighting of Latin words. Perhaps it is meant to convey a desperate effort to be objective, measured, legalistic and distanced; or perhaps it is meant to convey evasiveness, a basic and understandable unwillingness to come down to plain facts in plain words. Either might be true - or neither. The association of such diction with mere inflation, inflation that is to be satirised, is, however, one that in this particular play cannot be overlooked. It is an association that is either uncontrolled or very puzzling indeed.

When Troilus concludes by passionately determining that the Cressida he has just seen could not have been, must not be thought of as, his Cressida, and by vowing to wreak vengeance upon Diomedes, his self-deception is of course immediately obvious. It is an enlargement of the delusion he has always shown when considering his love. In retrospect, he sees it as having been pure and perfect: 'the bonds of heaven' are enlisted; a religious intensity implied. But even now it is significant that the strongest
expression he can give to his disillusionment is in physical, sensual terms, drawn from the palate and digestion:

The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy relics
Of her o'ereaten faith, are given to Diomed.

(V.ii. 156-57)

This strange mixture of religious intensity and physical impurity has characterised Troilus throughout the play. The strong reaffirmation of his central ambiguity at this point hardly seems congruous with the trend the action is taking, the shaping of events towards the tragic. It too helps to keep full sympathy at bay.

This reaffirmation does, however, work in another, and very important way, as does the whole of Troilus's outcry following the betrayal. It brings to the fore again the paradoxes and ambiguities upon which the play seems to be based, and leaves them, after all, unresolved. For, if a spectator has been responding fully, he knows that there is a sense, a very real sense, in which 'this is, and is not, Cressid' and that Thersites' vision is indeed limited, though literal, when he scornfully asks 'Will a' swagger himself out on's own eyes?' (V.ii. 134). And he knows that Troilus sees both the sense and the nonsense of such 'bifold authority' and of his 'hating by
weight' Diomed, for his last outburst, the outburst that brings forth Ulysses' reprimand, is against Cressida:

O Cressid! O false Cressid! False, false, false!
Let all untruths stand by thy stained name,
And they'll seem glorious.

(V.ii. 175-77)

Troilus is both seeing and unseeing, his love both pure and impure. An audience sympathises but from a distance. One feels for him in his disillusionment, but not wholeheartedly. This betrayal scene, though poignant, is not tragic. The spectator is still too removed; his interest primarily in issues; his involvement without sufficient depth or intensity.

Nevertheless, Troilus is emerging strongly as the central figure, if not the hero, of the play. He has changed significantly since the opening scene. The manly directness he shows in his interchange with Hector in the scene immediately following his disillusionment gives proof. This is not the pallid boy of the play's opening scene. Troilus as warrior has been subordinate to Troilus as lover. But the Trojan council scene, as early as II.ii., showed that, although hot-headed and irrational, he was a force to be reckoned with. His passionate arguing triumphed over Hector's better sense. His enthusiasm, though misguided, was inspiriting, and he emerged quite
securely as 'Troy's second hope'. But a doubtful hope, it was probably felt at the time: his excitable instability needed to be checked; a more mature balance and rational firmness attained. In the later scene with Hector (V.iii.), his crisp diagnosis and realistic stand seem to indicate that mature stability has been gained: the Troilus who accuses Hector of softness seems firm to the point of hardness. At the end of the same scene, he is also able, with hard rationality and controlled bitterness, to dismiss Cressida thus:

Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart; Th' effect doth operate another way.  
(Tearing the letter.)  
Go, wind to wind, there turn and change together. My love with words and errors still she feeds, But edifies another with her deeds. 

(V.iii. 107-12)

Troilus proves himself ultimately a fierce and zealous warrior. In V.v. Ulysses speaks with fear and admiration of Troilus,

...who hath done today Mad and fantastic execution, Engaging and redeeming of himself With such a careless force and forceless care As if that luck, in very spite of cunning, Bade him win all.

(V.v. 37-42)

1 This scene is more fully discussed, pp. 82-94.
Something of Troilus's frantic activity - and success - is also shown on the stage. The question that arises is this: does Troilus's emergence as a redoubtable warrior make him a hero, redeemed? In Ulysses' eyes, it would seem to. And in Hector's too: 'O, well fought, my youngest brother!' (V.vi. 12). In fact, by the standards set up by a great deal of the play - by the Greek scenes which, indirectly, decry the lack of such fervent commitment; by the critical attitude that is encouraged towards Troilus's earlier ennui; by the respect that is accorded to Hector's zeal - it would seem that Troilus's actions now are to be prized. But other things cause one to doubt. For the mad heat of Troilus's activity is related to 'the hot passion of distempered blood' that is so consistently criticised throughout the play. And the spectator has been urged to think about causes, to weigh action and origin, to see that it is not just glory that is involved. At this stage, Troilus's 'high blood' is indeed 'chafed' and the war is indeed 'cruel'. 'Mad and fantastic execution' cannot be evaluated in any simple way. It is neither a 'victory', a triumph of 'moral energy',

1 J.F. Danby, op. cit., p. 160.
nor simply proof of baseness, the emergence of 'a new Menelaus', the triumph of 'disorder'. It is something of both.

But one has only to set Troilus's last speech against his first - or even against one of the famous love-speeches, such as 'injurious time' (IV.iv. 33-48) or 'This is and is not Cressida' (V.ii. 134-48) - to realise that significant changes have taken place. Here is the first speech again:

_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.

(I.i. 1-5)

And here is the last:

_Aeneas:_ My lord, you do discomfort all the host.

_Troilus:_ You understand me not that tell me so. I do not speak of flight, of fear, of death, But dare all imminence that gods and men Address their dangers in. Hector is gone. Who shall tell Priam so, or Hecuba? Let him that will a screech owl aye be called Go in to Troy, and say there Hector's dead. There is a word will Priam turn to stone, Make wells and Niobes of the maids and wives, Cold statues of the youth, and in a word Scare Troy out of itself. But march away. Hector is dead. There is no more to say.

---

1 A. Gérard, loc. cit., p. 154.
2 G.I. Duthie, op. cit., p. 113.
Stay yet. You vile abominable tents,
Thus proudly pitched upon our Phrygian plains,
Let Titan rise as early as he dare,
I'll through and through you! And, thou great-sized coward,
No space on earth shall sunder our two hates.
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.

(V.x. 10-31)

Quite apart from the marked change in attitude to the war — indeed it is a complete reversal — there are significant changes in manner. The excitable rising stresses, the petulant tone, the pretty alliterations and self-consciousness that mark the first speech are not present in the last (except for the one section, lines 23-29). This last speech is remarkable, above all, for its firm, manly directness. Short, sharp sentences give its main statements force and dignity: they seem to be defined by emotions that are strong and real:

...But march away.
Hector is dead; there is no more to say.
Stay yet.

The opening sentence is direct in the same way. The alliterations of the second — 'flight', 'fear', 'death', 'dare', 'dangers' — work in quite a different way from the stylised alliterations of so many of Troilus's earlier speeches. They bring energy to bear and direct attention
to key words. 'Dare' takes strong stress, epitomising as it does the attitude that Troilus is advancing, the positive approach he is urging them all to accept in the face of this grim disaster. And the grimness of the disaster is made real: 'cold statues' at the beginning of 1. 20 gives precise formulation to the dread afflicting Troy.

But unequivocal admiration is not to be allowed for Troilus, even in this closing stand. From the point where he determines to 'stay yet', to rouse himself - and all Troy - to a pitch of frenzied anger against Greece so that comfort and hope may remain, there is a return to the insubstantial, nervous excitability that marks so much of his earlier style. 'Thus proudly pitched upon our Phrygian plains': this is the old, excessive, unsubstantiated manner of alliteration. 'Goblins', 'frenzy', 'haunt ... like a wicked conscience' recall the familiar 'skittish' instability that one has associated with him from the start. But there is now one important difference: Troilus's frenzy here is not mere self-indulgence. In fact, it is not indulgence at all. It is an attitude that he seems to be forcing upon himself for the sake of Troy. The speech closes with firm, manly vigour, giving hope of a
deeper-rooted strength and stability:

Strike a free march to Troy. With comfort go;  
Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe.

Even though 'revenge' is a doubtful good and Troilus's means of reaching this conclusion are very much open to criticism, such a close is inspiriting. It is inspiriting above all because it marks a radical change in Troilus's outlook. He is no longer petulantly self-absorbed: the 'cruel battle' is not 'here within'. His interests now are Troy's. It is the killer of Hector he seeks, not Diomed, his personal foe.

When he rounds on Pandarus, dismissing him in terms that indicate quite clearly that he knows now what Pandarus is and wants no more to do with him, one's hopes for Troilus are re-inforced:

Hence, broker, lackey! Ignominy and shame  
Pursue thy life, and live aye with thy name.

(V.x. 33-34)

Troilus's vigour and certainty here inspire. As he marches off the stage, an audience does feel the force of his 'moral energy'¹, an energy that has been gained from the hard experiences presented in the play. There is some triumph and hope here: not for Troy but for Troilus, perhaps even for man. Bitterness and doubt seem to have found some relief.

---

¹ Coleridge, op. cit., p. 248.
But, as Troilus marches off, he leaves the audience behind. They are still in a tainted and doomed Troy, alone with the oily Pandarus who, with sickening intimacy, addresses them as fellow-bawds and bequeaths them his diseases. Revulsion and uncertainty return in full measure. Troilus, of whom they have been so critical — have been encouraged to be so critical — turns out to be their moral superior. They may well feel stung and cheated for they have been manoeuvred to this ignominious end. They are given no chance to dismiss Pandarus themselves: they are related to him, like it or not.

SYNOPSIS

To clear the way for later reference, I shall briefly summarise some of my main findings. Its quintessential ambiguity is the most interesting feature of the love-story. (It points the way to Antony and Cleopatra, as I shall later show.) To a greater or lesser degree, this ambiguity marks the portrayal, for the major part of the play, of each of the three main characters. Because characterisation is ambiguous, so too are the kinds of responses controlled: one criticises and tolerates Pandarus; one criticises and is interested, even attracted, by Cressida; one criticises and sympathises with Troilus.
Towards the end of the play, fairly abrupt simplifications take place: Pandarus is revealed as a queasy bawd for whom tolerance is impossible; Cressida as a slut in whom an audience should feel little interest; and Troilus approaches the heroic, becoming at least their moral superior. In each of these simplifications, a provoking bitter quality makes itself felt: the spectator seems to be, somewhat unfairly, under attack. The mood of the love-story cannot be identified in any simple way: it has some of the qualities of tragedy and some of the qualities of satire; it never becomes either wholly tragic or wholly satiric. The openness that typifies so much of the play returns in full measure at the very end: there is ambiguity about Troilus's 'triumph', even about the very bitterness of the play. Throughout, the abstract issues involved have been brought into unusually sharp focus, the tendency being to pose them as questions, and to leave them as such. Sure control of a very wide variety of tones is a clear strength, but the central ambiguity poses some problems. And there are problems too about structural integration and congruity. Without doubt, however, the love-story succeeds in far greater measure than it fails, its most daring and successful achievement probably being
the portrayal of change and development in its central
and in many ways most ambiguous character, Troilus.

The openess of the love scenes is even
more marked in the war story. The tendency here is to
even sharper focusing upon abstract questions. The
scenes are filled with discussion, debate and
certainty one sees little of the war in action. Scenes
introduced from the Prologue to the final scene. Simple
answers are withheld. How to value characters and events
residing in many instances in inscrutable passages. Very	often, we enter the love-story, the spectator is urged to
'think' in one way only to be afterwards told for
having reasoned in that very way. The impression that
the audience is being
attack seems to be strengthened by these scenes.

SHAKES AND SCENES

To see the story of the play's ending in the distance
between Brooks and Palma in, as I have hinted earlier,
to oversimplify drastically, the war story in a

1 See pp. 11-13.
CHAPTER III

THE WAR STORY

The openness characterising the love scenes is even more marked in the war story. The tendency here is an even sharper focusing upon abstract questions. The war scenes are filled with discussion, debate and comment: one sees little of the war in action. Questions dominate, from the Prologue to the final scene. Simple answers are withheld. How to value characters and events remains in many instances an insoluble puzzle. Very often, as with the love-story, the spectator is urged to 'weigh' in one way only to be upbraided later for having responded in that very way. The impression that the audience is under attack seems to be strengthened by these scenes.

GREEKS AND TROJANS

To see the core of the play's meaning in the division between Greeks and Trojans is, as I have hinted earlier¹, to oversimplify drastically. The war story is a network

¹ See pp. 11-13.
of contrasts, but these contrasts are not only between Trojans and Greeks, but, for instance, between Troilus and Hector, between Ulysses and the other Greek leaders, between the Greek leaders and the Greek warriors, between Thersites and the other Greeks. Although one's sympathies are, on the whole, with Troy and against Greece, there is no clearcut dichotomy of values. In its own way, each side is infected and corrupt. The spectator's sympathy does not prove one side right just as his antipathy does not prove the other wrong. Indeed, one of the most consistent ironies of the play arises from the fact that the least sympathetic characters often seem to be the closest to being right. I state my case rather bluntly here. In the analyses that follow, I shall offer detailed instances as proof.

The crucial issue of the war story, perhaps of the play, is this: Are 'honour and renown' possible in a war that is rotten at core? This question, first raised in the Prologue, is the focal issue in the council scenes that dominate the first two Acts. The climax comes in the Trojan council scene (II,ii.) where the question's two sides are clearly articulated and brought to the fore in stark debate. But every preceding scene - and, most
importantly, the Greek council scene - has prepared the way. These two council scenes balance each other, setting the two camps in obvious contrast. But the basic, underlying dichotomy is not simply between Trojans and Greeks. Those who support the war for the glorious opportunities it may provide include not only the Greek leaders, Agamemnon and Nestor and Ulysses, but Troilus - and ultimately Hector too. It is true that Agamemnon and and Nestor's complacent fatalism does not match Troilus and Hector's active engagement, but neither does it match Ulysses' driving zeal. And all are united in their belief or hope that 'valiant and magnanimous deeds' may yet emerge. Against their attitude may be set not just the arguments of Hector in his earlier stand but the insistent pessimism of Thersites. Indeed this dominant, central question may be phrased in another way: Is Thersites right about the war? It is a question that arises again and again throughout the play, focusing and directing the spectator's attention to the very end. Very many, if not most, critics see the play as a straightforward endorsement of Thersites' view. Professor Kott, for instance, states firmly that 'only the bitter fool, Thersites, free from all illusion ... is right'; Dr Curtis Brown Watson that

'the audience cannot but feel that Thersites' cynical view of mankind is a sort of choral commentary'; while Mr Traversi concludes that 'As Thersites says, "All the argument is a cuckold and a whore"'. I would not want to deny the play's bitter, cynical slant, but I would want to argue quite firmly that the issue is never as closed as these critics maintain, that the play is not an unequivocally 'triumphant vision of evil, guided only by bitterness and disgust', that its bitterness is of a peculiar kind unrecognised by most critics, and that the audience is acted on in a way that is far from simple.

THE GREEK COUNCIL SCENE

The attitude advanced by the Greek leaders is essentially reasonable: 'actions' do rarely answer 'aims' and proof of the 'fineness' of men's 'metal' is needed. Once a war is under way, theoretical debates about its origin and possible termination are, perhaps, futile. This is a view that an audience might well support. But the play

2 Loc. cit., p. 318.
ensures that the spectator will either disregard or reject it. Agamemnon's smooth oratory, for instance, lacks persuasion. His manner, with its heavy Latin grandeur - 'protractive trials', 'persuasive constancy' - and its appearance of discrimination and balance - 'bias and thwart', 'affin'd and kin', 'tortive and errant' - alienates, for it seems ultimately spurious and hollow. Very little is actually said. Tautologies abound - 'persuasive constancy', 'affin'd and kin' - and his argument does not progress, despite the length at which he speaks. One is reminded that he himself is uninvolved in the actual fighting, and one suspects that complacency and incompetence lie behind the inflation, a suspicion that Ulysses' later attack seems to confirm. Nor does Nestor's 'application' (31-54) help. His embroidering, with its precious alliterations and inflated allusions, is not even 'valour's show'. The elaborate rhetoric of the Greeks, like their elaborate courtesy, is immediately suspect.

When Ulysses speaks - fundamentally in the same cause - one is more inclined to listen. For the contrast is marked.

---

1 e.g. 34-37 ('The sea being smooth ... those of nobler bulk').
2 The ritual that Ulysses goes through (54-69) seems to be necessary: 'applause and approbation' apparently need to be extended if audience is to be won.
Measured against the bombast and enervating slowness of the first seventy-four lines of this scene, the brisk directness of the opening of his 'degree' speech wins immediate support:

    Troy, yet upon her basis, had been down,
    And the great Hector's sword had lacked a master,
    But for these instances. …

(I.iii. 75-77)

The force of Ulysses' main statements, the keenness of his perceptions, the progression of his arguments impress after the noticeable lack of these qualities in the other leaders' speeches. He diagnoses and analyses. After the stagnation of their policies, his commitment and directed zeal demand hearing and support. His criticism of the other two leaders, veiled though it is, also wins an audience's support. For he is critical. The very terms of his praise are ambiguous: it will indeed be 'with a bond of air' that Nestor is to 'knit all Greekish ears' (66-67); while the clear placing of Agamemnon at 'the heart of our numbers', 'nerve and bone of Greece' (55-56), opens the way for very telling ironies in the 'degree' speech which follows. For Agamemnon is surely 'the glorious planet Sol ... whose med'cinable eye' no longer 'corrects the influence of evil planets' (89-94); it is Agamemnon - not Achilles - who, above all, stands accused. Achilles is only 'the sinew
and the forehand of our host'; Agamemnon is its 'nerve and bone'. 'Strutting' Agamemnon and 'fumbling' Nestor, 'drest to some oration', are the targets of Ulysses' attack.

But, even from Ulysses, who clearly deserves more sympathy and respect than do the other two leaders, the spectator's support must be withheld. Ulysses' methods are so indirect, his criticisms so veiled in flatteries and subterfuge - he plays so strongly on what is weakest in them (their pride, above all) - that he too alienates. His objectives may be honourable but his methods are not. His plan for Ajax - the plan that forms the basis for the main action to follow - seems to be a brilliant strategic move, but the cunning it implies, the underhand engineering it will entail, repel. It too plays strongly on what is weak; in its own way, is corrupt.

... Let us, like merchants,
First show foul wares, and think perchance they'll sell;

(I.iii. 358-59)

The 'merchant' image jarred with Troilus; it jars here too. Ulysses is out to 'buy' an answer to Hector's challenge.

1 I.i. 107, discussed p. 36.
Furthermore, although he does not share Nestor and Agamemnon's complacent incompetence, Ulysses does share their pride, their jealous guarding of their own reputations. When he moves more directly into an attack on Achilles - their 'best man', their greatest hope, the strongest threat to personal prestige - his tone changes; tempo quickens; the loading of feeling seems disproportionately high; the sense that personal rather than public interest is at stake, overpoweringly strong. He allies himself then, quite unhesitatingly, with the two he elsewhere disdains:

...the seeded pride
That hath to this maturity blown up
In rank Achilles, must or now be cropped
Or, shedding, breed a nursery of like evil
To overbulk us all.¹

(I.iii. 316-20)

The speech beginning 'They tax our policy and call it cowardice' (197-210) deserves close attention. The shrill tone, the unpremeditated directness, the excited rhythms suggest that this is where Ulysses has been touched to the quick. His pride is hurt. He who prides himself on his 'wisdom', his 'still and mental parts', the 'fineness' of his soul, is being undervalued - may even be 'overbulked'. His bitter resentment makes itself felt: accommodating

¹ My italics.
facades and carefully veiled insinuations have no place here. So Ulysses, unguarded for once, includes himself in his own ironies – and is as little aware as Agamemnon or Nestor. To seek out the very heart, the very centre of the corruption and disorder, one must go beyond 'the sinew and the forehand', beyond even 'the nerve and bone', through to 'the still and mental parts' that 'guide the execution'. Ulysses accuses himself: the crowning irony.

'Pride alone / Must tarre the mastiffs on, as 'twere a bone' (I.iii. 389-90). Nestor cannot know how truly he has spoken, how widely his neat epigram applies. 'Pale and bloodless emulation' is rife at all levels. None is disinterested. Pride is the 'universal wolf'. At this point, the spectator may well feel himself superior and safely distanced: from Greek policies as well as from Greek pride. Such security of vantage-point is not to be allowed for long.

Although the most biting irony – irony against himself – does not become apparent until later, the alert spectator must be aware at the time that I.iii. is informed by many ironies indeed. The Aeneas interlude, for instance, suggests that there is more dissension within the sides than between: his insolence is just a counterpart
of Agamemnon's strutting and Nestor's pitiful brags; Ulysses' silence is just another side of the same basic pride. When 'differences' are ironed out and vanities appeased, the foe is welcomed with open arms. The 'merchant' and 'appetite' images relate the two sides in a similar way. So too does the picture of Achilles 'on pressed bed lolling' which parallels that of Helen, Paris and Troilus in the previous scene. And then there are the layered ironies of the 'degree' speech, to which I have already referred and to which I shall refer again, for the greatest irony concerning that speech has not yet been mentioned. It is not until the Trojan council scene, and in some instances the whole play, has run its course that the full ironies of I.iii. become manifest.

If one cannot support the Greek leaders' view, neither can one support the only other alternative before the Trojan council scene: Thersites' view. Thersites' attitude to the war challenges theirs: he sees no glory, and no possibility of glory, there. But he is so repellent - I shall have more to say about this later - that one shrinks from aligning with him. The distaste established

---

1 I.ii. 113-74.
2 It is discussed p. 112.
3 pp. 116-23
for corruption in the Greek camp in I.iii. is intensified to something more like disgust, even physical revulsion, in Thersites' scene which follows (II.i.).

Before the Trojan council scene, then, there is very little with which an audience can sympathise. Both Trojans and Greeks seem to be infected; self-interest and instability characterise Troilus as well as the Greeks. All seem to think that glory - in war or love, as the case may be - can be gained by exploitation; that inglorious means may be used to attain glorious ends. (For Troilus, however, circumstances are more extenuating than they are for the Greeks.) Both Troilus and the Greeks seem to be falling short of the same unstated standard. Hector is the audience's only guide to what that standard may be. Before he even appears, one is predisposed to judge in his favour.

THE TROJAN COUNCIL SCENE (II.ii.)

The unworthiness of Helen as the origin of the war, suggested quite openly in the Prologue (9-10) and in the first scene (94-96), is borne out by Pandarus and Cressida's chat in the second (94-174). Later in the play it is established as unquestionable, given force by the attacks of Thersites (II.iii. 73-77) and of Diomedes (IV.i. 54-66),
and by the demonstration in the boudoir scene that opens Act III. Hector wins the spectator's respect and support by facing up to the unworthiness of the cause in the Trojan council scene.

He wins support too for other reasons. As I said, one is predisposed to judge in his favour. Before his first appearance, he is mentioned with unequivocal respect by every other character, even by Thersites. It is always 'great Hector': his honour seems to be accepted by all. Troilus's excitability and lack of involvement, dramatised in the first scene, show up badly against the report at the beginning of the second of Hector's commitment and zeal: Hector, 'whose patience / Is a virtue fixed' (I.ii. 45). Admiration for Hector survives even the satiric review of troops in the second scene, while his challenge is a prime concern of the two Greek scenes that follow, indeed of every Greek scene that follows. Against what it implies - serious commitment, honourable and active engagement - are measured the attitudes and methods of Agamemnon and Nestor, of Ulysses, of Achilles and Ajax, and of Thersites. All fall short. What is basically lacking in everyone of the Greeks, Ulysses included, and, to a degree, in Troilus too, is serious, disinterested commitment, nobility and honour. Self-centred pride is

---

1 It must be admitted, however, that the apparatus of chivalry seems to be satirised in both the Aeneas interlude (I.iii.) and the reading of the proclamation (II.i.). Ajax would seem to be a ridiculous object for Hector's rage.
eating into the Greeks. It is the counterpart of the self-centred 'love' that keeps Troilus weak and unheroic, that makes Paris 'wanton', that, together with pride, has originated the war. But the play has urged the spectator to be critical, to feel the want of honour and heroism, and the possibility that they may yet be realised in the war, even this war, has not been ruled out. At this stage, all hopes are pinned on Hector, whose reputation has survived undamaged.

Hector's first appearance does not disappoint. 'Though no man lesser fears the Greeks than I' is a claim that has been substantiated: his challenge has just been issued. His disinterested sincerity, evinced in simple, mature, dignified verse, convinces from the start. And his reasons for abandoning the war are cogent: Helen is 'not worth what she doth cost the keeping'; it is 'mad idolatry to make the service greater than the god'; the 'discourse of reason' should qualify blood that is 'madly hot'; thought should be given to 'what follows'. Hector's attitude has received weight from the start. Troilus's attempt at justification, his effort to establish Helen as a worthy object (II.ii. 66-83) does not convince. Its very terms - 'distaste', 'merchant', 'soiled', 'wrinkles',
'makes stale'\textsuperscript{1} - are suspect; it has no backing from previous scenes; it gets none from this: Paris's argument deserves Priam's retort. Helen's rape was not a sufficient, honourable cause for the war. This, as I have said before, much in the play - not just Hector's reasoning in this scene - makes abundantly clear.

So the spectator's sympathy is with Hector in his opening stand. The spectator is only too willing to align with this noble, wise man, particularly since every alternative offered so far has been so disagreeable. An audience seems now to be able to hold what is basically Thersites' view without having to share Thersites' repellent and degrading scurrilousness. The security felt in rejecting the Greeks is reinforced now.

But even this issue - the audience's support for Hector against Troilus - is not as completely closed and unequivocal as critics have maintained. There is an area of ambiguity that keeps facile judgment at bay. Measured against his own earlier ennui, the hollow apathy of Nestor and Agamemnon, and the general meanness that characterises the Greek camp, there is something inspiring and hopeful about Troilus's passionate replies, however misguided the logic on which they are based. He is now more sympathetic than he was. Moreover, there is some truth in his claim

\textsuperscript{1} On the authority of the Arden and Penguin editions, I vary from the Signet which gives 'pale' instead of 'stale' here.
that Hector's reasons should have been considered at the start, that the same conditions then applied - and were then applauded¹.

There are other minor puzzles. Hector's opening reference to 'no lady of more softer bowels' (11) troubles slightly in passing: it is not an objection that, at this stage, one would have thought needed raising. More worrying is the objection raised by Troilus that Hector is weighing 'worth and honour' in 'a scale of common ounces' (25-29). This worries, not because it is raised by Troilus - he can go on to say with pride that Helen is 'a pearl' whose 'price hath ... turned crowned kings to merchants'² - but because it connects so directly and critically with the 'merchant' images that jarred so noticeably in Ulysses' and Troilus's earlier speeches³, that jar even now when Troilus uses them⁴. The fact that the criticism is uttered by Troilus weakens it but does not erase it. Hector is weighing, just as Troilus and

---

¹ II.ii. 84-92. (There is, of course, more truth in Hector's reply, 186-87.)
² My italics. (The insistent linking of Cressida with Helen is again obvious - cf. I.i. 104-08)
³ Cf. I.iii. 357-64, discussed p. 78; I.i. 102-08, discussed p. 36.
⁴ Cf. II.ii. 68-72 ('We turn not back the silks upon the merchant...').
Ulysses weighed: he is putting a price as much on 'worth and honour' as on Helen. Nor has the audience any real sense of the value of 'every tithe soul'. The play has not made real the cost paid, the damage done, the lives lost in this war. It is the 'hours' and 'speeches' spent, not the 'lives', that have been given dramatic weight. 'Lazy tents' and 'a dull and long-continued truce' the spectator can believe in, but not grimly bloody conflict of which he has not even heard mention. The cruel reality of war, hinted at in the Prologue, has not been dramatised. The result is that Nestor's phrase, 'hot digestion of this cormorant war' (6), while it is highly suggestive, lacks the weight it would need - indeed lacks it partly because it is Nestor's\(^1\) - to give full support to Hector's stand.

But one of the most persuasive reasons for heeding Troilus's claims is, ironically enough, supplied by Hector himself. The relationship between the diseased outlook of the Greeks and the origin of the war is only very tenuously established, if it is established at all\(^2\).

---

1 Cf. I.iii. 332-56, where Nestor uses sexual imagery in the most asexual way.

2 The relationship between the origin of the war and Troilus's unstable love is probably easier to see. Perhaps the connection lies between that and Paris's love. But even this is tenuous.
Such corruption as one has seen need have no direct relation to war: the question of the relationship had no place in the Greek council scene. It is Hector — and Hector alone so far — who suggests what valour and honour mean, and it is the war that provides him with his opportunities. 'Valiant and magnanimous deeds' are most urgently needed. It is the want of them — the want of heroism and disinterested nobility — that has been chiefly criticised, in Trojans as well as Greeks. One wonders how much would in fact have been gained had the war (and play) ended here. Would a sufficient answer have been provided to Greek meanness and Trojan ennui?

Nevertheless, Hector's stand wins an audience's support much more firmly than does Troilus's. And none of these factors explains in any ultimately satisfactory way his sudden reversal. It is one of the most crucial problems in the play. The *volte-face* comes as a turning-point, an anti-climax after the patterned crescendo of the debate. It is of course historically necessary: the war does not end here, as most audiences would be expected to know. But the sudden change in direction and tempo stops and disquiets the spectator. The troubling question raised is not, why does Hector change, but why has the debate been incorporated, why has Hector himself been set to
marshal arguments against his own actions in the rest of the play? Apparent incongruity of event and preparation makes one sense manipulation, as it does when Cressida appears among the Greeks, and, to a lesser degree, when the purity of Troilus's love seems to be assumed, and again, most startlingly, when Pandarus addresses the audience at the end of the play. It is a manipulation that seems to accommodate more than essential requirements of the source story: it seems deliberately designed to unsettle, to make the spectator radically unsure, to leave him questioning. For Hector so far, shadowy though he may have been, has been the spectator's only firm guide to the values that the play appears to be supporting. And only Hector, precisely because he has won his sympathy and respect, could have the force to undermine him so completely. Hector's reversal does undermine. It seems to imply that heroism is incompatible with mature sense. Sense dictates the finishing of the war. But, if the war concludes, there will be no further opportunity for heroism. And noble deeds are most urgently needed. A neat truce now, though sensible, would hardly answer the needs that have been established since the beginning of the play. Yet noble deeds seem to imply necessarily rash excitability, even a dangerous pride. There seems little firm ground on
which to stand. The spectator fears now for Hector's safety, for his own ease of mind, and for the safety of the whole of Troy.

Hector's safety concerns one quite deeply because, despite his change of mind, he remains sympathetic, a 'good' man, a man whose triumph one hopes for. Indeed, up to a point and for the reasons already outlined, an audience can sympathise with his very change. One fears for one's own comfort, for it seems clear now that there will be no unequivocal guide to what is good in the play. And one fears very much for the whole of Troy because Cassandra's prophecies are a forcible reminder that Troy is doomed: it has yet to burn.

Troy has by now won a far greater share of an audience's sympathy than Greece. Despite the similarities I have pointed to, the council scenes set the two sides in obvious contrast. One admires the directness of the Trojans, remembering the sickening indirectness, flatteries and inflations of the Greeks; the united front of the Trojans — although it relies on Hector's disturbing volte-face — is yet felt to be a better thing than the 'hollow factions' of the Greeks. The Trojans are more fully engaged than the Greeks: there is greater life and tautness
in their verse; sharper tension in their debate; livelier rhythms throughout. The Trojan council scene owes part of its momentum to the Greek: it comes as the climax. It is perhaps the high point of the play as a whole.

There is generous passion — disciplined and undisciplined — in Hector's and Troilus's verse. For one of the few times in the play, an audience's response, though not uncritical, may also be generous. So Cassandra's passionate cries cast an air of almost tragic inevitability over all. They do not distance the spectator from either Hector or Troilus, but rouse his sympathy for the whole of Troy, awakening an awareness of the tragic waste involved.

The ultimate association of Hector and Troilus calls forth no simple response. It disturbs because one fears that Hector may prove to be as unstable as Troilus. But it also gives some hope. For, in this scene, Hector and Troilus are associated, even before Hector's capitulation, in one important way. Disinterested energy separates each from his respective ally: Hector from Helenus, and Troilus from Paris. This quality in fact marks them off from every other character in the play, Ulysses and the earlier Troilus included. They are united now in their
commitment (misguided, even impure, though it may be) to an ideal, and although Hector has lost in stature, Troilus has gained. Although the spectator's confidence has been shaken and his fears increased, all hope has still not been ruled out. If Troilus can prove more stable, more discriminating, if Hector can survive his own self-contradiction, bitter meanness may not prevail. But one has fears now about the very basis of heroism and reminders of the fate of Troy that make one's hopes, though existent, small.

Attention is focused sharply on abstract issues in this scene. The principal question to arise - from the play as a whole so far, not just from this scene - is, as I have said, this: When the cause is known to be unworthy, even dishonourable, is there any point in striving for 'honour and renown' in war? To see Hector's logically reasoned argument as a simple answer, as so many critics have done\(^1\), is to ignore much that the play has to say. It is to concentrate far too narrowly on his speeches alone. Hector's argument presents one side, one very important side, to the question, but it does not give it

\(^1\) e.g. O.J. Campbell, E. Davis, Una Ellis-Fermor, R. Kimbrough. It is an assumption that seems to underlie almost every critic's work.
full coverage. With some consternation, the spectator may well find himself recalling Agamemnon's argument now — with appreciation, not scorn. For, in a sense, wars as they develop are something other than wars as they start: the cause does dwindle in importance, becoming only one of the issues involved. Here the surrender of Helen — the whole question of the worthiness or unworthiness of the cause — is less important than, and only one aspect of, the possibility or impossibility of the survival of heroism in a largely ignoble world. Helen's rape and the ensuing war have contributed to the ignobility of that world, but Helen's surrender may not alleviate it: opportunity for heroism would seem to stand a greater chance.

One's awareness of the complexity of the issues involved has been deepened by all that has preceded this focal scene. But, characteristically, this deepening has been rather barbed: the spectator may well feel at least as bewildered as enlightened by the process. He criticised Agamemnon — and Troilus — with confidence. The play encouraged him to do so. With similar confidence he supported Hector. He may find himself now very unsure, defensive almost, for it now seems likely that the ironic exposure of pride in the Greek council scene

1 See I.iii. 1-30.
extended to him too: he has small cause for congratulating himself on the detection of ironies there. The crowning and most biting irony there would seem to be, not against Agamemnon and Nestor, not even against Ulysses, but against himself: the spectator's own judgment seems less sure than he had been led to believe.

The question - What possibility is there of 'honour and renown' in this war? - defines and directs a major part of the audience's interest and attention in the second half of the play. Although it touches Troilus quite importantly and has relevance in every war scene, it concerns Hector principally. Before examining his role in the rest of the play, indeed in order to set it in context, I wish to look more closely at the parts played by the Greeks.

AJAX AND ACHILLES

Ajax and Achilles are minor characters. For two reasons, however, I wish to discuss their roles in some detail. The first is to try to restore to proper perspective the simplifications usually offered by critics: 'Achilles is presented as the chief architect of the chaos'.

1 O.J. Campbell, op. cit., p. 198.
for instance, or 'Achilles and Ajax are both hopelessly spoilt by egotism and pride\(^1\), 'monsters of egotism, vanity and jealousy\(^2\). Such simplifications ignore the essential ambiguity of the play and result in serious distortions not only in the evaluation of such major characters as Ulysses and Hector but in the interpretation of basic ironies. My second reason is to draw attention to some of the play's central problems and weaknesses which a detailed study of the roles of these relatively minor characters - of Achilles, in particular - brings into quite sharp focus.

Just as the council scenes balance each other, so do the last scenes of Acts II and III. In II.iii., we witness the baiting and inflating of Ajax; in III.iii., the baiting and deflating of Achilles. Neither scene is pleasant. The unpleasantness of each seems, however, to have been achieved without full concentration and control. The Greek camp scenes play an important part in shaping Troilus's larger rhythms and structure. Until the merging of Greek and Trojan camps in the high-pitched, almost farcical close to Act V, they provide the lull and

---

1 G. Wilson Knight, op. cit., p. 56.
2 A. Gerard, loc. cit., p. 149.
the foil for each major crisis: they set off the two massive council scenes, (I.iii. and II.ii.), the central love scenes (III.i. and III.ii.), the scenes of Cressida's avowals and betrayal (IV.ii. and IV.v.), and the one solemn, weighty scene of the last Act, V.iii., the scene of Hector's noble resolution. The meagreness of the Greek scenes functions thematically as well as structurally: it creates the meanness of the background for both love and war. Nevertheless, these scenes - III.iii. serves as a particular example - yield only sporadic evidence for strong imaginative engagement. They tend to be straggling, prolix, repetitive, with only rare glimpses of poetic depth - and these only rarely congruous with the play's major concerns. While the scenes propel the plot, sometimes affording ingeniously repellent humour as they do so¹, they do not bear as strongly on the themes as they might have done. The vital sharpness of the street scenes in Measure for Measure and the Roman scenes in Antony and Cleopatra is not matched in the Greek scenes of Troilus and Cressida: a point to which I shall recur. Thersites forcefully voices focal questions, but simple repetition is called upon to carry a very heavy load. Thersites' persistent, pointed attacks and comments might have been even more forceful and stringent

¹ e.g. The mockery of Agamemnon and Nestor, II.i. and II.iii.
with stronger backing from more fully realised and charged camp scenes. The momentum of the play might have been more successfully sustained had there been no flagging in these scenes.

Ajax's role presents fewer problems than Achilles'. Ajax underlines many of the play's central ironies, reinforcing in a minor way some of the chief preoccupations of the themes. He is indeed 'boltish' and stupid: he allows himself to be worked upon outrageously: he becomes inflated with pride:

**Ajax:** Thou, trumpet, there's my purse. Now crack thy lungs, and split thy brazen pipe. Blow villain, till thy sphered bias cheek Outswell the colic of puffed Aquilon! Come, stretch thy chest, and let thy eyes spout blood; Thou blow'st for Hector.  

*(Trumpet sounds)*

(IV.v. 6-11)

The strained intensity of the verbs - 'crack', 'split', 'outswell', 'stretch', 'spout' - the physiological imagery, the excessiveness testify that Ajax is infected: the Greek leaders have succeeded in their task. And his infection is of a kind with the over-blown, over-heated disorder that infects so many, if not all, others during the play: Cressida's 'Tear my bright hair ... crack my clear voice' comes to mind.¹

¹ IV.ii. 109-11.
But, precisely because he has been worked on so outrageously, because he is the sufferer rather than the agent, Ajax's pride is never as repellent as the Greek leaders' - or even as Thersites'. At all stages, he is less antipathetic than the 'superiors' who taunt him. He shows that, when he is treated with courtesy, he can respond with courtesy. In the encounter with Hector, he speaks with simple truth and gentleness:

I thank thee, Hector; 
Thou art too gentle and too free a man. 
I came to kill thee, cousin, and bear hence 
A great addition earned in thy death. 

(IV.v. 138-41)

At the end of the play, when the news reaches the Greeks that Achilles has slain Hector, it is Ajax alone who, mixed though his motives are, comes close to setting it in perspective:

If it be so, yet bragless let it be; 
Great Hector was as good a man as he. 

(V.ix. 4-5)

Through him, emphasis is given to the irony of the arbitrariness of foes and allies in war, an irony that is underlined many times during the play. For, except for the fray with Troilus, Ajax's conflicts are all with fellow Greeks: with Thersites, with Achilles, with the leaders, and, in the end, as a final mockery, with Diomedes.
His one firm ally is the Trojan, Hector.

Ajax's simple-mindedness is never subjected to the ridicule directed at others' (including the audience's) wits. At one point in the play, it is used to very good effect indeed. In II.iii., it would be very simple-minded to assume that Ajax's questions - 'Why should a man be proud? How doth pride grow?' (153-54) - are as naive as they may appear. The play addresses itself quite centrally to questions of this kind - and supplies no simple answers. This precise and unexpected formulation seems to serve a similar function to Pandarus's 'Is this the generation of love - hot blood, hot thoughts, and hot deeds?' in the following scene. Agamemnon's easily wise answer is about as weightless, in context, as Paris's definition. Yet both startle the spectator into attention. Agamemnon says:

Your mind is the clearer and your virtues the fairer. He that is proud eats up himself. Pride is his own glass, his own trumpet, his own chronicle; and whatever praises itself but in the deed, devours the deed in the praise.

(II.iii. 155-59)

The 'devouring' metaphor connects directly with others in the play: 'appetite, an universal wolf', 'those raging appetites', 'How one man eats into another's pride', 'lechery eats itself', and so on. Undisciplined, self-
consuming passion - spent in sensuality or pride - is what the play chiefly examines. The irony of Agamemnon's reply is obvious; he excludes himself from his own neat appraisal. But this irony is milder, less dynamic, than the irony that the speech seems at its most significant out of context: an irony that extends to many major speeches in this play, including the speech on 'degree'\textsuperscript{1}.

Ajax is a butt, the target of sharper wits, but the sharpest irony in which he is involved is not against him. It is against the sharper wits of Ulysses. For the plan in which Ajax is used as a tool amounts to nothing: it is unrelated to Achilles' entering the war. The implication of this irony I shall consider more fully later\textsuperscript{2}. For now, it is enough to note that Ajax, the ignorant 'ass', survives almost unscathed, and that the spectator has his expectations flouted.

Achilles is not the straightforward 'monster' of most critics', and of Ulysses', estimates. He is degenerate. That the play clearly substantiates: Patroclus is his paramour; Thersites he calls his 'cheese', his 'digestion'; he obviously enjoys their 'pageantry', savouring their

\textsuperscript{1} The further irony implicit in the speech on 'degree' is discussed p.112.
\textsuperscript{2} pp. 113-16.
mockery of others, unmoved by Thersites' jibes at himself. Large and lax, he is uninvolved in the troubles going on around him. But Ulysses' terms of condemnation - the 'hot discourse' of 'imagined worth', 'rank' and 'seeded' pride - are not substantiated by what one sees of Achilles during the course of the play. Indeed, he is in need of something to make him 'rage' and 'broil' and become active in the war. When a spur is ultimately provided, it has nothing to do with defence of reputation or the hot pride of Ulysses' accusations. Achilles is alarmingly complacent, but fiery pride is quite lacking. More might have assisted his - and the Greeks' - cause.

III.iii. is a puzzling scene and needs some attention. It seems patched and evasive, not thought out firmly and sharply. It is as if the playwright's eye is not fully on the object, perhaps because he is caught in a dilemma of his own making, perhaps because he is intent on doing something else, something outside the play: provoking or catering for a specific audience, maybe. Such speculations must of course remain speculations. I doubt whether the puzzles of the scene can be explained in any satisfactory way. There are some things that seem skilled and typical

1 Professor Coghill, and, to a lesser degree, Professor Peter Alexander tend to spoil their cases by exceeding the limitations imposed by this basic fact.
of the play, conscious ambiguities, but there are others that seem surprisingly blurred and unskilled: evasive rather than deliberately unsettling. By this stage, it is of course difficult to say which is which, a difficulty that perhaps the playwright made the most of here.

The long philosophical excursion (94-141) raises one problem, one of the lesser problems. One can see what is happening, what Ulysses is aiming to manoeuvre; one can recognise his characteristic obliqueness and the cleverness of which he is so proud. He succeeds in troubling Achilles: it is all part of his 'derision medicinable'. But this passage seems to draw attention to itself, to something outside the action of the play. The 'book' seems hardly integrated. It almost looks as if it is offering an abstract, philosophical gloss on the events and circumstances of the play. To pursue it as such, however, is to be quite misled.¹ There is a strange slackening in tempo and weakening in poetic quality that needs to be heeded. This excursion is another instance of the curious lack of integration that characterises so many of the more abstract interludes in the play. Ulysses' speech on time which follows later in the

¹ I.A. Richards, 'Troilus and Cressida and Plato', Signet ed. pp. 239-255, seems to me to have been thus misled.
scene ("Time hath, my Lord, a wallet at his back, ...", 145-88), although much finer as verse, shares the same lack of fundamental integration. It is a rich but static set-piece, which, like Troilus’s 'time' speech and the earlier speech on 'degree', adds little of direct and central importance, although its vividness suggests that it does, or should, add a great deal.

More puzzling in the way of 'false trails' - by this, I do not mean to suggest that these pieces are consciously set to mislead - is the sudden introduction of the extraneous snippet about Polyxena. Such squaring with the source story was not necessary at this point. Following Ulysses' disclosure and exit, Patroclus immediately takes upon himself the blame: 'To this effect, Achilles, have I moved you ...' (216-24). The spectator is given no indication of Achilles' reaction to Patroclus's self-accusation, and very little of his reaction to Ulysses' disclosure: 'Ha! Known.' is his only comment (194). Ulysses' sudden production of this piece of evidence leads one to suspect that he has sensed that his attack on Achilles' pride has failed: Achilles' responses have certainly not been fired by rage. The audience is left not knowing what it is that keeps Achilles from fighting.
Is it pride, or at least complacency? Is it this Trojan princess? Or is it Patroclus? Why people fight or do not fight is of great, even crucial, importance in this play. And Achilles' reasons for not fighting are indeed central. It is hard to understand why there is this blurring, confusion, ambiguity, whatever it may be, at this point.

By the end of the scene, Achilles' 'mind is troubled, like a fountain stirred'. His reputation does matter to him, it would seem¹. But it is impossible to tell which aspect it is of the damage done to it that troubles him so sorely. By the end of Act IV, after the arrogant interchange with Hector (IV.v. 233-69), it seems that personal pride, after all, will rouse him to action: their hands are sealed upon a match. But Act V opens with Achilles' confession that he is 'thwarted quite' from his 'great purpose': he has received a letter from Polyxena, taxing him to keep an oath not to fight. He swears:

I will not break it.
Fall Greeks, fail fame, honour or go or stay,
My major vow lies here; this I'll obey.

(V.i. 43-45)

Because Achilles' love for Polyxena has not been dramatised, because the first (and only other) mention of it came so unexpectedly and undramatically, one cannot believe

¹ See 226-27.
in his 'love' now: it seems unreal, and, as a possible motive, lacks all weight. But one does not seem to be required to believe in it, for Achilles does eventually fight and gives this vow not a second thought. The interlude seems to be included solely for the contrasts it offers with Hector's vow and reactions in V.iii. Achilles shows here that he is prepared to renounce his countrymen in favour of a personal vow. His corrupt values - his love has not been given enough dramatic weight to establish it as a possibly valid force - are emphasised, it would seem, in order to underline Hector's integrity in the following scene. By underlining Hector's integrity, it increases the audience's confusion, for that very integrity - Hector will not renounce his countrymen by yielding to personal pleas - spells out doom for Troy. Nevertheless, I think that one needs to feel some dissatisfaction with the craftsmanship displayed in the inclusion of the Polyxena interludes. The final Act - and, in some measure, the play as a whole - is very much concerned with the concept of loyalty. But the concern seems sometimes, as here, to override more fundamental requirements. Weakness is basic integration, pointed up by slackened poetic control, seems to be again evident.
It is Patroclus's 'wounds' that finally 'rouse' Achilles 'drowsy blood', bringing hope and victory to the Greeks. The reasons for his inactivity - pride or personal vow - is never clarified. The ending suggests, however, that the greatest force in his life is his love for Patroclus. One's doubts about the Polyxena interlude increase in retrospect.

Ironies are multiplied in the ending: I shall discuss them more fully later\(^1\). One irony of peculiar bitterness that needs mention now, however, is the fact that the only bond of love of all those presented in the play - Troilus and Cressida's, Hector and Andromache's, Achilles and Polyxena's, even Paris and Helen's - that is ultimately effectual, that in the end stirs the lover to forceful action, is that between Achilles and his 'male varlet', Patroclus. One thinks back to Patroclus's 'To the effect, Achilles have I moved you...' (III.iii. 216-24). It was not an unmoving speech. A response of simple aversion to their love - Thersites' response - has not been established by the play\(^2\).

Until the end, and even there to a slight degree, there has been more ambivalence about the actual portrayal

---

1 pp. 115-16; 120-22; 132-33.
2 One might note too the satirical light that Achilles' fighting for his 'love' casts on the chivalric terms of Hector's original challenge (I.iii. 260-83).
of Achilles than one might have expected, than Ulysses' and Thersites' - and critics' - comments lead one to expect. Sympathy is not completely cut off. Consider, for instance, this speech from III.iii.:

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, and favour,
Prizes of accident as oft as merit;
Which when they fall, as being slippery standers,
The love that leaned on them as slippery too,
Doth one pluck down another, and together
Die in the fall.

(III.iii. 74-87)

The dignity and precision of the verse, the mature, resigned wisdom it suggests, its sensitivity and quiet falling stresses move one to concern, admiration. The 'butterfly' image is poignant in its delicacy. Coming as the speech does, in response to the rather crass rebuffs organised by Ulysses, it commands sympathy, a sympathy that is not dispelled by the note of easy confidence on which it opens and closes 1.

But one wonders whether the ambivalence is controlled and intentional at this point. There is something

1 III.iii. 74,87-94.
incongruous about both the quality of the verse and the quality of the response it calls forth. There is something incongruous too about its tone and matter. Is this speech another of the rich 'pieces' that jewel the play? Has it really an integral place? Does it mean to be doing all that in fact it is doing here? These are questions that cannot be answered. It is difficult to see what purpose is being served by drawing attention to sensitivity in Achilles here. The pattern of organising one response in order to counter it quite harshly is one that is too insistent throughout the play to be ignored as a possible explanation, but Achilles is too minor a figure, too much part of the general background, to make it seem likely here.

In Act V, Achilles' extreme baseness - a baseness that could admit none of the fineness glimpsed in III.iii. - is asserted and demonstrated. Sympathy is alienated, must be alienated, by the grossness of his act. The ambivalence that characterised the first meeting between Hector and Achilles (IV.v.), where one seemed no less proud and insolent than the other, disappears in the second (V.vi.), where Achilles' pride is clearly unfounded while Hector's is revealed as 'courtesy', whatever interpretation one may give to that. The extreme ignobility of Achilles' last
act in the play arouses strong aversion: Troilus's frenzied outburst is deserved. An audience is left feeling quite strongly that, despite appearances, the victory - the moral victory - has been Hector's.

ULYSSES

Although I have already, directly or indirectly, discussed Ulysses in some detail, there are still some important points that need either to be made or to be elaborated. For Ulysses, perhaps more than any other character, has been subjected to the most extreme divergence of critical opinion. Some see him as almost a villain: 'Macchiavellian', 'crafty and unsympathetic', 'unmoved, clean and cold' are terms used in his dispraise. But others have raised him almost to a hero's status, hailing him as 'an order-figure', 'an intellectual mouthpiece of the author', 'the wisest of the wise, ... shrewd and penetrating almost beyond human limits'.

1 Nevill Coghill, op. cit., p. 113.
2 George Brandes (1895), quoted in Augustus Ralli, op. cit., p. 151.
3 Nevill Coghill, ibid., p. 120. (Professor Coghill implies a preference for Pandarus.)
4 G.I. Duthie, op. cit., p. 113.
5 O.J. Campbell, op. cit., p. 206.
6 E. Davis, loc. cit., p. 12.
It must already be evident that I could not, without much qualification, support the latter view. In the implementation of his plan (II.iii. and III.iii.), one sees alienating displays of his 'juggling' and 'knavery', further proof of his coldness and duplicity. And, by the speech beginning 'The providence that's in a watchful state' (III.iii. 194-204), one's aversion to the extremity of his pride may well be strengthened.

I need now, however, to redress the balance, for Ulysses is a more ambiguous character - the responses he calls forth are more ambivalently than my account so far may have suggested. Those critics who disparage without qualification falsify just as surely as do those who offer unqualified praise.

There are qualities to admire as well as to scorn in Ulysses. He is, as Professor Mary Ellen Rickey says, 'surely the Greek whom we respect most'¹. His intelligence commands respect. His strategy seems brilliant, though underhand; his energy and efficiency remarkable; his intellectual superiority assured. His language is often tautly evocative, testifying to the admirable brilliance of his wit. One remembers, for instance, the sure control

¹ Shakespeare Quarterly, xv., 1964, p. 7.
of pun and metre in lines such as these:

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,
That all with one consent praise new born gauds,
Though they are made and moulded of things past,
And give to dust that is a little gilt
More laud than guilt o’er dusted.

(III.iii. 174-78)

Although Ulysses' wit - or Shakespeare's articulation of it - lapses at times¹, it so outshines the other Greeks' that one sees why some critics have mistaken him for the author's 'mouthpiece'. Even in the 'soul of state' speech (III.iii. 194-204), where one realises the enormity of Ulysses' pride - he sees his function and abilities as 'almost like the gods' - the clarity and discrimination of his expression, the control of rhythm, image and tone are so impressive that one admires, while criticising, and would be ready to concede that Ulysses is in fact discerning and intelligent enough to ensure the success of his plan.

There is too a kind of general wisdom in his precepts about 'degree' and 'time' and 'the state', a wisdom that influences although it misleads. Ulysses' major speeches seem to beg to be considered in isolation - a point I have touched on elsewhere². And, in isolation,

¹ See 'degree' speech, discussed p.112, and excursion on 'the book', III.iii., discussed p.102.
² e.g. p. 102-03.
removed from the flow of the play, they are, on the whole, impressively eloquent and wise. It is a mistake to extract them, holding them up as potted summaries not only of Ulysses' 'wisdom' but of the play's - and even of Shakespeare's generally - as so many critics have done. For one does need to see that an ironic incongruity very often exists between his precepts and the way the speeches function in the context of the play. This is particularly true of the speech on 'degree', although the further irony exists there that, despite the inflated claims of critics ('a marvel of eloquence', 'a text', 'a great moral and political lesson'), out of context, it is really less impressive than in. It is its underlying ironies that give it life and force in the play. When these are lost - and critics seem determined to lose them - the verse is, on the whole, as Professor Knights has said, relatively undistinguished; the precepts fairly

1 See, for instance, A. Gérard, W. Nowottny, O.J. Campbell, H. Fluchère.
2 A. Gérard, loc. cit., p. 154.
3 O.J. Campbell, op. cit., p. 197.
4 H. Fluchère, op. cit., p. 212.
5 Professor Kott, Dr Hawkes and, perhaps, Professor Knights, are amongst the very few to make any reference, direct or indirect, to the ironies of the speech in context.
 Nevertheless, there is a massiveness, a static brilliance and general sagacity about Ulysses' speeches of this kind — they contain so many lines that seem to comment wittily and wisely on the general trend of events in the play — that he is raised to a superior plane, and respect and admiration are compelled.

And there is another even more important reason why his 'extraordinary mental stature' may justly be called 'admirable'. Act IV is characterised by quite sudden changes in tempo and simplifications in characterisation: I have noted this already in discussing Troilus and Cressida. Ulysses is simplified too: he becomes, or is suddenly asserted to be, unambiguously clear-sighted, even wise. The doubts one had before — doubts about duplicity, coldness, vanity — seem to be without foundation now. He is kind and direct with Troilus, and what

1 See Williams M. Mitchell, *The Rise of the Revolutionary Party in the English House of Commons, 1603-29*, (1957), for a demonstration from sources of common boredom with speeches of this kind: the sentiments, it would seem, are quite hackneyed. He reports, for instance, that the House of Commons 'laughed at Sergeant Heyle in 1601 when he said that all they had was the queen's. In fact, "all the House hemm'd and laughed and talked"... They were in no mood for the wise saws about the sun, moon and stars and the rhetorical glories of the Tudor firmament.' (pp. 16-17).

2 *e.g.* I.iii. 116-17, 120-24.

pride he shows seems to be justified. In IV.v., Ulysses' perceptions seem to be established as uncannily and unquestionably right. He is right about Cressida, and, one suspects, about Troilus and Hector too (IV.v. 55-106). He predicts Troy's fate with certain truth (IV.v. 216-19).

'The providence that's in a watchful state' does seem to know 'almost every grain of Pluto's gold'; there does seem to be 'a mystery' in 'the soul of state'. This scene gives one reason for seeing him as 'an intellectual mouthpiece of the author', and even as 'the wisest of the wise'.

In the latter part of the play, then, the spectator's distrust of Ulysses tends to be broken down, his respect increased, and his confidence in Ulysses' judgment secured.

But Ulysses' elaborate plan - the basis for most of the action - fails; his penetrating scheme amounts to nothing. His last act in the play is to announce to the Greeks that Achilles and Ajax, their only real strength, are at last arming, roused, not by his strategy, but by what seems to be another instance of 'the hot passion of distempered blood'. Ulysses' importance has been illusory, his pride less founded than anyone else's. His shrewd clear-sightedness, which an audience has been urged more and more to value, has played no part in Greek victory.
His role has been merely to organise dissension among his own ranks. At the very end of the play, he fades into insignificance. If it is anyone's, it is Nestor's scheme that triumphs: it is his idea to send Patroclus's body to Achilles (V.v. 17-18); and it is Agamemnon who issues the last command and pronouncement to the Greeks (V.ix. 6-9). Ulysses does not feature again.

The spectator may well feel unnerved by the failure of Ulysses' plan, minor though it is to the vanquishing of Hector by Achilles. The bold irony against Ulysses' pride of judgment is an irony against his own too, his almost unequivocal admiration having been angled for in the preceding scenes. This seems to be another, and very pointed, instance of a procedure that, as I have already observed, marks the play: the spectator is exposed as 'wrong' now for a position that he has been urged to think 'right'. And the demonstration that 'still and mental parts' hold no sway over 'blood that is madly hot' is enough to unsettle him radically. The general implications, beyond the confines of the play, seem bleak to the point of nihilism.

1 pp. 25, 29-30.
In retrospect, the ironies of the early Greek council scene (I.iii.) startle in their number and sharpness. Have the complacent, unsympathetic Agamemnon and Nestor the last word in this play? With something of a shock, one recalls Nestor's feeble, pretty echo:

> In the reproof of chance
> Lies the true proof of men. ...
>
> (I.iii. 33-34)

It has gathered unexpected point and force now. What the play's ending reveals about 'the true proof of men' I shall go on to examine in the final section on Hector.

**THERSITES**

Before I turn to Hector, however, there is more that needs to be said about Thersites. I said before that the question - Is Thersites right? - is of crucial importance to the play. Is he right, for instance, when he growls out such uncompromising denouncements as the following?

> 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!
>
> (II.iii. 73-77)

> ...Lechery, lechery; still wars and lechery; nothing else holds fashion. A burning devil take them!
>
> (V.ii. 192-93)
He is so often before the audience, his attitude so consistently sour, his language so consistently strong, that the question is kept forcibly, if, as I have suggested, rather unsubtly, alive. I have mentioned too that there are very many critics who think that, without doubt, he is right: that the bitterness of what is shown in the play is so unequivocal that it clearly merits his berating cynicism. Such critics include Professor Gérard, Professor Kott, Professor Oates, Professor Ellis-Fermor, Mr David Horowitz and Professor Duthie. I hinted, however, that I disagreed with the unequivocality of these critics. I should be more inclined to support Dr Tillyard who claims that Thersites 'is not a coloured glass through which we should watch the play'\(^1\); Professor Campbell who insists that he is 'not Shakespeare's mouthpiece'\(^2\); and Professor Foakes who maintains that, although 'the war, like love, does indeed turn sour at the end', it is 'never reduced to the level of animality suggested by Thersites'\(^3\).

Thersites' rankness is overpowering. The image of 'running boils', the first he uses in the play (II.i. 1-9), is characteristically repugnant, the associations clinging

---

1 Op. cit., p. 64.
3 Loc. cit., p. 272.
more to him than to Agamemnon whom he describes. By contrast, he makes Pandarus seem sweet-tempered and clean. His language is floridly metaphorical, his chief source of imagery being the physically corrupted and diseased: 'botchy core', 'loathsome scab', 'guts-gripping ruptures' are familiar terms of his abuse. Of all the characters in the play, he is the one for whom the spectator feels the strongest antipathy, from whom he should like to be furthest.

But the spectator is not allowed to be distant from Thersites. Throughout, an intimacy is imposed. As the play progresses, he is associated more and more closely with him. Twice in the last scene of Act II, Thersites addresses the audience alone; he alone holds the stage as Act III closes; although he does not appear in Act IV, he almost directs Act V. But it is not just because he so often addresses the audience directly that intimacy is imposed. The chief reason is that the spectator so often seems to have to agree with what he says. Thersites seems to be clear-sighted, discerning weaknesses that the spectator himself has discerned, ratifying his perceptions. After what he has seen in the Greek council scene, for instance, the spectator seems forced to agree with Thersites many times when he takes the stage for the first time in
the scene that follows (II.i.). Thersites discerns Ajax's jealousy of Achilles and the wiles of Ulysses and Nestor. He seems right when he says that Agamemnon has no 'matter' (8); that Ajax is 'beef-witted' and 'here but to thrash Trojans' (12, 48); and that both Ajax and Achilles are being 'yoked' 'like draft oxen' and made to 'plough up the wars' (110-11). And his next appearance, after the Trojan council scene, strengthens the agreement between the audience and him. When he describes Greek tactics as 'patchery', 'juggling' and 'knavery' (II.iii. 73-74), he seems unquestionably right, and his pithy 'All the argument is a whore and a cuckold' (74-75), in essence, not only champions the stand that one applauded Hector for holding in the previous scene, but is in line with the one clear directive that the play gives: about the wantonness of Paris and the unworthiness of the original cause. And so the spectator is repeatedly forced into alignment with the rank Thersites. The result is that not only is he radically unsettled and disturbed - such alignment is against his choice - but he is drawn deep into the bitter taintedness of the war, or of Thersites' view of it. Although the spectator is distanced from most of the events and characters in this play, in this bitterness he is forced to be very much involved.
The audience does seem to 'fall more and more into agreement with Thersites'; he is, in many ways, 'a coloured glass' through which one seems set to see the play. But to say that Thersites is right simply because his opinions are so often the audience's is to fail to see just how the irony is working and just how peculiarly bitter it is. Very often, in fact, neither is more than partially right. Critics have too often overlooked the fact that there are many ironies against Thersites. The play does not in fact end by supporting a good many of his judgments. They seem right at the time but they are very often exposed to be quite wrong. For instance, one later learns that there is 'matter' in Agamemnon; that Ajax is not 'bought and sold' nor Achilles 'yoked': Ulysses has in fact very little influence over their actions; that Troy does fall when left to 'these two' (Achilles and Patroclus); that that 'tassel of a prodigal's purse', Patroclus, plays a major part in the winning of the war for Greece; that they are in fact warring for more than a 'placket': there are issues involved other than the original cause; and that they are not 'all incontinent varlets': Hector, and Troilus at the end, stand apart. There is, in fact, no 'spiteful issue' of Thersites'

1 Una Ellis-Fermor, op. cit., p. 59.
'execrations', just as there is no issue of Ulysses' elaborate plan. In both cases, the irony seems to be against pride of 'wit'. Thersites is not 'free from illusions'; his sight is muddied; he is no more a 'mouth-piece' than is Ulysses. And, once again, the irony is against the audience too. It is precisely because the spectator thought Thersites shared his own 'perceptiveness' that he has found himself so often in league with Thersites, agreeing with him despite a natural repugnance. Peculiar bitterness lies in the fact that the spectator is ultimately mocked - 'attacked' might be a better word - for the position that he has, very much against his inclination, been forced to hold. Such bitterness is of a different kind from that arising from simple alignment, distasteful though it also is. It goes deeper and has a sharper edge. Bitterness of this attacking kind characterises the play: a similiar procedure has already been noted in the presentation not just of Ulysses but of almost every major character; it culminates in Pandarus's 'epilogue'.

Nevertheless, although the play proves Thersites wrong on many important points, it upholds his view on the unworthiness of the cause, and it moves close to his basic attitude in its strong suggestion that there is little possibility of glory in this war. The world of
The play is corrupt. Repellent imagery of disease and physical taintedness, although at its most intense in Thersites' speeches, is present throughout the play. It links the scenes of 'love' and war. Troilus's 'heart beats thicker than a feverous pulse' (III.ii. 36); Pandarus's business 'seethes' (III.i. 41); he bequeaths the audience his 'diseases' (V.x. 56); Diomedes' bitter reference is to Helen's 'contaminated carrion weight' (IV.i. 71). And, while 'the enterprise is sick' among the Greeks, 'an envious fever' debilitating them all (I.iii. 103, 133), the Trojans suffer from 'raging appetites' and 'the hot passion of distempered blood' (II.ii. 181, 169). Glorious deeds stand little chance of survival in such a world. And, indeed, there is little that is glorious at the end. Cressida is revealed as a plain slut, and, more crucially, Achilles slays Hector. But to say that there is little glorious is not to say that there is nothing. What the play offers, I would contend, is not as nihilistic as Thersites' version of what it offers. The issue is not 'closed', as his single-minded, cynical commentary would make it seem. In its presentation of both warriors and lovers, the play has been much too open to answer directly to Thersites' unequivocal denial of value. As Professor Foakes says, love and war are 'never reduced to the level of animality suggested by Thersites'. Bitterness is not
entirely unrelieved. The poetry has quickened and kindled in passages that forcibly suggest dignity, splendour, even poignant suffering for man. (Troilus's 'injurious time', Cressida's 'When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy', Achilles' 'men like butterflies', Ulysses' 'soul of state' come to mind.) The freshness as well as the giddiness of young love has been caught. And Troilus at the end of the play is both more heroic and more mature than Troilus at the start\textsuperscript{2}. The energy he displays in the final scene is by no means unambiguous, but its very ambiguity forces the basic issue - the possibility of glory - to be left open. And so too does the ambiguity of Hector's action, even of his death, in the latter part of the play. It is to Hector's role that I must now turn.

\textbf{HECTOR}

Although Hector's actual appearances are few - between II.ii. and V.ii. he is on stage only once (IV.v.) - he is the focal point for many, if not most, of the insistent contrasts and parallels that characterise the play's structure, and it is to him, principally, that an audience looks

\begin{flushright}
1 \textit{Loc. cit.}, p. 272.
2 See pp. 34-37.
\end{flushright}
for an answer to the leading question raised by the play. It is very strange that critics such as Mrs Nowottny and M. Fluckère have almost completely overlooked his role. Professor Coghill seems to me closer to the truth when he says that, of the three main stories - Troilus's Ulysses' and Hector's - Hector's is the most important.¹

Is Hector flawed? This is a question that the play forces upon its audience. It is raised first by his disturbing turnabout in the Trojan council scene. As I noted, the spectator is unsettled there, not only because his bearings have shifted, but because he fears that Hector cannot survive such instability.² And, if Hector cannot survive, neither can Troy. For, throughout, one is made very much aware that Hector's fate is Troy's: Ulysses calls him 'Troy's base and pillar' (IV.v. 211); and Aeneas, heralding his encounter with Ajax, proclaims:

The glory of our Troy doth this day lie
On his fair worth and single chivalry.

(IV.iv. 147-48)

The question is focused even more narrowly and sharply just before his second appearance in IV.v. Two conflicting opinions are juxtaposed. The spectator must weigh them

---

² See pp. 88-90.
how he will, but what he is to weigh - the nature of Hector's fair worth and single chivalry - is in little doubt. Aeneas urges unqualified admiration:

In the extremity of great and little,
Valour and pride excel themselves in Hector;
The one almost as infinite as all,
The other as blank as nothing. Weigh him well;
And that which looks like pride is courtesy.

(IV.v. 78-82)

But, only a little later, Ulysses voices the first open criticism of Hector in the play. He criticises softness in Hector, claiming that, as a foe, Troilus is 'more dangerous':

For Hector, in his blaze of wrath, subscribes
To tender objects.

(IV.v. 105-06)

Because he has been shaken by the reversal in II.ii., when attention is directed thus just before Hector's next appearance in IV.v., the spectator tends both to question Aeneas's defence - it does strike one as defence - and to heed Ulysses' criticism. In the action that follows, Hector's 'courtesy' comes under close scrutiny. Is it founded on pride? Is it strength or weakness? Does it lead him to 'subscribe' to 'tender objects'? Does it spell out hope or ruin for Troy? Attention is narrowed and directed in a way that typifies the procedure of the play. (One recalls
the questions that preceded Troilus's first love-scene, and Ajax's ingenuous queries about pride.) By the time Hector is seen in action, the spectator knows exactly what issues to mark. And he knows too - Thersites' comments are a persistent reminder - just what the larger issue is, on which the implications of these questions have a vital bearing.

Hector's 'worth' is 'fair' and his 'chivalry' 'single'. His goodness bulks large. In the scenes between his first two appearances, he has, by report or implication, continued to outshine all others, his commitment and integrity contrasting not only with Achilles' unprincipled complacency, but also with his fellow Trojans' slackness. In Act III, when both Paris and, to a lesser degree, Troilus are diverted by their 'loves', each recognises that he is falling short of Hector's standard1. And in almost every encounter from IV.v. to the end, Hector stands out for his magnanimity and honour. He spares Ajax because he is his kin and Achilles because they are not equal in freshness. He holds unswervingly to his vow as warrior before the pleas of Andromache, Cassandra and Priam. His manly firmness and integrity continue to

1 See III.i. 134-37 and IV.v. 140-88. (Troilus's awareness is clearly superior to Paris's.)
contrast markedly with the dishonour shown by all others: with his brothers' irresolution; with Cressida's faithlessness; and, particularly, with Achilles' self-centred unscrupulousness demonstrated so clearly in V.i.. None can rival Hector for 'valiant and magnanimous deeds'.

But admiration for Hector is not allowed to be unqualified. The play does not let one see him as 'the perfect knight'. The attention focused on him in the latter part of the play is, by its very nature, essentially critical: the audience is set to mark and to question. Those critics - Professor Campbell, Professor Ellis-Fermor, Professor N. Davis and Dr Kimbrough are examples - who see his worth as unambiguous, his courtesy as unflawed, ignore criticisms that are both implicit and explicit in the play. In IV.v., Ulysses' word has weight: he has just been shown to be right about the Cressida of this scene. And in V.iii., when Troilus speaks out, because he voices doubts that the spectator has been encouraged already to hold, one heeds him too:

**Troilus**: Brother, you have a vice of mercy in you, Which better fits a lion than a man.

**Hector**: What vice is that? Good Troilus, chide me for it.

---

1 Robert Kimbrough, op. cit., p. 112, describes him thus.
Troilus: When many times the captive Grecian falls,
Even in the fan and wind of your fair sword,
You bid them rise and live.

Hector: 'O, 'tis fair play.
Troilus: Fool's play, by heaven, Hector.

Hector: How now? How now?

Troilus: For the love of all the gods,
Let's leave the hermit pity with our mother,
And when we have our armours buckled on,
The venomed vengeance ride upon our swords,
Spur them to ruthless work, rein them from ruth.

Hector: Fie, savage, fie!

Troilus: Hector, then, 'tis wars.

(V.iii. 37-49)

It is wars, and in wars, there is a very real sense in
which 'the end crowns all'. There is bitter irony in the
fact that the man who cried 'Fall Greeks, fail fame, honour
or go or stay' (V.i. 46), by foul murder, goes on to 'crown
all' for Greece, while the other by his very determination
to stand fast by Troy, to win honour by 'deeds worth praise',
loses all for Troy. It is an irony that comes close to
being tragic.

Hector's death is the moment in the play closest to
being tragic. So many of the elements of tragedy are there:
Hector is a noble hero; his cruel death disproportionate,
perhaps even undeserved; he is the victim of the inevitable
workings of a remorseless fate and of his own excessive
magnanimity, his 'tragic flaw'; he is elevated by the sympathy and respect he wins throughout. In another play, his death might well have been tragic. But in this play there are forces at work to ensure that its tragic implications are suppressed. Hector has shared the foreground with two other major characters, and has had less of it than the other two: his actual appearances have in fact been minimal. There has been no prolonged suffering, and his death, coming as it does as the culmination of the fast-moving, episodic last scenes, accentuates Achilles' baseness more than his own fineness. It is with Achilles, not Hector, that an audience closes in on the scene of death. The spectator may well be confounded, dashed. For he is acutely conscious not only of the tragic waste involved - such a consciousness alone need not be confounding¹ - but of the folly that has led to the waste, of the compound of good and bad that comprises heroism, of the disproportion, that is not a solely tragic disproportion, between the death and the cause. Hector's is a martyr's death without a martyr's cause. It spells out no restoration for his society, no 'balance and composure'¹, for audience.

¹ In the Tragedies it is usually not. See discussion pp. 245, quoted in Clifford Leech 'The Implications of Tragedy', Shakespeare's Tragedies, ed. Lawrence Lerner, p. 287.
The play seems set to inhibit natural sympathy to an unusual degree, allowing little release of tension. In the last few scenes, Troilus's indictment of Hector's 'vice of mercy', farbeit from Aeneas's praise, gains surprising support and force. For here ironic parallels, by implication, mock the 'softness' of Hector's 'courtesy', the folly of his 'excessive magnanimity'. The first of these - the 'encounter' with Thersites - is in the scene immediately following Troilus's accusation:

Hector: What art thou, Greek? Art thou for Hector's match? Art thou of blood and honour?

Thersites: No, no, I am a rascal, a scurvy railing knave, a very filthy rogue.

Hector: I do believe thee; live. (Exit.)

(V.iv. 27-31)

And this irony is reinforced - hardened into parody almost - by the 'encounter' which follows between Thersites and the bastard, Margarelon:

Bastard: Turn, slave, and fight.

Thersites: What art thou?

Bastard: A bastard son of Priam's.

Thersites: I am a bastard too; I love bastards. I am bastard begot, bastard instructed, bastard in mind, bastard in valour, in everything illegitimate. One

---

1 E.M.W. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 72, coined this phrase.
bear will not bite another, and wherefore should one bastard? Take heed, the quarrel's most ominous to us. If the son of a whore fight for a whore, he tempts judgment. Farewell, bastard.

Bastard: The devil take thee, coward! (Exeunt.)

(V.vii. 13-23)

In neither of these incidents is it Thersites alone, or even primarily, who is being mocked. Between them comes Hector's fatal display of courtesy towards Achilles (V.vi.), a display that perhaps, after all, Achilles is right to 'disdain' and right to call 'proud'. It may well be that 'that which looks like pride' is in fact pride. When Cassandra accuses him of 'hot and peevish vows', his defence reveals something of the extent of his pride in his own courtesy:

Life every man holds dear; but the dear man
Holds honour far more precious dear than life.

(V.iii. 25-28)

It is a noble attitude and one that needs voicing in a world where meanness and slackness flourish. But it is not an attitude that Troy's 'base and pillar' can, in mature responsibility, afford to hold. Hector's values are 'false to the situation'. One can understand why he has been criticised for his 'misplaced sense of honour', his

---

'fatally divided mind', why he has been called 'a self-deceiver and disordered personality', why Cassandra cries:

Farewell. Yet, soft; Hector, I take my leave. Thou dost thyself and all our Troy deceive.

(V.iii. 89-90)

The suspicion that he too is infected by rash instability and pride, a suspicion first roused by his reversal in the Trojan council scene, seems to be reinforced by his last act in the play. His mad pursuit of the 'one in armour' strikes one as nothing more than the irrational act of 'distempered blood'.

Nevertheless, the audience's attitude towards Hector at the end of the play is complex. It is not simply critical. Characteristically enough, it is open: the spectator both sympathises and criticises, incompatible though the two responses may see. He sees that Hector's 'courtesy' - his magnanimity and honour - is flawed. It is excessive and unstable and brings ruin to himself and to Troy. Hector's pride is of a different kind from that of the Greek leaders or of the Greek warriors - it is much more acceptable than theirs - but it is pride nevertheless, and devours itself even more manifestly than does theirs.

1 E.M.W. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 69.
Yet, even as the spectator criticises, he admires - cannot help admiring - the great superiority of Hector's 'courtesy' to Achilles' baseness.

In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men.

(I.iii. 33-34)

Hector, tried, is not unflawed, but a truer, greater man than Achilles. In a sense, the victory is not to the Greeks, although they win the war. Hector's 'honour' - to him 'far more precious dear than life' - is never undermined. The play leaves the audience questioning the very meaning of triumph and defeat.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Because there has been so much disagreement about what the play is saying and what its central concerns are, I shall begin by clarifying my position.

Troilus and Cressida is centrally concerned with problems of corruption and disorder, particularly with 'the hot passion of distempered blood' and appetite, the 'universal wolf'. Recurrent imagery of devouring appetite and overheated, physical disorder¹ not only relates the

1 Imagery of 'appetite' and 'digestion' may be found: Prologue 12-13, 29; I.i. 13-28; I.ii. 250-51, 165-66; I.iii. 120-24, 337-38, 349, 278, 386-87; II.i. 15, 39, 41, 44; II.ii. 6, 33, 66, 123, 143, 181; II.iii. 44, 113, 122, 156, 159, 186-87, 197, 224, 226; III.i. 44, 67, 73, 74, 127; III.ii. 117-120, 66, 93, 188; III.iii. 13, 145-49, 137-38, 148-49, 165, 220, 228, 238; IV.i. 59-66, 71; IV.iv. 3-10, 24, 47-48; IV.v. 274, 291-92; V.i. 5, 9, 58, 78; V.ii. 17, 55, 155-57, 190-91; V.iii. 17-19, 111; V.iv. 11-13, 33-36; V.v. 26-29; V.viii. 1-3, 19-20; V.x. 1-2, 43.

Related imagery of 'overheated, physical disorder' may be found: Prologue 2, 20; I.i. 26, 55, 64-65; I.ii. 115-16, 172-73, 183-84; I.iii. 8, 52, 55, 103, 126, 133-34, 139, 141, 173-74, 193, 337-38; II.i. 1-9, 26-31; II.ii. 6, 59, 63, 110, 115-16, 144, 169, 181, 196; II.iii. 20, 76, 85, 122, 175, 202, 214; III.i. 42, 119, 127-29; III.ii. 36, 164; III.iii. 44, 134, 229, 231, 238; IV.i. 15, 69; IV.ii. 109; IV.iv. 19, 33-38; IV.v. 6-10, 20, 60-64, 105-06, 286, 259; V.i. 1-2, 18-24, 32, 49; V.ii. 55, 174, 178-79, 194; V.iii. 10-11, 17, 55, 82, 85; V.v. 32, 36; V.x. 55-56.

There is also much 'bestial' imagery in a similar vein.
two sides and prevents the two plots from falling apart but keeps this central concern continually alive. That it is a central concern, patent though it seems, needs saying, for there are still critics who argue that the play's centre is elsewhere. Those who see it in the opposition of Trojans and Greeks\(^1\) distort, for the two sides are alike as well as unlike. Those who see it in Troilus's 'love-tragedy'\(^2\) also distort, for they pay too little attention to the weighty scenes of 'war'. And those who see it in the role of Time — be it Time that 'kills' or Time that 'determines' or both\(^3\) — distort in yet another way, for they pay too much attention to the rich pieces — and in some cases, to the background provided by Shakespeare's other work — and too little to the flow of this particular play. I shall have more to say about such distortions later.

The crux of the play lies in the testing of Thersites' viewpoint: is he right to deny all possibility of love and honour in this war? This question, raised first in the

---

1 Professor Wilson Knight, Professor Danby, Mrs Nowottny, Dr Hawkes, Professor Coghill and Dr Kaula are critics who take this view.
2 The most extreme proponents of this viewpoint are Mr Morris, Mr Arthos and Mr John Russell Brown.
3 Professor Wilson Knight, Professor Muir, Mr Traversi and M. Fluchere see it in Time that 'kills'; Professor Norman Rabkin in Time that 'determines'; while Professor Foakes argues for both.
Prologue and clearly articulated in the council scenes, is kept very much before the spectator by Thersites' persistent comments: comments that, very often, are for the spectator's hearing alone. It is never closed in the completely unambiguous way that most critics suggest. It is typical of the play's essential ambiguity that, as Professor Derick R.C. Marsh has recently claimed, the answer 'must be both yes and no'. Thersites is right because the play presents much that is disordered, diseased and base. But he is also wrong because the ambiguity of Troilus's 'moral energy' and of Achilles' 'victory', together with the dignity and splendour suggested at times by the poetry, forces the issue to be left open. Thersites' awareness is not simply or crudely the play's.

The play is essentially ambiguous: a fact too often overlooked by critics. The Prologue suggests that the war both is and is not heroic; Cressida repels and attracts; Pandarus shocks and yet amuses; the principal love-scenes are tainted but not unfresh; Trojans and Greeks are alike and unlike; 'time' determines and does not determine, destroys

---

1 Cf. Derick R.C. Marsh. 'Interpretation and Misinterpretation: The Problem of Troilus and Cressida', Shakespeare Studies I, ed. J. Leeds Barroll, 1965, p. 196. Dr Marsh, however, gives surprisingly little evidence from the play itself to support this conclusion. He denies, for instance, that Troilus learns and changes (p. 197) and that Hector's life is heroic (p. 196), ambiguous though heroism is.
and does not destroy; 'hot blood' creates as well as destroys; 'chivalry' is compounded of both strong and weak, to be valued and criticised; Agamemnon is both right and wrong; Ulysses commands both admiration and scorn; Troy both loses and wins the war. The language of the play is at times flat and prolix, at times live and compressed; the tone often cynical and bitter but sometimes hopeful and fresh. The clearcut solutions that critics have so often supplied do not answer to what is in the play.

My chief interest has not been directly in interpretation. It has been in analysing how the play acts on an audience. I have not before attempted to draw together my findings because I think it necessary, first, to show how such features arise in the flow of the whole. Now, however, I shall take the opportunity to do so.

Questions dominate in this play. Debate, discussion and commentary prevail; characters and events are only of secondary interest. Attention is focused narrowly on the abstract issues as such. This tendency, begun in the Prologue, continues throughout the play. Sometimes, seemingly ingenuously, precise questions are formulated: Pandarus's 'Is this the generation of love...?', for instance, or Ajax's 'Why should a man be proud...?'. Very often, discussion or debate precedes the action under discussion: the council
scenes function thus; so too does Troilus and Cressida's abstract discussion before their first love-scene. Throughout, of course, Thersites' commentary keeps the central, larger issues continually alive.

Parallels, juxtapositions and contrasts also play a large part in defining the play's shape and meaning. Opposing viewpoints are often juxtaposed: between them we must weigh. Hector's 'courtesy' comes under this kind of scrutiny: Aeneas's assessment is set beside Ulysses'; a little later Hector's own confidence is balanced against not only Andromache's and Cassandra's forebodings but Troilus's open criticism. Events comment on each other in much the same way: the Greek council on the Trojan; Paris's love-scene on Troilus's; Thersites' 'encounters' on Hector's. Parallel choices - devotion to a warrior's honour or to love - confront Troilus, Hector, Paris and Achilles; contrasting responses help to determine how the audience is to weigh. Juxtaposition and contrast help the spectator too to differentiate not just between Greeks and Trojans as, for instance, they meet in council, but between Hector and Achilles as they meet on the field, between Ulysses and the other leaders of the Greeks, and, ultimately, between Troy's two main hopes - Hector and Troilus - and all other warriors, Trojan and Greek. The play is, as Mr Knowland
has said, 'a pattern of contrasts'. And, throughout, the many references to - and images from - weighing are a reminder that evaluation is the spectator's chief task.

Clear directives about how one should weigh are withheld. Because unambiguous sympathy is denied to all, because there is nothing unequivocally good (although there are some things unequivocally bad), it is seldom easy to find one's bearings. The brisk indifference displayed at the close of the Prologue is fair warning of the spirit that controls the play. Ground is constantly shifting: Hector's turnabout, Cressida's 'fall', the changes in Troilus, the collapse of Ulysses' plan all demand flexibility of response. The spectator's perspective is constantly being forced to change. The complexity of the issues and the continual cross-reference calls for unusual alertness. The sustained ambiguity that marks the play makes demands not only on intellect but on temperament. Critical literature in all its diversity bears witness to the temptation to close what the play leaves open.

1 Loc. cit., p. 361.
2 See p. 30-31 of this study.
3 The 'unequivocally bad' things I see to be the 'wantonness' of Paris and the 'rankness' of Thersites. The baseness of Cressida, Achilles and Pandarus is not fixed during the play: it is fully revealed only towards or at the end.
About the openness of *Troilus and Cressida*, there is, as I have noted many times, a peculiar, attacking bitterness. This spirit marks almost every turn the action takes in Acts IV and V. Very often the spectator seems to be under attack for a position that the play has encouraged him to hold, sometimes against his will. In Acts IV and V, sudden simplifications take place: Troilus and Ulysses become more clearly admirable; Cressida, Achilles and Pandarus more clearly base; Hector, admirable still, is more clearly to be criticised. In each case, the direction of the simplification is one that, although it might have been predicted, the very flow of the play to that point has kept one from expecting. Had, for instance, Cressida been portrayed from the start as a plain slut, the spectator would have found it much more difficult to feel any sympathy for Troilus. Sympathy for him is assumed in V.ii. Similarly with Pandarus: one needed to share something of Troilus's tolerance. And the collapse of Ulysses' plan, coming as it does after the spectator has been manoeuvred, almost against his will, into a position of ungrudging admiration for Ulysses' wit and sagacity, unsettles and confounds. The spectator learns ultimately too that the alignment with Thersites - so much against his taste - seems to be, in part at least, a mockery: Thersites' pride in his wits has less
foundation than the spectator, priding himself on his own wits, had been led to believe. This kind of toying, manoeuvring and attacking reaches its climax in Pandarus's 'epilogue'. No opportunity to assert himself against Pandarus's corruption is allowed to the spectator as it is to Troilus - Troilus whose moral inferiority an audience has been encouraged to criticise. The full force of the playwright's antagonism is felt here. Peculiar bitterness of this kind, as I shall go on to show, marks Troilus and Cressida off from every other of Shakespeare's darker plays.

Troilus and Cressida is clearly not a tragedy, although, in Troilus's and Hector's stories, there are elements of the tragic. Nor is it simply satiric, although, in the ironies and attacks it directs against its audience, there are traces of satire. It is both tragic and comic, yet, distinctively neither, nor even tragicomic. 'Problem play' seems still the least misleading term: less misleading than either 'problem comedy' or 'problem tragedy'. The neutrality of the term is an asset, and, while it fails to indicate the play's cynical bias and bitterness, the term does give some

1 'Tragicomic' seems to imply more tears and more laughter than Troilus and Cressida offers. It gives no notion of its philosophical, intellectual bias. Professor Kott uses this term.

2 Professor Lawrence and Professor Marsh favour 'problem comedy'; Professor J.C. Oates 'problem tragedy'.
hint that the play's dominant characteristic is its openness, its probing - without conventional resolution - of general, abstract problems.

The chief strengths of the play are the firmness with which it directs attention to the complex, paradoxical issues that it is examining; the subtlety and sureness with which it controls an audience's very mixed responses; the definition with which it makes its contrasts, juxtapositions and parallels; the command it has of a wide variety of tones; the vivid intensity of some of its language; and, perhaps above all, the power with which it makes the thrust of its attack felt. The fact that it has shocked and challenged so many into convinced response is tribute enough to its success. In demonstrating such a point, one may, for once, align such diverse critics as Professor Wilson Knight, Professor Oscar J. Campbell, Professor L.C. Knights and Dr Tillyard.

There are problems, however: stretches of slackened verse and possible weaknesses of integration and balance. Some are relatively minor: Ulysses' long excursion on 'the book', for instance, the polyxena interludes, or even the suddenness of Cressida's 'fall' or the assumption of tragic sympathy that seems to underlie V.ii.. The blurring in the portrayal of Achilles may even come into this category.
But some are more serious. A central problem concerns the integration of the stories of love and war. With very little loss, it is possible to separate the two plots for discussion, as I have done in this study. What relates them is, of course, primarily the corruption shown in each: Cressida's values turn out to be base, as are Achilles'; Pandarus is Thersites' counterpart; both Troilus and Hector share something of the taintedness of their backgrounds; the imagery of the diseased and physically corrupted runs through the stories of both love and war. Corrupt love seems to answer to corrupt pride and corrupt dishonour. But the relationship between the diseased origins of the war - this is where love and war most clearly merge - and the diseased outlooks of so many of the warriors and lovers, although it is an assumption that seems to underlie the play, is never firmly and irrefutably established. Greek pride and complacency, for instance, need have nothing to do with Helen's rape.

Perhaps because there is no single, dominating figure whose cast of mind they particularly suit, the major abstract speeches in Troilus and Cressida - Troilus's 'injurious time', Ulysses' on 'time', 'the state' and 'degree', Achilles' on

1 Coleridge felt a similar uneasiness about integration at this vital point: op. cit., p. 248.
'fortune' - tend, as I have noted, to stand out as rich but static set-pieces, on the whole, more impressive out of context than in. This is not to deny their thematic significance, nor even the irony, characteristic of the play's attacking spirit, that, ultimately, against an audience's expectations, it is in context that their significance makes itself felt. My contention is simply that these speeches neither smoothly fit their dramatic contexts - although, with the exception of Achilles', in a general way they suit their speakers - nor fulfil the promise that their 'rounded fullness' and 'superb ring'¹ seem to offer. Their weightiness often seems incongruous. Even though their poetry is often splendid - indeed the most splendid in the play - it is a mistake to see in these speeches the central preoccupations of the play.

Critics who have attended too closely to the speeches on 'time', isolating them and exaggerating their importance, include Professor Wilson Knight, Mr Traversi, Mr Morris, Professor Muir, M. Fluchère, and, more recently, Professor Norman Rabkin². Professor Wilson Knight claims that at 'the core of the play's philosophy' is 'the arch-enemy, Time,

1 These phrases are Professor Gérard's, loc. cit., p. 157, and Professor Ellis-Fermor's, op. cit., p. 61.
that kills values\textsuperscript{1}; Professor Rabkin that 'time's determining of value' is 'the play's thematic center'\textsuperscript{2}. Troilus and Cressida is centrally concerned with questions of value and evaluation\textsuperscript{3} and 'time', or more particularly 'fate', necessarily plays a part: Cassandra's prophecies are a forceful reminder; the finiteness of love is frequently discussed; the main debates address themselves to problems of determinism; Achilles proclaims 'It is decreed Hector the great must die' (V.vii. 8); and, as I have noted, Agamemnon's fatalistic philosophy gains unexpected weight from events as they unfold during the play. The many references to 'time' serve, as Dr Kimbrough has suggested, to keep the spectator distanced\textsuperscript{4}, and, as Professor Rabkin has persuasively argued, to help to make the two plots cohere\textsuperscript{5}. But to attach primary importance to the role played by time is, as I suggested earlier, to distort. It is not time alone - or even primarily - that determines or destroys value in this play. Time alone is not responsible for Cressida's betrayal of Troilus, for the collapse of Ulysses' plan, for Achilles' foul murder of Hector, or for

\textsuperscript{1} Op. cit., p. 65.
\textsuperscript{2} Loc. cit., p. 280.
\textsuperscript{3} Cf. p. 139.
\textsuperscript{5} Loc. cit., p. 271 ff.
\textsuperscript{6} p. 135.
the fall of Troy. It is not so much time, the 'process over
which none of them has control'\(^1\), as 'the hot passion of
distempered blood', a condition that infects them all, over
which each of them might have had more control, that de-
termines and threatens to destroy value in this play. The
play's central concern is, as I have argued throughout,
with problems of corruption, of overheated instability and
disorder, with the way man shapes his own fate - or tries
to shape it, for 'hot passion' is a condition over which
man has imperfect control - rather than with the absolutely
inevitable, 'devouring' or even 'sifting' time\(^2\). In the
controversies that rage still about the part played by time
in this play, my support goes, then, to the more moderate
stance taken by critics such as Mr Knowland, Professor Knights,
Professor Marsh and Dr William B. Toole.

At the beginning of this study\(^3\), I mentioned Professor
Coghill's recent theory. If I have not, in the course of
my analyses, succeeded in refuting his claim that the
Prologue and 'epilogue' do not belong to the play, that,
without them, it is a simple tragedy, I cannot hope to do
so now. In summary, however, perhaps I might point once

---

1 Norman Rabkin, loc. cit., p. 280.
2 R.A. Foakes uses both notions, loc. cit., pp. 275-76.
3 p. 3.
again to the problematic nature of the whole play, to its openness, its ambiguities, its characteristic toying with its audience's responses, its determined lack of resolution. *Troilus and Cressida* is of a different kind from the Tragedies. Although I cannot support his conclusions, nor even his choice of evidence, Professor Coghill's basic hypothesis that the play may have been reworked in 1609, providing that one does accept it as no more than an hypothesis, seems possible. It may explain not only the extraordinary sharpness of the Prologue and 'epilogue' but the imperfect integration of many of the play's rich pieces. The major speeches on 'time' and 'fortune' are recognisably Shakespearean - in content and texture - and take their place easily in the canon, particularly when placed beside the Sonnets. Indeed, a speech like Troilus's 'injurious time' rewards the kind of attention one would give to one of the Sonnets more than the attention it can claim as part of a forward-moving, fluid play. The fact that both the Sonnets and *Troilus and Cressida* were published in 1609 may have no significance, but it may have some.

Another theory that, discredited though it is, seems to me quite plausible is Professor Peter Alexander's.

---

His hypothesis that the play was written for a special audience of bright young legal men seems to me, again as no more than an hypothesis, to have point. It has recently won support, indirectly, from Professor Coghill and from the scholarly research of Dr Robert Kimbrough. Dr Kimbrough's evidence is more external — and more comprehensive — than mine, but his interest in the nature of the first audience seems to me to arise naturally from the play, and his thesis — that that audience was a coterie — to have some weight. The peculiar nature of the relationship between playwright and spectator needs to be recognised. That the attacking bitterness of this play is peculiar I shall demonstrate more fully later. Although one cannot say with any certainty who formed the original audience, its nature seems to me a legitimate field for hypothesis. For the play itself gives one reason to think that there may well have been a special audience, one whose pride of judgment Shakespeare scorned. Professor Alexander's hypothesis does not seem unlikely.

_Troilus and Cressida_ is an uneven play. At best, a rare fineness is achieved in its language and dramatic control. One thinks, for instance, of the splendour of

much of Troilus's love-poetry, of the sharp brilliance of
many of Ulysses' aphorisms, of the beautifully structured
betrayal scene and the subtle orchestration of the Trojan
debate. But such excellence is not sustained. There is
much prose - some of it distinguished by its incisive wit -
and much verse that might just as well have been prose.
In the Greek scenes particularly, the language is often
undistinguished and dramatic control weak. In III.iii.,
for instance, there is little that is sharply focused,
even from Ulysses. In I.iii., the Greek council scene,
the most substantial of the Greek scenes, animation shows
itself only in glimpses: in the central lines of the
'degree' speech, in the tough compression of some of
Agamemnon's opening lines, in the covert ironies. There
is much that seems diffuse and slack. The prolixity of
course makes its own point, as it might be argued does the
meagre flatness of many of the war-scenes in the middle of
the play and towards its end. Lowering of tension, tempo
and poetic quality helps to define response and to shape
the play's larger rhythms, sharpening the crises. But the
flat patches seem at times to be unnecessarily prolonged:
they seem in fact to be unfocused. And there are too places
where a flagging in energy and control, though evident,
seems unintended: Troilus's 'recordation' speech, for
instance, or Hector's speech of capitulation, or even Achilles' speech of victory, and perhaps the virtual absence of comment from Ulysses in the decisive war-scenes at the close of the play. Conversely, there are places where sudden increases in poetic force and tempo seem inappropriate to the action at the time: most of the speeches on 'time' are, as I have remarked, of this kind, Achilles' speech on 'fortune' being the most notable example.

This play poses a curious problem for the critic: its best poetry is not the surest guide to its chief thematic concerns.

A playwright who sets out to deny full engagement to his audience sets himself curious problems. He perhaps runs the risk of not being fully engaged himself. In my final chapter, to which I shall now turn, I shall try, by ranging beyond this play, to deal with questions of this kind.
In this chapter I wish to turn from close analysis of a single play in order to set the discussion in a larger perspective. What follows is necessarily tentative and sketchy but seems worth attempting because it allows for a sharper definition of this play's particular qualities and a more balanced appraisal of its achievement. I shall first examine Troilus and Cressida's Shakespearean affinities, and then its relationship to the 'black comedies' of today.

Within Shakespeare, the usual grouping for Troilus and Cressida is of course with Measure for Measure and All's Well That Ends Well. I see much point in comparing Troilus with Measure for Measure but little in including All's Well in the group. All's Well shares with the other two a tendency towards the neutralisation of sympathies - there are tensions that work against the surface story - and a bias (less marked than in them) towards a rather bitter ambiguity. But its affinities are much more obviously with the Comedies than are theirs: its fanciful train of events claims the major part of one's attention; general questions are a
secondary concern. The other two plays are more clearly of a kind.

Like *Troilus*, *Measure for Measure* sharply directs attention — by means of debates, contrasts, juxtapositions, parallels and precise formulations — to its underlying questions. Each shows a society in need of correction — the Duke's scheme is the counterpart of Ulysses', the Duke being as ambiguous as Ulysses — and, in each, problems of discipline and of passion are explored, *Measure for Measure* being the more dramatic in that there the problems tend to be enacted rather than discussed. In neither are sympathies simply and clearly directed: each controls, subtly and surely, a range of complex, ambivalent responses, allowing no central hero. But there is one important difference: *Measure for Measure* attempts to close where *Troilus and Cressida* leaves open; it is much more neatly patterned and stylised, particularly in its ending. It is, ultimately, a less ambiguous, teasing and bitter play: the peculiar attacking bitterness that distinguishes *Troilus* is not present in this play. Comparison of the two helps in the evaluation of each. For all its possible weaknesses, *Troilus and Cressida* is, I think, a better-balanced and a better-integrated play: it does not split so noticeably into two halves, one of exposition, one of resolution; and it does
not suffer from the kind of imbalance between these two halves that seems to me to mar the other play. The first half of *Measure for Measure* is, however, a greater achievement, in the same kind, than the whole of *Troilus and Cressida*. Issues are defined even more sharply, yet they are at least as complex; greater force is brought to bear, for only one central, unifying problem is being examined: energies are not diversified; fundamental questions of unity do not arise; there is greater compression and depth in the language; a spectator is excited and involved more immediately than he is in *Troilus*. The essential ambivalence, being more clearly-defined, is in its own way more painful - and more stimulating - than anything in *Troilus and Cressida*. The full teeming society portrayed with brilliant economy in the first Acts of *Measure for Measure* asserts its own valid and ambiguous force. The 'hot passion', attacked by Hector, by Ulysses, by Thersites and in large measure by the rest of the play, lacks such force in *Troilus and Cressida*: because there is so much discussion and so little actual dramatisation, because the language seems on the whole flatter, less dense, the society there seems by contrast rather ragged and thin. Nevertheless, as I have already suggested, *Measure for Measure* loses on the whole because the 'ballet-
like' precision\(^1\) of its second half cannot match the weight and force and complexity of its first half. And one values the sustained openness that is perhaps the greatest achievement of *Troilus and Cressida*: it is a greater achievement than the elaborate patterning that closes *Measure for Measure*.

Although it is not itself a tragedy, comparison with the Tragedies can cast valuable light on *Troilus and Cressida*, more valuable, I would maintain, than comparison with *All's Well* or the Comedies. *Hamlet*, sometimes grouped with the Problem Plays, provides an even richer source for comparison than does *Measure for Measure*. *Hamlet* shares the sustained openness, the central ambiguity, of *Troilus and Cressida*. To try to simplify its hero is to distort. *Hamlet* is idealistic and pragmatic, sane and insane, innocent and corrupt, tender and savage. His love for Ophelia, his hatred of his mother, his motivation in delaying are all essentially ambiguous. Paradox is at the basis of his characterisation, as it is of the play's action. Because they are both open plays, wide divergence marks critical response to *Hamlet*, as it does to *Troilus and Cressida*. The plays are alike too in the bitter taintedness and physicality of their imagery, although *Hamlet* exceeds *Troilus* here. One thinks,

\(^1\) F.R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit*, p. 171.
for instance, of Hamlet's:

Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty-

(III.iv. 92-95)

Each play shows a corrupt world and poses, sharply, a viewpoint that is cynical to the point of nihilism, against which one is to test that world. But the grotesque force of Hamlet's language makes Thersites' execrations seem hollow, spurious, merely spiteful, his cynicism unfelt, disproportionate. For Hamlet's repellent, driving zeal, excessive though it may also be, is a measure of deep trust that, when violated, has led to deep disillusionment. And the corruption against which he drives - and in which he is, rationally or irrationally, involved - is black and against nature. It makes Paris and Helen's 'love', even Pandarus's 'honeying', seem relatively sweet and natural.

Although the questions themselves do not dominate as noticeably in Hamlet as they do in Troilus - they do not fully determine the play's structure as they seem to in Troilus - it is clear that both plays are vitally and centrally concerned with raising and exploring questions of large, general significance. And each unsettles: the strange mixtures of the graveyard scene, for instance, startle an audience into awareness and expectations that
are not conventional; and the nihilism of Hamlet's spec-
ulations and quips disturbs, outweighing as it seems to 
affirmations that the play otherwise offers.

The plays are alike too in another minor but inter-
esting way: each continually offers, seemingly ingenuously, 
possible interpretations of its own events. Hamlet's
'veicious mole' speech (I.iv. 14-38), for instance, is of 
a kind with Agamemnon's 'The ample proposition that hope
makes...' (I.iii. 1-30) and Ulysses' speech on 'degree'.
Troilus's 'But something may be done that we will not...' 
(IV.iv. 94-97) functions in a similar way. Patterns of
imagery also, as well as being similar, work in a similar
way. In Troilus there is a marked tendency for imagery
(of disease, appetite and evaluation particularly) to recur
persistently, playing a greater part in directing and
shaping an audience's overall attention than in defining
particular crises and moods. In Hamlet, the patterns
exist too, but they tend to define as well as to direct:
one is less conscious of them primarily as patterns. In
both plays, attitudes, interpretations are offered in
abundance; but in each - although more particularly in
Troilus - simple directives are withheld.

Troilus and Cressida is, nevertheless, a much more
unsettling play than Hamlet. It is much harder to find
one's bearings in *Troilus*: there is much less firm ground on which to stand. In *Hamlet*, there is stability in the unambiguousness of Horatio's simple goodness which survives at the end, in the good of Hamlet's continuing friendship with Horatio, in the evil of the King's corruption, and in the certainty — by contrast with Hamlet's — of Ophelia's madness. There is stability too in the dominance of one central character, in the interest he absorbs and the sympathy he wins. The play has a clearly-established centre. So too has Measure for Measure, although of a different kind. (Its centre lies in its thorough exploration of 'the terms for common justice'.) The centre of *Troilus and Cressida* — I think that one must see it as the questioning of Thersites' viewpoint — is less clearly-established. It is infinitely less disturbing too to find oneself caught up in Hamlet's malaise than to find oneself in line with Thersites. For Hamlet, sympathy, though not unmixed, is compelling — more compelling than it is for anyone in Troilus. For Thersites antipathy is extreme. And the ending of *Hamlet*, despite the hero's death, is more settled and affirmative than the ending of *Troilus*. Hamlet, being so integral a part of the state's 'out-of-jointedness' has to die if corruption is to be cleared. The last Act, with its grotesque mixture of

1 The Duke's words, I.i. 11.
farce and tragedy, organises an audience to respond more to the necessity than to the pathos of his death. There is greater waste and denial in Hector's death, and even though Troilus's survival gives some hope (more hope than Hamlet's could have given), Pandarus's vicious 'epilogue' leaves the spectator in no doubt that corruption - corruption not confined to Pandarus - remains. There is some evidence in Hamlet - the extraordinary weight given to the soliloquies - to suggest that Hamlet's bitter disillusionment is, in part at least, the play's: the ending by no means solves all. But the peculiar, hostile, undermining bitterness that marks Troilus and Cressida - although there are traces of it in the savage mixture of antipathy and sympathy that Hamlet's foul imagery compels - does not characterise the spirit of that play.

Hamlet is not the only Tragedy to which Troilus and Cressida is related, although, of all Shakespeare's plays, it is the closest in temper. Troilus and Cressida may well be grouped not only with Hamlet but with Timon of Athens and King Lear. Each of these plays follows a similar procedure: in each, an audience is set to test one bitter, pessimistic assessment - Thersites', Hamlet's, Timon's, Lear's (they are not unrelated) - against the world that it is assessing and against other assessments of that world.
The chief difference is of course that in the Tragedies it is the hero's deep pessimism that one has to weigh. He is closer to his world: the horror of it is in him as well as it; and the audience is more closely involved in his struggle: he occupies the centre and the forefront of the stage and, partly because he is more involved and more central, his language denser and more resonant, never repels as completely as does Thersites. The chief value of such a grouping - for the purpose of this study at least - is that it helps to define the difference in the bitterness of each, emphasising once again the peculiarity of the attack in Troilus. It points too to the greater concentration, resilience and integration in the other plays, particularly Hamlet and Lear. (Timon is a lesser play for concentration tends to be a matter more of structural neatness than of imaginative compression.) Timon and Troilus are the blackest plays - partly because Timon and the many 'central' characters of Troilus can involve and sway an audience less than Hamlet or Lear - and they are on a lower plane. The painfully moving experience that is Lear's special creation elevates it above all others. When Lear cries out:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks. Rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks.
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
the furious strength that, through strident violence of sound and image, accrues to 'Singe my white head', 'Strike flat' and 'crack', falling with pitiful irony to 'ingrateful man', creates forcibly not just 'the tempest' of his mind but the anguish of his plight, the might of his disillusionment, the measure of the strength of his idealism. Reinforced and challenged by the rhythms, the imagery — of destructive, chaotic natural and supernatural forces — defines both his agony as victim and the irony of the strength of his cry. By reverberation, issues are raised so far-reaching that they seem ultimate. Even Hamlet's cries against his mother, his vacillation between settled cynicism and abstracted questioning seem, by comparison, to lack force and solidity. How much more hollow and spurious do Thersites' execrations appear, close though his world may come to deserving them. In Troilus and Cressida, it is rank Thersites who has Lear's Hamlet's and Timon's role. He is at the furthest possible remove from a hero's status. His language cannot exalt, inspire. His cynicism has had no cost: it is not disillusionment;
it can have no nobility. An audience fights against involvement with him. Neither Lear nor Hamlet nor even Timon, where the ending's neat affirmation can neither correct the injustice nor cancel the bitter stench of Timon's misanthropy, leaves one with the bitter taste that remains after Troilus. No other play shows such antagonism to its audience.

Nor is this the only valid grouping with the Tragedies. There is another that, for this study, is probably even more important. I have sought to demonstrate that Troilus and Cressida is distinguished by the ambivalence it controls. The spectator responds both critically and sympathetically to Troilus, Hector and Ulysses; he is pulled in opposite directions when he tries to evaluate characters and events; issues remain open to the end. Although the settings give him his bearings much more clearly in the Tragedies - there are minor characters who are much more clearly 'good' or 'bad' - ambivalence of exactly this kind marks his response, to a greater or lesser degree, to all the tragic heroes. Unqualified sympathy is allowed for none. In the later Tragedies, as Professor Willard Farnham has pointed out, paradox dominates Shakespeare's interest. Timon, Macbeth Antony and Coriolanus all, as he says, 'have a power...to draw from us reactions that vary widely between profound
antipathy and profound sympathy. Troilus and Cressida may well be seen as the beginning that led ultimately not only to Lear and Timon but to Coriolanus and Macbeth and, above all, to Antony and Cleopatra. One weighs Coriolanus much as one weighs Hector - by evaluating contrasts, parallels and juxtapositions - and one is again vitally concerned with the problem of the complex relationship between heroism, instability and pride. In Macbeth, control of ambivalent response - of sympathy that survives the strongest antipathy - probably reaches its peak. But Antony and Cleopatra is clearly the play that owes most to the experience gained in the writing of Troilus and Cressida.

The brilliant intensity of Antony's tragedy outshines the fitful vividness of Troilus's love story; Antony's 'captain's heart' 'tied by the strings' to Egypt's 'opulent throne' eclipses Troilus's youthful idealising of his 'cruel battle here within'. Just how indebted the triumphant poise of Antony and Cleopatra is to the earlier - by no means unsuccessful - venture into paradox and ambiguity cannot be estimated. The two plays share many features: dual plots of love and war; scene-switching; conflicts of honour; ambiguity of hero and heroine; ambivalence of

1 Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontiers, p. 9.
dramatic experience (ground is constantly shifting); a denial of the possibility of holding absolute, unchanging standards. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, there is a much greater intensity, a much greater concentration of purpose. The language is more consistently vivid and compressed; control of tempo and rhythm never flags. The conflicts of honour become focal. The claims of both love and war are intensified. 'Hot passion', paradoxical still, becomes a stronger and more valid force, Cleopatra's ambiguous vitality being established for the spectator as well as for Antony. It is established not only in her own changeful, sensuous, live speech (her passionate questions and claims to Charmian in I.v. 18-34 serve as an example) but in the intensity of others' descriptions of her (e.g. Enobarbus's 'The barge she sat in, like the burnished throne...' II.ii. 196-211) and in the Nile imagery that runs throughout the play, so often shaping Antony's thought. The strength of Antony's 'Egyptian fetters' makes Cressida's claim on Troilus and Troilus's passion seem pallid indeed. The rival claims of a warrior's honour are also more clearly and forcefully defined. The spectator is encouraged to sympathise with Antony in his weakness in failing Rome, to feel with him the strong pull of Egypt, but to see, nevertheless, that Rome makes a strong claim, a claim that it
is weak in him to dishonour. While the drop in intensity of language and tempo in the Roman scenes helps to keep sympathy open for Antony's yielding to Egypt, the sharp focus and hard-edged precision of these scenes create Rome as a viable, solid force. The weakened control that accompanies change in scene and mood in some of Troilus's war-scenes is not to be found in them. Contrasts in Troilus are strengthened into tensions there.

In Antony and Cleopatra there is too a sharper concentration on the ambiguity of all experience. Time—the essential paradox of life—is a dimension that is integral to the play's chief thematic concerns. An awareness of man's role in and against time informs the play as a whole, is basic to its conception, not just to several of its major speeches. The play in fact does not have major speeches of the kind one finds in Troilus: speeches that seem to assert themselves against or despite the flow of the scenes in which they occur; that stand out as vivid, largely self-sufficient poems, defining an area of experience that is not the play's central concern.

 Firmer integration marks too the plots of love and war: they cannot be separated as they can in Troilus, Antony's position being so much more central and compelling than Troilus's.
Antony and Cleopatra, like Troilus, is essentially an open play. Each stimulates and challenges, deepening one's awareness; neither pretends to resolve. But Antony and Cleopatra does not share Troilus's refusal to engage an audience's sympathies. It calls for a deeper and fuller involvement with its central characters and in its central tensions. The spectator reacts with strong sympathy as well as with strong antipathy. Each play is highly ambiguous. But the apprehension of ambivalence that shapes Antony and Cleopatra is not bitter: the spectator is left exalted rather than confounded. The magnificence of the language proclaims a magnificence for man, even caught as he is in the paradox of time and his own weakness. The bitter, attacking spirit, peculiar to Troilus and Cressida, does not inform the later Tragedy.

While one can profitably compare the structure, themes and temper of the two plays, it is unprofitable to criticise Troilus and Cressida because it is not Antony and Cleopatra. Those critics who see it as a 'failed tragedy' do just that. One needs to recognise not only that the love-story is not the whole of Troilus and Cressida but that the play itself is of a different kind: a kind that sets out to disturb,

1 Professor J.C. Oates makes this claim explicitly (loc. cit., p. 141); others do so implicitly.
that deliberately denies to its audience the involvement and the release of feeling that the Tragedies allow.

Comparison with the Tragedies helps one to see more clearly some of the special problems which Shakespeare set himself in *Troilus*: difficulties of integration, balance and unification must arise where no dominating hero or heroine is allowed, where the simple but forceful responses that come with identification, even involvement, are denied, where abstract issues as such are set to dominate. Comparison with the Tragedies - and particularly with *Antony and Cleopatra* - does, however, raise the question of the value of the kind to which *Troilus and Cressida* belongs. *Troilus and Cressida* does not set out to do what *Antony and Cleopatra* does, but how valuable is what *Troilus and Cressida* and other related plays set out to do? This is a question that, I think, cannot be baulked. To explore its implications, and also to see *Troilus's* achievement in a different and possibly fairer light, I wish now to consider it against the background of the 'black comedies' of today, to which I would claim, as others have done, it is related in kind.

In the 1898 Preface to *Plays Unpleasant*, Bernard Shaw claimed that, in his 'Problem Plays', Shakespeare was 'ready and willing to start at the twentieth century if the seventeenth would only let him'. He elaborates no further but

his closing remarks indirectly reveal the acuteness of his intuition:

Finally, a word as to why I have labelled the three plays in this first volume Unpleasant. The reason is pretty obvious: their dramatic power is used to force the spectator to face unpleasant facts. No doubt all plays which deal sincerely with humanity must wound the monstrous conceit which it is the business of romance to flatter. ... I must, however, warn my readers that my attacks are directed against themselves, not against my stage figures.  

Such a preface could serve a great many twentieth century plays. It could also serve *Troilus and Cressida*. Many of the features that the works of such diverse dramatists as Ibsen, Chehov, Shaw, Brecht, Pirandello, Anouilh, Eliot, Williams, Miller, Beckett, Pinter, Ionesco, Albee, Osborne and Weiss have in common are features that they share with *Troilus and Cressida*. In its determination to unsettle, in its openness, in the dominance of debate and discussion, in its primary concern with abstract problems, in its questioning of heroic standards, in its pessimistic bias and in its continual shifting of ground and manoeuvring of response, *Troilus and Cressida* is related to the drama of our time. They are of the same kind. Why this should be so, one cannot say. Perhaps Professor Ellis-Fermor is right to trace the affinity back to similar experiences of

1 Ibid., p. 726. My italics.
'disintegration and disruption'. The fact remains that
this play has peculiar interest today, indeed, a popularity
that Shaw, for one, did not foresee. Theatre-goers,
familiar not just with the denials and assaults of the 'fifties and 'sixties, but with the earlier work of Pirandello,
Anouilh and Brecht, even of Ibsen, Chehov and Shaw, must find \textit{Troilus and Cressida} less strange than did audiences of the nineteenth, eighteenth, or even the seventeenth centuries. Techniques and preoccupations are often quite startlingly similar.

Professor Ellis-Fermor, Professor Gérard, Professor Oates and Dr Kimbrough have all pointed to \textit{Troilus}'s affinity with the drama of this century. I cannot without qualification support their claims, because each sees the basis for the affinity in \textit{Troilus}'s uncompromising nihilism and restricts the relationship to the avant-garde, particularly to the Theatre of the Absurd. \textit{Troilus and Cressida} is not an uncompromisingly nihilistic play: it is essentially

\begin{itemize}
\item[2] In the last few years, few Shakespeare journals have been without essays on this play. My bibliography, for instance, includes over a dozen publications for 1964-66.
\item[3] Shaw refers to 'such unpopular plays as All's Well, \textit{Troilus and Cressida} and \textit{Measure for Measure}', op. cit., p. 724.
\end{itemize}
ambiguous; its denial is not absolute. It does not make the denial of, for instance, Waiting for Godot, where the absolute pointlessness of life is the play's point, where ambiguity is removed, fundamentally, in the play's underlying assumption that nothing has meaning (an assumption that remains fixed, even while the skill and joy of the execution and the absurd comedy of the situation force one's attitudes to it to be ambivalent and unfixed). Nor is it related in any fundamental way to the bitter spectacles created by Albee or the bitter outbursts of Jimmy Porter. One would need to isolate the Greek scenes, distorting the play's rhythms and emphasis, to make claims for affinity of that kind.

It is not in their unequivocal blackness that the plays are related. Professor Gérard's suggestion that Troilus and Cressida 'might have been written by one of our own muckrakers'¹ needs to be firmly refuted. But affinities do exist, some quite central, not with the Existentialists and the Angry Young Men alone but perhaps more particularly, as I hope to show, with the 'foundation' dramatists of the twentieth century, the playwrights who were concerned as much with questioning and exploring as

---

¹ Loc. cit., p. 144.
with asserting and denying, who reacted against comfortable melodrama and were determined, as Shaw puts it, 'to force the audience to face unpleasant facts'.

Shaw's own 'problem plays' tend to be too cut and dried to afford a fruitful source for comparison with *Troilus and Cressida*. A play like *Saint Joan* resembles *Troilus*, however, in that it takes a problem, examines it from several sides, denies simple hero-worship, and forces the audience into a new awareness of the issues underlying its familiar surface-story. Anouilh's methods are similar: I shall examine them more fully later. And so too are Eliot's in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Osborne's in *Luther*, Robert Bolt's in *A Man for All Seasons*, Miller's in *The Crucible*, Brecht's in *Mother Courage*. Peter Weiss's *Marat Sade* is an extreme example of questioning of this kind. This is in fact the characteristic procedure of modern 'historical' plays. It is customary now for debate and discussion to prevail, for certitudes to be shaken, for the audience to be distanced from the characters, yet strangely involved in - and disturbed by - the issues at stake. Few modern playwrights, however, can disturb as deeply as Shakespeare does in *Troilus*. Shaw, with his clear assumption that he is 'right' and the audience 'wrong', certainly cannot.
Of the many 'attacking' plays of this century, one of the most interesting to put beside Troilus and Cressida is Pirandello's Right You Are! (If You Think So). It affords an interesting and quite valuable comparison because it makes explicit, heightens and sharpens, the awareness implicit not only in Troilus but in very many twentieth century plays. This awareness is that men want and need and cannot have 'good, solid, categorical stuff', (that is, exclusive, fixed categories of 'right' or 'wrong', 'true' or 'false', 'good' or 'bad'). Pirandello's method of attack is not unlike Shakespeare's: responses are organised in order to be countered, often with sharp irony. The whole play relies on its audience's curiosity: it is the essential condition for its existence. Yet it is just this that is under attack: the spectator shares it with the people that he is set to condemn. Laudisi, more identifiably the playwright's spokesman than anyone in Troilus, says - as much to the audience as to the characters - 'All I ask is your permission to go on laughing at your efforts, right to the bitter end'. The spectator is left to gasp with the abominable Mrs Cini, 'Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Then we can know nothing for certain?', only to be further

1 Right You Are!, Penguin Plays, 1962, p. 66.
2 Ibid., p. 49.
3 Ibid., p. 55.
mocked by Laudisi's recounting of the days of the week and the months of the year. Nothing more complex can he 'know for certain' - unless, of course, he 'knows' what Laudisi 'knows': that he can 'know nothing for certain'. If the spectator does 'know' this, he is, in a sense, outside life: Laudisi's role of distanced, cynical observer must be his. The play itself can have no further interest for him.

Although Right You Are! addresses itself, centrally and explicitly, to paradox and ambiguity and assumes a superiority of awareness, the greatest paradox is that it is basically, like most twentieth century plays, less paradoxical than it thinks it is. It has really less to offer about the essential ambiguity of experience than the less pretentious (in this way) Troilus and Cressida. The same might also be said, as I suggested earlier, about the Theatre of the Absurd. Very many twentieth century plays, while denying certitudes, paradoxically cling to them. In Right You Are!, the certitude held still is that Laudisi is right, that nothing can really be known. Troilus and Cressida does not hold certitudes in this way: the play's awareness is greater, more complex and less fixed than that of any one of its characters. If it does hold an absolute, it lies outside the play in what one must infer
to be the sure expectation of obtuse, mistaken pride in its audience. The savagery of Pandarus's 'epilogue' is not matched by Laudisi's laughter, derisive though that may be. Pirandello's play ends with the amused contempt of one who expected no more; Shakespeare's with the concentrated bitterness of one who does seem to have expected more. The assumption underlying Troilus is not that 'nothing can be known', the self-defeating basis for so many of today's 'black comedies', but that, given less pride, less blindness, more could be known, an assumption that does not differ significantly from that which underlies the Tragedies. Troilus and Cressida points up the weakness in Right You Are! and in the many plays that Pirandello's may be taken to represent. In them, all is too clearcut. Despite surface intricacy and, in some plays, even obscurity, the rationale is too simple, the playwright too sure that 'right he is' and 'wrong we are'. Pirandello has toyed with an audience very cleverly, but the brilliance of his virtuoso exercise is indeed limited: the interest of his work is soon exhausted. Troilus and Cressida rewards continued attention. It presents a life that is complex, a compound of passion and reason, of good

---

1 Ibid., p. 87.
2 See, for instance, the plays of Beckett.
and bad, irreducible to the logical pattern of a Pirandello or a Shaw, or even to the equally contrived anti-logical pattern of Beckett or Ionesco. It tests rather than endorses Thersites' viewpoint, challenging an audience to accept his stand, to see through his eyes, but in fact offering more than he can understand. Thersites' execrations do not sum up the temper and substance of the play, as Laudisi's wry pronouncements tend to. In Troilus and Cressida, as the mood fluctuates between satirical comedy and near tragic pathos, the language too varies from the toughly witty and the prosaically flat to heights that ensure inexhaustible interest and freshness, forcing an awareness wider and more sympathetic than Thersites'.

Anouilh's refashioning of heroic material provides another interesting - and obvious - source for comparison with Troilus and Cressida. In a play like Antigone, it is clear that Anouilh's purpose is very close to Shakespeare's in Troilus: to question the bases of heroism, to force the audience into an awareness of the overwhelming complexity and ambiguity of the issues involved, to invalidate simple views - particularly sentimental views - of the heroic and the tragic, and to make the spectator see that the world of the play is his own world. The plays are alike in the dominance of debate and discussion, of 'talk' over action,
in their openness (neither clearly resolves or offers clear support for a simply cynical view), in their use of heroic legend, in their neutralisation of sympathies and in their obvious intention to unsettle and disturb. They are without doubt of the same kind. Antigone is an interesting, challenging and well-constructed play. Although the 'thesis-approach' that seems to me to mar so many of today's plays only begins to reveal itself here (in the discussion and denial of the 'simplicity' of tragedy), and although it sustains its complexities and ambiguities much more successfully than most, Antigone suffers from comparison with Troilus. Anouilh's methods are much less subtle than Shakespeare's: his anachronisms, his modern, colloquial idiom, his blocks of discussion are fairly crude ways of commanding and directing attention. One misses the linguistic range and control of Troilus: the juxtaposition of one fully mastered idiom against another, of one tempo against another, of one mood against its opposite; the unexplicated ironies that help to create the play's force and shape its movement. A play like Antigone has a more clearly-defined purpose and centre: its outlines are bolder and probably more theatrically

---

1 By this, I mean plays that are clearly contrived to fit a thesis or philosophical standpoint: Shaw's plays and those of the Existentialists are obvious examples.
assured. But it has relatively little to offer once its central point has been grasped.

Another play clearly of the same kind is Brecht's The Good Woman of Setzuan. It explores a very similar question to the one that chiefly shapes Troilus - Can good exist in such a world as that presented in the play? - and, by very similar techniques, forces the spectator to see that the world of the play and his world are one. Brecht goes to even greater lengths to deflect attention from personalities to issues - characterisation is quite stylised - and breaks even more dramatic conventions to force audience involvement in the issues as such. The Epilogue of his play makes interesting comment on the ending of Troilus:

You're thinking, aren't you, that this is no right Conclusion to the play you've seen tonight? After a tale, exotic, fabulous, A nasty ending was slipped up on us. We feel deflated too. We too are nettled To see the curtain down and nothing settled. How could a better ending be arranged? Could one change people? Can the world be changed? Would new gods do the trick? Will atheism? Moral rearmament? Materialism? It is for you to find a way, my friends, To help good men arrive at happy ends. You write the ending to the play! There must, there must, there's got to be a way! ¹

Eric Bentley, the translator, notes that Brecht wrote the

Epilogue after the play, 'influenced by misunderstandings of the ending in the press on the occasion of the Viennese premiere of the play'. It is tempting to think that Pandarus's 'epilogue' could have been written thus, and for similar reasons. Like Shaw's Preface, Brecht's Epilogue could fit not only a great many modern plays but *Troilus and Cressida*. In its determination to leave issues unresolved and its audience unappeased, Shakespeare's play is quite remarkably attuned to this century. But although Brecht's preoccupations, techniques and even purpose are very similar, this Epilogue illustrates one significant way in which he - and most other twentieth-century dramatists - differ from Shakespeare. Methods are much less subtle. I noted this briefly in discussing Anouilh. There is a marked tendency to explicate, often to an excessive degree. Brecht's clarification here is of a kind with Laudisi's commentary in *Right You Are!*, Shaw's Prefaces, Anouilh's central discussion on 'tragedy' in *Antigone* and even Eliot's on 'martyrdom' in *Murder in the Cathedral*. One notes the unsubtle flatness of Brecht's verse. It is clear even from the translation that the compressed suggestiveness of poetry has not been sought. Metre and rhyme have been

---

1 Ibid., p. 109.
imposed on prose to create a kind of doggerel that will keep the spectator distanced and bemused while leaving him in no doubt about the issues he is to mark.

Peter Weiss's free verse in *Marat/Sade* is of a similar quality and serves a similar function. The normal expectations for prose are not to be allowed in language that is essentially prosaic. A peculiar jolting stylisation results, often with outrageous rhyming. The Herald, for instance, introduces Marat thus:

To act this most important role we chose a lucky paranoid one of those who've made unprecedented strides since we introduced them to hydrotherapy …

(Part 4, 9-12)

*Marat/Sade* carries to an extreme the tendency to clash styles and break conventions in an effort to jostle and shock the spectator into a new awareness of the questions it examines. Its violence is brilliantly achieved. Weiss's force is, as Peter Brook states, 'not only in the quantity of instruments he uses; it is above all in the jangle produced by the clash of styles'.

To produce jangle seems, however, a curious aim. In his introduction to *Marat/Sade*, Peter Brook makes an interesting

The whole problem of the theatre today is just this: how can we make plays dense in experience? Great philosophical novels are often far longer than thrillers, more content occupies more pages, but great plays and poor plays fill up evenings of pretty comparable length. Shakespeare seems better in performance than anyone else because he gives us more, moment for moment, for our money. This is due to his genius, but also to his technique. The possibilities of free verse on an open stage enabled him to cut the inessential detail and the irrelevant realistic action: in their place he could cram sounds and ideas, thoughts and images which make each instant into a stunning mobile. 1

Playwrights today, however, seem all too often to mistake stridency for density. Familiarity with twentieth-century drama does give a clearer understanding of Troilus and Cressida: one sees that it relies not only on the possibilities of free verse but even more markedly on contrasts and juxtapositions of tones and styles, the blocking of one idiom against another, the tensing of one mood against its opposite. Troilus and Cressida exploits these 'modern' methods with assurance and vigour and without the strident sensationalism that seems so often to mar today's plays. The subtlety of, for instance, Shakespeare's warning of his design to unsettle (Prologue, 30-31), of his methods of unsettling – particularly, his use, without comment, of

1 Ibid., pp. 5-6
ironic juxtaposition - and of his final unexplicated attack is rarely to be found today. The fault is, of course, as Eric Bentley's note points out, lies at least equally with the audience. Indeed, it seems hardly reasonable to demand that playwrights risk the total incomprehension and misunderstanding to which Troilus has been subjected. On the other hand, however, the value of assaults that seem to be becoming blunter and blunter is highly questionable.

There are very many twentieth century plays that one could profitably compare with Troilus and Cressida, for they are obviously of the same kind. Many examples could be found to illustrate the superior subtlety, complexity and control of language and modes in Shakespeare's play. Rather than go on multiplying examples in this way, I want now to try to redress the balance a little, and, for final comparison, to choose a play that more closely approaches Troilus in range and complexity, that has not been obviously constructed to fit a thesis or philosophical standpoint, and yet organises and manoeuvres its audience's responses in a similar way. I found it necessary to return to Ibsen or Chehov for such a play. Of recent dramatists, very few indeed are clearly free from a 'thesis' approach. Ibsen's The Wild Duck, written in 1884, is one of the few 'modern' plays - one of the few of Ibsen's plays too - that clearly
survives comparison with Troilus. 1

The plays are alike in their subordination of personal drama to focal, abstract issues: this is true of The Wild Duck, although personal drama is not sacrificed quite as noticeably as it is in Troilus (and in most modern plays). They are alike too in their sustained openness: The Wild Duck questions Relling's view just as Troilus questions Thersites'; at the end of the play, the audience is left questioning the necessity of 'the saving lie'; no easy answers - for or against - are supplied. And the plays are alike too in the subtlety and sureness of the methods they use not only to direct attention to their central issues - The Wild Duck also makes use of imagery, of direct formulation, and of ironic contrast and parallel - but to unsettle their audiences. In neither play is the most sympathetic figure the closest to being right or the least sympathetic the closest to being wrong. With the exception of Hedvig, the spectator feels just as uneasy about where he should direct his sympathies in The Wild Duck as he does in Troilus. What separates these two plays is not the marked superiority of one over the other (although Troilus's exploitation of linguistic resources is clearly greater), but the totally different spirit that controls each. The Wild Duck unsettles but it does not attack. The peculiarly

1 Arthur Miller's The Crucible is one of the very few later plays to clearly survive comparison. It is interesting to note that this play has more in common with Ibsen and Chehov than with the avant-garde.
bitter hostility that marks *Troilus and Cressida* is quite absent from *The Wild Duck*. Playwright and spectator are not in opposite camps. It is a shared problem that is being enacted and discussed, one for which compassion seems a more appropriate emotion than hostility. Indeed, *The Wild Duck*, as I think Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* also does, leads one to question the value and necessity of the attacking bitterness of Shakespeare's play. Ibsen allows and controls a deeper, fuller involvement in his characters' predicaments — a response closer to that controlled by *Antony and Cleopatra* than to the response commanded by *Troilus* — yet his is just as surely a 'problem play'. One wonders whether the narrow, attacking bitterness of Shakespeare's play is not a limitation, whether it does not — consistent, subtly-executed, forceful though it is — circumscribe, even distort, just as Thersites' bitterness distorts. The limitation of Pirandello's and of Shaw's work — a too certain assumption of their own rightness and their audience's wrongness — seems, partly at least, also to narrow Shakespeare's. It tends, ultimately, to overwhelm one's attention, diverting interest from the problems and questions that the play is chiefly set to explore. In Ibsen's play — as, I would contend, in every
other of Shakespeare's - the chief thematic concerns dominate to the very end.

The peculiarity of the attacking bitterness of *Troilus and Cressida* is emphasised not only by comparison with others of Shakespeare's plays but, more surprisingly, by comparison with the 'black comedies' of today. Bitterness abounds today - *The Wild Duck* is neither representative nor 'modern' - but it is of a different kind from the bitterness of *Troilus*. It is not nearly so direct in its attack. Playwrights like Osborne or Albee, or, to take an example more extreme, Patrick White, do not in fact direct their attacks against the audience, but against a larger society that is, they quite clearly assume, outside their particular audience. The minority, the 'rebels', the 'clear-sighted' - the coterie for whom they write - are not in a different camp. Their attacks can afford to be biting for, in making them, they indirectly woo their audiences. Where the approach is more direct - in Brecht, for instance - biting hostility is not really present: shared problems are being dramatised and sympathy is communicated, even in an Epilogue as seemingly abrupt as that appended to *The Good Woman*. The direct, stinging attacks of *Troilus and Cressida* are rarely found in drama: they form a questionable basis.
Comparison with other plays, within and without the Shakespearean canon, does help in the evaluation of this one. I do not think it possible to support Professor Rabkin's claim that *Troilus and Cressida* is 'one of Shakespeare's greatest plays'. The Tragedies - *Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet*, in particular - seem unquestionably greater. They overbulk and overshadow *Troilus*. Their language is denser, more highly charged; they raise issues that are more searching, more profound; the consciousness of their central characters not only gives unity but, being a focus for an audience's sympathetic identification, provides a powerful medium for the playwright's exploration of ideas. These plays seem to have engaged their author more fully; assuredly they involve their audiences more deeply. *Troilus and Cressida*, while sharing something of their complexity and sureness of control, is a lesser play. It is a lesser play only partly because it is of a different kind. *Troilus* has many affinities with the Tragedies. And the great Tragedies are in a sense the greatest problem plays: although abstract issues do not dominate so noticeably in them, they are raised just as surely though more subtly and with implications that are even more widely ranging. Beside the Tragedies, *Troilus and Cressida* seems a strangely secular

1 Loc. cit., p. 265.
and narrow play.

In denying to his audience full emotional involvement, in turning the tables on them by offering Thersites in the place of Hamlet or Lear, by marshalling three half-heroes to fill only fragmented sequences not the centre, Shakespeare seems to have been experimenting with a new kind of drama, or rather, to have pushed to the limits the possibilities of the old kind. *Troilus and Cressida* seems to be a protest against the flattery of the theatre: its audience is allowed neither the identification of tragedy nor the distanced superiority of comedy. Its attacking bitterness is, in the final analysis, the most distinctive feature of this play. This quality is felt not just in the Prologue and 'epilogue' and in the simplifications that mark Acts IV and V but in the openness that distinguishes most of the characterisation, the over-riding debates, and the ending itself.

Whether assaults of this kind can ever form a basis for great drama is, however, as I suggested earlier, questionable. The twentieth century has produced few plays to match *Troilus*'s sophistication and 'savage power'\(^1\) although it has produced many that are clearly of the same

\(^1\) Professor Marsh's phrase, *loc. cit.*, p. 197.
kind. *Troilus and Cressida* is not a tedious or a tricksy play as so many of its modern counterparts are. It does not simply enact a thesis as they so often do: it explores and questions as well as undermines. Within its kind, it must be held to rank high. Its finely sustained openness is a rare achievement. But the bitterness of its attacks does tend to circumscribe. And the suspicion that one may well hold about much twentieth century drama - that its interest may not survive the coterie whom it serves - may apply to it too. The current taste for plays of discussion rather than action, of scepticism rather than sentiment, of attack rather than appeasement, plays that expose rather than pander to the illusion of the theatre, may endure: it may represent something other than the extremity of reaction to floods of second- and third-rate films; it may mark a genuinely fruitful departure, with *Troilus* as a precursor. But it may be only a passing vogue. The popularity of *Troilus and Cressida* today may also be only short-lived. It is a most interesting play - particularly to modern audiences - but, placed beside the Tragedies or even the very best of this century's plays, I doubt that it can be called great.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts


**Critical References**


