

## SHAKESPEARE'S *ILIAD*: HOMERIC THEMES IN *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*

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Text of the H.W. Allen Memorial Lecture  
Ormond College, 19 September 2006

The first words of *Troilus and Cressida*'s prologue clearly announce where we are: 'In Troy, there lies the scene'. The last years of the 16th century had seen a revival of interest in the Trojan War, the most significant manifestation of which was the publication in 1598 of the first part of Chapman's 'translation' of the *Iliad*. This was not the complete poem, but contained versions of Books 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and the Shield of Achilles from Book 18. The precise date of *Troilus and Cressida* is unknown; the first reference to it is in the Stationer's Register of 7 Feb. 1603. Modern scholars tend to think that the play was first produced around the turn of the century; George Bernard Shaw was of the opinion that it came between *Henry V* and *Hamlet* and was written in 1600 as a response to Chapman's *Iliad*, holding that 'Shakespeare treated the story as an iconoclast treats an idol...It was Shakespeare's protest against Homer's attempt to impose upon the world and against Chapman in upholding him.'<sup>1</sup> Shaw also held that Cressida was 'Shakespeare's first real woman'— certainly an interesting idea, but perhaps one which tells us more about Shaw than about Shakespeare and not one that this lecture will pursue. Rather what I propose to do is cast a classicist's eye over Shakespeare's variations on a quintessentially classical theme and consider what these might tell us about the nature of Shakespeare's response to Homer. Is it in fact appropriate to call this play 'Shakespeare's *Iliad*'?

Iliadic expectations are certainly aroused by the prologue. The speaker summarises the cause of the war (the abduction of Helen by Paris) and the coalition of Greek forces which crossed the Aegean Sea to demand her return (there will be a reference later in the play to Marlowe's 'face that launch'd a thousand ships'). The most striking signposting comes towards the end of the Prologue's speech:

And hither am I come  
A prologue arm'd, but not in confidence  
Of Author's pen, or Actor's voice; but suited  
In like conditions as our Argument;  
To tell you (fair beholders) that our play  
Leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils,  
Beginning in the middle...

(*Troilus and Cressida*, Pr. 22-28)

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<sup>1</sup> *Transactions of the New Shakespere Society*, 29 Feb. 1884, quoted in P. Martin (ed.), *Shakespeare Troilus and Cressida: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan 1976), 57.

‘Suited/In like conditions as our Argument’ presumably means ‘in the garb of an Iliadic warrior’ (well, that’s what I would do if I were directing); more significantly, there is a clear reference in the words ‘beginning in the middle’ to the Roman poet Horace’s famous praise of Homer’s narrative technique:

He doesn’t start Diomedes’ return from when Meleager  
died, nor the Trojan War from the egg containing Helen.  
He always presses on to the outcome and hurries the reader  
into the middle of things (*in medias res*) as though they were quite familiar.  
(*The Art of Poetry* 146-149, tr. Rudd)

The implication clearly is that Shakespeare is undertaking a Homeric theme in a Homeric way; as the prologue leaves the stage, therefore, we might well be expecting to be plunged into the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon that occupies the first part of the *Iliad*’s first book.

That of course is not what we get. Two individuals come on stage, one armed and ready for combat, to be sure, but hardly at this stage in the play behaving like a heroic warrior, since in his very first line he declares he’s going to take his armour off (‘Call here my varlet, I’ll unarm again’). And this is not Achilles declaring that he is withdrawing from the fighting; we are not in the Greek encampment, but in Troy, and the character is Troilus. The potential Trojan hero has turned into a lovesick youth engaged in conversation with his beloved’s guardian, declaring his love in typically exaggerated rhetoric and beseeching Pandarus to aid him in his designs. Instead of Greek epic we seem to be in a Roman comedy.

So while the Prologue invites us into the *Iliad* with its wars and battles, in the opening scene of the play the love theme takes over.<sup>2</sup> The cause of the Trojan War was the abduction and retention of Menelaos’ wife, Helen, by Paris, one of the many sons of Priam, King of Troy. Helen is reputedly the most beautiful woman in the world. But Troilus will have none of this. Compared to Cressida, Helen pales into insignificance; we hear the sounds of the Trojan War going on in the background, but Troilus dismisses them as irrelevant:

Peace, you ungracious clamours, peace, rude sounds.  
Fools on both sides, Helen must needs be fair,  
When with your blood you daily paint her thus.  
I cannot fight upon this argument:  
It is too starv’d a subject for my sword.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 1.1.92-96)

The love-plot, with Pandarus engaged by Troilus to act as go-between and help him persuade Cressida to return and consummate their love, leads to the first major parody of a scene from the *Iliad* in the play. In Book 3 of Homer’s epic, Priam and Helen are on the walls of Troy,

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2 The love-plot of course derives principally from Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, which dates from the late fourteenth century. There are obvious intertextualities to be explored here, too, but it is well beyond the scope of this lecture to do so.

and Priam asks Helen to sit beside him and identify for him the leading figures on the Greek side. The conversation continues for some 80 lines, during which Helen identifies Agamemnon, Ulysses, Ajax and Idomeneus. Homer has come in for some negative criticism with respect to this scene; how can we believe (critics say) that when the Achaians have been besieging Troy for ten years, Priam isn't yet able to recognise their commanders? The answer of course is that he can recognise them perfectly well; he just wants an excuse to have the beautiful Helen sitting next to him for a while. Shakespeare cleverly manipulates this scene to fit the love-plot. Again we have an older man and a beautiful woman, but this time it is Cressida and Pandarus.<sup>3</sup> But instead of looking out at the Greeks, Pandarus has Cressida review the Trojan heroes as they return from the battlefield. Another inversion here is that it is the older man who does the identifying while the young woman does the questioning; but even though she does ask questions ('who's that?'), we get the feeling that she is just going through a charade (or a script adapted from Homer) to humour her uncle—and as with the Homeric situation, we may rightly wonder how it is that a woman whose conversation suggests she has lived anything but a sheltered life should not yet be able to recognise the most good-looking young men in town. And in any case it is not a matter of simple recognition; Pandarus is using this 'march-past' of Trojan heroes to whet Cressida's appetite for Troilus, like a brothel-keeper parading his best girls before a prospective client. First we have Aeneas, then Antenor, then hunky Hector, then pretty-boy Paris, then Helenus. Then a delicious piece of humour, when Troilus finally appears:

CRESSIDA: What sneaking fellow comes yonder?

*Enter Troilus*

PANDARUS: Where? Yonder? That's Deiphobus. 'Tis Troilus! There's a man, niece, eh! Brave Troilus, the Prince of Chivalry!

*(Troilus and Cressida 1.2.246-49)*

Pandarus slips up at the crucial moment, misled by Cressida's loaded question. After this the 'also-rans'; the stage direction says *Enter common soldiers*, but Cressida's interest does not flag:

CRESSIDA: Here come more.

PANDARUS: Asses, fools, dolts, chaff and bran, chaff and bran, porridge after meat. I could live and die in the eyes of Troilus. Ne'er look, ne'er look; the eagles are gone, crows and daws, crows and daws. I'd rather be such a man as Troilus than Agamemnon and all Greece.

CRESSIDA: There is among the Greeks Achilles, a better man than Troilus.

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3 Chapman's 1598 version of the *Iliad* does not contain Book 3, but it seems obvious enough that Shakespeare is parodying the *Teichoskopia* in this exchange. It would appear that Shakespeare had more Greek than Ben Jonson gave him credit for—or is this another argument for the proposition that 'Shakespeare' is really Marlowe in disguise?

PANDARUS: Achilles? a drayman, a porter, a very camel.

CRESSIDA: Well, well!

(*Troilus and Cressida* 1.2.261-72)

There are ‘also-rans’ in the Homeric scene also (Helen is speaking):

‘And now I can see all the other bright-eyed Achaians whom I could recognise and name for you. But there are two marshals of the people I cannot see, Kastor the horse-breaker and the boxer Polydeukes, my own brothers...’

(*Iliad* 3.234-38, tr. Hammond)

Homer ends his scene on a note of pathos; the reason why Helen cannot see her brothers is because they are dead. Shakespeare on the other hand continues with humour: Cressida will look at anyone, even the so-called ‘common soldiers’, rather than admit any interest in Troilus. (That Cressida is playing games with Pandarus becomes quite clear from her soliloquy at the end of the scene, where she acknowledges her love for Troilus and explains why she is playing ‘hard to get’.) Helen is looking back at her own people with nostalgia—these are her former friends and kinsmen whom she abandoned to follow Paris to Troy; Cressida is sizing up potential lovers.

Here then we have a Homeric episode both debunked and debased; and this is not the only time we will see Shakespeare doing this. There are other occasions though where Shakespeare’s adaptation of Homer is anything but parodic. Take for example Act 2 scene 2, where Priam and his sons debate the issue of whether or not to return Helen. This, together with the duel between Hector and Ajax (of which more anon), is based on an episode from Book 7 of the *Iliad*. Shakespeare has here considerably expanded on Homer; in Homer’s version, there are only three speakers, Antenor, Paris and Priam. Antenor opens the discussion as follows:

‘Listen to me, Trojans and Dardanians and allies, so I can tell you what my heart within me urges. Come now, let us hand over Argive Helen and all her possessions with her to the son of Atreus, for them to take away. We are fighting now with our sworn oaths broken: so I can see no good coming for us, unless we act as I say.’

(*Iliad* 7.348-53)

Paris responds with a simple refusal; he is willing to hand back the property, but under no circumstances will he give up Helen. Priam closes the ‘debate’ (such as it is) by ordering Idaios to take this offer to Agamemnon and Menelaos in the morning; this is done, and naturally the offer is refused. The issues are simple and clear-cut. Antenor draws attention to the fact that the Trojans are morally in the wrong, first in the way Paris violated the laws of hospitality by stealing Helen in the first place, and secondly by violating the terms and conditions of the duel between Paris and Menelaos in Book 3, terms ratified by solemn oaths and sacrifices to the gods. Paris continues in the position he has maintained all along; Helen was given to him by

Aphrodite, and he will not let her go. Priam again demonstrates his weakness by failing to exert the authority he ought to have over his son and ordering him to give Helen back.

In Shakespeare we have a purely family conference; there is no Antenor. Instead Priam himself opens the debate: an offer has been made by Nestor to the effect that the Greeks will settle for Helen alone—no property, no reparation, just Helen. Hector advocates giving her back; she is not worth the cost in human lives:

If we have lost so many tenths of ours  
To guard a thing not ours, nor worth to us  
(Had it our name) the value of one ten;  
What merit's in that reason which denies  
The yielding of her up?

(*Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.21-25)

Hector lacks nothing in heroism or courage; in Shakespeare he is the Trojan champion, just as much as he is in Homer. In the *Iliad* Hector is represented as acutely aware of the negative consequences of Paris's actions; in both Book 3 and Book 6 he expresses the wish that Paris had either never been born or had died young, such is the harm that he has brought to the Trojans. In Shakespeare Hector is vigorously opposed by Troilus. He accuses Hector of bean-counting; the issue is not one of weighing up the worth of one life against another, but one of honour. We thought it right at the time that Paris should abduct Helen; it would be sheer cowardice to return her under threat of force:

It was thought meet  
Paris should do some vengeance on the Greeks;  
Your breath of full consent bellied his sails,  
The seas and winds, old wranglers, took a truce,  
And did him service; he touch'd the ports desired,  
And for an old aunt whom the Greeks held captive,  
He brought a Grecian queen, whose youth and freshness  
Wrinkles Apollo's, and makes stale the morning.  
Why keep we her? The Grecians keep our aunt.  
Is she worth keeping? Why, she is a pearl,  
Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships,  
And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.72-83)

The moral issue is made more complex than it is in Homer. There, Paris's acquisition of Helen was a consequence of his choosing Aphrodite as the winner of the beauty contest between the three goddesses, Hera, Athene and Aphrodite (the well-known 'Judgement of Paris'). On this the narrative voice of the *Iliad* is unequivocal:

They [Hera and Athene] persisted with the hatred they had from the beginning for sacred Ilios and Priam and his people, because of the blind folly of Alexandros [Paris], who had scorned the goddesses when they came to his sheepfold, and gave his choice for the one who offered him dangerous lust.

(*Iliad* 24.27-30, tr. Hammond)

The Trojan War is squarely attributed to a moral failing on the part of Paris, as is also suggested by the remarks made about him by Hector in the passages to which I earlier referred. Shakespeare however says nothing of this; taking his cue perhaps from the opening of Herodotus' *Histories*, where the abduction of Helen is presented as one in a series of tit-for-tat incidents of woman-stealing between East and West that the Greeks took far too seriously, he has Troilus offer a political (or perhaps family) reason for Paris's action. The unnamed 'aunt' in question is presumably Hesione, sister of Priam, who was taken by Heracles in the previous sack of Troy and given to Ajax's father Telamon, by whom she became the mother of Teucer. In Shakespeare she is held to be the mother of Ajax too, which makes Hector and Ajax cousins (see 4.5.120). Troilus argues that since the family supported Paris at the time, they have no moral grounds for changing their minds now. He then goes on to counter Hector's argument based on value with rhetoric based on skilful conflation of Marlowe's famous 'Is this the face that laugh'd a thousand ships' speech from *Doctor Faustus* and the 'pearl of great price' passage from *Matthew* 13.45-46. Helen is certainly worth keeping.

The Homeric voice in this scene is most clearly heard from the least relevant characters. First Cassandra:

Cry, Troyans, cry, practise your eyes with tears,  
Troy must not be, nor goodly Ilion stand.  
Our firebrand brother Paris burns us all.  
Cry, Troyans, cry, a Helen and a woe;  
Cry, cry, Troy burns, or else let Helen go.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.108-12)

—this putting the moral responsibility firmly on Paris. But Cassandra is fated never to be believed, and will if anything influence the debate the other way, in spite of Hector's support. And Priam, responding here to Paris:

Paris, you speak  
Like one besotted on your sweet delights;  
You have the honey still, but these the gall,  
So to be valiant, is no praise at all.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.142-45)

That Paris's enjoyment of Helen is bringing pain and suffering to his compatriots is very much what Hector says to him in *Iliad* 6:

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Our people are dying, fighting right by the city and its steep wall—and it is because of you that the clamour of battle is blazing round this city.

(*Iliad* 6.327-29, tr. Hammond)

But in Shakespeare Paris defends himself; and unlike the Paris of *Iliad* 7, he has—or says he has—reasons for keeping Helen other than purely hormonal ones:

Sir, I propose not merely to myself,  
The pleasures such a beauty brings with it,  
But I would have the soil of her fair rape  
Wip'd off in honourable keeping her.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.146-49)

He wants to make an honest woman of her (or at least an honest man of himself). And further:

There's not the meanest spirit on our party  
Without a heart to dare or sword to draw,  
When Helen is defended: nor none so noble,  
Whose life were ill bestow'd, or death unfam'd,  
Where Helen is the subject. Then, I say,  
Well may we fight for her, whom we know well,  
The world's large spaces cannot parallel.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.156-60)

Paris echoes Troilus' argument about the worth of that for which the war is being fought; Helen is a woman without parallel. We recall the reaction of the Trojan elders to this wonderful woman in *Iliad* 3:

'No shame that the Trojans and well-greaved Achaians should suffer agonies for long years over a woman like this—she is fearfully like the immortal goddesses to look at.'

(*Iliad* 3.156-58, tr. Hammond)

She is a cause worth fighting and dying for—or so it seems to one of a romantic sensibility.

Hector's final contribution to the discussion shows that he is in fact torn between conflicting demands. He begins his speech with a philosophical argument (prefaced by one of Shakespeare's more notorious anachronisms, the reference to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Commenting on the arguments of Paris and Troilus Hector says that they have spoken well but 'superficially; not much/Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought/Unfit to hear moral philosophy' (2.2.165-67). The reference is to Aristotle *NE* 1.3 1095a2ff., where one of the reasons given for this

showing that both natural and human law demand that the marriage bond be upheld, and hence that Helen should be returned to her rightful husband; however, he then goes on to say that he will support his brothers in their resolution to keep her. At the end of the scene he is clearly influenced by Troilus' rhetorical appeal to the glory to be won in war. Here we certainly see the Hector of the *Iliad*, whose response to the appeal of Andromache to stay inside the walls and direct operations from there is very much in terms of the heroic value system:

‘Wife, all that you say is surely in my mind also. But I would feel terrible shame before the men of Troy and the women of Troy with their trailing dresses, if like a coward I skulk away from the fighting. Nor is that what my own heart urges, because I have learnt always to be brave and to fight in the forefront of the Trojans, winning great glory for my father and for myself.’

(*Iliad* 6.441-46, tr. Hammond)

Even though he persists throughout this scene in his position that the right thing to do is to return Helen, a position for which he advances both pragmatic and philosophical argument, yet in the end the Homeric Hector prevails; war is the place where men win glory, and if there is no Helen then there is no war. Act 2 scene 2 closes with Hector looking forward to the outcome of the challenge he has issued to the Greeks. Cassandra's prophecy in the end has as little effect on him as on anyone else, in spite of his using it at the time to caution Troilus against the prospect of ‘bad success in a bad cause’ (2.2.117).

It is time now to look at Helen. Who is this ‘pearl without price’, this ‘woman without parallel’? In Homer she is a complex character; rather like Shakespeare's Hector in the scene we have just been considering, head and heart send conflicting messages. Nowhere is this more apparent than at the end of *Iliad* Book 3. Here Aphrodite has miraculously saved Paris from certain death at the hands of Menelaus and spirited him away from the battlefield into his bedroom. She then goes to fetch Helen. At first Helen refuses:

I will not go to him—that would bring shame on me—to serve that man's bed.  
All the women of Troy will blame me afterwards: and I have misery enough in  
my heart.

(*Iliad* 3.410-12, tr. Hammond)

—but confronted by Aphrodite's threats, she is forced to go. In her conversation with Paris she compares him unfavourably with Menelaus; on the criterion of martial prowess, he is nowhere near the man that Menelaus is. But Paris speaks gently and seductively to her, reminding her of the first time they ever made love after he took her from her home in Sparta, telling her that he loves her now even more than he did then; and she follows him to bed. This is an absorbing psychological moment. Aphrodite of course is the goddess of sexual love; to be ‘compelled by Aphrodite’ I think symbolises being in the grip of a passion you cannot control. Helen does

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view is that a young man ‘tends to follow his passions’. Hector in fact echoes this too (‘The reasons you allege do more conduce/To the hot passion of distemper'd blood...’, 2.2.168f.).

not choose to be in love with Paris, she does not *want* to be in love with Paris, and she tries as hard as she can to convince herself that he is nowhere near as good as her husband. But in the end the power of Aphrodite and Paris's charm and physical attractiveness overcome her, and in spite of her acknowledgement that it is wrong ('that would bring shame on me'), she ends up as she did before in Paris's bed. Further complexities are added to Homer's portrait through the way she is represented elsewhere in the poem. On a number of occasions she expresses self-loathing for what she has done, as in her conversation with Priam earlier in this book or in her conversation with Hector in Book 6. And yet the first time we meet her in the poem she is working at a complicated piece of weaving, in which she is depicting 'many scenes of the conflict between the horse-taming Trojans and the bronze-clad Achaians, which they were enduring for her sake at the hands of Ares' (3.125-28), almost revelling in the fact that she has all these men fighting over her; and in the conversation with Hector I just mentioned, she concludes by remarking that she and Paris will be 'themes of song for future generations' (6.357f.)—in other words achieving that same kind of immortality through memory that heroes on the battlefield seek. She is a fascinating woman; and we have already seen how the Trojan elders react to her: 'No shame that the Trojans and well-greaved Achaians should suffer agonies for long years over a woman like this.'

Helen makes one appearance in *Troilus and Cressida*, in Act 3 scene 1. If we are expecting someone like Homer's Helen, we are going to be sorely disappointed. Sexy she may be, but she comes across as a complete air-head, seeking nothing but entertainment and the pleasure of male flattery. The following exchange between her and Pandarus gives some indication:

PANDARUS: My niece is horribly in love with a thing you have, sweet  
Queen.

HELEN: She shall have it my Lord, if it be not my Lord Paris.

PANDARUS: He? No, she'll none of him, they two are twain.

HELEN: Falling in after falling out may make them three.

PANDARUS: Come, come, I'll hear no more of this, I'll sing you a song now.

HELEN: Ay, ay, prithe, now: by my troth, sweet Lord, thou hast a fine forehead.

PANDARUS: Ay, you may, you may.

HELEN: Let thy song be love: this love will undo us all. Oh Cupid, Cupid,  
Cupid.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 3.1.106-120)

The song is as superficial as the conversation that leads up to it. This Helen has none of the complexity or robustness of Homer's; there are perhaps vague echoes of Homer's Helen's self-criticism in the words 'this love will undo us all' and of heart overcoming head in her last words in the scene to Paris ('sweet above thought I love thee'), but there is a saccharine quality about this woman that quickly palls (the word 'sweet' is used so often in this scene that it makes one want to throw up). This Helen might well join the company of those equally artificial 'twenty love-sick maidens' of Gilbert's *Patience*; like them, she is obsessed with 'love'. Can *this* be 'the face that launched a thousand ships'? The contrast with Homer's Helen is I

think deliberate and makes one call into question the remarks of Troilus and Paris in Act 2 scene 2. The disjunction between the image of Helen evoked there and the reality presented to us here demonstrates how in the minds of the participants in the Trojan War she has become over-romanticised; to justify the war's continuation she *must* be a woman without parallel, no matter what the reality might be. Further, comparison is clearly invited between this barbie-doll Helen and the much more complex and interesting Cressida; why is it (we ask) that Cressida can be blithely handed over to the Greeks as a trade for Antenor by the very same people who consistently refuse to hand back Helen and so save the lives of all those who are to be killed fighting over her? One wonders why Troilus does not ask this question himself, particularly when he has himself, as we have seen, drawn his own comparison between Helen and Cressida back in Act 1 scene 1. The key I think lies in his own words on that occasion: 'Fools on both sides, Helen *must needs* be fair/When with your blood you daily paint her thus' (1.1.93-94). They *have* to believe she is beautiful; if she is not, then they are fools indeed. The Greek Diomedes expresses a more cynical and unhappily realistic view later in the play:

For every false drop in her bawdy veins  
 A Grecian's life hath sunk: for every scruple  
 Of her contaminated carrion weight,  
 A Trojan hath been slain. Since she could speak,  
 She hath not given so many good words breath,  
 As for her Greeks and Troyans suffered death.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 4.1.69-74)

Let us now move to the Greek side. The *Iliad* of course is far more focused on the Greek or (as Homer calls them) Achaian side than the Trojan; Homer announces his theme in the opening lines as the anger of Achilles, and it is that that forms the thread of the plot. In *Troilus and Cressida*, as we have seen, Iliadic expectations are raised and then blocked as we find ourselves in the middle of the love-plot; but when we do eventually find ourselves in the Greek camp in Act 1 scene 3 we are in more familiar territory. It is a meeting of senior staff, at which Achilles is a notable absentee; his absence is thus explained by Ulysses:

The great Achilles, whom opinion crowns  
 The sinew and the fore-hand of our host,  
 Having his ear full of his airy fame,  
 Grows dainty of his worth, and in his tent  
 Lies mocking our designs.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.142-46)

Shakespeare in fact makes no reference to the particular cause of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon that looms so large in Homer, Agamemnon's abduction of Briseis. Instead, Achilles' attitude is represented as symptomatic of a general malaise afflicting the Greek army, a lack of respect for proper social order. Agamemnon is not the incompetent commander that we find in the *Iliad*, where he is portrayed as only holding the position that he does be-

cause he happens to be his father's son and as far more concerned with the perks of office than with competent performance of his duties. Certainly he is not particularly perceptive, ascribing the fact that the Greeks have been unable to take Troy even after seven years to Jupiter's penchant for testing people's staying-power, an error from which Ulysses disabuses him; but there is no question that he tries his best. Shakespeare has deliberately rewritten the Homeric account to put Achilles in the wrong, denying him any valid cause for his negative attitude towards the duly appointed king and commander-in-chief. As we shall see, there is very little that one could call heroic about Achilles in this play; the trajectory of the Greek plot in fact runs parallel to that of the *Iliad*, from the analysis of dissension within the Greek camp at the beginning to Achilles killing Hector at the end, but the character assigned to him is very different. But of this more later. First I want to look more closely at Ulysses.

The centrepiece of the first part of Act 1 scene 3 (before Aeneas enters to issue Hector's challenge) is the long speech about order and degree, which goes for over 60 lines of densely argued blank verse. To be successful, society must be properly structured, with the King at its apex. Social order should in fact reflect cosmic order, an idea that goes back to Cicero and the Stoics:

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,  
 Observe degree, priority, and place,  
 Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,  
 Office, and custom, in all line of order:  
 And therefore is the glorious planet Sol  
 In noble eminence, enthron'd and spher'd  
 Amidst the other, whose med'cinable eye  
 Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,  
 And posts like the commandment of a king,  
 Sans check, to good or bad.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.85-94)

The problem with the Greek army is that this is not happening; the order imposed by degree, that is, by respect for the person above you, has disappeared, to be replaced by 'an envious fever/Of pale and bloodless emulation' (133f.). And for this state of affairs Achilles is primarily responsible. The Homeric referents in this speech are largely to *Iliad* Book 2. Shakespeare has Ulysses preface his remarks with a bee simile:

When that the General is not like the hive,  
 To whom the foragers shall all repair,  
 What honey is expected?

(*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.81-83)

In the *Iliad*, the very first of those extended similes for which Homer is famous occurs early in Book 2 (there are none in Book 1), and also uses bees as the figure of comparison. The Achaian army musters on the plain before Troy:

As when a mass of bees comes swarming out from a hollow in the rock in a never-ending stream: squadrons take wing this way and that, and they fly in tight clusters to settle on the springtime flowers; so the many tribes of the Achaians marched in troops from their ships and their huts...

(*Iliad* 2.87-93, tr. Hammond)

Homer's simile suggests that the Achaian soldiers are like bees, mustering in squadrons as bees cluster around their queen in springtime swarms, here assembling to seek direction from the super king-bee, Agamemnon. They will be sorely disappointed, as Agamemnon by delivering a totally inappropriate speech causes them to scatter and run in an undisciplined, disorderly stampede for the ships. It is left to Ulysses to bring them back to order. He has one speech for his social equals, another for his social inferiors; it is to the latter that Shakespeare refers:

'Friend, sit quiet and listen to what others tell you, your superiors—you are a coward and a weakling, of no account either in war or in counsel. We cannot all be kings here, every one of the Achaians. To have each man his own master is ruin: there must be one master, one king, the man endowed by the son of devious-minded Kronos with the sceptre and the ways of law, to make judgments for his people.'

(*Iliad* 2.200-06, tr. Hammond)

Ulysses in the *Iliad* is as aware as anyone of the shortcomings of the commander-in-chief; nonetheless he realises that respect for the office is of paramount importance to maintaining social cohesion. One must believe the king to be worthy of respect, just as one must believe Helen to be a woman of unparalleled beauty; otherwise it is the end of the world as we know it.

Ulysses reinforces this world-view in the *Iliad* by putting an end once and for all to the unruly behaviour of the objectionable Thersites. This character appears only in Book 2, raising his head only to have it firmly and decisively kicked. Here is how Homer describes him:

His head was full of vulgar abuse, reckless insubordinate attacks on the kings, with anything said that he thought might raise a laugh among the Argives. He was the ugliest man that went to Ilios...He was hated most by Achilles and Ulysses, the two whom he constantly reviled.

(*Iliad* 2.213-16, 220-21)

He is dragged back into line by Ulysses striking him with the sceptre, the symbol of kingly authority. When we first meet him in *Troilus and Cressida* he is also being struck, this time by Ajax, but this has nothing to do with any attempt to restore order. Ajax is acting out of personal pique because Thersites won't tell him about Hector's challenge. And Thersites is far from cowed, because as we have already learned he is under the protection of none other than Achilles himself. Here we have a major inversion of Homer, who states that Achilles and Ulysses were the ones who hated him most. And yet it is interesting to note that when Ther-

sites speaks for the first and only time in the *Iliad*, the criticisms he makes of Agamemnon are very similar to those made by Achilles in Book 1. Shakespeare exploits and expands upon this similarity, turning Thersites into a major comic character in his play and making him a close associate of Achilles and Patroclus. He is certainly ready with 'vulgar abuse, reckless insubordinate attacks and anything said that might raise a laugh'; but whereas in the *Iliad* he is quickly put back in his place, in *Troilus and Cressida* he becomes emblematic of the disorder that Ulysses identifies as the disease eating away at the Greek war effort. Achilles and Patroclus are said by Ulysses to be amusing themselves in Achilles' hut by caricaturing their fellow commanders; the freedom of Thersites to go around mocking and insulting everyone is a clear extension of this. Achilles himself is by no means exempt from Thersites' railing, but far from earning him Achilles' hatred as Homer maintains, Shakespeare's Achilles sees this as a source of amusement. Thersites in effect has become Achilles' Fool. And it is Thersites who brings the posturing of the commanders very much down to earth. When Agamemnon and the other members of the Greek High Command come on their first attempt to talk Achilles round (itself a parody of the embassy to Achilles described in *Iliad* Book 9), Thersites comments:

Here is such patchery, such juggling, and such knavery: all the argument is a cuckold and a whore, a good quarrel to draw emulations, factions, and bleed to death upon.

*(Troilus and Cressida 2.3.77-80)*

It is the role of the Fool to pierce through the cloud of posturing and rhetoric with which the upper-class characters who spout blank verse clothe their actions; the plain truth of the matter is that the whole argument is indeed a cuckold (Menelaus) and a whore (Helen), with no more status than a bar-room brawl over the favours of a prostitute. Earlier Thersites had wished the 'Neapolitan bone-ache' (presumably syphilis) on the whole army—'for that methinks is the curse dependent on those that war for a placket' (2.3.21-23). In Homer's aristocratic world there is no room for insubordinate, foul-mouthed individuals like Thersites; in the sick world of Shakespeare's Greek encampment his physical and verbal ugliness (his first words in the play image Agamemnon as covered all over with ruptured boils), he is a constant, nagging presence. There is serious debasement here.

Which inevitably brings us back to Achilles. In Act 2 scene 3, Thersites accuses Achilles, Patroclus, Agamemnon and himself of all being fools. Why?

Agamemnon is a fool to offer to command Achilles, Achilles is a fool to be commanded of Agamemnon, Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool—and Patroclus is a fool positive.

*(Troilus and Cressida 2.3.66-70)*

Shortly after this Agamemnon and his staff enter, at which Achilles retires with Thersites into his hut. The link between Achilles and Thersites is here made explicit by stage-direction; we end up with Agamemnon and his staff outside, Achilles and Thersites inside, and Patroclus acting as go-between. As I said earlier, Shakespeare has chosen to ignore the specific cause of Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon that is central to Homer's narration of the incident in Book

1; on the other hand, there is a strong sense in Homer that the abduction of Briseis was little more than the proximate cause that caused a long-standing resentment between the two men to break out into open quarrel. The issue between them is not so much Briseis as the question of who is the best of the Achaians. Achilles chooses to opt out of a social system that fails to reward individuals according to their deserts; he retires to his hut, with the intention of letting the Trojans get the upper hand and so forcing Agamemnon to see the error of his ways. By withdrawing his services he will cause the deaths of many of his comrades, a questionable moral position in a society which lives by the ethical rule of 'help your friends and harm your enemies'. Achilles' position becomes more questionable when in Book 9 Agamemnon offers a full apology backed up by an impressive list of gifts of reparation, but Achilles refuses point-blank to accept either gifts or apology. Shakespeare's Achilles is represented as withdrawing simply because of pride; he has no Briseis-incident to complain of, but simply regards himself as 'too good' to submit to Agamemnon's authority, a position in which Thersites is only too happy to back him up. And whereas Homer's Achilles at least received the embassy from Agamemnon courteously, offering them food and drink according to the accepted standards of hospitality and speaking with them face-to-face, Shakespeare's Achilles simply retires inside his tent, forcing Agamemnon to employ first Patroclus and then Ulysses as go-betweens. There is of course an added twist, in that Homer's Agamemnon also relies on go-betweens, sending Ulysses, Phoenix and Ajax to argue the case for him; one may note also that Shakespeare's Agamemnon offers nothing by way of apology (though of course he has nothing to apologise for) but simply stands outside Achilles' hut reciting a moral lecture. After Ulysses returns reporting failure, Agamemnon asks Ajax to go in:

Let Ajax go to him.  
Dear Lord, go you and greet him in his tent;  
'Tis said he holds you well, and will be led  
At your request a little from himself.

*(Troilus and Cressida 2.3.188-91)*

Alert readers of the *Iliad* will recall that in Book 9 it is in fact Ajax who has the greatest impact on Achilles, causing him to resile from his original declaration that he will sail home the next day to saying that he will return to the fray when the fighting reaches his own ships. Homer's Ulysses is considerably miffed that Ajax has had more success with his short, blunt speech than he did with his long and elaborately crafted one; Shakespeare's Ulysses obviates this possibility by persuading Agamemnon not to let Ajax go in at all. In fact he has other plans for Ajax. And unlike Homer's Ulysses, he is given the opportunity of a second go at Achilles, in which he will use some very different techniques of persuasion (Act 3 scene 3).

A significant element in the plot of this play is the duel between Hector and Ajax, which develops from the time of Aeneas' relaying Hector's challenge to the Greeks at 1.3.260ff. to the actual duel in the final scene of Act 4. The Homeric version occupies the first half of *Iliad* 7; there, Hector, after calling a halt to the battle, issues a challenge to the Achaians to choose a champion to fight against him, the prize being the honour and glory of victory (remembering that the code these warriors live by is 'either to win glory yourself or yield it to another'). For

a while the Achaians are too frightened to respond; but after Nestor has upbraided them for their cowardice, nine nominate themselves as champion, and the issue is decided by a lottery which Ajax wins. The two arm and set to; and while Ajax is the only one actually to draw blood, the duel is eventually declared to be a draw and ends with an exchange of presents. All very gentlemanly, and not much more than a piece of by-play. In *Troilus and Cressida*, however, the duel is far more integrated into the plot. Ulysses sees it as an opportunity to bring Achilles down a peg by putting Ajax up as the champion, and using every opportunity to advance Ajax's reputation as a warrior against that of Achilles. The amusing thing about this is that Ajax is portrayed as having a similar intellectual capacity to Obelix in *Asterix the Gaul*, but without Obelix's engaging personality. It is no accident that when we first meet Ajax we see him resorting to physical violence (this in the scene where we first meet Thersites, which I've already mentioned). This is his way of dealing with problematic issues. He is inclined to deal with the 'Achilles problem' in the same way: 'If I go to him, with my armed fist I'll pash him o'er the face' (2.3.216). Homer's Ajax is no intellectual giant, but at least he observes the norms of civilised behaviour; Shakespeare's is a complete moron, and is putty in the hands of Ulysses and Nestor, who easily convince him to regard himself as Achilles' superior. The lottery to choose the Grecian champion is rigged; whereas in Homer's account we read that 'out of the helmet sprang the lot the men were hoping for, Ajax's' (*Iliad* 7.182), in Shakespeare Ulysses makes it quite clear that this is not a matter of chance:

No, make a lott'ry,  
And by device let blockish Ajax draw  
The sort to fight with Hector.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.374-76)

It is the fact that Achilles is losing out to Ajax in the matter of reputation that Ulysses uses in his second attempt to persuade Achilles to return to the fold in Act 3 scene 3; that plus the fact that he knows that Achilles is in love with Polyxena, one of Priam's daughters, something that is certainly not part of Homer's version of the story (but is found in Euripides and Seneca). In Shakespeare, it allows a much more sinister construction to be put on Achilles' behaviour; is he reneging on his commitment to the Greek war effort because he is sleeping with the enemy? 'Better would it fit Achilles much,/To throw down Hector than Polyxena' (3.3.208f.).

Ajax will meet Hector in the duel; but Ulysses' speech moves Achilles to the extent that he insists on meeting Hector after the duel is over. The duel itself turns out to be something of an anti-climax, lasting only 4 lines of text before Hector withdraws in deference to the fact that Ajax is his kinsman—taking his cue from the similarly chivalrous gesture of Diomedes in his encounter with Glaucus in *Iliad* 6. In the conversation that follows, Achilles shows an inordinate interest in Hector's body:

Tell me you Heavens, in which part of his body  
Shall I destroy him? Whether there, or there, or there,  
That I may give the local wound a name,

And make distinct the very breach, whereout  
Hector's great spirit flew.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 4.5.241-45)

Ostensibly Achilles is trying to go one up on Ajax, marking down Hector as doomed to die by *his* sword. But the speech has interesting undertones, given the insinuations of homosexuality made about the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, and the fact that Achilles has earlier said that he has 'a woman's longing/...To see great Hector in his weeds of peace' (3.3.237-39). Achilles is posturing here, playing to the gallery, trying to get them to look at him rather than Ajax. The irony is that when he finally does kill Hector, Hector will be similarly unarmed. Yes, the final encounter between Achilles and Hector is *very* different from what we find in the *Iliad*. But regretfully I have run out of time, and so a detailed account of the intricate web of allusions to the *Iliad* in Act 5 of this play will have to be left for another occasion.

So to conclude. It would be wrong to see the *Iliad* as simply another 'source' that Shakespeare has drawn on, like Plutarch for the Roman plays or Holinshed's *Chronicle* for the histories. *Troilus and Cressida* shows Shakespeare setting up an intertextual relationship with Homer's poem, a rewriting that is intended to be recognised as a rewriting. The imposition of the love-plot at first threatened to drive the Iliadic plot into the background; but as the love-plot unravels with the faithlessness of Cressida and the destruction of Troilus' hopes, the Iliadic plot resurges, with the deaths of Patroclus and Hector coming at us with dizzying rapidity. The final 'rewriting' of the *Iliad* comes in the fact that it is Troilus who exhibits the 'anger of Achilles' in his relentless pursuit of his rival Diomedes; and it is Troilus who utters the last defiant word. The rhymed couplet that concludes his lament for Hector ('But march away,/Hector is dead: there is no more to say', 5.10.21f.) sounds as if it should be the end of the play (just as the laments for Hector by Andromache, Hecuba and Helen followed by the narrative of Hector's funeral close Homer's *Iliad*); but there *is* more to say:

Stay yet: You vile abominable tents,  
Thus proudly pight upon our Phrygian plains:  
Let Titan rise as early as he dare,  
I'll through and through you; and thou, great-siz'd coward,  
No space of earth shall sunder our two hates.  
I'll haunt thee like a wicked conscience still  
That mouldeth goblins swift as frenzy's thoughts.  
Strike a free march to Troy, with comfort go:  
Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe.

(*Troilus and Cressida* 5.10.23-31)

There will be no reconciliation scene between Achilles and Priam in Shakespeare's *Iliad*. Instead the final image is that of the defiant, jilted lover swearing vengeance. The plot did its best to return to that of Homer's *Iliad*; but just as the superimposed love-plot hijacked the opening scene, so it intrudes upon the conclusion. Troilus now has the same issue with Diomedes as Homer's Achilles had with Agamemnon; and while the rhetoric here hardly matches

the magnificence of Achilles' reply to Ulysses in *Iliad* 9, the sentiment is the same: He stole my girlfriend and I'll hate him forever. Love, as Pandarus said (quoting *Matthew* 3.7 horribly out of context), is 'a generation of vipers' (3.1.146).

There is clearly a high level of literary gamesmanship involved here, of the kind that would appeal far more to an audience of intellectuals familiar with Homer than to the standard play-going public. The preface to the Quarto edition of 1609 suggests that the former were precisely the audience for whom Shakespeare was writing and before whom the play was performed:

Eternal reader, you have here a new play, never stal'd with the Stage, never clapper-claw'd with the palms of the vulgar, and yet passing full of the palm comical...

The somewhat startling implication of this preface is that the play should be classed as a comedy. It is a radical suggestion; but if we consider the exaggerated role allotted to Thersites, the way in which Homeric heroes have become caricatures of themselves (Ulysses, Achilles and Ajax particularly spring to mind), the intrusion of the love-plot and the fact that the final speech in the play is comic rather than tragic, the bawdy reflections of Pandarus rather than the melodramatic effusions of Troilus,<sup>5</sup> we can I think see ways in which this might be true. Turning the *Iliad* into a comedy? That would be iconoclasm indeed.

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<sup>5</sup> There are in fact four 'endings' to the play, three false and one genuine. The first two belong to Troilus, both couched in the normal Shakesporean mode of closure, the rhymed couplet (5.10.21f. and 5.10.30f.). Pandarus then unexpectedly appears to be greeted with yet another rhymed couplet, a repeat of the one with which Troilus dismissed him at the end of Act 5 scene 3: a third possible endpoint. But Pandarus will not go away, and it is he who finally brings closure with a series of seven rhymed couplets over 15 lines. It is as if Troilus' attempts to bring the play to an 'appropriate' and decorous Iliadic conclusion are consistently and conspicuously foiled, first by himself as his rage at his rival in love overwhelms his lament for Hector, and secondly by Pandarus, who refuses to be silenced in the way that he was before and turns what should have been a Homeric tragedy on its head.