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Illusion in *Troilus and Cressida*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of Shakespeare's 1603 satire *Troilus and Cressida* that looks at illusion and the value given to it by means of war, Helen of Troy, and ultimately the two lovers themselves. Although it is depressingly obvious throughout the drama that life is an illusion, it is also obvious that there is a need for that illusion, and an equally profound necessity to have the illusion debunked.

The first part of the thesis examines the impact of war on Troy. This part concentrates on the myth of the hero, who like Falstaff presents himself to the world as heroic but is actually a coward. The theme of a person who presents himself as one thing but is another recurs throughout the play. Shakespeare did not have a monopoly on this insight. The paper details how two of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Galileo and Cervantes, also addressed this problem.

The paper continues with an examination of the convictions and distortions played out by the less than perfect military council and by the insidious politics of the major characters and their flawed commitment to unreliable leaders.

The thesis examines the emotional traps the characters set for themselves as well as the bad advice they listen to in order to set themselves free. The paper keeps returning

to the theme of illusions, their danger, and their usefulness. The end focuses on the title characters themselves, as well as the homoerotic relationship of Achilles and his live-in lover.

The conclusion attempts to sort out the real from the fiction. The play ends, or so it appears, with the familiar story of two men fighting over a woman. It has come, like many other plays of the period, full circle. The characters seem at peace with themselves, or at least at peace with the haunting and perpetual idea that life is indeed an illusion with both a necessity for that illusion and an equally valid necessity to have that illusion debunked.

Introduction

1603 is the year *Troilus and Cressida* makes its debut. In the quote below, A. M. Potter is disagreeing with the possible argument that *Troilus and Cressida* might be written from a position of nostalgia:

It could be argued that Shakespeare wrote *Troilus and Cressida* in the same conservative spirit (as the *Tudor Homilies*, etc.), yearning nostalgically for a perfect past which is implied by its obvious lack in the play, yet it seems to me that the undermining of so many of the central myths and beliefs of the Elizabethan/Medieval view of life suggests that Shakespeare is writing from a somewhat different position, expressing rather in dramatic form an intense awareness that not only is the present different from the past, but that the interpretation of the world inherited from the past had always been illusion, something like a vast cultural and political confidence trick foisted upon Englishmen for centuries, with no basis in reality whatsoever. (26)

I found Potter's use of the word "illusion" especially illuminating. For several decades before Potter's 1988 essay, the common practice had been to examine a single speech in *Troilus and Cressida*, usually the degree speech, and render an opinion on the entire play. It was also trendy in the 1940s and 1950s to see *Troilus* as having a "poetic imagination" (Nowotny 28). Early critics saw the implications of the entire play by

assiduously examining its parts. Potter is more willing to discuss the play as a whole. Where the poetic imagination seems to describe the character's gift of interpreting the world around him, the word "illusion" denotes a hindrance. Although the difference is subtle, it is profound.

I would like to define two terms, "illusion" and "valuation," and then conclude by showing the symbiotic relationship between the two terms. Although the word "illusion" can mean many things both inside and outside the theater, it is used here to connote a false sense of reasoning, a questioning of authority, the inherited way, as Potter suggests, of "the interpretation of the world." This questioning of authority can be nascent in a culture, either Shakespeare's or our own, where art can be used as a weapon "undermining of so many of the central myths and beliefs of the Elizabethan/Medieval view of life." According to Barlett's massive concordance of Shakespeare's word usage, Shakespeare uses the word "illusion" only five times throughout his works; it is never used in *Troilus and Cressida*. In this sense, Shakespeare is not creating a myth: he is debunking the myth with which his audience already arrived. Although Shakespeare uses the word "illusion" in five other plays, he chooses not to use it in *Troilus and Cressida*. He chooses instead to let the audience do the work of deciding what is real and what is not.

There is an infinite range of images Shakespeare could have included in the drama but chose to leave out. Although there were certain logistics to getting "dead bodies" off the stage, there was no problem getting giant armies on stage for *Henry V* and no problem providing a "naval battle" in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare could have written in a forty-foot wooden horse for *Troilus and Cressida* just as easily; the

groundlings would have been expecting one. Shakespeare chose to leave it out. There is always a certain vulnerability when making a case from things “Shakespeare left out.” One can always ask, “He left out elephants too, is that significant?” Elephants, I would answer, are not relevant to the story. The forty-foot horse is of particular relevance to the story of the Trojan War, and a part of the story even the most unschooled of theatergoers would be waiting to hear a reference to. The fact that *Troilus and Cressida* has no forty foot wooden horse in it is possibly revealing. He may have “left out” any reference to the forty-foot horse for the same reasons he left out any overt reference to the word “illusion”: its absence may draw more attention than its presence. Shakespeare is not simply re-creating a myth; on the contrary, he is assiduously debunking one. He is not disappointing his audience as much as he is redirecting their attention.

Whatever his reasons for excluding the word “illusion,” Shakespeare was equally motivated to include the word “value.” Closely related to the term “illusion” is the idea of “valuation,” a major theme of *Troilus and Cressida*. Before a character assigns a value to something, person or prophecy, the first thing most characters want to know is, “Is it real?”; once this crucial question is answered, the character may proceed to the second question, “What is it worth?” The terms, in large part, cannot be separated: the value of a thing rests on its authenticity. The bulk of *Troilus and Cressida* is structured around these two basic questions. It is surprising how often the object under consideration is not real. Even the critics from the 1950s, who were hesitant to admit to Shakespeare’s cynical bent in *Troilus and Cressida*, had the word “value” in the title of their essays (Nowotny, Kermode). The presence and problem of value have been recognized and debated for quite some time: it is not a new idea.

Linking the terms “value” and “illusion” is not a radical departure from the previous discussions about value: it simply identifies another layer of meaning. Here we are framing one of the major themes of the play: valuation, the process of determining the price of a thing. In the universe of *Troilus and Cressida* everything is a commodity: the vendible society, the society of peddlers hawking their wares to one another, taken to its extreme. In a universe where nothing is real, nothing can hope to have any type of value, absolute or otherwise, attached to it. *Troilus and Cressida* is such a universe. The cynical idea of “illusion” is more recent; it is one of the tenets of this paper to show that the link between “illusion” and “value” is stronger than one may be given to suspect and indeed a crucial component of *Troilus and Cressida*. It is one of the positions of this paper to show that it is impossible to assess the value of something without first assessing its authenticity, a common bond between the two terms quite pervasive in *Troilus and Cressida*.

This paper looks at three types of values and the illusions inherent in them: the value of identity as seen through Ulysses, the value of love as seen through Troilus and Cressida, and our starting point, the value of war as seen through Helen. In each of these cases, value plays as important a role as the authenticity of that which is being valued. In every case, what is being valued is an illusion; in every case, there is a necessity for that illusion.

Helen and the Value of War

Juliet Dusinberre believes “the idea of Helen as the archetype of beauty seems to have been challenged very early by shifts in perspective” (Dusinberre 85). It is implausible, even to the early Greeks, that men would war for ten years over a good-looking woman. Dusinberre cites art historian Giovanni Petro Bellori as asserting that the Trojan War was fought over a representation of Helen rather than Helen herself. In real life, rumor has it that Helen had flaws and shortcomings. Her statue, however, was a representation of the real life Helen with all the flaws removed. Her statue was taken by the Trojans instead of her, and the war followed (Dusinberre 86). This version, even as a rumor, makes more sense. As a matter of logistics, it is easier to kidnap a statue rather than a person. It is easier to embellish the beauty of the real Helen in lyric poetry, claiming she is every ounce as gorgeous as her artifice. It is also easier to inflame the foot soldiers who, in all likelihood, have never seen either the real Helen or the artistic representation of her. The fake Helen, the illusion, is more valuable than the real Helen. As the illusion is moved a few degrees away from the reality, the illusion becomes more valuable. In a sense, there were two Helens: the ideal of perfect beauty, and the actual woman. Helen as an ideal that men will war for and die for is of more value to the Trojans than the actual woman who was abducted to be Paris’s concubine.

Helen is at the ideological center of the play, as well as the physical center of the script. Without Helen, there would be no play, there would be no Trojan War. Although

she is the lynchpin of the entire plot, she has little more than a cameo in act 3. It has been noted by Roger Apfelbaum and others that there is a dearth of commentary written about “the Helen scene” (108). The illusion of Helen is pervasive throughout the play, almost in every conversation. One of the most frequently asked questions remains: is Helen worth it? When Helen is not the noun in question, Cressida’s story is unfolding in parallel to Helen’s. Although Helen the character is scant and her lines few and shallow, Helen the illusion is abundant and complex. She is the entity in the play so prominently deserving of the cryptic label “is and is not.” A modern day cost benefit analyst might view Hector’s observation “(Helen) is not worth what she doth cost the holding” (2.2.51-2) as tantamount to “bad investment.” The accuracy of Hector’s claim fuels the bulk of debates in the drama.

The Trojan camp consists of a family rallying in support of their brother Paris, and honoring their father King Priam. From the Trojan point of view, it has the feel of a family feud rather than a war. We seldom forget that Troilus is the youngest brother, and Hector is often in the position of doling out fatherly advice. Troilus, speaking to Hector, asserts, “What’s aught but as ‘tis valued?” (2.2.52). Although the word “aught” can mean “anything of value” as it does here; it can also be a place holder in arithmetic, whose value is zero. Troilus believes there is really no price to a thing other than the price it will fetch on the open market; all prices are relative. Hector responds, in the sermon-like fashion of an older brother, saying things possess an absolute value. Answers Hector:

. . . value dwells not in particular will;

It holds his estimate and dignity

As well as wherein ‘tis precious of itself

As in the prizur. 'Tis mad idolatry

To make the service greater than the god. (2.2.53-58)

How is it possible to make “the service greater than the god?” A few paragraphs of an explication may be in order. According to Bevington (193), this is a reference to the King James Bible, Matthew, 23.19: “Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?” One of the original complaints Protestants had against Catholics was the Catholic tendency to heap lavish material goods on the altar. This abundance of material wealth was viewed by the Protestants as sheer idolatry. The essence of the quote is that the god that is being offered the abundance of material wealth paled in comparison to the enormity of the wealth itself. In actuality, it was commonly known by Protestants that it was the Vatican who was in line to receive all the loot.

The illusion, perpetrated by the Catholic church, was that enough money could wash away sin and inevitably purchase salvation for the sinner. Shakespeare was saying now, as Hobbes was to say decades later, that salvation is not a vendible commodity. It is not possible, according to Hobbes, to exchange authentic coins for illusory salvation. The church cannot sell something it cannot verify it has. Thus, it becomes “mad idolatry” to frantically attempt to purchase it. Such salvation was an illusion; although it appeared at times a necessity, even a blessing, there is something corrupt about cornering the market on salvation. We again return to the basic premise that it is difficult to discover the value of something if it is unclear whether or not it is authentic. As stated in the introduction, there is always an explicit question of “what is it worth?” coupled to an implicit question of “is it real?” In order to ascertain the value of anything, both questions must be answered. One of the problems making the process of valuation so difficult is the answer

to the question “is it real?” The answer to this question in this play is frequently, “No, it is not.” This, in turn, makes the process of valuation extremely difficult.

Although violence is a pervasive backdrop in this play, only two named characters die of it, both in the act of being who they are not, both being faithful to the illusions they are portraying. The vast majority of characters are willing to trade, sell low, mitigate and negotiate their way around death. In the universe of *Troilus and Cressida* everything is a commodity: the vendible society taken to its extreme. Although Hector is giving sage advice to his impetuous younger brother in the above exchange, he gladly loses all his dignity and any chivalric sense of fair play when there is a shiny suit of armor to be had. When material gain is concerned, Hector is as greedy as any other “prizer.” The exchange value becomes less tangible and more abstract as *Troilus and Cressida* unfolds. There is a cost-benefit blanketing the entire play. Simply stated in twenty-first-century terms, the cost/benefit is “the exercise of evaluating an action’s consequences whereby the pluses are weighed against the minuses” (“cost benefit analysis”). These “pluses and minuses” can be measured in terms of cash, emotions, or intangibles such as “honor,” or combinations thereof. They are by no means restricted to money. As the drama progresses, the characters are concerned more with blood and honor, less with pounds and pence (Thersites notwithstanding). The cost of keeping Helen never leaves the stage; likewise, the word “illusion” and the wooden horse are never given an entrance.

Lewis Hyde says in his book *The Gift* that artists are often compelled, for a variety of reasons, to give their art away rather than sell it for commercial gain. One reason for this is that the sale itself may alter the nature of the gift. The most obvious

example of this is when a lover is offered cash, and the lover quickly becomes a prostitute, like Helen. Or at least that was the opinion of the often critical Thersites, “the argument is a whore and a cuckold” (1.3.70). Lewis says “there are two primary shades of property, gift and commodity” (181). Of course, this is an oversimplification. In reality, each bleeds into the other at least in some degree and neither exists in a pure state. Roughly speaking, though, something is either a gift or it is not. The helpful neighbor who gives a cup of sugar may or may not expect gossip in return; if she does, the sugar is not really a gift, not really “free.” Giving a gift and expecting something in return for it is not a gift exchange: it is a commodity exchange. With the exception of Cassandra, every character in the story is a commodity to be bought and sold, the primary example being Helen. The more her price is debated, the more of a commodity, Thersites would say whore, she becomes. Agamemnon says of Achilles, “if he overhold his price so much, / We’ll none of him” (2.3.131-32). As both Achilles and Helen become increasingly expensive, they tend to price themselves out of the market.

We turn now from the valuing of Helen, the principal cause of the war, to the valuing of the war itself. Whether the war was real or not is a topic of discussion which is beyond the scope of this paper. Heather James’s phrase “Trojan legend” at once refers to Shakespeare’s source material and at the same time casts doubt on its authenticity.

Although James makes no overt connection between authenticity and value, she does say the “play and the war cannot effectively end before their values have been defined” (95).

The values of both the play and the war are intentionally, systematically *not* defined and true to James’s assertion do not end. Again we return to the two component questions of

valuation, “is it real?” and “what is it worth?” In this case we are questioning the authenticity of the war itself, or as James would have it, the “Trojan legend.”

The truce, or at least the cessation of killing, dominates the first four acts of the play. In a play about a war, we would expect the last act to contain violence and slaughter: it does not. Visiting the enemy camp is such a frequent occurrence, along with swapping prisoners, it is easy to forget there is a war going on. “Words, in this inflated economy, consume deeds, as its amplified speeches and debates replace action on the battlefield” (Parker, 221). One of the main reasons there is so little fighting in the drama is because there is so much talking. Inflation is not only of the economic kind, but inflated rhetoric as well. Troilus rages, “Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart; / Th’effect doth operate another way” (5.3.107-8). A war of words has replaced the actual war of Troy.

The actual war of Troy, what James terms “Trojan legend,” lacks authenticity. It functions as a myth, as illusion, and there is no shortage of critics who are convinced the abduction of Helen was a sham. Long before the story even got to Virgil, the Greek poet Stesichorus claimed the tale was false. Dio Chrysostom denounced Homer as a blind beggar “who told lies for a living” (Dusinberre 88). The list goes on of people who accused Homer of being a massive fiction. Socrates says wisely that although he agrees with multitudinous smears against Homer, stories can be educational (*Phaedrus* 243A, 243B).

There is further evidence to suggest that the war in *Troilus and Cressida* is an illusion. The war can be compared to any of Shakespeare’s other plays in which the war is presented as authentic. I would like to compare the soldierly death of Macbeth to the

less than knightly slaying of Hector. When Macduff enters the room in which he will kill Macbeth, he makes two revealing statements that will ultimately separate him from Achilles and the slaying of Hector. The first statement by Macduff which separates him from Achilles is his announcement of his presence in the room by saying, “Turn, Hell-hound, turn!” (*Macbeth* 5.8.3). Apparently Macduff has entered the room with Macbeth’s back turned to him. If ever there was a villain who deserved to be knifed in the back, it is Macbeth. Macduff, however, chooses not to do this. Macduff allows this ferocious soldier to die a knightly death in face to face combat. Macduff’s second statement which separates him from Achilles, of a more symbolic nature, is when Macduff proclaims, “I have no words; / My voice is in my sword” (*Macbeth* 5.8.6-7).

The soldierly combat, characteristic of *Macbeth* and other plays, is missing from *Troilus and Cressida*. It is defensible that combat as the audience has come to know it is missing entirely from *Troilus and Cressida*. Combat would be defined as in *Macbeth*, where two men fight and one dies. Combat such as this cannot be found anywhere in *Troilus and Cressida*. In contrast to the death of Macbeth, Achilles’ murder of Hector plays more like a mugging than a battle between soldiers. Achilles surprises Hector while Hector is in a state of half dress. Hector is in the midst of disarming himself so that he may put on the armor of the freshly killed Unknown Knight. Achilles does not do the killing himself. Instead, Achilles orders his Myrmidons, ants which Zeus had turned into soldiers, to do his killing for him. The mighty Hector, unarmed, is stabbed to death by the Myrmidons as Achilles looks on. Hector said earlier to Troilus, “I am today i’th’ vein of chivalry” (5.3.32). Hector has had an illusion of himself throughout the entire play as being in the vein of chivalry. Hector’s image of himself as being in the vein of chivalry

proves to be an illusion which he quickly abandons for a suit of armor; he sinks from high nobility to low commercial acquisition. He murders a knight so he can possess his armor. Ironically, his less than knightly pursuit of shiny armor precipitates his less than knightly death. Hector has a choice between the fake image of himself and the true value of the armor he was chasing: he chose the real armor over the fake image and paid the real price. Hector dies on stage. As we have seen, there is nothing heroic, Aristotlean, remarkable, or even out of the ordinary about the death of Hector.

As we are given all the details of Hector's less than noble death on stage, we are left to guess at the details of one other death in the play, Patroclus, off stage. In the same way we have solid evidence about the death of Hector, we are left with only conjecture of the details which Patroclus suffered off stage. The audience is allowed to use whatever bias they came into the theater with. There is no reason to believe that Patroclus did not die a noble death while fighting for a noble cause. Conversely, there is no reason to believe it *was* a noble death. Because we did not see him die, the audience is only left with their assumptions; that is, their illusions. The audience arrives with certain ideas about how things are *supposed* to work, how things *should* work.

Even as we watch the barbaric murder of noble Hector, we are convinced the death we did not see was honorable; we are convinced that the death of Patroclus was not sordid and barbaric. For all we know, Patroclus died the same way as Hector. Our assumption is he did not, and our assumption should be questioned. Is it accurate to say there is a "war" going on in a play where no characters in the play fight in it, no soldierly combat is shown? There exists no evidence even a single character in the plays dies as a result from war. I would argue our generally agreed definition of the word war (i.e., a

thing in which men fight and die) means nothing in *Troilus and Cressida*; it is only a word, signifying nothing. War is an illusion, a grandiose smokescreen to hide behind while stripping someone of his armor.

One may argue that the trappings of war justify it being called a war whether any lead characters die in it or not. We are informed a conflict has been going on for seven years in which many men have died and that should be enough to call it a war. It would be accurate to say that the story of *Troilus and Cressida* is a love story that takes place against the “backdrop of a war,” as a recent PBS film has phrased it. This sounds closer to a movie promo for *Gone with the Wind*. In this case, however, the war is a portrayal of a real war. In *Gone with the Wind*, as with Shakespeare’s other plays containing wars, the war has a visceral impact on all the characters in the story. Sherman burns Atlanta. The people in the story suffer loss and death as a direct result of Sherman’s action; this is war, not an illusion of war.

One may argue I am simply playing with words. If Shakespeare chose the word “war,” why should I choose anything else? I would argue that Shakespeare chose for his characters to discuss “war” the same as he chose Hector to have a self-image of a man who fights in such a war, a self-image of a man who has chivalry running through his veins: a flawed image, an illusion. War is an illusion created by words, words, and more words. A coat of armor, or mail, was and is a symbol of chivalry and all that it stood for. *Troilus and Cressida* repeatedly makes a point of separating the mail from the man who is wearing it. The following passage underscores the fact that the armor lives on long after the inhabitant is dead:

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,

Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
A great-sized monster of ingratiitudes.
Those scraps are good deeds past, which are
Devoured as fast as they are made, forgot
As soon as done. Perseverance, dear my lord,
Keeps honour bright; to have done is to hang
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
In monumental mock'ry. (3.3.146-54)

The chivalric code of behavior had existed in England for many centuries for the benefit of the upper class. It was of little help to the starving, the plague ridden, and the destitute. A. M. Potter holds that *Troilus and Cressida* was a more acerbic attack on the outdated code of conduct than was its chronological and thematic counterpart in Spain, *Don Quixote*. Potter believes that the rise of similar satires during the same time period is evidence of the public need. The above quotation of sixty-seven words constitutes the thematic warning of the play: life is an illusion. Potter, Shapiro, Lee, Weir and others have said that in 1603 chivalry was, to say the least, on the decline.

The Helen scene, as well as her general absence from the play, parallels all the soldiers' scenes with their almost methodical refusal to engage in anything remotely resembling combat. Helen is an illusion, the same as the soldiers who fight and die for Helen are an illusion; the entire war, if it still can be called a war, is an illusion. At the play's end, the living far outnumber the dead the same as scenes without Helen far outnumber scenes with Helen. Not being on stage if you are Helen, not fighting if you are a soldier, are in large part the things that define a character in this play. A character is

defined by what they are not. In the next chapter, we will look at Ulysses and the illusion of identity. We can say now that Ulysses, who is the speaker of the “monumental mock’ry” speech cited above, is painfully aware of the many illusions that surround him. He is very much aware, as evidenced by his speech, that the mail can be radically different from the man hiding inside it.

As stated earlier, illusion cannot be separated from the process of evaluation. Illusion can, however, be separated from the reality it purports to represent. The armor can be separated from the life within it the same as the war can be separated from the words used to describe it. In *Hamlet*, the character of Fortinbras was everything Hamlet was not: a man of action. Hamlet’s admiration for Fortinbras was partly because Fortinbras did not merely talk about war, he actually waged it: war was not an illusion to Fortinbras. This line of reasoning is based on the commonplace, “all talk, no action.” It implies a polarity between talk and action. It also implies a substitution: a person who does much talking is a person of little action. Hamlet would be an excellent example in the first four acts of that play of a person who does much talking and takes little action. Hamlet and Troilus voice the same complaint of “Words, words, words” (*Hamlet* 2.2.193). Words, as well as the actions they are divorced from, are important in both plays.

It is the severity of the divorce, though, as well as its pervasiveness, which is unique in *Troilus and Cressida*. This paper only identifies and discusses three kinds of illusions in *Troilus and Cressida*, and the subsequent difficulties involved in arriving at their valuation. The three examples were chosen because they represent different aspects of the play. They are, by no means, the only examples of illusions that the drama has to

offer. It is one of the major points of this paper that the authenticity of a thing cannot be divorced from the process of its valuation. These two questions will continue throughout the paper explicitly as they permeate the drama implicitly: “Is it real?” and “What is it worth?” This paper argues that it is impossible to arrive at the answer to “What is it worth?” without first answering the question “Is it real?” In the universe of *Troilus and Cressida*, the first question, “Is it real?” is always in serious doubt. Helen is an illusion. She is the catalyst of a war which also appears to be an illusion. Neither the value of the war nor the value of Helen can be assessed before their authenticity is established. The value of representing a never-ending war in a play may be, as Socrates seems to suggest, educational.

Ulysses and the Value of Identity

The thirty-line prologue is delivered by an unidentified character described only as a knight in armor: Greek or Trojan remains unspecified. The knight tells us that “expectation, tickling skittish spirits / On one and other side, Trojan and Greek, / Sets all on hazard” (prologue, 20-22). Bevington glosses, “[e]xpectation, rather like Fortune, doesn’t care who wins” (131). The speaker’s apathy, or Expectation’s apathy, displayed in sharp contrast to the elevated words of the prologue, is our first indication of the divide between rhetoric and deeds. Expectation seems not to care which side wins. The speaker of the prologue, decked out for combat, in the traditional sense of the word, is surprisingly neutral in speech.

There is reason to believe the Prologue Knight’s face is hidden behind his “vizar.” This allows for any of the actors to play the Prologue Knight, allowing the audience to wonder who he is beneath his mask. In short, the drama opens with the problem of identity. Before Ulysses makes his entrance to begin his speech on degree, there is a scene where Cressida is introduced, dubbed by Garber as the “identity parade” (547), where she and Pandarus are watching the Trojan warriors pass in front of them; it is one of the many instances in the play where one character inquires of another “who is who?” Although Nestor has watched Hector both slaughter and spare Greek youths, he never knew what Hector’s face looked like. Hector’s “countenance still locked in steel”

(4.5.196) was impossible to identify. It was apparently the standard to keep the face masked. Nowotny sees the Greek camp as “Ulysses dominating, arranging, and interpreting the action,” which is accurate (286). R. W. Elton describes Ulysses as a “supreme manipulative merchant,” which is also accurate, but noticeably more cynical (95). Elton points to a noteworthy passage where Aeneas is unable to distinguish one combatant from the next. Aeneas wants to know “which is that god in office, guiding men?” (1.3.231). The god in office can also be applied to identity issues in the mystery of state speech discussed below. Aeneas complains, or pretends to, that the rules of engagement require full armor. The speaker of the prologue, not the only unidentified knight in the story, initiates problems of identity which recur throughout the drama. The other unidentified knight is the knight in act five whose armor stimulates Hector’s latent materialism.

Sandwiched between these two knights is the bulk of the play, as well as the role of Ulysses. Ulysses refers to himself, with the first sentence he speaks in the drama, in the third person (1.3.54-58). This is an instance where the performance would be much more confusing than the script. Ulysses also ends his introductory speech with a reference to himself in the third person. After referring to himself twice in the third person, requesting permission for “Ulysses” to speak, Agamemnon grants permission. It is at that moment that the audience is fully aware of the identity of Ulysses. This is where Ulysses begins his “degree” speech. This speech is designed to answer the question,

“What honey is expected?” (1.3.83). I will elaborate on the sexual overtones this question poses in the next chapter.

In plays past, such as *Henry V*, we have seen the convention of a long speech (in fact including honey bees) where the words describe exactly the action that is to follow. The figurative “band of Brothers” from *Henry V* contrasts sharply with the biological band of brothers in *Troilus and Cressida* who spend more time debating about each other’s concubine than uniting together against their theoretical enemy. Henry’s victory at real life Agincourt was, and still is, a source of British Pride. Says historian Anne Curry, the portrait of a vastly outnumbered English army is “only a myth, but it’s a myth that’s part of the British psyche” (Glanz 2). If Curry is correct, the authentic battle of Agincourt was an illusion from the day it was waged. Whether or not it was illusion, Shakespeare was adequately nostalgic to portray Henry as a real life hero; no such nostalgia exists in *Troilus and Cressida*. The action that follows Henry’s bee speech (*Henry V* 1.2.187-204) is what the audience would expect it to be; Ulysses, following the knight in the prologue’s example, debunks expectations.

Before Ulysses starts on the lengthy answer to “What honey is expected?” (1.3.83), he tells the audience that “Degree being vizarded, / Th’unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask” (1.3.83-84). It is impossible to tell who is of noble rank and who is of questionable or low rank behind the mask: all appear the same. The mask, in effect, is a great equalizer. At this point, Ulysses starts a speech where equality is to be *avoided* with almost religious fervor; distinction of rank is devoutly to be wished. Ulysses remains

“masked” throughout this speech, a speech which is comically counterpoint to all he is about to do. Obsequiously fawning to an elder statesman (Nestor) and king (Agamemnon) alike, Ulysses positions himself as senior dispenser of wisdom. He jumps his rank as he is cautioning against such behavior, seemingly unaware of his true identity. The identity being hidden is increasingly Ulysses’ identity. Of course, this is in radical contradiction to the overt thrust of the degree speech, a speech which emphasizes the supremacy of monarchy, everything in its place, and the natural order of things.

W. R. Elton poses the question, “If value, knowledge, and identity appear to be relative, what principles of order must a politic spokesman for the state espouse?” (98). Elton sees Ulysses as the ultimate pragmatist who is essentially pushing the natural order of things in preference to utter chaos. Elton points out that at the end of the degree speech, it appears to Aeneas that Agamemnon cannot tell the difference in rank between soldiers, thus “Ulysses addresses himself” (99). The degree speech has completely the opposite effect it was supposed to have had. Ulysses, as it turns out, is far more ambitious than simply reigning in chaos with his flamboyant orations. “Comparisons are odious,” Dogberry tells us. To underscore his point, Dogberry adds his own comparison, “palabras neighbor Verges” (*Much Ado About Nothing* 3.5.12). In the universe of *Troilus and Cressida*, all commerce is relative; it is based on a comparison to something else of more or less value.

Aside from the comment about the vizar, the degree speech is a rather conventional speech applauding the natural order of things and obedience to the

monarch. “This much-discussed speech contains, as it has been exhaustively shown, a series of Medieval commonplaces” (Potter 33). The drama that follows this speech is unlike the drama that followed Henry V’s speech; it is more a satire of his previous play rather than an endorsement of it. It is, most certainly, not the honey the audience is expecting. “Despite his high council schemes, for example, Ulysses’ strategies are eventually consummated through the low angry passions of an unchivalrous Greek bereft of his lover” (Elton 96). I would agree with this and add as an afterthought that Ulysses also takes an odd pleasure from observing Troilus bereft of Cressida as well. Like Achilles, Troilus is enraged to fight, none of which goes unnoticed by Ulysses. Ulysses spends much of the play drifting from the high-minded degree speech. Marjorie Garber points out that the split between words and deeds is almost immediate: “[n]o sooner does Ulysses laud the universal value of ‘degree’ and hierarchy than, in the next moment, he argues that the inferior Ajax be substituted for the incomparable Achilles” (6). From this early point in the play (1.3.54-58), Ulysses’ spoken agenda of degrees and authentic agenda of manipulation seem headed in different directions.

The “degree” speech is delivered to, among others, Agamemnon the king and old Nestor, both in their own ways symbolic of the established order: the surface meaning which Ulysses passionately claims to desire to keep in place. As Garber shows, Ulysses is violating these professed values as quickly as he can claim to possess them. “Values are social norms,” says business analyst Stephen Covey, “They’re personal, emotional, subjective and arguable” (48-9). By the end of the drama, Nestor and Ulysses are seeing

the war from two different perspectives. Both assume the role of Greek choruses, but Nestor spots “a thousand Hectors in the field” (5.5.19) where Ulysses sees only Troilus. Both Nestor and Ulysses say essentially the same thing: the Trojans are fighting fiercely. Nestor describes the enemy as a formidable adversary; Ulysses uses poetry to describe his admiration for the Trojan he has befriended and guided through the Greek encampment. Agamemnon and Nestor have values which rigidly adhere to the degree speech as Ulysses seems concerned with praising his new friend Troilus. Ulysses has relegated the war to the background in a way the others have not.

Wendell Barry, the economist, has a slant similar to Covey’s. Barry sees some of the economic virtues of land husbandry as “honesty, thrift, care, good work, generosity . . . imagination, from which we have compassion” as well as the value of the land to renew itself. Barry goes on to say “things of absolute value (such as unpolluted water) [are] beyond and above any price that could be set upon them by any market” (19). Although neither writer is a psychologist nor theologian, both share the inclination to define the word “value” as an essentially human experience, even spiritual. They see value as centered in, and central to, the human condition.

Although Ulysses uses this massive speech to underscore degrees of rank among individual men, he has also mentioned, in passing, that these important degrees of rank are concealed behind the vizar, or mask that covers the face. The face behind the mask initiates plot twists for Ajax and Hector; later Hector’s less than chivalrous behavior toward the man behind the suit of armor costs Hector his life. The separation between the

illusory armor and the authentic soldier wearing it is reiterated again by Ulysses as he attempts to manipulate Achilles into combat in the “monumental mock’ry” speech. Ulysses concludes this speech by comparing past deeds to “a rusty mail” (3.3.153). Bevington glosses this phrase as “a mocking trophy of forgotten noble deeds, like fully armed figures carved on tombs, or like armor hung up in churches at the tombs of dead knights (such as the Black Prince’s armor in Canterbury Cathedral)” (251).

The Black Prince, and there is no evidence his armor was black, first received the appellation in writing from Shakespeare himself in *Richard II* (“Black Prince”). The armor of the Black Prince hangs over his tomb at Canterbury Cathedral. Although the prince’s remains were found in France, by the roadside, in mud, he is nonetheless honored for his heroic chivalry in battle. This fact would lend further credence to the theory that Ulysses is similar to Homer’s Ulysses and in agreement with Falstaff’s slant on valor. Being the son of royalty, the Black Prince would undoubtedly have expensive, high quality armor, similar to a man of Ulysses rank, either one of which the mighty Hector would be willing to kill for. Although the body of the Black Prince that was inside the armor perished, the legend of the Black Prince lives on.

As Ulysses continues to manipulate Achilles through words, he arrives at his mystery of state speech, which Elton views as reinforcing the earlier “degree” speech. Ulysses’ other major speech, his comments about the “mystery of the State,” reinforces the secrecy operating behind the mask:

There is a mystery—with whom relation

Durst never meddle—in the soul of state,
Which hath an operation more divine
Than breath or pen can give expresse to. (3.3.203-07)

Ulysses invokes a religious sanctuary, elevating a merely political model to an untouchable religious model; he describes an operation so divine it cannot be put into words. This speech, like the degree speech, seems to endorse the outright superiority, almost divinity, of an absolute monarch ruling over an absolute state. There may also be a swipe at the Catholic mystery of transubstantiation, a mystery Martin Luther had been assailing quite aggressively since the early sixteenth century. Again, the mystery seems to be whether Ulysses is concerned with divine states of the soul or bereft lovers. His words are increasingly divorced from his action.

As the separation of words and deeds grows wider, Ulysses' behavior eventually inverts his claimed priorities in terms of deeds, loyalties, and ultimately the words themselves. Ulysses does not simply devolve into a different person. He devolves into his polar opposite. Ulysses began, as Gardner suggests, almost immediately arguing in contradiction to his degree speech for the substitution of Ajax. The argument for Ajax is so subtle it goes unnoticed by Agamemnon or any of the Greek camp who listened to the degree speech. During his final sentence of the play, Ulysses seems somewhat less loyal to the Greek cause:

Roaring for 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. (5.5.37-42)

These lines are significant in several different ways. Primarily, “careless force and forceless care” are a reversal of order, effectively exiting the play where he entered: the order of things. Ulysses is the one character in the play who insisted the universe and everything in it maintain a pure and unbroken “line of order” (1.3.88). Ironically, the man who gave us the ultimate speech on the order of things, reverses the order of his words in his last line. Ulysses is the primary spokesman for a place for everything and everything in its place. Some may argue the label “hypocrite” is appropriate for Ulysses. It is more accurate, and a bit more forgiving, to describe Ulysses as having a well-ordered vision of himself, the Greek cause, and the universe which simply do not mesh with reality.

Ulysses’ perception of himself and his universe is an illusion. After uttering these lines, the talkative Ulysses disappears from the play, or at least from sight. In these final lines, Ulysses has become similar to the knight who delivers the prologue in several important ways. First, Ulysses the Greek commander seems to have some degree of admiration as he watches Troilus the Trojan redeem himself; this echoes the knight of the prologue’s detachment of “expectation, tickling skittish spirits” (prologue 20).

Expectation, like Fortune, does not care who wins. Imagine Henry V saying this at the conclusion of the Battle of Agincourt, a major confrontation between England and

France in 1415 during the Hundred Years' War. The French had a major "expectation" to win an easy battle. According to historian David T. Zwiaback, the English take great pride in the memory, bordering on myth, of a bedraggled English contingent overcoming the French, who outnumbered the British by four to one. There is great disagreement among historians as to how the English accomplished this. Most agree that the English triumphed due to a combination of advantages, both strategic and natural. The English had a better disciplined force, what Shakespeare refers to as a "band of brothers," as the men had fought many battles together and were used to working as a team. Also, the British weren't clad in heavy suits of armor, such as the French, who were heavily armed in suits which bogged them down in the deep mud from the rain the night before, and actually choking many to death. The attitude among the French leaders was that no one wanted to take the blame for the unexpected, humiliating defeat. According to Christopher Hamme, a historian writing about the Hundred Years' War, the myth throughout the English populace at this time and throughout history has been that the win can be attributed to their devotion to their Saint Crispin, an English holy figure on whose holiday the battle fell.

Besides being an inversion of order, the language is exceptionally elevated here, even for Ulysses. Hendiadys such as "careless force and forceless care" show up only during the plays written "for five years or so past *Hamlet* through the great run of plays that included *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*, after which hendiadys pretty much disappear again" (Shapiro 287). Unlike Homer's hero, Ulysses shows little interest in actual combat himself; his preoccupation with prodding his fellow commander Achilles, his equal in rank, suggests, again, Ulysses is trying to manipulate somebody of

inferior rank. As Ulysses said from the start, we really do not know who is under the vizar or what, if anything, he values: we only have his words.

From this point forward, we will hear no more words from Ulysses. The most likely place for Ulysses to reappear on stage would be with the rest of the Greek camp at scene ten. The stage directions for the Folio edition list the entrance of Agamemnon, Ajax, Menelaus, Nestor, Diomedes, and the rest. The only variation the Quarto has to offer is the absence of the name “Diomedes.” Everything else is the same. It is up to the discretion of the director how to interpret “the rest.” A director may choose to include Ulysses as part of “the rest,” but this may prove an awkward decision. If Ulysses is brought on stage, there are no lines for him to speak. Menelaus, for example, is without any lines in this scene. His presence, though, tends to underscore the senseless brutality of the war and its causes; nor has Menelaus established himself as much of a talker. The idea of a mute Ulysses would seem out of character. Although “the rest” allows for broad directorial interpretation, the catalog of Ulysses’ previous times on stage would resist having a Ulysses on stage who speaks no lines.

Ulysses’ final lines in the play have him journalistically reporting that Fortune seems to be favoring the Trojans. Ulysses remains behind a mask, obscuring the noble from the peasant, the same mask he describes at the very beginning of his degree speech. The possibility exists in the script to allow Ulysses to be dressed in the suit of armor Hector kills to acquire. The person wearing the attractive coat of arms is clearly from the upper class; Hector would not throw aside his chivalric code for anything less. Gordon Williams, one of the few critics to take an interest in the Unknown Knight, perceives that

“only one of superior rank would be wearing armour fine enough to arouse Hector’s rapacity” (116).

Although the Unknown Knight is clearly some sort of king or nobleman, Williams points out that he runs in fear “for his life like any lesser mortal” (117). If the elites behave under stress like commoners, like Falstaff, Williams postulates, what antiquated and unjust code awards such privileged position in the first place. Only a small minority of soldiers could own armor that expensive; this is a story of the small number of elite Trojans willing to sacrifice huge numbers of commoners for a clearly personal cause not involving the people of Troy whatsoever. Henry V was mythologized for doing precisely the opposite, his hungry and ill-equipped men, outnumbered five to one, sacrificing for the larger cause. “Like Pistol in *Henry V*, Pandar, no hero, does not die, but lives to practice his trade in the brothels that surround the Globe playhouse” (Garber 560). The intense pre-battle rhetoric, flyting, which was so common in *Beowulf* and an honored part of the chivalric tradition, is being replaced in Elizabeth’s England by Machiavelli, Falstaff, even common sense. The Unknown Knight, by refusing to exchange insults with the formidable Hector, is acting the role of a modern warrior, a portent of things to come. Hector, who has tried throughout the play to live up to the image he has of himself of chivalrous, does not, in private, emulate his public image. Like most of the characters in the drama, Hector is not what he appears to be: he succumbs to blatant materialism.

There are an equal number of reasons to believe the Unknown Knight is not Ulysses. Up until his disappearance from the stage, Ulysses has proved himself to be a talker, not a fighter. His role has been to manipulate Achilles into combat, but it has

never even crossed his mind to engage in combat himself. The Unknown Knight is also mute, a trait uncharacteristic of the Ulysses we have known up until now. If the Unknown Knight were to utter a single word, the audience would recognize if that was, or was not, Ulysses behind the mask. We are not even certain if the knight in question is Greek. We only know the desirable armor he wears is Greek. Hector is about to prove that Trojans will gladly dress in Greek armor, kill to own Greek armor, as long as the mail is suitably shiny. This is further proof of Ulysses' opening observation "Th' unwortheiest shows as fairly in the mask" (1.3.84). This validation is shortly to become an ironic reversal: the Unknown Knight is about to become the Unknown Corpse. As Hector plans to don the Unknown Knight's mail, Hector will take on the identity of a Greek, adding a new tier to the omnipresent identity issues. This attitude makes "monumental mock'ry" of armor in general and the degree speech in particular; both speech and mask have kept the identity of Ulysses, like the Unknown Knight, unknown. "Asking after the identity of an individual is a major motif in this play, and there is no other of Shakespeare's plays where people are so continually asking as to the identity of another" (Potter 31). Not knowing who is who is a major thread throughout the drama.

There are similarities between the death of the Unknown Knight and another of Shakespeare's extremely talkative characters: Polonius. Polonius talks too much in almost every scene he is in; the other characters are always telling him, in polite ways, to get to the point. Polonius is hyper-talkative in every scene except the scene he dies in; Hamlet slays Polonius in a case of mistaken identity. Ulysses is talkative, to say the least, in all of the scenes that he is in, too. If the Unknown Knight and Ulysses are the same person, Ulysses is as mute as Polonius was in his death scene. If standards are taken

seriously, and there seems some support for Nestor's observations (4.5.196 and 5.5.19), the speaker of the prologue dresses the part of an Unknown Knight as well. It is possible that the speaker of the prologue, Ulysses, and the Unknown Knight are the same person.

Had Hector lived to wear the Greek mail he killed for, he would be inviting identity issues into war where absence of identity seems to be the price of admission. The characters shared habit of "asking after the identity of an individual is a perpetual motif in the play, and there is no other of Shakespeare's plays where people are so continually asking as to the identity of another" (Potter 31). *Troilus and Cressida*, alongside *Hamlet*, is also a showcase for negative adverbs: people and things are defined in terms of what they are not. Garber points out that many of Shakespeare's characters are adequately complex as to be mixed in with real people who actually existed. It would be common, for instance, for the names of Kennedy, Lincoln, and Duncan to emerge in a general discussion of trusted slain leaders (34). Following Garber's lead, it would not be a stretch of the imagination to list Ulysses among other luminaries of his age. Although the word illusion is not used in the play, the word "sop" is used by Ulysses, and essentially carries the same danger implied by illusion. A sop would be a piece of bread or toast which floats in a glass of wine, consequently absorbing and being destroyed by the very liquid which keeps it afloat. Hamlet expresses similar fears of hydration in his "too, too solid flesh" speech (*Hamlet* 1.2.129). It is also worth noting in this play rich with the language of barter that sop can also mean bribe. Garber speculates that if the character of Hamlet were actually a playwright, he might very well be inclined to write a play such as *Troilus and Cressida* (538). Hamlet does, in fact, rewrite a few lines for the "Mousetrap," a play about the Trojan King Priam.

Ulysses warns us in his degree speech, where he assures his listeners of the firmness and fixedness of the universe, that previously “bounded waters” would wreak havoc if they ever slipped out of their natural container, making “a sop of all this solid globe” (1.3.113). Although images of this kind of disaster date back to at least Noah’s Ark, Garber points out the sly pun the playwright is making on the name of his new theater: “warning signs, signs of illusion” (28). As we often do not know who it is behind the vizar, neither do we know with any certainty which globe in Ulysses’ speech is in danger of being washed away. Garber adds another possible reading: “To ‘make a sop’ of the Globe is to reduce the audience to tears” (545). Two contemporaries of Shakespeare, Cervantes and Galileo, were giving good cause to question both “globes.”

Miguel Cervantes, who died the same year that Shakespeare died, wrote a milder assault on the popularity of chivalry and the old social order. “It seems more likely that Shakespeare’s purpose in writing the play is closer to that of Cervantes when writing *Don Quixote*” (Potter 33): destroy the influence of chivalry because chivalry appeared of little benefit to the common people.

Galileo, the Italian astronomer born the same year as Shakespeare, was a staunch advocate of Copernicus (1473-1543). Galileo, who had been publishing since the age of nineteen, was casting serious doubts on the underpinnings of Ulysses’ degree speech: the motion of heavenly bodies. Much of what Ulysses believes to be incontrovertible fact, Galileo is proving to the world of science to be loosely constructed and erratic theory based more on what the naked eye can observe than on sound physics. Ulysses has chosen the stability of the planets to underscore the stability of rank and position among men. Even today we prefer to talk about the poetic “sunrise” instead of the more

scientifically accurate earth spin: old habits die hard. Few things in 1603 Europe were more in doubt than the stability of the planets or the centrality of the globe.

Couples and the Value of Love

There are three romantic pairings in *Troilus and Cressida*, two of which can be classified, according to Garber, as courtships: “There are in fact two courtships dramatized in the plot of *Troilus and Cressida*:

- The Greeks woo Achilles, trying to get him out of his bed and onto the battlefield;
- Troilus woos Cressida, trying to get her into bed.” (Garber 538)

The prologue has warned us: “Like or find fault; do as your pleasures are” (prologue, line 30). Despite Ulysses’ massive speech imploring everyone to do as the State dictates, all the characters have been either unwilling (Achilles) or unable (Nestor) to follow the agenda set by the state; they have fought, or not fought, for their own private reasons, as if the war existed for the sole purpose of the participants’ private agendas. The one exception to this, again, would arguably be Paris. Although most others in the story can complain they have been drawn into the war because of the overpricing of Helen, concubine to Paris, Paris himself cannot. Permitting two countries to war for seven years to preserve a sordid domestic arrangement is, if believable, selfish.

The story of Paris and Helen cannot be classified as a courtship, at least not in the present tense, and is frequently portrayed throughout the play by Thersites as nothing

more than a prostitute and her customer. If there is some kind of courtly romance going on, Thersites is not buying into it, summing up the plot: “the argument is a whore and a cuckold” (1.3.70). There was a high level of denial for lunatics and fools. “Even if the fool was detected stumbling into sense, he could not be held responsible. This was the grand evasion, for the cunning dramatist could hide from official disapproval behind the fool’s privilege” (Williams 40-41). Although this grew with the proliferation of books, it was especially true in the last decades of the sixteenth century. “In 1603,” according to historian Christopher Lee, “a third of the male population had a very basic ability to read and write . . . books could only be owned by men who owned property; women were discouraged from reading; literacy in any extensive form was really confined to the higher classes” (56). Books are ubiquitous enough for Thersites to say to Ajax, “thy horse will sooner con an oration than / thou learn a prayer without a book” (2.1.16-17). As Thersites is the official fool of the play, he is also the unofficial bearer of awkward and subversive truisms. The fool acts as Ulysses’ vizar; it is difficult to tell if the person beneath the vizar is mad, subversive, or just the village idiot.

As there exists a gap between an actor and the character which he plays, there also exists a gap between money and the thing which it buys. “The gap . . . to profit on the alienation of the symbol from the real” (Hyde 343), is what both Paris and Helen are invested in defending. “The gap” is the space between what is real and the thing that is substituted for what is real. Helen is a stand-in for a wife; Paris is a stand-in for a husband. Neither is real. As has supposedly been “clear from the outset, Helen is worth a

war, the loss of countless lives, and the end of a mode of civilization” (Garber 554). In reality, both Helen and Paris are accurately appraised in Thersites’ summation.

Sterling had been the recognized currency in England since about the twelfth century. The term was applied to gold and silver plated coins denoting a standard value or purity. Sterling applied also, figuratively, to anything of sound intrinsic worth. A man with sterling qualities was quite beyond questioning. The literal value of the coin tended to reinforce the figurative value of the man, and vice versa. For centuries, this worked. The end of the sixteenth century saw a substantial shift in the economy of coin and the figurative people it represented.

Money does not exist in the conventional sense in *Troilus and Cressida* as it did in *The Merchant of Venice* and many other plays. In *Troilus and Cressida* a special type of currency, one that has no buying power, is introduced. Although Shakespeare borrows from many different currencies and cultures to fabricate this unreal economy, we begin with the Bible. Because the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are telling the same story from different perspectives, there are bound to be minor discrepancies. This is the case with Matthew and Luke, two gospel writers who recall the parable of a sparrow in slightly different detail. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29). In this gospel sparrows are being priced at two for a farthing.

The gospel of Luke quotes Jesus as asking, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?” (Luke 12:6). In Matthew’s

version, the price of eight sparrows would be four farthings; in Luke's telling, the price of ten sparrows would be four farthings. A farthing is a quarter of a penny, derived from the word "fourthing."

Matthew's version would have eight sparrows for a penny; Luke's version, presumably offering a quantity discount, would have ten sparrows for a penny. T. S. Baldwin points out that Shakespeare takes the average between Matthew's version and Luke's version, settling on a penny for nine sparrows (Bevington 186). Thersites tells Ajax, "I will buy nine sparrows for a penny" (2.1.68-69).

The Bible gives the price of either ten sparrows or eight, depending on which gospel you read. Thersites offers to buy nine sparrows for a penny, a price offered nowhere in the Bible. This is an illustration of a defunct economy which permeates, and is unique to, *Troilus and Cressida*. The play borrows other currencies from times gone by, money that has no bearing to either the Trojan War or 1603 London. A special economy was made for *Troilus and Cressida*, the most consistent characteristic of which is its uselessness. A "museum" economy, a collection of bartering systems which were once valid, but are no longer. Only the remnants of civilization long ago and far away leave a faint impression on the characters of *Troilus and Cressida*, a nostalgic glimmer in the margins of the way things used to be: a ghost economy.

Before leaving Matthew 10:29, it is worth noting that Hamlet invokes the same line of Scripture, but for a much more profound purpose. Hamlet tells Horatio, "We defy augury. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to

come. If it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come—readiness is all” (5.2.202-5). *Troilus and Cressida* is the chronological cousin, almost the twin, of *Hamlet*. The two plays share a lot of interests and techniques. They both feature an enormous amount of advice about stagecraft. They are motivated by characters who have tiny parts on stage, yet enormous impact on leading characters. The ghost of old King Hamlet appears in two very small scenes, without which there would be no play. Although Helen’s impact is pervasive, her time on stage, like old King Hamlet, is minuscule.

Although the war was started all those years ago for the benefit of Paris and his concubine, Paris seems to play the participant in a war of somebody else’s making. Paris declares of Helen, “I would have the soil of her fair rape / Wiped off in the honourable keeping of her” (2.2.148-49). Paris is complaining as if a victim. To place the word “fair” beside the word “rape” is an oxymoron, to say the least: another of the play’s paradoxes. Even if the meaning of fair is as in the commonplace “all’s fair in love and war,” it shows a rather grotesque insensitivity to the person who was abducted. Hector’s view of reality is less humane than Paris and Helen’s. Hector will chase the suit of arms at the end of the play as if killing the person within is an inconvenience which must be suffered in order to acquire the armor, or “pelt.” If selfish can be separated from greedy, Hector has won the distinction of being both selfish and greedy.

“Over the course of his career,” asserts Garber, “Shakespeare wrote three remarkable plays that linked the names of famous lovers in their titles. One of these,

Romeo and Juliet, was to become, over the ensuing centuries, the modern paradigm for romantic passion” (550). There are some similarities between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida*. Both sets of lovers operate beneath the shadow of a feud which is beyond their control. There are significant differences, though, that make it difficult to see the second pair as “romantic.” Romeo and Juliet spend most of their time on stage telling each other how fond they are of one another; Cressida spends her time on stage explaining why men cannot be trusted. The primary evidence for this is “the proportion of stage-time allotted to the two lovers whose names give the title to the play” (Potter 26). Kenneth Palmer has actually done a line count in which lovers appear *as* lovers: 33 percent in *Troilus and Cressida* compared to 91 percent in *Romeo and Juliet* (Palmer 39). In the most romantic scene Troilus and Cressida have, Cressida is riddled with doubts about whether or not Troilus is to be trusted.

While Cervantes tends to mangle and degrade the chivalric idea of courtly love, *Troilus and Cressida* demolished it completely. Although both stories feature prostitutes in place of the courtly damsel in distress, *Troilus and Cressida* takes it one step further by ensuring Troilus, the knight on a white charger, has lost his interest in combat; like brother Paris, he prefers the bedroom to the battlefield, as a result of his damsel. *Don Quixote* was the comic trashing of a Spanish aristocrat; Shakespeare’s version left out the slapstick. There was disparity in money and education both. “With the shifting of the old power base, which brought money into the hands of the vulgar, the new social demarcation was through education—classical education” (Williams 75). There always

must be a social demarcation, a system to separate those much like oneself from others (the clearly inferior), even if the separation is only a matter of degree. People, it turns out, are willing to commit huge amounts of effort and money to attaining a desired class distinction, even an artificial one. When money and the things it can buy become a little *too* available, pretensions to chivalry, fidelity, sex and combat are handy alternatives. “War in this play, like love, is understood as an elite activity, taking scant account of the commoners’ role or opinion” (Williams 115).

Troilus says to Hector, “Brother, you have the vice of mercy in you, / which better fits a lion than a man” (5.3.37-38). Little has remained from the days when Portia was saying the quality of mercy drops from the heavens. Mercy has eroded from being a quality in Portia’s world to a vice in Hector’s. In *The Merchant of Venice*, written in 1595, Portia intuits money was never the cause of the dispute and money will do nothing to correct it. Instead, Portia extols the value of mercy which, like rain, is a gift from heaven. Mercy is blessed twice: “him that gives and him that takes” (*Merchant of Venice* 4.1.186). Shylock is not impressed: he has a contract and wants it honored. Chivalry and honor are still the accepted, unquestioned models of conduct when *The Merchant of Venice* was written.

There is a possible allusion in *Phaedrus* to *Iliad* 22, lines 262-63, “As there are no trustworthy oaths between men and lions, / nor wolves and lambs have spirit that can be brought to agreement” (cited by Nehamas, 23). These lines from the *Iliad*, spoken by Achilles to Hector, come from a longer speech where Achilles emphasizes his hatred of

Hector, confirms no possible reconciliation, and vows to kill Hector with the help of Pallas Athene. In the Homeric version, Achilles throws his spear at Hector and misses. Unbeknownst to Hector, Pallas Athene retrieves the spear and gives it back to Achilles. As Hector eventually dies, he realizes some type of cheating has been done by Athene (Book 22, line 299). Hector's dead body is then stabbed repeatedly by lesser Greeks.

The word "nothing" appears in *Troilus and Cressida* several times. It is spoken, not implied or assumed, by both characters who share the title. In the middle of the play, a play which depicts the middle of a war, Troilus and Cressida are swearing their oaths of unending love for one another. As the two lovers begin "billing," Pandarus excuses himself to fetch firewood. Although billing has the primary image of "kissing," as ducks, it has a possible second meaning as in the mercantile act of "presenting the bill." As the lovers kiss, Troilus foreshadows Achilles' "fountain stirred" by asking Cressida, in non-metered prose, what dregs are "in the fountain of our love" that seems to be killing the mood? The lovers continue their conversation in prose, turning to words like "fear," "worse," "worst," "apprehend," and "monster." Cressida is the first to introduce the word "nothing" in the form of a triple negative, asking, "Nor nothing monstrous neither?" (3.2.73). Troilus' answer is "nothing but . . .," which introduces a speech about taming tigers and eating rocks. Troilus offers these soothing reassurances in hopes of making Cressida comfortable, eagerly attempting to put her back in the mood.

King Lear tells Cordelia, "Nothing will come of nothing" (1.1.89). Patricia Parker points to this line as an example of "negative increase," a reversal of "the mode of

celebration, fertility” and abundance that was enjoyed in *All’s Well that Ends Well* and other plays. In a chapter of Parker’s on dilation and inflation, *King Lear* presents a dark and problematic vision that folds into the opposite direction—nothingness (Parker 185). As Lear’s story moves from madness to sanity, his preoccupation with “nothing” is at the beginning of the play; because Macbeth moves from sanity to madness, his major speech on “nothing” concludes the play. In both plays, “nothing” is uttered by a mad king at the zenith of his madness. In neither play is the concept assumed: the word “nothing” is actually spoken by both title characters.

Cressida’s rebuttal, continuing in prose, is that men are notorious for promising more than they can deliver, especially when it comes to the sexual act. A decidedly un-reassured Cressida concludes her skeptical observations by asking, “They that have the voice of lions and the act of hares, are they not monsters?” (3.2.84-86). Here again the monster can be of two kinds: a) a human male with an animal appetite and b) a chimaera, a monster from Greek mythology which had the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a dragon. Pandarus’s repeated interruptions throughout this scene, salted by his raunchy language lend support to the claim of a monster with three parts. Troilus and Cressida return to using blank verse to make traditional vows to each other as Pandarus looks on (beginning around line 109).

It is difficult to tell what effect the presence of Pandarus has had on his niece’s nascent nuptials. Pandarus is entering and exiting the scene constantly as the young couple is attempting emotional and physical intimacy. Romeo and Juliet also had

difficulties finding alone time, though their speeches of devotion to each other, always rendered in blank verse, showed few worries of “dregs”: love was the hero and feuding parents the antagonist. In *Troilus and Cressida* it is clear who the characters *think* they are, who they truly are remains elusive. Audience empathy, in the cerebral universe of *Troilus and Cressida*, may not be quite as forthcoming.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, the legal tender for all debts public and private is, to use Dunsinburne’s phrase, “uncurrent coin.” (87). Although original claim, argument, and trade all have their appropriate valuation in *Troilus and Cressida*, money does not count; there is frequent, almost compulsive, substitution for money throughout the play. The solution that the Trojans and Greeks can agree on is military, not monetary. Paris unconvincingly complains about his isolation (as in Paris, alone, battling for a righteous cause), and Jove only knows if he had to fight this war alone, he would only hope for strength and courage to fight it with honor, etc., etc. (2.2.130-42).

His father answers Paris with searing brevity, “You have the honey . . .” (2.2.145). Paris continues his long-winded tirade, oblivious to the price his family is paying for his continued indulgences, indifferent to his father’s rebuke, an attitude more befitting an imperial lion than a brother or a son. “Again the familiar images come, Shakespeare using honey for sexual sweets” (Williams 69). King Priam has answered the question Ulysses asked at the beginning of his degree speech, what honey is expected? Paris, who has all the honey for himself, fully expects the rest of the beehive to continue

working, producing, and sacrificing for him. Shylock, although selfish in his own way, never expected any “beehive” to continue working for his benefit.

Unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, *Troilus and Cressida* does not totally rely on a heterosexual romance; nor is *Troilus and Cressida* linear as *Romeo and Juliet* is. If there is one thing that can rouse Achilles into action, it is the death of his lover Patroclus. The last line Patroclus speaks in the play is “Paris and I kiss evermore for him” (4.5.35). The homoerotic overtones in this sentence are arresting. The “him” in this case is Menelaus, who has just turned down his opportunity to kiss Cressida. The ominous “evermore” makes this a fitting, and haunting, final comment. It may be argued that all this kissing demonstrates a lack of fidelity to Achilles. The assets, however, outweigh the liabilities. It has always been a goal of Patroclus to remain above suspicion regarding his “friendship” with Achilles. There is no genuine betrayal being committed. The true betrayal would occur if the other Greek warriors found out what was really going on in Achilles’ tent. In an odd sense, the cover up and all that it implies is actually a way of staying faithful to the primacy, and privacy, of his relationship with Achilles: an act of high chivalry. Patroclus is true to himself, true to his partner, and contrary to what Polonius may think, false to many other men.

Ulysses finishes his degree speech by comparing Achilles to a bad actor, “a strutting player, whose conceit / Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich / to hear the wooden dialogue and sound” between his foot and the scaffolding of the stage (1.3.153-56). In a few years Macbeth will echo this line, wantonly bemoaning “Life’s but a

walking shadow; a poor player, / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, / And then is heard no more . . .” (*Macbeth* 5.5.24-26). Although the “poor player” Macbeth was referring to could mean several things, a bad actor was certainly one of them. Both Ulysses and Macbeth are grousing about bad actors. Throughout this section of Ulysses’ speech, Patroclus’ name is not spared either; Ulysses includes many homosexual overtones as he berates Achilles. He finishes his tirade against Achilles, as with other scenes in the play, denouncing a paradox that “is and is not” (1.3.183). Although Achilles is almost immortal, he is still vulnerable in his heel; if cut in his heel, he will die like any other mortal: paradoxically, Achilles is a human god.

Actors present an inherent polarity between timeless stage characters and the mortals who play them. Even a skilled actor from any age would experience a gap between the potentially immortal character he portrays and the poor mortal who does the portraying. The polarity would be much more pronounced, though, in a bad actor. Although the walking shadow lives only as long as the brief candle who insignificantly breathes life into it, the shadows of Cassandra and Ulysses stand ready to come to life as soon as a new “poor player” accepts the role: the polarity between mortal and immortal. The part is not only played by an actor, but in the special circumstance of satire, the actor/character portrays real life as it occurs beyond the walls of the theater. As Jaques tells us in his “All the world’s a stage” speech at the end of act 2 in *As You Like It*, the soldier is seeking a “bubble reputation” even in the cannon’s mouth, and in old age we are faced with mere oblivion. Given the musical mood of the play, explicit references to

walking shadows signifying nothing are best left out; the closeness of death and briefness of life, though, is ever present.

Achilles may have introspection, but he seems not to be able to get to the bottom of it all; nor is it helpful there is a growing consensus he is a horse. Like most of the characters in the drama, he must arrive at a valuation of his worth by weighing the valuation of others with the valuation of himself. The others' opinions may be politically motivated, inept, or just plain wrong; Achilles can certainly trust his own opinions, but these might be subject to a natural bias. The ultimate benchmark, tragically, is Cassandra. Cassandra's prognostications are as far above human error as they are beneath human belief; her predictions are priceless in theory and worthless in practice. Cassandra is the most blatant example of un-spensible wealth.

In the Homeric version, Achilles refuses to leave his tent and fight because he is upset about a female concubine Agamemnon usurped from him (although Patroclus is also a key part of the story). The ferocious warrior's sexuality in Shakespeare's version seems less ambiguous; his perception of himself as a ferocious warrior seems more in question, especially after Ulysses has planted so many seeds of doubt in such an unclear fountain. Ulysses' Machiavellian manipulations may be doing the Greek cause more harm than good.

Although it is Ulysses' supposed wish to get Achilles out of the tent and back to the battlefield, the relentless assault on Achilles' self-esteem may have the opposite effect: even when enraged to fight, Achilles believes it necessary to cheat. Ulysses

prophecies: “For yonder walls, that pertly front your town, / Yon towers, whose wanton tops do buss the clouds, / Must kiss their own feet” (4.5.229-31). The victory goes to the Greeks in the Homeric version. The end of the war is recalled in *The Odyssey* (Book 8, 1.552-84) where the Greeks sneak into the besieged Troy in a giant wooden horse. By overplaying his own hand, Ulysses may be crippling his own army. When Ulysses acts as Troilus’s voyeuristic guide to the passions of Diomedes and Cressida, it seems less clear than Achilles’ stirred fountain what Ulysses gets from this politically or militarily, if anything. After being compared to a horse, twice, once by Ulysses and once by Thersites, Achilles ruminates, “My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirred, / And I myself see not the bottom of it” (3.3.309-10). Although it makes sense to read “myself” as a simple repetition of “I,” it is equally valid to read “myself” as the thing which Achilles cannot see the bottom of. Stumbling onto an almost Hamlet-like prescience, he is immediately disproving what a horse he is.

It is sometimes unclear whether Troilus is outraged at having his girlfriend stolen, or the second humiliation of having his horse stolen by the same man who took his girlfriend. As the relationship between Troilus and Cressida has previously been deflated to a sigh, it is further deflated to one of Troilus’s material possessions: his horse. Troilus is now motivated to fight all the harder, since he has a reason for personal involvement. As Troilus had predicted earlier, Trojans would fight harder for Helen. The only reason that motivated Achilles to fight in the war at all was Patroclus. Hector has a reputation on the battlefield for allowing more of his adversaries to live than die, as did the real life

Earl of Essex. Ajax and Thersites use similar speeches of “relative” familiarity to avoid battle. Ulysses, who has no battle scene as Ulysses, is equally adept at avoiding conflict if he is also the Unknown knight. Although Ulysses is given much “applause” for the degree speech, by play’s end most characters are fighting for their own cause, not the State’s. The cause for Troy to continue the war is largely the personal gratification of a single individual: Paris. When Troilus emerges at his fighting best, it is over a horse. Troilus and Diomedes have an egocentric investment in each other which the war, at best, merely complements. Troilus has a longer, more passionate, more intense and arguably more committed relationship with Diomedes than he has with Cressida.

A Shakespearean paradox comprises a unified tri-fold structure: a contradicting polarity of two opposites on the surface, and a third meaning “underneath,” which explains the apparent contradiction. Because this third element is the reconciliation of the contradicting element, it is fair to say this third element negates the so-called conflicting elements. To complicate matters further, this third element is often implied. Sometimes there is a paradox, such as “is and is not” in *Troilus and Cressida*, where the glaring contradiction is never fully explained at all, merely hinted at. “Troilus’s despairing declaration ‘This is and is not Cressida’ tells the only real ‘truth’ the play has to offer. It is a ‘truth’ as meta theatrical as it is metaphysical; the actor who plays Cressida ‘is’ and ‘is not’ the figure of consummate desire and legendary inconstancy” (Garber 554). One of the play’s unambiguous elements is how the story ends where it began: two men fighting over a woman. The message on the futility of war is clear. Although the two men

are now Diomedes and Troilus, and the woman Cressida, it is clear that there is no end to war, if such a word as “end” even applies to a drama which is all “middle.”

It is a story that takes place long, long ago to an audience about to say goodbye to their Queen Elizabeth, a monarch who has ruled since before Shakespeare was born. Gordon Williams says “Chivalry itself may have been largely political convenience; yet there are those like Anthony (in *Antony and Cleopatra*), or Hotspur in *2 Henry IV*, who invest it with moral meaning” (75). Be that as it may, continues Williams, Prince John has no qualms about betraying rebels to their death, and Anthony “wastes his breathe expecting Octavius to meet him in single combat” (75). Although there are many similarities between *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra* an Elizabethan audience could latch on to, one is the death of chivalry.

The humanitarian mind set of chivalry was dying and the harsh pragmatism of empire was taking its place. When the old chivalry clashes with the new economy, the new economy wins every time. In a universe where garrulous rhetoricians inflate themselves into kings, where Helen has inflated the price which launched above a thousand ships, the result of owning her has deflated “kings to merchants” (2.2.83). The cost of ownership is, in part, the deflation of the owner. In act 5, scene 8 Paris appears fighting on stage, briefly, with Menelaus as Thersites is watching. In this short scene, it appears the entire war can be reduced to nothing more than a barroom brawl.

According to Joseph Campbell, a person’s spirit, the same as an actor’s, can essentially be divided into two types of life, in the person’s mind. “The moon is symbolic

of the body's life, which carries death within it. The sun is symbolic of the pure spirit that has no darkness, no death in it" (Campbell 102). As moon-life darkens and removes the way of all life, it is sun spirit's never ending love for life, that can watch with compassion as the mortal moon fades into oblivion: moon-life and sun-life, or the life of a frog and the life of a god. Every culture since the dawn of time has had a way of symbolizing both mortal and immortal life. "In our own time," says Lewis, "it is called the gene pool" (41). These two types of life, mortal and indestructible, combine to create the human condition. As the moon reflects the temporary light from another source, the sun is perpetual: the sun *is* the source; the body that dies exists to give life to the spirit that does not.

Troilus laments early in the play that "Cassandra's mad. Her brain-sick raptures / Cannot distaste the goodness of a quarrel / Which hath our several honours all engaged / To make it gracious" (2.2.122-25). This is not simply a play about valuation. It is also about who is doing the valuing. Socrates says that the people who designed the Greek language "never thought of madness as something to be ashamed of or worthy of blame; otherwise they would not have used the word 'manic' for the finest experts of all—the ones who tell the future—thereby weaving insanity into prophecy" (Plato, *Phaedrus* 244C). Ironically, Cassandra's brain-sick raptures are among the few, reliable predictions in the story; the accuracy of her prophecies, unbeknownst to the other characters in the drama, is absolute. In this story, absolute values and the people who hold them are doomed. The "richest" person in the story, Cassandra, is cursed never to find a partner.

Although Troilus and Diomedes have a very similar way of valuing people, things and horses, it is complicated by the fact that they hate each other. Hector feigns belief in intrinsic value but drops this charade when nobody is looking. DusiBerre points out that the impact of Troilus' comparison is poetry, not religion, agreeing with Nowotny that Troilus seems to be ruled, and flawed, by his poetic imagination. DusiBerre goes on to say it is almost as if he had discarded the deities. Compared to Shakespeare's other pagan plays, *Troilus and Cressida* "lacks religious dimension" (88). If this is a drama where there is a pronounced absence of God, there is also an absence of any supreme standard to which all else is measured. Such was the overt complaint of Ulysses' degree speech: the need for order.

Conclusion

Troilus and Cressida is largely about how to arrive at the value of something and who is doing the valuing. As I have shown in this paper, it is difficult to arrive at the value of something if you are uncertain whether or not what you are appraising is real. It is a moot point to argue the merits of absolute value over relative value unless one can first determine authenticity. Garber suggests the illusion refers to actors; Potter suggests the illusion refers to the inherited medieval culture. The fact there is a debate at all seems an advance of earlier criticism of *Troilus and Cressida*.

The scope of this paper has not allowed space for all the illusion issues *Troilus and Cressida* has to offer. I have only touched on the problems of Cassandra, alone the subject of another thesis. There are the less than perfect parenting skills of King Priam, head of a dysfunctional family, father to Paris. There is Paris himself, similar to the celebrity athletes of today and the illusions they suffer as a result of simply being famous. This is a story, in the tradition of *Don Quixote*, that represents illusions in the hope of demolishing them. In the nineteenth century Coleridge would talk about the willing suspension of disbelief, a human frailty which turns out to be the bread and butter of magicians, playwrights, and aging monarchs the globe over. Life, however you choose to

frame it, is an illusion; there is a necessity for that illusion, and an equally compelling necessity to debunk it.

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