

THE TEXT OF CRESSIDA AND EVERY TICKLISH READER:



Troilus and Cressida, Act IV Scene V

Claire M. Tylee

There are only three out of thirty-seven odd plays attributed to Shakespeare where the title indicates that there is a female protagonist to share importance with the male: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*. In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare replaced Chaucer's Criseyde and Henryson's Cresseid with his own construction, Cressida¹. It is perhaps because *Troilus and Cressida* raises the question of women's sexual identity that it was scarcely performed for three hundred years². I am going to discuss recent ways in which Shakespeare's Cressida has been construed by critics, producers and actresses, and how these interpretations might affect the understanding of the play by an audience in the nineteen-eighties. Until the nineteen-seventies most interpretations themselves manifested precisely that coercive dominance of a particular set of cultural values which is the theme of the play. This was especially marked in views of what G. Wilson Knight called «the pivot incident of the play»: Cressi-

¹ See Bradbrooke, M. C., «What Shakespeare did to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*», *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9 (1958); Thompson, Ann, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins*, Chapter 4 (Liverpool University Press, 1978); Smith, Valerie, «The History of Cressida» in Jowitt & Taylor, eds. (1982); Dusinberre, Juliet, «'Troilus and Cressida' and the Definition of Beauty», *Shakespeare Survey*, 36 (1983) discusses the possible influence of Dio Chrysostom.

² Cf. «a new play, neuer stal'd with the Stage», *The Epistle*, Quarto [second state] 1609; and «The Stage History of *Troilus and Cressida*», pp. xlvi-lvi of Alice Walker's edition (Cambridge University Press, 1957) based on the New Variorum Shakespeare (rev. ed. 1953). Although *Troilus and Cressida* was performed in Munich in 1898, the first recorded performance in English was a 'costume recital' in London, in 1907. Around 1870, William Poel was recommended by his tutor never even to read the play, it was too 'improper' [Michael Jamieson «The Problem Plays, 1920-1970: A Retrospect», *Shakespeare Survey* 25 (1972)].

da's arrival at the Greek army-camp (Wilson Knight 1949: 47). My discussion will centre in on this scene, to show how it is a key to the significance of one of the main questions posed by the play: whether a person's nature or identity is determined by the valuation set on that person by others. This question forms part of the general neo-platonic scepticism which the play develops with regard to the possibility of anything's having absolute value or identity in a world subject to the digestive effects of time and human judgement. Within the world of the play Cressida is unable to maintain a sense of her own integrity. Similarly, in the course of changes in Western society, the character of Cressida in the text of the play has been subject to changing readings and widely divergent performances. This has inevitably affected the comprehension of the whole play.

From the first, Shakespeare's play deliberately counters the traditionally alluring vision of Helen summoned up by Faustus in Act V of Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*; glutting his desire at the lips of this myth, Faustus takes Helen to be a worthy ground for war. But the seductive lips of the glamorous illusion suck forth Faustus's soul and charm it to hell. Pointedly, Shakespeare's Prologue debunks his own high-flown eloquence about «the princes orgulous» who are fighting the Trojan War, by explaining that: «The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' queen, / With wanton Paris sleeps - and that's the quarrel». Pandarus and Paris may call Helen sweet, but Diomedes speaks of her «contaminated car- rion» as «bitter to her country». Even Troilus is cynical about her: «fools on both sides, Helen must needs be fair / when with your blood you daily paint her thus». Hector puts it more bluntly: «She is not worth what she doth cost the keeping». When finally we see «that peerless dame of Greece, the admirablest lady that ever lived», «love's visible soul», we discover a silly, vain, petulant woman: spoilt into a mere «Nell». Her only asset is her painted flesh. There is no doubt that she parallels that «most putrified core, so fair without» which tempts Hector and sates his sword. Although boasting about the possession of women is used as an excuse for the war in general, the duel between Hector and Ajax in particular, and the vendetta between Troilus and Diomedes, women are actually held in low esteem. (Troilus, despises his own weakness and vacillation, his prevarication, as «womanish»). The first we hear of the great hero Hector, is that «he chid Andromache», his wife, because he had been struck down by Ajax. Women's opinions are neither sought nor listened to, although their future is at stake with the future of Troy. No one pays any attention to the prophecies of Cassandra, «our mad sister», despite her prescience. Cressida is truck for barter, without rights; her wishes are not considered any more than are Helen's). Women, prized solely as untainted, painted flesh, have no other worth.

However, although no doubt is ever expressed as to Helen's superficiality in Shakespeare's version of the myth, for the last century critics have been absolutely divided as to the nature of Cressida: from G. B. Shaw, who in 1884 found her «most enchanting, Shakespeare's first real woman» (Shaw, 1964: 16) to Frederick S. Boas, who in 1896 considered her «a scheming, cold-blooded profligate» (Boas, 1896: 376); from Joyce Carol Oates, who actually called her «evil» and «villainous» in 1967, and assumed she was «impure» before becoming Troilus'

mistress», «an experienced actress in the game of love» (Oates, 1967: 178); to Daniel Massa, who in 1980 found *Cressida* an «a fearful, loving innocent» and, although «indecent», «still a virgin», «unpracticed» (Massa, 1980: 29). Oates completely ignored Pandarus's jokes about maidenheads (IV. iii. 23-4) and neither Oates nor Massa paid any attention to *Cressida*'s soliloquy where she claims that:

Then though my heart's content firm love doth bear,
Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear.

Yet, despite disagreements about the sincerity or virginity of *Cressida* when she makes love to *Troilus* (and thus about *Troilus*'s naivety), most commentators have agreed with *Ulysses*' judgement of her on the very next morning, at her arrival at the Greek camp, where he sets her down as «one of the sluttish spoils of opportunity and daughters of the game»³.

It should be noted that, as in modern English, 'daughter of the game' does not mean simply that she knows how to flirt and turn meetings into sexual encounters, but that she is 'on the game', a prostitute; that is: a woman who offers sexual intercourse for money. The understanding and repetition of this expression by commentators seems to range from a weak sense, in which *Cressida* is simply an incurable flirt who is incapable of treating love as more than a game, to a strong sense in which she is a nymphomaniac. If the phrase is taken to mean not that she sells herself (although she does call *Pandarus* a «bawd» for bringing her a token from *Troilus*), but that she is promiscuous, we should remember that *Ulysses* bases his judgement on a simple meeting. Being unfaithful to *Troilus* with *Diomedes* does not constitute either prostitution or promiscuity, nor does it prove she was insincere with *Troilus*. (Unexamined) emphasis on this part of the quotation has obscured the implications of the first part, where the sense of violent seizure implicit in 'spoils' suggests that men have made use of any available opportunity whatever to take advantage of her. Repeating the aggressive martial imagery by which sexual intercourse is viewed throughout the play and that explains *Cressida*'s guardedness, this hardly justifies the venom of *Ulysses*' choice of the word 'sluttish' or his use of 'Fie' to express disgust at her.

The problem with most scholarly interpretations of *Cressida*, as with *Coghill*'s repetition of *Alice Walker*'s solution that she is merely «a chameleon», who reacts to her surroundings (*Coghill*, 1964: 107; *Walker*, 1957: xii), is not so much that they do not permit her to change in response to her experiences, as that they treat *Cressida* as if she had some essential integrity of personality to be found. In fact, whether or not she is sexually experienced, she seems to have had no op-

³ Eg *Una Ellis-Fermor*, *The Frontiers of Drama* (London, Methuen 1945) chapter 4; *Kenneth Muir*: «*Cressida*'s rapid capitulation stamps her as a daughter of the game so clearly that we hardly need the official portrait by *Ulysses*» in «The Fusing of Themes» (1953) included in *Priscilla Martin*, ed., *Shakespeare «Troilus and Cressida» A Casebook* (London, Macmillan 1976); *Robert Ornstein*: «a slut... She is a daughter of the game that men would have her play and for which they despise her» in *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press 1960); *James K. Lowers*: «One hardly needs... the enlightened observations of a *Ulysses* to recognize her for what she is» in «*Troilus and Cressida» Notes* (London, Coles 1964).

portunity to act autonomously, according to her emotions, and so she seems never to have been allowed to develop her own sense of herself, a sense of her own identity⁴. Repeating bits of acquired 'wisdom' to the effect that «Achievement is command; ungain'd beseech», in other words, that her only power lies in 'playing hard to get', and deciding that she will therefore «hold off», she reveals in soliloquy that she bears firm love in her heart for what she herself sees in Troilus but is determined to keep that emotion concealed. Nevertheless, perhaps influenced by Troilus' declaration of «firm faith», she goes back on that decision by usurping the «men's privilege / Of speaking first» to confess: «Prince Troilus, I have loved you night and day / For many weary months», from «the first glance» like all true lovers. Then, she immediately remembers that now he «will play the tyrant» for «who will be true to us, / When we are so unsecret to ourselves?» Left briefly alone with him, she discloses her blind, but percipient, fears that lovers make promises that they cannot keep. In this she proves wise. She is still tentatively exploring her ground. Not so secure as Troilus, she is not so convinced of her whole-hearted commitment to him: «I have a kind of self resides with you, / But an unkind self that itself will leave / To be another's fool». The implication of this paradoxical statement is that to be false to Troilus is to be false to her own self. But how should she be committed to him, despite his adamant claim that he will be true to her? Even had he offered her marriage, Prince Troilus and his brothers show scant regard for the bonds of marriage.

In fact, Troilus has from the first demonstrated the typical bad faith of his culture with regard to both the war over Helen, and his 'love' for Cressida. He has no «appetite» to join the fools on both sides that fight over Helen, yet, since he cannot get «better sport» with Cressida at home, he is persuaded by the alternative prospect of «good sport» on the battlefield. Paris, who continues (in his own word) to «soil» Helen in adultery, nevertheless encourages the others to see her as a source of their honour, and encourages her to use her beauty to disarm Hector's morality. Hector is the most double-minded. A married man who treats his own wife like a piece of property, he is convinced that it is a moral law of nature and society, designed to curb «raging appetites», for a woman to belong to her husband. Yet he resolves not to return Helen to Menelaus. Apart from the besotted lover, Paris, and the warrior-husband, Hector, Troilus has one other elder brother on whom he might model himself as a man: Helenus, the priest, who recommends reason over desire. According to Pandarus, Helenus fights «indifferent well», but Troilus is contemptuous of him as lacking virility. «Reason and respect / Make livers pale and lustihood deject». In that martial culture rational judgement cannot prevail against the bull-headedness of physical energy; the Trojans share with the Greeks a system of values which equates sexual intercourse with armed combat, treating both as good sport, and proofs of manhood. Reasonableness is taken for virgin timidity in the face of 'manly' drives.

⁴ Cf. Alan Sinfield: «(Cressida) is hardly allowed to exist as an independent person» in «Kinds of Loving: Women in the Plays» in Jowitt, J. A. & Taylor, R. K. S. eds., (1982); and Gayle Green: «Her fate is the working out of a character that lacks integrity or autonomy» in «Shakespeare's Cressida: 'A kind of self'» in Lenz, Greene & Neely, eds., (1980).

From the moment the Prologue speaks, until Pandarus' epilogue, the titillating idea of destructive blood-lust is the central image of the play: the sword and the arrow excitedly tickling like the erect penis, which 'kills' the lovers like the sting in the tail of the sweet honey-bee. Swords are addressed as if they were hungry, greedy for flesh and blood, and it is «with a bridegroom's fresh alacrity» that Aeneas prepares to view the «maiden battle» between Hector and Ajax. Both Hector and Paris are governed by desire, raging appetite: Paris' sexual lust for Helen is paralleled by Hector's eager pursuit of military glory. And Troilus emulates them both. His 'love' for Cressida is a sexual gourmet's desire, painted up to look fair. Having awaited Pandarus' preparation of this delicacy, Cressida, he is fearful his palate may not discriminate finely, as a victorious soldier does not discriminate in his joy among piles of dead enemies. Cressida is surely right to be wary. Her gradual dawning that, «O heavens! you love me not» is followed by two doubtful questions, and then silence as Troilus, blithe about his own fidelity, self-importantly plays the comrade in arms with blunt cynic, Diomedes. Too self-deceived to recognise his own domineering sensuality, Troilus cannot foresee that it is not Greek gallantry that will undo Cressida, as he supposes; she will be dominated by an unscrupulous bully who is frank about his lust.

Since J. L. Styan wrote his study of the relation between the criticism and performance of Shakespeare's plays, not many scholars would repeat Louis Marder's view that «only the text can tell us what Shakespeare intended»⁵; Styan believed that the text would not tell us much until it speaks in its own medium. On the other hand, the text itself does not dictate any particular medium. Neither text nor medium can control interpretation. The problem Styan identified, that the producer and scholar both see what they interpret, before they interpret what they see, is the problem inherent in *Troilus and Cressida*, which, as R. J. Kaufmann points out, «provides no secure point of vantage from which to evaluate the action. There is no single reliable choral observer within the play who can orient our responses» (Kaufman, 1964: 156) although many commentators have treated Ulysses as just such a privileged observer. In a sense, Cressida is the text. Without responding to how she presents herself, without allowing her any autonomy, men impose on her their own evaluation; just as Cressida answers to people's expectations of her, so does the play. Cressida is not the self-assured young widow, Criseyde, but is she completely inexperienced, «an unpracticed jilt» as Hazlitt called her, or an «experienced actress» as Oates says? How artless might she be were Pandarus not around to chivy her and tease her into self-consciousness? The text is indeterminate. Neither can it determine the nature of the medium by which it will speak.

Struggling to remove the paradox of Cressida's submission to Diomedes, so that it should be only Troilus and not the audience to whom this is, and is not, Cressid, some producers have presented her as a artful bitch from her first appearance. This was taken to extremes in Tyrone Guthrie's production at The Old Vic

⁵ Louis Marder, *The Shakespeare Newsletter*, XXIV, n° 1 (February 1974); quoted in J. L. Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

in 1956, where Cressida was having an erotic liaison with her manservant before she seduced Troilus. Jonathan Miller's 1981 version for *The BBC TV Shakespeare* has a very young Cressida already licking her lips over Troilus in incipient lasciviousness even before the love scene. The famous production by John Barton and Peter Hall at Stratford in 1960 starred Dorothy Tutin, «sweltering with concupiscence» in the words of *The Times* (27 July 1960), «too early a seductress from an exotic film» in the opinion of John Russell Brown to make Troilus' belief in her «winnowed purity» credible (Brown 1982: 150). (This was one of a series of productions where 'antique' costuming accentuated the characters' physicality, although references in the text to a sleeve and a glove suggest that, if the play was ever staged in Shakespeare's time, it was performed in contemporary clothes). Such interpretations falter on Cressida's grief at being cast out of Troy: «No kin, no love, no blood, no soul so near me / As the sweet Troilus». Miller produced these scenes as the histrionic tantrums of a spoilt child, demanding attention and placated with a sleeve. (An experienced whore would hold out for more, one might suppose). The parting became comic in Guthrie's production, with Troilus trying to pin Cressida into her clothes between her sobs, but his was part of an overall conception which diminished the love plot in order to show up the glamour of war and thus tended to obscure the relation between the two plots. In Poel's production in Elizabethan dress in 1912, an opportunist Edith Evans was already busy with her hat in the mirror while Troilus tried to gain her attention: «But yet, be true».

This 'business' with costume is a significant detail in the physical medium of a total interpretation. In 1982 Valerie Smith questioned Seltzer's (1963) description of Cressida in Act IV scene iv as a «brassy slut»:

When we last saw her, she was distraught and weeping at her parting from Troilus. Is she still distraught? Or has she stopped crying, made up her face and put on a new frock for the occasion? Does she kiss the Greek soldiers of her own free will, or is she simply pushed from one to the other without the power to refuse? Are her witty lines to Menelaus (34-44) spoken, flirtatiously, or with sad resignation, as she tries to preserve some dignity in this humiliating scene? (Smith, 1982: 62).

In Howard Davies' 1985 production at Stratford, which echoed Guthrie's by updating the play to the Crimean war, Cressida's grief-stricken refusal to leave Troilus led to her being bundled off in her nightie, her vulnerability never more clear. This was an interpretation in agreement with Jan Kott's view of the play. Writing in Polish in 1964, he considered Cressida to have been one of Shakespeare's most amazing characters. According to Kott, she is a teenager who has not yet been touched. Inwardly free, passionate, a would-be cynic, she defends herself by irony. On the night in which she comes to know the reality of love, «she is violently awakened» (Kott, 1965: 66). Robert Wilcher found Juliet Stevenson's portrayal of this conception of Cressida completely sympathetic. Her arrival at the Greek camp was a «brutal paradigm of how women are reduced to objects» (Wilcher, 1985). It is here, perhaps more than anywhere, that the absence of stage-directions in

the text has left scholars to interpret what G. Wilson Knight called «the pivot incident of the play» according to their preconception of innocent men tempted by a libidinous woman rather than as a case of Susanna and the Elders. In 1931, W. W. Lawrence wrote: «I do not see how anyone can be in doubt as to what Shakespeare thought of her, and meant his audiences to think, after reading the famous scene in which she kisses the Greek chieftains all round; and the scorching comments fo the clearsighter Ulysses» (Lawrence, 1931). This conception of the scene was repeated by James Oscar Campbell in 1938: «Cressida goes directly to the Greek camp, and kisses all the men, with an abandon much greater than the liberal customs of Elizabethan salutation prescribed. Ulysses... is conveniently at hand to keep the audience clear on that point» (Campbell, 1938: 215) and by A. P. Rossiter in 1961, when he wrote of the Cressida that Ulysses encountered, «kissing the Greek generals all round as soon as she meets them» (Rossiter, 1961: 133). Although there are no stage-directions at this point, it is clear from what Nestor says, that it is *Agamemnon* that kisses her: «Our general doth salute you with a kiss», and not the other way around. And in fact it is upon *Ulysses'* suggestion that everyone then kisses her: «'Twere better she were kissed in general».

Although Daniel Seltzer recognized that it is she who is kissed, he insisted that «Cressida must parade happily among the Grecian generals» while it happens, since «she is now the brassy and degraded slut the Elizabethans had been taught to expect». Yet he also felt that, «no simple reliance upon the Elizabethan rumor of Cressida's harlotry can explain her sudden and complete degradation» (Seltzen, 1963: xxxi). That Shakespeare might have been querying the dominant Elizabethan myths about both Helen and Cressida does not seem to have occurred to Seltzer. Although in 1980 Gayle Greene did not actually claim Cressida does it «happily», she too thought that «Cressida is quick to live down to (the Greeks') view of her, allowing herself to be 'kissed in general'» (Greene, 1980: 143). Boas agreed that «on her arrival at the Greek camp she at once shows herself in her true colours. She allows herself to be «kissed in general» by all the chiefs» (Boas, 1896: 376). But does she? Very pointedly she asks Menelaus whether he is giving or receiving a kiss, and determines: «Therefore no kiss». And as for Ulysses, who set «the game» up, she tells him to beg for one. Whether happy or quick, she does not just 'allow' 'all' the generals to kiss her, although I do not think that the text quite lends itself to the reading of Voth and Evans: «She manages, with her wit, to keep most of the Greeks, including Ulysses, at arm's length for the entire scene» (Voth & Evans, 1975: 236) since, according to the dialogue, out of the seven Greeks named as present at least four get close enough to kiss her, Patroclus twice. Howard Davies' production in 1985 showed Cressida being grabbed and flung from man to man until she recovered her self-possession by means of the same defence she had used against Pandarus: sarcasm. This conforms to Luke Spencer's view in 1982, that: «Cressida has been passed from hand to hand by the Greek generals in a ceremony that parodies their declared allegiance to collective responsibility» (Spencer, 1982: 88) as well as to Carolyn Asp's reading in 1977, that «as she is passed from man to man», Ulysses contemptuously

«emphasizes her weakness in this masculine world» (Asp, 1977: 413). It is somewhat different from Mark van Doren's conception of the scene as displaying the crude quality of Cressida's coyness, for «each joint and motive of her body is so eloquent of the game as she passes down the row of Greeks lined up to kiss her» (Van Doren, 1939: 207). That view was clearly influenced by what Ulysses says («her wanton spirits look out / At every joint and motive of her body»), identifying her as one of:

these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
That give a coasting welcome ere it comes,
And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
To every ticklish reader (IV.v.58-61).

Yet neither Pandarus nor Troilus was able to read Cressida's thoughts.

Ulysses has, of course, just been made to look a fool, and did not get the sexual thrill he had presumably hoped for in setting up the «game». The fact that he is «ticklish» does not mean that Cressida is happy to tickle him. The suggestion that Cressida has somehow 'asked for it' obscures the grotesqueness of her being kissed full on the lips by Nestor, a man old enough to be her grandfather, and the disgusting innuendo of Patroclus' kiss (if Palmer is correct about 'popping'⁶). That this is not a «ceremonial salute», as Yoder tried to redeem it (Yoder, 1972: 14), is made quite clear when we see, almost immediately, the respect with which the chiefs greet Hector, in what might have been an identical welcome. The shock that this assault on Cressida might have given to Seltzer's assumed original Elizabethan audience, may be gauged from the fact that earlier versions of the story still current, such as Cacton's, took pains to indicate how respectful the Greeks were toward Cressida, promising to «hold her as dear as their daughter'⁷». They presumably did not mean 'daughter of the game'.

At the beginning of the play Troilus called on Apollo to tell him: «What Cressid is, what Pandarus, and what we». The question of the value and identity of the self is a constant query throughout the play: what's aught but as 'tis valued?

⁶ «(IV. v. 28. *hardiment*) act of daring, but I suspect Patroclus of an obscene allusion to tumescence (cf. *pop* = thrust in, or enter, suddenly and unexpectedly)». Kenneth Palmer notes to *The Arden Shakespeare* edition of *Troilus and Cressida* (London, Methuen 1982); I have followed Palmer's edition throughout. At IV. v. 61 he chooses *ticklish*, which he glosses as «easily aroused (especially sexually)», following the Q reading, rather than F's *tickling* which both Kenneth Muir and Alice Walker prefer. Alice Walker comments: «Q has been widely approved, but it looks like a case of assimilation to 'sluttish' in the next line and 'tickling' gives perfectly good sense: C's wanton spirits are fully disclosed to anyone who chooses to encourage them» in *The New Shakespeare «Troilus and Cressida»* (Cambridge University Press, 1957). Kenneth Muir, adopting *tickling*, suggests that Shakespeare may have altered *ticklish* (Q) to avoid the repetition of sound in *sluttish* (62): «Both words make good sense: the admirers can be described as making lustful advances, or as being sexually aroused by daughters of the game» in *The Oxford Shakespeare «Troilus and Cressida»* (Oxford University Press, 1982). Palmer adds: «But since the *encounterers* are as active as their partners (cf. 1.59), and since *the tables of their thoughts* may be presumed rather to tickle the reader, than to be tickled by him, I retain the Q reading. It is the reader (as Johnson observed of Lord Hailes) who is combustible». It seems to me that in either case the onus is on the reader (to be tickling or ticklish) rather than on the text/Cressida, which conforms to the Prologue's reference to «expectation, tickling skittish spirits».

⁷ *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (c 1474); cf. the discussion by Valerie Smith (1982).

Does anyone have an integral value or only by reputation?⁸ It is a dilemma that both Hector and Achilles fall foul of. The question is raised particularly with regard to Helen, that «pearl / Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships / And turned crowned kings to merchants». Helen has been reduced to merchandise, second-hand goods, a soiled pearl whose only power lies in caprice. Ominously, Troilus answers his own query: Cressida is a pearl and he himself a merchant. Passed from Pandarus to Troilus, from Troilus to Diomedes, shoved from one general to another, then back to Diomedes who hands her to her father who passes her back again, she is a pearl cast before swine. When finally Troilus watches her capitulation to Diomedes, her behaviour confirms the valuation at which he already held women, that they were inconstant and could not match his own unquestionable integrity and truth. Yet at first he cannot believe the evidence of his own eyes: «If there be rule in unity itself, / This was not she. O madness of discourse» although at the very moment he was watching her, he himself was saying: «I will not be myself, nor have cognition / of what I feel». The tragedy of Cressida is that she has no power to maintain any sense of her own value, her own identity, in the face of the way she is treated by both Trojans and Greeks. It might be she who says: «I will not be myself, nor have any cognition of what I feel» but she is already too far gone for that psychological movement to be a decision. Instead, her capitulation to Diomedes is also her capitulation to the male-dominated ideology: «Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find, / The error of our eye directs our mind»⁹. Then, speaking for the play itself, a warning for Troilus and Ulysses, if only they could hear it: «What error leads must err. O, then conclude, / Minds swayed by eyes are full of turpitude». Troilus himself, led by Ulysses, swayed by his eyes, finds his will distastes what it elected. From now on he is motivated by vindictiveness, and the brutalising nature of masculine rivalry becomes apparent.

It seems to me no accident that many critics and producers have taken what Alice Walker called Ulysses' «realistic» view of Cressida as a guide to her nature, despite his duplicity and other unreliable judgements¹⁰. In much the same way E. M. W. Tillyard used Ulysses' speech on order to exemplify what he called 'The Elizabethan World Picture' as if there were unanimous agreement as to the nature of reality in Renaissance England. In fact as we know, it was a time of increasing ideological conflict throughout Europe, resulting in Britain in the religious and political civil wars which took place between 1642 and 1691¹¹. Ulysses' speech authoritatively validates authority and hierarchy as fixed values in a play that constantly questions how values are determined; he delivers it during a debate amongst authority figures who mutually bolster each other's sense of self-

⁸ This question is discussed at more length in: Eagleton, Terry, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986), and in: Palmer, Kenneth, «Introduction» *op. cit.* (1982).

⁹ This point is further substantiated in: Dollimore, Jonathan, *Radical Tragedy* (Brighton, Harvester 1984), Chapters 2 & 15.

¹⁰ Cf. Voth and Evans (1975) Notes 11 & 12 p. 239.

¹¹ Cf. J. W. Lever, *The Tragedy of State* (London, Methuen 1971).

importance while discussing how their pomposity is ridiculed. As part of their comforting myth of a natural order that guarantees social laws, these 'realistic' Greek men promote and share with the idealistic Trojan men a particular conception of manhood that defines men by contrast with women. This conception is implicit in the very first lines that Troilus speaks in the play. To be a man is to be virile, to be strong, brave and forceful; the most important value for a man is his honour, his reputation for strength and courage, which is determined by his physical prowess. A woman is expected to be weak, to lack courage, and to feel pity; to be 'tame'. She is valued by men for being fair. The value set by men upon male honour and their acquisitive attitude towards female beauty leads inevitably to envious rivalry amongst men, and is a source of the militarism that leads to war.

Despite the fact that for Ulysses as for Hector, a stable social order based on natural laws is supposed to restrain men's base appetites, because, self-contradictorily, they believe that man is naturally bestial, their conception of manhood not only leads to the social instability of war; it also degrades women and brutalises men. A man who not fight is effeminate, i.e. less of a man and more of a woman, which is, in Patroclus' words, «loathsome». A woman who is disrespectful of men's values, impudent, is mannish and equally loathsome. This emphasis on 'natural' sexual distinctions leads to brutish behaviour, and denies individuality. It also denies men those responses which are classified as 'feminine' and prevents women from being assertive. Women are powerless in *Troilus and Cressida*: powerless to prevent war and death; powerless to prevent their own debasement into objects without feeling. In Shakespeare's other plays of the same period it is the powerlessness of what are presented as 'feminine' qualities that leads to chaos and despair, but with the restoration of the feminine 'weaknesses' such as pity, courageous sympathy and spontaneous generosity (which are the true milk of humankindness in men too) order and grace return. These are precisely the human qualities which find no place in war, and no grace or order blesses the aggressive world of *Troilus and Cressida*. Thus what appeared to Roger Warren to be a drawback in Howard Davies' 19th century setting, seems to me to be one of the vindications for updating the play in that way:

The very specifically nineteenth-century setting both helped and hindered Peter Jeffrey's Ulysses. He was given commanding positions behind tables that helped him to deliver the Degree and Time speeches with maximum clarity; but coming from a Victorian statesman in a frock-coat his wisdom sounded like a series of sententious platitudes (Warren, 1985: 117).

The programme- notes, which include discussions by members of the cast concerning the hypocrisy of so-called «Victorian values», indicate that this was deliberate.

As shown by the examples of Paris and Hector, the pursuit of female beauty or male glory for their own sake is delusive; an obsession with glamorous appearance actually converts the living reality into rottenness. But there is no naked eye available to Troilus to see this, or to see more *in Cressida* (as she sees in Troilus) than Pandarus presents:

Pandarus: I speak no more than truth.
Troilus: Thou dost not speak so much.

Troilus can only come to Cressida in Troy by means of Pandarus; he can only get to her in the Greek army-camp by following Diomedes with Ulysses as his guide. Both Ulysses and Pandarus use Troilus vicariously. Pandarus is the entrepreneur who titillates Troilus by reiterating how 'fair' Cressida is ('fair' is almost the keynote of this play as 'honest' is of *Othello*). He is the showman who produces their first meeting as if it were a play: he interprets Cressida to Troilus, «she fetches her breath as if it were a new-ta'en sparrow», controls and displays her, «Here she is», and prompts Troilus' response, «Why do you not speak to her?» commenting on the effect as he does so, «Pretty, i'faith», thus pre-empting all spontaneity. In the Greek camp Troilus watches Cressida flirt with his love-token, and as Diomedes 'tames' Cressida into submission to his will, so Ulysses 'tames' Troilus into patient resignation that Cressida is essentially fickle. Ulysses is already convinced that Cressida «will sing any man on sight» - that she can sight-read a man like a sheet of music and respond immediately as if she knew him well, just as Ulysses could read her body like a text and be tickled by it on sight. Ulysses having been publicly scorned by Cressida is not the aid most likely to show sympathy for her predicament, nor to make it plain to Troilus. His irony to Troilus, «You are moved, prince... May worthy Troilus be half-attached / With that which here his passion does express?» is more than a little reminiscent of Iago's provocation of Othello's revulsion. Can the audience, too, only come to Cressida by means of the producer and the critic, those interfering go-betweens?

Pertinently, two actresses who have played Cressida recently have left us their responses to the co-ercive effect of male interpretations of their role¹². Juliet Stevenson felt herself threatened by Howard Davies' interpretation of Cressida's relationship with Pandarus and Troilus for the RSC production in 1985. Davies wanted to create a sense of an intimacy between the three of them like the mutual affection in *Jules et Jim*. This went counter to Juliet Stevenson's understanding of the nervous defensiveness that Cressida displays against Pandarus at the beginning, and of her apprehension about Troilus' promises of constancy (which seems justified in the event by what Stevenson took for his betrayal of Cressida to Diomedes). Howard Davies' idea about this happy threesome echoes what Anton Lesser said in Fenwick's account of Jonathan Miller's 1981 production for BBC TV, in which Lesser had also played Troilus: «It's an amazing triumvirate, Pandarus and Troilus and Cressida — what we discovered together was the mutual dependence that they had, which led to the emotional trauma when one of them is ejected and the triple relationship breaks up». This does not cohere with what Suzanne Burden says about her understanding of Cressida in the same article: «Taught by Pandarus, she's just about learned the ropes and she's quite aware

¹² Juliet Stevenson, «Foolish Dreaming Superstitious Girls - Female Perspectives in the Plays (and in the Rehearsal Room)» unpublished talk given at Royal Shakespeare Theatre Summer School, 1985; and Suzanne Burden in an interview for Fenwick, Henry, «The Production», *The BBC TV Shakespeare «Troilus and Cressida»* (London, BBC 1981).

that to him she's a puppet, a plaything he enjoys, but as soon as he's through playing that game he'll forget her ... I felt she was a victim of states and men and rulers». Miller himself sound much more sympathetic to Cressida than Pandarus or Ulysses do, at first, but then he reveals himself as another ticklish reader: «What we see is not the inevitable blossoming of a corrupt and sexually titillating girl but the disintegration of a girl whose innocence is too inexperienced to handle the shock and the overwhelming stimulus of these rough attractive Greek warriors she comes across». Under his direction Suzanne Burden played Cressida as sexually excited by being kissed in general, as thoroughly enjoying the game and her own power of arousal. She herself said: «I used to get terribly upset in the first days of rehearsal when people would say, 'She's nothing but a tart and a sexual tease'. Instinctively I would feel quite angry but I couldn't explain why she wasn't. I saw her as a witty, intelligent young woman... just discovering herself... She's been brought up in a sophisticated man's world and she's enormously unprotected... She doesn't know what's happening and she's terrified, and her survival instincts come into play. She thinks, 'There's got to be a way out of this and I have to use my sex I will'».

Juliet Stevenson managed to develop their idea of Cressida's vulnerability on the stage. She believed that, being hustled away from Troilus on the first morning after losing her virginity to him, Cressida is emotionally raw and experiences the kissing-game as a brutal sexual assault from which she defends herself by her only weapon: sarcasm. Stevenson's interpretation was partially successful for at least one other critic in the audience besides Robert Wilcher. Roger Warren saw that Stevenson's playing of a «mercurial Cressida» in Act I was to use «a brazen manner (as) a cover to protect herself from becoming a love-object like Helen». But, after «the generals subjected her to brutally violent kisses that amounted to assault», at first appalled, she then begins «to play their game» and becomes a love-object like Helen after all: «Ulysses made the parallel with Helen specific» (Warren, 1985: 117). It seems to me that Cressida was lost from the first moment she tried to take Troilus's sport seriously, but she is still demanding fair play at that moment of confrontation with Ulysses, a stalemate that is only ended by Diomedes' intervention. In the last analysis, women do not even have the power to play hard to get; they can be assaulted both physically and mentally, which is what Ulysses does make clear. Yet it is not until she is called out of her father's tent by her «guardian», that Cressida finally succumbs to being a toy in a boys'-game, treating Troilus's token for what it is worth. Stevenson acted the flirtation scene with Diomedes as if Cressida had been emotionally cauterized.

Juliet Stevenson's Stratford talk was ironically entitled: «Foolish Dreaming Superstitious Girls» with the clear implication that some women, Cassandra-like, may have a true vision of the play which men might consider mad. Yet, as we can see from the example of Alice Walker and Joyce Carol Oates, most women's ability to see is as much conditioned as men's by the dominant values and conceptions of their culture¹³. The text cannot determine how either women or men

¹³ For other, morally unfavourable judgments of Cressida by women see also: Una Ellis-Fermor (1945); Winifred Nowotny, «'Opinion' and 'Value' in *Troilus and Cressida*», EIC, 4 (1954); Mary Ellen Rickey, «'Twixt the Dangerous Shores': *Troilus and Cressida* Again» S.Q. XV (1964).

read it, although editors, producers, and actors, may incline our understanding toward their particular reading, since they control the medium by which we come to the text. Joyce Carol Oates, writing in 1967, was even more vehement than Victorian male critics had been in her denunciation of *Cressida* as «villainous». The one Victorian critic to speak up for *Cressida* was G. B. Shaw, who was vilified for the stand he took against war fever during the 1914-18 War. One of the first recorded English productions was mounted by the pacifist William Poel as that fever was gathering momentum in 1912; it was not a success, and the play only gained appreciative audiences from among the war-weary in 1920. Despite the wide regard for Jan Kott's views, the critical revision of *Cressida* did not gather strength until the 1970's.

The general move towards exonerating *Cressida* for inauthenticity (although there was still no agreement as to whether Ulysses was 'clear-sighted' or not) took place on both sides of the Atlantis. In a paper published in 1972, the time of the war in Vietnam, the American critic Audrey Yoder spoke of *Troilus and Cressida* as «our play», because «we know what this society and its war has done to our best youth». Quoting with approval from Kott with regard to *Cressida*'s «rude awakening», Yoder said that «among the Greeks (*Cressida*) is bound to be exposed and degraded... the Greek generals are taking what *Cressida*, essentially a captive, has no real power to refuse. She plays their game with wit and spirit, for that is her best defence... it is self-righteous for her world to judge *Cressida*. After all, she is simply practicing the way of that world» (Yoder, 1972). In a further sympathetic reading of *Cressida* published in 1975, not long after Watergate, Voth and Evans challenged the «constant» critical judgement that *Cressida* is «a mere prostitute, a cold and calculating woman»: «Insofar as her actions are determined by the real world of the play, a world which makes human attempts at ideals nothing more than attempts to give 'fair' covering to sordidness and corruption, *Cressida* is not responsible» except for «the 'folly' of ignoring her knowledge of this world» (Voth & Evans, 1975). By this date the women's movement in America was creating a new perspective on literature, and expressly feminist criticism of Shakespeare was gaining official recognition¹⁴. However, in 1977 Carolyn Asp developed a view of *Cressida* which she had first indicated in 1971, contesting the general critical opinion that *Cressida* was «either shallow or calculating, or both». Asp claimed that the text will not allow us [*sic*] «to dismiss her as Ulysses describes her, merely 'a daughter of the game'», rather, she shares «the weakness of those who cannot see value in themselves independently of perceivers». Conforming to Ulysses' insistence that «it is public opinion that reveals the inner self», *Cressida* «attempts to establish her value by the only way her culture allows. She uses her physical beauty to attract the praise of men» (Asp, 1977). This interpretation not only ignores the sex and cultural power of «the perceivers»; it slides over the particular vulnerability of women which is the «weakness» *Cressida* shares. The first politically feminist revision of *Cressida*-reading appeared in 1980: Gayle Greene's «Shakespeare's *Cressida*: 'A kind of self'». Commencing by stating

¹⁴ Preface to Lenz, Greene & Neely (1980).

that «human nature is not 'natural', but is, rather, shaped by social forces», Greene follows Raymond Southall's characterization of Cressida's society as «a world informed with the 'spirit of capitalism... busily reducing life to the demands of the belly'». Cressida, treated as a cake or pearl, «reminds us of the effects of capitalism on women». Cressida is «a cynical coquette» who treats «love as combat» because she understands the principles of her society, «though she is helpless to act on what she knows» (Greene, 1980). It would have been interesting if Greene had made the connection between the greedy spirit of capitalism implicit in the play's language and the envious rivalry of militarism in the action of the play to show how Shakespeare traces the source of war in the depreciation of women and 'femininity'.

The general reevaluation of Cressida in England seems to have commenced in 1975 with an article by John Bayley which suggested that «when Ulysses calls her a daughter of the game, we may feel obscurely that he is wrong». Recognising that «social exigencies compel Cressida to act in ways which society then condemns», he nevertheless considers that the play's action «exhibits but does not explain» Cressida's predicament (Bayley, 1975). In 1978, Ann Thompson could still find Cressida «repellent» (Thompson, 1978: 127) and in 1980 Kenneth Palmer was still speaking of Cressida as inexplicably «transformed as she enters the Greek camp», and repeating, without qualification, Ulysses' judgement of Cressida as a whore (Palmer, 1980: 57). Kenneth Muir felt that «it should not be held against Cressida» that she is sensuous, or «treated as a sex-object», but he also repeats the idea of her as a whore, and speaks of her «uninhibited behaviour on her arrival in the Greek camp» (Muir, 1982: 36-7). The views of Muir and Palmer are likely to be influential since their editions will be used in schools and universities. However, in 1982, a group of papers read at a conference in Leeds tried to explain Cressida's predicament in terms of the ideology of her society (Jowitt & Taylor, 1982). Ironically, in view of the Falklands conflict, Valerie Smith concluded:

Part of the change in critical attitudes towards the play has been brought about by a change in public attitudes towards war. Two world wars have made people wary of the public-school heroism of Hector and Achilles, who talk about the Trojan campaign as though it were an extended Test Match. More particularly, where Cressida is concerned, the new current of feminist thinking has led to a reevaluation of traditional attitudes towards women (Smith, 1982: 76).

Jonathan Dollimore discussed *Troilus and Cressida* in 1984 as part of a general reappraisal of 16th-17th century drama in terms of the contemporary debate about natural law, to conclude that: «The discontinuity in Cressida's identity stems not from her nature, but from her position in the patriarchal order» (Dollimore, 1984: 48).

Such political radicalism may not be widespread, but after the powerful influence of the Women's Movement, Juliet Stevenson's audience in 1985 might have been less inclined to view the play through Troilus' eyes as directed by Ulysses. Ros Asquith, reviewing that production for *The Observer* (30 June 1985),

thought that «almost every woman on the planet» could have the insight to see Cressida «as a human being torn between love and survival, rather than as a flirtatious plaything». Perhaps now more women would consider, apparently «instinctively» like Suzanne Burden did, that Cressida may not behave as she does merely in order to tease, even if men find her tickling. Her attempts to gain the upper hand over Diomedes by playing hard-to-get are pitiful, but sympathy for «her choice ... between rapist or protector» as Asquith put it need not be sentimentalised. Burden points out that Cressida never tells Diomedes that she loves him. No. But she talks of giving her heart together with Troilus' dangling it tantalizingly in a context that equates «heart» with «cunt». If she has become emotionally «hollow», that is because no real choice of emotional commitment has been left open to her. I think one difficulty for women in the audience now is that they may sympathise too much with Cressida, identifying too far with a feminist wish for female integrity to be able to acknowledge what, she is finally forced to become. If she is not precisely a whore, she is synthetic. Ros Asquith found that: «Juliet Stevenson is ... a startling and forceful Cressida». One who is as much in two minds as Cressida states herself to be, and as «subject to exploitative definitions of her by men» (Sinfield, 1982: 33), which she is shown as powerless to control, can scarcely be forceful. In this play valuing is not detached appraisal; it is an active, dynamic process which affects what is valued. Pursued for her sexual allure, Cressida gradually learns to read her own self through the double-minded male discourse that dominates her by the end of the play; degraded, she becomes as it were a corrupt text.

One of the problems with most productions this century lies in what Ros Asquith thought to be an asset to Howard Davies' production when she called it «visually seductive». If the text is now generally agreed to be concerned with the seductive process by which the pursuit of fair appearances corrupts reality itself, then producers and designers need to find a medium which will express this to the audience. Any medium chosen still has to overcome a pre-established adherence to the very values which the play exposes as inauthentic. Naturalism actually tends to reproduce the aggressively materialistic representations of women's sexuality which our culture enforces, along with the egoistic greediness which leads to rivalry and war. Making a production as glamorously «realistic» as possible simply encourages the audience to read with its eyes only, superficially. Shakespeare's text tells us little about the theatrical conventions of his time, but certain scenes are pointedly non naturalistic. Hector's encounter with the enticing corpse in armour is an example of such an emblematic scene¹⁵. My own feeling is that, despite the insight into the play to be gained from Juliet Stevenson's committed performance and Howard Davies's choice of a Victorian setting in 1985-6, modern audience, both women and men, might benefit from the reintroduction of two non-naturalistic conventions of Shakespeare's time: doubling, and the use of male

¹⁵ This scene significantly had to be omitted from Davies's modern dress production, cf Alan C. Dessen, «Price-tags and Trade-offs: Chivalry and the Shakespearean Hero in 1985», *S Q*, 37, n^o 1, 104.

actors for female roles¹⁶. The way in which readers are influenced by their own sexual expectations might be better brought home if the female parts were played not by glamorous, nubile young women, but by men. The point that women are constructed by cultural values would be made more effectively if the two wives, Andromache and Helen, were played by the same actor, and if one other played both Cassandra and Cressida. Audiences, of course, do not much enjoy being estranged in this way. Like other readers, they prefer to be tickled pink by vicarious excitement.

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¹⁶ Cf Ralph Berry on the notion of 'conceptual doubling' as revealing the play's 'underground logic' in: «Hamlet's Doubles», *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37, n° 2, 1986.

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