

Shakespeare's Deconstruction of Exempla in *Troilus and Cressida*

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Abstract

Literature and theatre have traditionally used exempla based on historical or classical models as a fundamentally conservative rhetorical technique which aimed to reinforce pre-existing values. However, in the early modern period the reproduction of exemplary figures on stage also created the possibility that the authority of the dominant culture could be used to reinterpret exempla and the tradition they represented. In *Troilus and Cressida*, instead of presenting an internally consistent alternative version of the Troy story, Shakespeare presents a deconstructed narrative in which nothing is definitive or authoritative.

Many of *Troilus and Cressida*'s characters were traditionally presented as exempla, but in Shakespeare's story they are divided between the exemplary self and the actual. Shakespeare reproduces and enhances the contradictions of earlier versions of the Troy story, so that the exempla which are supposed to signify a singular virtue instead point to a confusing variety of possible motives and interpretations. Their behaviour is indefinitely open to reinterpretation and resists a singular meaning.

Cressida's inherently divided and contradictory nature undermines her traditional position as a negative exemplum with a clear, singular meaning. The contradiction she embodies also applies to the play as a whole. The limited viewpoint the audience is given in *Troilus and Cressida* and the ambiguity of the characters undermine both specific examples of exemplarity and broader ideas about the value of exempla. The play works to create confusion and multiplicity of meaning, posing questions for the audience to consider rather than providing definitive answers.

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Introduction

In early modern England it was common for writers to use historical or classical characters and stories as the basis for their own writing. The characters acted as examples upon which readers were supposed to model their behaviour. However, the use of exemplary figures was coming into question in the early modern era as ideas about construction of the self and the relevance of classical models changed. As Timothy Hampton writes in his discussion of exempla, during the Renaissance “the representation of exemplarity underwent a series of transformations which undermined the authority of ancient exemplars as models of action. From those transformations were born new modes of representing virtue, of understanding the relationship between politics and literature, and of depicting the self” (ix). This is evident in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*; many of the characters were traditionally presented as exempla, but in Shakespeare’s story they fail to live up to the images they create of themselves. Cressida recognizes this when she tells Troilus, “I have a kind of self resides with you,/ But an unkind self that itself will leave/ To be another’s fool” (3.2.143-5). All the characters are similarly divided between the exemplary self and the actual, and their behaviour is indefinitely open to reinterpretation, resisting a singular meaning. Shakespeare rewrites the history of the legendary characters to create a play in which the exemplary figures, instead of signifying virtue or fallibility, point to a confusing array of possible meanings.

In his essay on exemplarity in the seventeenth century, John Wallace summarizes the early modern understanding of literature:

[n]o seventeenth-century reader ... would have understood Stanley Fish when he identifies the meaning of a poem solely with the reader's experiencing it; nor would he have comprehended an interpretative method that 'refuses to answer or even ask the question, what is this work about.' That was the very question that would probably have first come to his mind, and the second would have been, 'how can the moral be applied?' Works of literature, whether Fish likes it or not, were receptacles of moral truth and 'repositories of properties and meanings'. (290)

Literature was traditionally expected to enact known moral truths for the edification of readers. This view is confirmed by Sir Philip Sidney in *An Apology for Poetry*. Sidney writes, "it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by," and that poetry "setteth virtue so out in her best colors, making fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamored of her" (21, 34). In short, the primary purpose of literature, including drama, was moral instruction.

Exemplary figures were an important component of the instructive purpose of literature. They acted as models of virtue which the reader could strive to emulate, or as examples of immorality to be avoided. This was particularly evident in the biblical plays which were one of the predecessors of early modern theatre. The miracle plays presented familiar stories from the Bible or the lives of saints from which familiar morals would be drawn. Morality plays used exempla even more overtly, presenting personified virtues and vices.

As well as being descended from religious drama, English theatre was influenced by the theatricality inherent in Christian ritual. Robert Entzminger highlights this connection, saying,

the analogy between pulpit and stage is explicit in a description of the Mass written by the twelfth-century bishop Honorius of Autun. Referring to the celebrant as a ‘tragedian,’ Honorius says that he ‘represents to the Christian people in the theater of the church, by his gestures, the struggle of Christ, and impresses upon them the victory of his redemption’. (41)

In his study of iconoclasm and early modern theatre, Michael O’Connell similarly argues that “[t]he theater of the Middle Ages originated in the ritual of the Church and took its life from the mysteries of faith that maintained the culture. Its central subject was the biblical story of humanity’s fall and salvation” (16). Theatre was a supremely serious matter aimed at the moral improvement of the audience. Even after the development of secular theatre, the importance placed on drama remained. O’Connell argues of Shakespeare’s stage that “[w]hile no longer religious in an explicit or intentional way, that stage would, potentially at least, still claim the power to transfix and transform its participants. It would continue to lay claim to the seriousness of purpose that theater had maintained” (115).

There are a number of reasons why exemplary figures were so important to early modern literature. Writing in 1499, Polydore Virgil argued that history is

most commendable, because it informeth all sorts of people, with notable *examples* of living, and doth excite Noble-men to insue such activity in enterprises, as they read to have been done by their Ancestors; and also discourageth and dehortheth wicked persons from attempting of any heinous deeds or crime, knowing, that such acts shall be registered in perpetual memory, to the praise or reproach of the doers, according to the desert of their endeavours. (qtd. in Lyons *Exemplum* 13)

It is not only for moral reasons that people are expected to follow positive exempla, but because of the pressure of public opinion. The assumption inherent in this view is that history is accurate and true, and common values mean that all actions will be judged the same way. The value of exemplary figures is dependent on the existence of shared values.

Another reason cited for the effectiveness of exempla is the “authority of the past” (Lyons *Exemplum* 14). Hampton describes exemplary figures in Renaissance texts as “a marked sign that bears the moral and historical authority of antiquity and engages the reader in a dialogue with the past” (5). The past has authority in this context because the outcomes of different courses of action are known and so are easier to judge: “[p]ast and present are linked through a relationship of similitude ... to imitate an ancient exemplar as Girolamo Olgiati imitated Catiline is to place the self in history, to form it on a *tested* model” (Hampton 9, italics mine). But this means that the authority of the past rests on the assumption that the world is constant enough that behaviour modelled by classical or biblical figures will still prove effective.

Sidney also emphasizes the authority of the past, but it is not the historical past which he views as important. He writes that “a feigned example hath as much force to teach as a true example” (33). He illustrates the point using the example of a poem about Lucretia, in which the poet

painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue. For these ... be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be, but range only reined with learned discretion into the divine consideration of what may be and should be ... For these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know

that goodness whereunto they are moved: which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed. (20)

The past is not only the factual, historical past, but more importantly it is the shared past of common values. A common understanding of virtue is what allows poets to instruct through the use of exemplary figures.

Ultimately the purpose of exemplary figures is to cause real change in behaviour. Hampton argues that heroism is “a deliberative rhetoric intended to provoke action” (4). The primary purpose of exempla is to affect the audience or reader and create action beyond the subject or scope of the text: “[t]he past per se is not the primary value. Rather the authority of the past becomes the raw material for the corrective genius of the writer in his quest to influence the future conduct of the reader or audience” (Lyons *Exemplum* 14). The past’s value is not inherent but is found in its usefulness and applicability to the present. Exemplarity involves an interaction between the text and the reader which is expected to lead to the interaction of the reader with his or her world; as Hampton put it, “the question of exemplarity involves the ways in which texts are public artefacts, documents designed to affect the public sphere” (5).

The use of exempla was intended to be a fundamentally conservative rhetorical technique. As John Lyons points out, once this relationship is created, “example serves as an instrument for relating the individual to sources of authoritative knowledge” (*Exemplum* 237). Hampton notes that “[t]he application of past to present aims at the maintenance of social relations, at the production of practical knowledge and communicative action” (17). It aims to reinforce the notion that things should continue to be done as they have been done, that there is one right way to be. But the re-creation of exemplary figures on stage or in fiction admits the potential to rewrite history to suit

the writer's will, and therefore to postulate an alternate view using the authority of the dominant culture. In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare does not present an internally consistent alternative version of the Troy story; instead he presents a deconstructed narrative which reforms the relationship between the individual and knowledge which was previously viewed as authoritative. Nothing in the story is authoritative or definitive; it is presented in all its complexity and uncertainty for the individual to interpret.

This is precisely the type of theatre which was so unsettling to early modern anti-theatricalists. Belief in the exemplary power of theatre is very evident in anti-theatrical writing, which frequently argues that audiences will imitate immoral behaviour seen on stage. Anti-theatricalist Robert Milles, in a 1611 sermon, "registers the relative success with which the defenders of the theater argued their case"; he expresses his horror that "people say plays are as good as sermons" (qtd. In O'Connell 34). The power of example, which made theatre an effective tool of the medieval church, made it a disturbing source of potential subversion in the seventeenth century. The same anxieties are reflected in modern debates over the impact of media violence, as concerned groups argue that young people will imitate violence represented in movies, television shows, or video games.

Once a story was staged, its meaning was beyond the control of any authority, creating anxiety about possible interpretations. For example, Elizabeth I identified herself with the Richard II of Shakespeare's play, shutting down productions of it. The Earl of Essex must have agreed with her reading of the play, or he would not have staged a production on the eve of his revolt; however it did not have the expected result

of inspiring popular opinion against Elizabeth. Perhaps Elizabeth and Essex read the play as about themselves not because it was inherently about them, but because of the tendency common to all readers to interpret texts in relation to themselves. While Elizabeth “read” *Richard II* as being about herself, others did not. This variety in interpretation is endemic among work written on theatre during the Renaissance. It was generally agreed that theatre was an important medium, but “[o]ne of the most fascinating aspects of the Renaissance debates about the theatre is how variously this institution was interpreted by contemporaries and how differently they described the ‘lessons’ it taught, the social consequences it effected” (Howard 4).

Those social consequences went beyond the use of exempla to simply model virtue to be emulated or vice to be avoided. As Hampton notes, “the images of exemplars in Renaissance texts are intended as more than guides for practical political action. The heroic or virtuous figure offers a model of excellence, an icon after which the reader is to be formed. The representation of the exemplary figure functions as the occasion for reflection on the constitution of the self” (xi). Construction of the self is a major concern in *Troilus and Cressida*. The images characters construct of themselves are contradicted by their actions, leading to questions about whether action or perception truly constitutes the self, and if there is in fact a “real” self. Terry Eagleton argues that in *Troilus and Cressida* identity and meaning are wholly created by social interaction; that “reality is a public process” (14). Within the play, there are no objective standards; identity is created through social interaction so it is subject to constant change. This is a far cry from the models of heroic virtue who appear in Shakespeare’s sources.

The changing belief system of early modern Europe made the wholesale acceptance of exemplarity impossible, because “[i]deological anxiety and epistemological scepticism lead to an erosion of the authority of exemplary figures. This erosion signals the beginning of a new, posthumanist attitude toward the representation of antiquity in literature” (Hampton x). Recognition of historical change also reduced the importance of historical exempla. Hampton refers to Charles de Saint-Evremond, who wrote in 1686 that

the heroes of Homer and Virgil offer images of action which inspire admiration in the modern reader and test his judgement, but which could never offer him models of comportment. Along with the great religious change from paganism to Christianity ... another development has taken place that makes the ancients unacceptable models. This is the progressive refinement of manners and customs. (Hampton 297)

As Hampton points out, “Saint-Evremond ties this moral development to a political development” (297). This more sceptical attitude toward exempla indicates a shift from earlier expectations that exempla would be directly imitated, and recognizes that changing circumstances meant that the same action would not yield the same result. This view also implies a more complex view of the individual, as it distinguishes between different aspects of the self, recognizing that only parts of a person may be exemplary. The virtue of Hector might be admired even if it was impossible to reproduce. But the act of discarding and replacing models created questions about exemplarity itself, not just about specific exempla discarded. These questions had repercussions reaching back to the religious origins of exempla on stage. If exemplary heroes can be read as meaning their opposite, are religious figures also destabilized by association—is anything sacred? Questioning of accepted truth and accepted ways of

reading the world is a dangerous proposition. In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare is leading his audience away from the certainty traditionally associated with exempla.

One of the causes of the changing ideas about exemplarity must have been the Reformation. The Protestant reformers fundamentally changed Europe by breaking with the Catholic past in an attempt to recreate a more authentic version of Christianity by returning to what they believed to be Christianity's past. This introduced—or made prominent—questions about the interpretation of history and the accessibility of the past. If there were such different interpretations of the common past as those held by the Catholic and Protestant churches, the past could not be seen as the immutable, unchallenged authority it had been. The authority of the past was undermined by the present disagreement over which church truly followed the example set by Christ and his disciples. If the authority of the past depends on the fact that the outcome has been determined, when history is being reinterpreted the past cannot hold the same authority. If there is no final version of the past it is impossible to definitively identify any past individual as exemplary because their behaviour is subject to reinterpretation. If even the intentions of Christ in founding the church are open to debate, the meaning of any other, lesser model must also be questioned. This is the type of rewriting of history which occurs in *Troilus and Cressida*.

As well as changing the way Europeans related to their collective past, the Reformation altered the way people thought about themselves, elevating the importance and autonomy of the individual. In discussing faith during the Renaissance, Debora Kuller Shuger states that “[t]he private recesses of the individual anima replace the medieval church as the primary point of contact between God and persons” (12). Lyons

argues that this shift in thinking extends beyond religion into all aspects of thought: “[i]n the transition from heavy reliance on textual authority to emphasis on observation and introspection, both the role of the giver of an example and the role of the receiver change” (*Exemplum* 237). The authority of the past could not be unconditionally accepted as the “receiver” of the example exercised more judgement regarding the usefulness or applicability of an example. Hampton argues that an exemplary figure “engages the reader in a dialogue with the past” (5). With these changes in thought the relationship between giver and receiver of example did become more of a dialogue as the receiver, like Saint-Evremond, reached his or her own conclusions about the validity of the exemplum.

In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare is deconstructing existing ideas about exemplarity. Instead of creating models which, like Platonic ideals, are supposed to present virtue or vice in an unadulterated form, he is deconstructing the characters, finding and enhancing their contradictions. Jacques Derrida’s theory of meaning is useful in articulating what Shakespeare does with the legends left him by his literary predecessors. The position of exempla as signs for particular virtue is helpful in identifying the relationship between the characters and what they do (or traditionally did) exemplify. Derrida’s theory of meaning and absence within signs explains the way in which a single character—or a single action or speech by a character—can point to multiple possible meanings. Everything within the play contains a trace of its opposite—Hector’s fixed virtue is moved, and everything is, as Cressida says, “true and not true” (1.2.94). The exempla which are supposed to signify a singular virtue instead point to a confusing variety of possible motives and interpretations, leaving the

audience or reader to decide what the signifiers must signify to that they can assemble a narrative they find coherent. Because of the ambiguous, contradictory behaviour of the characters and the indeterminacy of the story, the readers must accept the inherent inconsistency of the characters—and by extension of their own human nature—or ignore some aspects of the characters in order to make a cohesive narrative. I say readers specifically because in production the choices of the director or actors would foreclose some possibilities; remarks that could have multiple meanings would be delivered one way, so some choices would be made for the audience.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will look at other versions of the Troilus and Cressida story. While Chaucer's is the best known, there are other significant versions of the story, and over time the characters evolved and the story grew more complicated. One point worth noting is that Cressida's name changes in different versions of the story. She is Briseida in Sainte-Maure, Criseida in Boccaccio, Criseyde in Chaucer, Cryseyde in Lydgate, Breseyda in Caxton, and Cresseid in Henryson, though after Shakespeare she remains Cressida. Cressida changes, as if the editors are not sure who she really is, or as if it is the individual author who decides what sort of Crisseid or Briseyde she is. That is, until Shakespeare fixes her as Cressida. Troilus' name remains constant, with the exception of an Italianized Troilo in Boccaccio. The names of the other characters are generally spelled more consistently or are regularized by editors. These previous versions of the story are important because of their influence on readings of *Troilus and Cressida*; the ambiguous and disjointed structure of the play compels the audience to draw on these other versions of the story to understand Shakespeare's version.

The second chapter will focus on Cressida and how she embodies contradiction—as evidenced both by her actions in the play and by critics’ extreme reactions to her—and how this undermines her position as an exemplum with a clear, singular meaning. Her actions and words can be read in multiple ways, making it impossible to definitely read her motivation, particularly since her thoughts are her own, and after she leaves Troy and Troilus we are not given access to them in monologue, letter or discussion with a confidante. She is read by the other characters and the audience, rather than being given an opportunity to speak for herself. This multiplicity of meaning undermines exemplarity, because there can be no agreement on what her actions are or how they should be interpreted. While to be “false as Cressid” was proverbial in Shakespeare’s time, in the play she is too complicated and divided to stand for any singular failing.

In the third chapter I will examine how the contradiction embodied in Cressida applies to the play as a whole and how the play undermines specific examples of exemplarity, and broader ideas about the value of exempla. While the play works to create confusion and multiplicity of meaning, there are hints of a greater structure of meaning that eludes the characters of this retelling. However, the play ultimately poses questions for the audience to consider rather than providing definitive answers.

Chapter 1: Other Troiluses and Cressidas

The first accounts of the Trojan War do not mention the Troilus and Cressida story; in the *Iliad* Troilus is mentioned only briefly and Cressida not at all. The first account of the love story is Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Le Roman de Troie*, written in the latter half of the twelfth century. It was followed by Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* in 1338, and most famously by Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in 1385-87. The story was also included in accounts of the Trojan War written after Chaucer's poem, notably John Lydgate's *Troy Book* of 1420 and William Caxton's *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* in 1474. In the late 1400s Robert Henryson wrote a continuation of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Testament of Cresseid*. There were also a number of versions of the story produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. George Chapman's comedy *Sir Giles Goosecap, Knight*, written about 1602, is a modernized version of the first three books of *Troilus and Criseyde* and Thomas Heywood's *The Iron Age*, which includes Troilus and Cressida's story as part of a chronicle of the destruction of Troy, appeared about ten years later. Dryden's "corrected" version of Shakespeare's play, *Troilus and Cressida or Truth Found Too Late*, which reworks the play into a conventional tragedy, appeared in 1679. Shakespeare likely used Chaucer, Caxton, and Chapman's translation of seven books of the *Iliad* as his primary sources. I will not discuss the sources Shakespeare used or was familiar with; my primary purpose in examining other versions of the story is to look at how the characters and the exemplary

nature of the story evolved and how Shakespeare's retelling of the story fits into that evolution.

The story of Troilus and Cressida was first developed in Sainte-Maure's twelfth century *Le Roman de Troie*. Sainte-Maure's heroine Briseida is described as pretty but inconstant, and her character is not developed much beyond those two traits. Troilus is described in much greater detail, as his knightly virtues are enumerated and his handsomeness and every limb are described at length. He is second only to Hector in knightly perfection. The basic story is set by Sainte-Maure: Calchas, the Trojan priest of Apollo, defects to the Greeks after being told the Trojans will lose the war. Notably, Apollo is really responsible for Calchas' defection; the gods play a major role in the story. Briseida's virtue is reinforced when Calchas demands she be handed over, and Priam says, "If it were not that the maiden [Briseida] is noble, and worthy and wise and beautiful, she should be burned and torn to pieces because of him [Calchas]" (8). Priam gives Briseida leave to go, at which point the love affair between Troilus and Briseida is introduced, as well as the fact that their affair was common knowledge. Troilus takes her to Diomedes, who has been established as Troilus' bitter enemy, who then escorts her back to the Greek camp and professes his love for her.

After some time Briseida decides to abandon Troilus for Diomedes, and is aware that she will become a model of faithlessness:

To herself she thought and said: 'Henceforth no good will be written of me, nor any good song sung ... I was false and inconstant and mad when I gave heed to words; he who wishes to keep himself loyal must never heed to words; by words the wise and the most cunning are deceived. From this time forth those who love not will not lack things to say of me; the Trojan women will talk of me. I have done shame most horrible to damsels and rich maidens. My treachery and my ill deeds will always be told to them. (19)

This is particularly interesting because this is the first written version of the story, so Briseida's anticipates that her story will be rewritten and she will become proverbial for her unfaithfulness. This speech also highlights the contradiction between Briseida's recognition of the misleading nature of language and her concern about what will be said about her; she says she "was false and inconstant and mad when [she] gave heed to words he who wished to keep himself loyal must never heed to words", but immediately follows this admonition with concern that her treachery will be told (19). Language is misleading but its power is inescapable. Following Briseida's involvement with Diomede, Troilus "complained with great bitterness of his lady, who had left him and given her love to his enemy. He called ladies faithless and maidens false" (21). He is not the only one to generalize Briseida's falseness: "[o]ften now she heard herself spoken of; the damsels made great mock of her. They hated her deeply and wished her much ill; they loved her not as they had been wont to do. She had done shame to them all" (21).

Boccaccio expands the story in *Il Filostrato* in 1338. Unlike Sainte-Maure,

Boccaccio frames the story by describing his own suffering in love:

I began therefore to turn over in my mind, with solicitous care, old stories in order to find one which I could make into a likely shield for my secret and amorous suffering. Nor did any one more suitable for such a need come into my mind than that of the valorous young Troilo, son of Priam, the most noble king of Troy, to whose life mine has been very similar after your departure insofar as it was sorrowful—if any credence can be given to ancient stories—because of love. (13)

The author claims his life is in dialogue with the story; his grief is like Troilo's, and he writes Troilo's story in imitation of his own life, which he then hopes will continue to be read and to influence others. He addresses the story to a lady whom he refers to as

Filomena, writing, “I composed these rhymes into the form of a little book, in perpetual testimony, to those who see it in the future, both of your worth, with which in the person of another these rhymes are in large part adorned, and of my sorrow” (13). The author hastens to clarify that while any praiseworthy thing written about Criseida is written about Filomena, “other matters” do not pertain to her, and are there only because the story of the noble lover requires it (15).

Boccaccio expands on the story, adding the beginning of the love affair and a more detailed account of Criseida’s position in Troy. She is a widow, has no children, and like Sainte-Maure’s Briseida, “by everyone who knew her she was loved and honored” (Boccaccio 25). Boccaccio also adds a scene in which she asks Hector for protection after her father betrays Troy: “Hearing the threatening outcry caused by her father’s flight and very dismayed at being in the midst of such a fearful rage, in mourning habit and with tears she flung herself on her knees at the feet of Hector, and with a very pitiful voice and look, excused herself and accused her father, ending up her speech by requesting mercy” (23). Hector takes pity on her and says, “Let your father who has offended me deeply go with bad luck and you yourself remain with us in Troy, safe and happy without harm, as long as it pleases you” (25). Although Boccaccio states this as an example of Hector’s merciful nature, the reader knows, if not from familiarity with the story, then from the introduction, that Hector will not keep his promise and Criseida will have to leave Troy.

Boccaccio’s Troilo is more complex, beginning as a cynical young man who has experienced love and mocks it, saying,

What’s the use in loving? The way a leaf turns itself with the wind, so a thousand times a day their hearts change, and they don’t care for the

sorrow any lover of theirs feels ... I have already experienced through my great folly what this accursed fire is. And if I were to say that love was not courteous to me, and did not give me delight and joy, certainly I'd be lying; but all the good together that I gathered in my desire for love was little or nothing compared to the torments and to the sad sighs. (29-31)

It is during a religious ceremony at the Palladium that Troilo first sees Criseida and suddenly changes from mocking love to being immediately smitten. As in Sainte-Maure's story, the gods are heavily involved. Troilo prays to Love, who moves him to "work marvels in arms" because of "his desire for glory to be more pleasing" to Criseida, so that "through love, *if the story speaks the truth*, he became so fierce and strong in arms that the Greeks feared him as they did death" (43, italics mine). Although Boccaccio's Troilo is concerned about what other men will think of him, imagining them saying that "[w]here he ought to be fierce in war, his thoughts are consumed in loving", in fact love makes him a better soldier (47). As well, by adding the caveat "if the story speaks the truth," Boccaccio brings into question the extent of his authority as author of a story that has already been written and is part of a legendary tradition, so that even while he describes Troilo as a powerful warrior, he acknowledges what Derrida would describe as a trace of the opposite idea, that the story might not speak the truth and he might not have been so great.

In deciding whether to begin the affair, Criseida is concerned for her honour, but says, "In this land I do not even know any woman without a lover; and, as I know, I see most people fall in love, and I lose my time for nothing. To do as others is not a sin, and no one can be blamed" (87). The moral flexibility of the lovers' attitude towards their relationship, in which social norms and public opinion are more important than any abstract virtue, is made explicit.

One of Boccaccio's major additions, which carries through later versions of the story, is the character of Pandaro, Criseida's cousin and Troilo's friend, who acts as go-between. Pandaro delivers Troilo's letters to Criseida and talks her into accepting his advances, guaranteeing discretion, and finally arranges to get Troilo into Criseida's bedroom. In exchange Troilo offers Pandaro his sister Polyxena, who is "more praised for beauty than any other", or his sister-in-law, "the most beautiful Helen" (141). The love affair is presented as an exchange between men, and the value of the women exchanged is based on their reputation for beauty.

Criseida's departure differs significantly from the earlier versions of the story in that the Trojans agree to exchange her for Antenor, rather than simply sending her to her father. Troilo is present when Greek ambassadors ask for the trade, but does nothing, because "Love made him ready to oppose anything, but on the other side was Reason, which stood against it and which made that noble enterprise very dubious, lest perhaps Criseida might be angry with it because of shame" (191). He thinks she is so concerned about her reputation that she would rather leave Troy than be found out. While he debates whether to act, the Trojan leaders decide to exchange Criseida. Troilo tells Pandaro he would rather die than find a new mistress, but he also refuses to prevent Criseida from leaving as Pandaro suggests. At their last meeting Criseida faints and Troilo, thinking she is dead, prepares to kill himself, but she revives before he can do so. In another significant change from Sainte-Maure, in which the lovers did not plan to be reunited, Boccaccio's Criseida agrees to return to Troy. However, on arriving at the Greek camp, she changes her mind and stays with Diomedes, though there is little explanation for her change of heart.

Diomede is described more favourably by Boccaccio than by Sainte-Maure; he is less aggressive, and “ha[s] a nature prone to love” (335). Criseida gradually falls in love with Diomede and writes to Troilo making excuses for her failure to return to Troy, until Troilo has a dream of Criseida and a boar. Cassandra interprets the dream as meaning that Criseida has fallen for Diomede, and scolds Troilo for being “led to waste away by the daughter of a wicked priest, of ill life and small importance” (383). This is one of the few instances in any version of the story in which Calchas’ betrayal of Troy is explicitly linked to Criseida’s faithlessness. Troilo later sees Diomede with the token he gave to Criseida and realizes she has been unfaithful. As in Sainte-Maure, he responds with rage and kills many Greeks, until Achilles kills him.

Boccaccio concludes by imploring young lovers to “restrain your ready steps to the evil appetite and ... mirror yourselves in Troilo’s love which my verses have displayed above because, if you will read them in the right spirit, you will not lightly have trust in all women” (411). Boccaccio clearly intends that the characters be taken as exempla, and that Criseida’s faithlessness should be taken as indicative of the falseness of women, extending into reality the generalization of Briseida’s faithlessness that occurred within the world of Sainte-Maure’s story. Boccaccio adds a second moral to the story, saying, “Therefore be prudent and have compassion upon Troilo and yourself at the same time, and it will be well done. And piously make a prayer for him to Love that he may repose in peace in the region where he dwells and that he kindly grant you the grace to love so wisely that in the end you will not die not for an evil woman” (413). Clearly, to Boccaccio the story is about Troilo’s suffering, not about both Troilo and

Criseida, or the Trojan War. Boccaccio's stated purpose is that he is using this as a personal narrative about his own suffering, so Troilo is his stand-in.

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* of 1385-87 popularized the story in England, and was the major source for Shakespeare and all later writers of the Troilus and Cressida story. Until *Romeo and Juliet* succeeded it as the archetype of tragic love, *Troilus and Criseyde* was "the single most important and influential love-tragedy in English poetry, the archetype to which situations in both life and literature were referred"; Chaucer's story firmly establishes Troilus and Cressida as exempla of lovers (Thompson 95). Chaucer followed *Il Filostrato* closely, but expanded it. Like Boccaccio, the author claims to rely on a source, although he changes some of the details of his source and claims not to know others. The narrator does not know whether Criseyde had children, and Calkas is not a priest but a great lord and an expert in science, who learned of Troy's destruction from Apollo and fled the city. The earlier emphasis on the intervention of the gods is shifting, as the gods are usurped by a depersonalized higher power referred to as Fate or Fortune. The poem uses images of Fortune's wheel to explain the rising and falling fates of the characters or of the opposing armies: the emphasis on Fortune which works to remove individually culpability for actions by suggesting it is Fortune, not individual action, which is responsible for the tragedy. As well, the focus on Fortune and inevitability emphasizes the characters' positions as exempla; it is in their predestined nature to be true as Troilus or false as Cressid.

The poet explicitly states,

But how this town com to destruccion
Ne falleth naught to purpos me to telle,

For it were a long digression
 Fro my matere, and yow to long to dwelle.
 But the Troian gestes, as they felle,
 In Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite,
 Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write. (1.141-47)

The love story is not interrelated with the war story; the war is merely a device to separate the lovers. In Shakespeare's play love and war are inextricably entangled, but here the love affair is purely personal.

As in Boccaccio, Troilus falls in love with Criseyde after seeing her in the temple, but here the god of love smites him to punish him for mocking love. Love is explicitly to blame (1.206), though the idea of the doomed love affair as punishment from a god is not pursued. Chaucer makes Pandarus Criseyde's uncle rather than her cousin, placing him in a position of rather more authority. Unlike the early stories of the Trojan War, the gods do not appear as characters, other than Love shooting Troilus at the beginning, but they are referenced frequently. Troilus is presented as pining away for love and lying sickly in his tent. Unlike Boccaccio's account, in which Troilus has had previous love affairs, Chaucer's Troilus is inexperienced and younger. Troilus is more passive than in previous accounts, and Pandarus seems to do all the work in the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde, giving Troilus detailed instructions on how to be a courtly lover that could just as easily be followed by a reader.

Criseyde's ideas about love have been formed by literature. When Pandarus tries to convince her to love Troilus, threatening that both he and Troilus will die if she does not, she is being read the story of the siege of Thebes, which she calls a "romaunce" (2.100). Later when she is deciding what to do, her niece sings a song about love, written by "the goodlieste mayde / Of gret estat in al the town of Troye, / And let hire lif

in moste honour and joye” (2.880-82). Reflecting on these stories, Criseyde decides to give love a try.

Pandarus advises both lovers what to write in their letters to each other, conducting both sides of the affair. He is much more active in pushing the lovers towards each other than his counterpart in Boccaccio. There is also a strong homoerotic subtext to his relationship with Troilus. He is always rushing into Troilus’ bedroom and finding him in bed (1.547, 2.947, 2.1305, 4.355); Troilus and Pandarus spend more time in bed together than Troilus and Criseyde do. As well, Pandarus is present with Troilus and Criseyde whenever the lovers are in the bedroom together, literally pulling one or the other into the room; first leading Criseyde into Troilus’ “sick room”, and later leading Troilus in to Criseyde’s bedroom. As well, he is with Criseyde in her bedroom the morning after she consummates the affair, asking her about the previous night and kissing her. It is not clear what their relationship is; the narrator says that Criseyde “with her uncle gan to pleye” until “hom til her house she wente, / And Pandarus hath fully his entente” (3.1578, 1581-82). Some critics have interpreted this to mean that there is a sexual relationship between Pandarus and Criseyde, although others disagree, and say that Pandarus’ “intent” was that Criseyde and Troilus consummate their affair. Pandarus is an integral part of their relationship; as in Boccaccio, Troilus and Criseyde’s affair is a transaction between men who use elaborate schemes to convince Criseyde to play her role in the affair. Pandarus lies to Helen and Deiphebus and tells them Criseyde needs their help and Troilus, so Troilus has a legitimate reason for being in Pandarus’ house when Criseyde is there. Troilus pretends to be sick so that Criseyde

will have a reason to see him in the bedroom, arguably calling into question the authenticity of his earlier pining for love (3.204).

All three ensure that the affair is kept secret to protect Criseyde's honour. Pandarus makes it explicit that his concern is with the appearance of virtue rather than actual virtue, insisting that Troilus should "kep hire out of blame, / Syn thow art wys, and save alwey hire name" while pushing him to begin the affair (3.265-66). He is also concerned with his own reputation, saying,

And were it wist that I, thorough myn engyn,
Hadde in my nece yput this fantasie,
To doon thi lust and holly to ben thyn,
Whi, al the world upon it wolde crie,
And seyn that I the werste trecherie
Dide in this cas, that evere was bigonne,
And she forlost, and thow right nought ywonne. (3.274-80)

This concern about what people might say about him and Criseyde does not prevent him from arranging for her to spend the night with Troilus. He even lies to his niece about supposed rumours that she loves another man to convince her to agree to meet Troilus in her bedroom.

Criseyde is more manipulated than in previous versions of the story, and Troilus more passive. Unlike Boccaccio's Troilo who faints when he learns he will be parted from Criseida, Troilus faints when he is brought into Criseyde's bedroom. Chaucer makes Pandarus worse, making Troilus and Criseyde better because they are not responsible for the worst actions.

The exchange of prisoners is somewhat altered as well. The Greeks want to trade Antenor for Criseyde and King Toas; Criseyde alone is not worth giving up Antenor for. As in Boccaccio, Troilus does not speak against the exchange because he is

afraid his relationship with Criseyde will be revealed, to her dishonour. However, Chaucer's Hector argues strongly against the trade:

“Syres, she nys no prisonere,” he seyde;
 “I not on yow who that this charge leyde,
 But, on my part, ye may eftsome hem telle,
 We usen here no wommen for to selle”. (4.179)

Hector is outvoted by an apparently democratic parliament and the trade is arranged. Considering how strongly Hector defends Criseyde, Troilus' suggestion that he cannot argue to keep Criseyde without revealing their relationship seems suspect. In a recreation of Boccaccio's scene, Hector has offered Criseyde his protection at the beginning of the poem, and here he tries to fulfill his agreement by attempting to convince the Trojans not to trade her away.

Pandarus proposes numerous schemes to reunite the lovers, but Troilus finds reasons to dismiss any action on his part, leaving it to Criseyde to find an excuse to return to Troy, which she says she will do in ten days. Chaucer repeats the incident in Boccaccio in which Criseyde faints and Troilus, thinking she is dead, prepares to kill himself. Fortunately Troilus spends so long saying farewell to life that Criseyde wakes up before he can commit suicide. In his discussion of Shakespeare's use of Chaucer, E. Talbot Donaldson notes that

[t]he anticlimax that occurs when the two lovers are left alive after all the talk of death does not, one must admit, add to the dignity of the occasion. One feels perhaps a bit let down that so much fine deathbed speech has gone for naught, and it is almost embarrassing to have the heroine awoken before the hero finally gets around to broaching his boiling bloody breast. Chaucer has allowed the humor latent in the situation to peep out from behind the mask of tragedy. (25)

Troilus' failure to manage the grand and tragic end he anticipated for himself is used to add a hint of comedy to Chaucer's story which “reflects a vision of humanity that sees

the absurdity in situations in which people try desperately to force reality to be what it is not” (Donaldson 26). Troilus’ attempted suicide seems to be an act of imitation; he seems to be modelling himself on an exemplum of a tragic lover, but fails due to Criseyde’s failure to actually die. Shakespeare will expand upon this type of disparity between intention and reality to make it the basis of his version of the story.

When Criseyde leaves Troy, the narrator says, “trewely, as men in bokes rede, / Men wiste nevere woman han the care, / Ne was so loth out of a town to fare”, acknowledging Criseyde’s position as a character from a story (5.19-21). Unlike Boccaccio’s characters, Diomedes and Troilus are not enemies, and their wooing of Criseyde is similar, though Diomedes does not act through an intermediary. He immediately proclaims his love for Criseyde, saying many people love on first sight (as Troilus did), though it is not clear whether Diomedes actually loves her. He considers

How he may best, with shortest taryinge,
 Into his net Criseydes herte brynge.
 To this entent he koude nevere fine;
 To fisshen hire he leyde out hook and lyne. (5.774-77)

This is strikingly similar to Pandarus’ description of Criseyde as a hunted deer when he instructed Troilus to “hold the at thi triste cloos, and I / Shal wel the deer unto thi bowe dryve” (2.1534-35). The men around Criseyde envision her in similar ways, as prey to be captured, rather than as an autonomous individual.

Like her predecessor, Criseyde puts Diomedes off at first, but eventually gives in, staying with him while Troilus waits in vain for her to return to Troy. Both lovers are conscious of their image after their separation. Like Sainte-Maure’s heroine, Chaucer’s Criseyde is aware that no good will ever be written of her, saying,

“Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,

Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
 No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende
 O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
 Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge! (5.1058-62)

She also says women will hate her most for shaming all of them; she is conscious of the role she is playing as archetype of faithlessness. Similarly, when Troilus pines for Criseyde, he imagines that people must look at him and wonder what has made him so pale and ill; he is consciously playing the romantic tragic hero. The war re-enters the narrative to give the hero his tragic end, as Fortune turns against the Trojans. Hector and Troilus are killed by Achilles, though no details are given about their deaths. Troilus ascends into heaven and sees that worldly things are unworthy of concern. The narrator tries to abdicate responsibility for making Criseyde unfaithful, saying that he is only repeating what his sources have written about her and asking that ladies, “be nat wroth with me” (5.1775). The poem ends by blaming the pagan gods for the inconstancy, and saying young people should trust only in God. *Troilus and Criseyde* does not merely show that human falseness will lead to disaster, but that even virtue like Troilus’ faithful love will only lead to disappointment if misplaced.

Whether this is the moral any reader would draw from the story is questionable.

As Donaldson notes, the narrator himself does not seem convinced of it:

once he has established himself in the first fifty-six lines as the translator of a very sad story and has warned the reader in so many words that Criseyde forsook Troilus before she died, he goes on merrily cheering the principal characters into their love affair and occasionally giving very dubious advice, such as that ladies in the audience should yield to their lovers as Criseyde finally did to Troilus. (123-24)

Only after Troilus realizes Criseyde has betrayed him does the narrator become concerned with morals, and to accept the narrator’s suggestion at the end that no one

should love anyone but God, “converts an 8,200-line poem in praise of love into a negative moral exemplum fifty lines from its end” (Donaldson 124). Certainly it is hard to read the poem as a negative exemplum, considering how much advice is dispensed to Troilus, and by extension the reader, on how to be a proper courtly lover. Donaldson suggests that while critics have often considered the authorial voice at the end of the poem to be Chaucer’s, as distinct from the narrator’s, it is still the narrator, emotionally overreacting to the sadness of the story; a view which seems reasonable, as it considers the poem as a whole. Donaldson concludes that “the poem does have a moral. This moral, I reiterate, can have no ex post facto application to Troilus and Criseyde, and it is simply that the best thing we know, love, is unreliable, like all things human. If you wish to ensure constancy in love, you had better love God, who will betray none who love him” (127). The fact of human inconstancy is a theme that Shakespeare uses and expands upon in his version of the story.

In any version of the story, the characters are rarely as straightforward as their proverbial counterparts, though this is particularly true in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, which Donaldson describes as “a vast assemblage of unknowns, of half-truths and half-perceptions on which each must build his understanding of the poem” (4). Shakespeare picks up on these contradictions and expands them. Unlike most plays which work to draw the viewer in, *Troilus and Cressida* works to keep the audience at a distance. As with Shakespeare’s other problem plays, the audience is “left pondering the questions raised by the action rather than contemplating the sense of loss characteristic of tragedy or of feeling the release or joy inherent in Shakespeare’s romantic comedies” (Thomas 14).

Lydgate's *Troy Book* was written from October 1412 to 1420 and is based on Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae*, a Latin account from 1287 which was in turn based on Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*. Lydgate takes up Chaucer's theme of the fickleness of Fortune, but he suggests that prudence is the answer. He uses the Troy story to show the value of prudence as embodied by Hector, and the disastrous results that follow when Hector's prudence fails. Lydgate clearly intended the story to be exemplary, viewing the ultimate peacemaking between the Greeks and the Trojans as example for England and France (Edwards 14). In his concluding envoy he dedicates the poem to Henry V, whom he praises for his prudence, and for having the seriousness of Joshua, the wisdom of Solomon, the mercy of David, and the prowess of Julius Caesar (Envoy 38, 41, 47, 48). Henry V has followed the examples of those before him and become exemplary himself.

In Boccaccio and Chaucer the war is not significant; it is a part of the background and becomes a plot device to separate the lovers, but in Lydgate the story of Troilus and Cryseyde forms a small part of the greater tragedy of the Trojan War. Their romance, like those of Jason and Medea, Paris and Helen, and Achilles and Polyxena which are also represented, is doomed. Lydgate's Cryseyde is not alone in her betrayal; she is part of a pattern of legendary tragic romance. As well, within her part of the story her betrayal is linked to the betrayal of Troy by her father, and by Antenor and Aeneas. Against the backdrop of the war, nothing can remain faithful.

In writing about Troilus and Cryseyde, Lydgate refers to Chaucer as the definitive source of their story and tells readers to refer to Chaucer for a more detailed account. His Cryseyde does not betray Troilus until she has given up all hope of

recovery. He also expands on Troilus's death; he is beheaded by Achilles after being disarmed and surrounded by four thousand Myrmidons (4.2818).

Although Lydgate does not add much to the Troilus and Cressida story, his poem may have been one of Shakespeare's sources for the war plot. His treatment of Hector is particularly interesting considering his explicitly exemplary intentions. Hector is presented as the great hero of legend. As in Shakespeare's play, he sends a challenge to the Greeks, but "[u]nlike the duel in Shakespeare, where Hector brags that the challenge will rouse the factious Greeks, in Lydgate the challenge is designed to prevent further deaths: if Achilles wins Priam will submit his city and power to the Greeks; if Hector wins the Greeks will sail away leaving the Trojans in peace" (Thomas 37). However, both camps are unwilling to risk so much in single combat, so Hector's plan to bring the war to a swift end fails, and Hector himself fails to remain wholly exemplary. When the Trojans have the advantage, they begin to burn the Greek fleet, aiming to prevent the Greeks from getting the supplies and reinforcements they desperately need and essentially ensure Trojan victory. Ajax asks Hector not to burn the fleet, and to retreat to Troy. On the basis of their kinship, Hector agrees to do so. The Trojans also grant a truce even though it clearly benefits the Greeks and not them; all this is "strongly suggestive of Trojan folly or naivety" (Thomas 36). Hector's failure to act prudently is the cause of Troy's fall; he "was culpably negligent in not accepting the gifts of fortune" in yielding to Ajax and not burning the boats (Tillyard *Problem Plays* 47).

Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* was translated from Raoul le Fevre's French Trojan War epic in 1474, and is quite similar to Lydgate's *Troy Book*.

Caxton sets the beginning of the story at the time of Noah, attempting to reconcile Trojan legends with biblical myth, on the presumption that they are both true parts of history and must fit together. He too follows Chaucer closely in describing the love story, but draws on Boccaccio as well, reintroducing the scene in which Breseyda confronts Calchas about his treasonous betrayal of Troy, which Chaucer omits, thus explicitly connecting Breseyda's betrayal of Troilus to Calchas' betrayal of Troy.

Caxton adds a few more details to the story, including that Calchas had tried unsuccessfully to have Breseyda sent to the Greek camp, but the Trojans thought he was evil and false and would not agree to his requests. His Troilus, like Lydgate's, is a soldier who is eventually killed by Achilles. Caxton goes into detail about Diomedes' return home and reclamation of his throne, but like his predecessors he does not say what happened to Breseyda.

Like Lydgate, Caxton explicitly states that the story is intended to be exemplary.

He closes by saying:

the deth of so many noble prynces as kyngs dukes Erles barons knyghtes and comyn peple and the ruyn irreperable of that Cyte that neuer syn was reedefyd whiche may be ensample to all men duryng the world how dredefull and Jeopardous it is to begynne a warre and what harmes losses and deth foloweth. Therefore thapostle saith all that is wretton is wretton to our doctryne whyche doctryne for the comyn wele I beseche god maye be taken in suche place and tyme as shall be moste nedefull in encrecyng of peas loue and charyte whyche graunte vs he that suffryd for the same to be crucyfied on the rood tree And saye we alle Amen for charyte. (702)

He casts the entire story as an exemplum, thus presenting a hopeful ending to an unrelentingly tragic story. Like Chaucer, Caxton's moral may not be evident from the story itself, and must be explicitly stated. Giving the story an explicit moral reinforces its value by giving it a didactic function, but since it does not appear until the story has

ended the reader has been free throughout the narrative to interpret it as he or she sees fit. Caxton's statement of the purpose of his story can be interpreted either as a half-hearted attempt to confirm didactic purpose, or as an attempt to fix the way the story is interpreted.

Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* was written in the latter part of the fifteenth century as a continuation of Chaucer's poem, and seems to have been generally accepted as part of the story. In Henryson's version, Troilus has not been killed and Cresseid has become a prostitute after Diomedes abandons her. She then curses the gods of love and they punish her with leprosy, which was generally considered a venereal disease in the Middle Ages, and so is directly related to her infidelity. After she has lived among the lepers she meets Troilus. They do not recognize each other, but he gives her money which she distributes among the other beggars, after which she dies redeemed.

Henryson's poem, like its predecessors, is self-consciously exemplary, but he takes the exemplary nature of the characters further than other writers. Donaldson writes that "Chaucer's Troilus is indeed also true in love, but nowhere does Chaucer convert him into a byword for truth. Shakespeare's Troilus has been reading Henryson as well as Chaucer, for Henryson is the first considerable poet to celebrate Troilus' truth and to counterbalance it rhetorically with Cressida's falseness" (Donaldson 101). Henryson sets up the binary opposition that is often read into other versions of the story. The rhetorical symmetry is appealing, but simplistic.

Henryson addresses women directly, saying this short ballad was made for their instruction, so that they will not mingle love with false deception (610, 613). However,

it is not Cresseid's deception that causes her leprosy, but the fact that she curses the (pagan) gods, who play a more active role in Henryson's story than they do in Chaucer, Lydgate or Caxton. Presumably her falseness is part of the same moral laxity that led to cursing the gods.

As well as these major works rewriting the Troilus and Cressida story, there were numerous poems and ballads which retold the story. Interestingly enough, in some of the ballads Cressida is presented as a positive exemplum. Hyder Rollins cites a number of popular bawdy songs and poems in which Cressida is held up as a model mistress. In this competing popular tradition her defining characteristic is not that she betrayed Troilus, but that she allowed herself to be seduced by him in the first place. Rollins writes that "in the popular literature of the early Tudor period she became a staple comparison. . . . Peculiarly enough, Cressid was often glorified as the highest type of a sweetheart,—as a complaisant damsel who 'yielded grace' to her lover's importunities, and who was worthy of emulation" (389-90). Rollins also cites a number of minor poems based on the first three books of Chaucer's poem in which Cressida is the model mistress. The list includes a 1568 book of model love letters written by William Fulwood which contemporary lovers could imitate in their correspondence. As Rollins notes, "Cressida must have been held up as a worthy example by many young lover-writers, for the *Enimie of Idlennesse* went through eight editions by 1598" (392).

A number of versions of the Troilus and Cressida story were written during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were at least two lost versions—Grimald's 1559 *Troilus ex Chaucero comoedia* and Chettle and Dekker's 1599 *Troilus and Cressida*—and three surviving plays in addition to Shakespeare's play. They differ

wildly: George Chapman's *Sir Giles Goosecap, Knight*, written between the fall of 1601 and the spring of 1603, is a comedy, Thomas Heywood's *The Iron Age*, written around 1612 or 1613 is part of a cycle of chronicle plays, and John Dryden's *Troilus and Cressida, or Truth Found Too Late*, written in 1679, is his "improved", wholly tragic version of Shakespeare's play.

Grimald's play is entirely lost, but a plot fragment of Dekker and Chettle's *Troilus and Cressida* survives. It appears to have combined the love story with the siege, and it likely drew on both Chaucer and Henryson, as the stage directions indicate that Cressida enters with beggars near the end of the play (Thompson 32). Beyond the suggestion that the play ended as Henryson's poem does, there is no record of its contents. While some critics have suggested that Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* was written in response to Dekker's play, it is impossible to be certain. In any case, these other versions are primarily of interest as contemporary ways of dealing with the same material, not as sources.

Heywood's *The Iron Age* is a two-part chronicle play, part of the cycle that includes the Golden, Silver, and Brazen Ages. Like Shakespeare, Heywood makes the Troilus and Cressida love story a minor subplot in the story of the Trojan War. The first part of *The Iron Age* begins with the Trojan decision to seize a Greek woman as revenge for the Greek's taking Hesion, and the second part ends with the destruction of Troy. Heywood clearly draws on Lydgate for the war story, and on Chaucer and Henryson in his depiction of Troilus and Cressida, though he departs from his sources. Cressida is not traded to the Greeks, but chooses on her father's advice to leave Troy and betray

Troilus. Diomed rejects her after she agrees to begin an affair with another Greek and she is sent back to Troy, and ends the play alone and leprous after Troy's destruction.

Chapman's *Sir Giles Goosecap, Knight* could not be more different. It is a comedy based on the first three books of *Troilus and Criseyde* and set in early modern England. *Sir Giles Goosecap* makes extensive use of the plot, dialogue, ideas and images but assimilates them into typical Renaissance comedy (Thompson 35). The lovers are never separated, but are married at the end of the play, fitting the conventional comedy mould. Troilus is transformed from a medieval courtly lover to Clarence, Renaissance gentleman and scholar, and Cressida becomes Eugenia, a self-possessed widow and scholar who falls in love with Clarence because of their intellectual bond. The Pandarus character is much more sympathetic; his final aim is the marriage of Clarence and Eugenia, and he makes Clarence his heir so he will be able to properly support his new wife. Instead of coinciding with the tragedy of a war plot, the romance between Clarence and Eugenia is contrasted with the foolish attempts by Sir Giles Goosecap and his hapless friends to court Eugenia and her friends. The comedy that peeks through Chaucer's story is developed, and the unhappy aspects of the story discarded.

Like Chapman, Dryden rejected the traditional ending of the story when he remade Shakespeare's play, but instead of expanding on the comic potential of the story's beginning, he reworked *Troilus and Cressida* into a conventional tragedy. But he does more than that: "[t]he central point is not that Dryden has merely altered the end of the play, and introduced a rude sort of poetic justice at the eleventh hour, but that the entire plot has been completely revamped in accordance with new principles of

construction. Under these circumstances, a ‘tragic’ denouement follows as a matter of course” (Bernhardt 134). The significant changes leading to the tragic denouement are that Cressida remains faithful and Calchas repents of his treachery, and they plan to escape the Greek camp and return to Troy. The betrayal scene Troilus witnesses in Shakespeare’s play is recast as a scene staged by Cressida and Calchas to trick Diomedes into helping them escape to Troy. Dryden also makes the characters less complex than they are in Shakespeare’s play: “[i]n the original, heroic and comic elements are blended in the conception of a single character such as Troilus, and Dryden is careful to refine but a single strain. The potentially heroic characters are, therefore, considerably ennobled” (Bernhardt 135). Although traditionally, Diomedes survived the Trojan War, Dryden has Troilus kill him to punish him for leading Troilus to believe Cressida has been unfaithful. Troilus is then killed by Achilles to be reunited with Cressida, who has killed herself to prove her fidelity.

Dryden makes Cressida a traditional heroine; more like Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* than like any previous version of herself. Like any good heroine, she wants to be married to Troilus; she “is not content with the hand-fasting over which Pandarus presides, and exacts the promise of a religious ceremony” (Lyons “Trysting” 113). As in Chapman’s comic play, Dryden makes marriage the goal of the relationship to fit it into a conventional generic mode. Dryden described his purpose in rewriting *Troilus and Cressida* as repairing the flaws of the play, because Cressida cannot be false and remain unpunished. It is odd, however, that he chose to fly in the face of tradition by making her a paragon of fidelity, rather than simply punishing her for her infidelity as Henryson did. In rewriting Cressida as faithful, Dryden was, in the most

obvious sense, going against the literary tradition. However, in reworking her character to make her a more comprehensible, if simplified, character he was in keeping with the tradition of critics and audiences since, who have tried to read Shakespeare's Cressida, who is more complicated and divided than her predecessors, in a straightforward way.

Chapter 2: Cressida's Kinds of Selves

These other versions of Troilus and Cressida's story are important to any reading of Shakespeare's play, not least because they colour critical reaction to *Troilus and Cressida*. R.A. Foakes writes that

[i]f we are addicted to the glamour of the heroic legend, we may find *Troilus and Cressida* harsh and unpleasant; if we retain a traditional sympathy for the Trojans, we may emphasize their honour and generosity as against the practicality of the Greeks; if we see the conflict as a representative one, we may read the play as a philosophical debate; in any case, we interpret the play in some measure by what we know of the characters and events outside the play. ("Reconsidered" 152)

The structure of the play, beginning *in medias res* as it does, invites this use of external characters and events. Little background information on the characters and their relationships is provided; instead, the play assumes that audiences will be familiar enough with the story to "fill in the blanks" so they can make sense of the action. Shakespeare's reinterpretation of the Troy story "does not damage the larger myth; it is the myth that modifies the play" (Foakes "Reconsidered" 153-54). Since the myth has evolved considerably over the centuries, there is no authoritative version to modify the play; the play is modified by the individuals reading it, depending on their previous experience with the story of the Trojan War and Troilus and Cressida.

While it seems to be generally agreed that the legend modifies the reader's interpretation of the play, there is considerable disagreement over the degree to which literary tradition limited Shakespeare's interpretation of the story. On one hand, critics

such as William Lawrence assume that “Shakespeare was further restricted by the definite character which the story of Troilus and Cressida had assumed in his own day. As has often been pointed out, its great familiarity made radical changes impossible” (425). Rollins agrees, saying, “Henryson’s beautiful story ... rang Criseyde’s ‘bell’ so loudly that it reverberated to the time of Shakespeare, and forever damned her as a loose woman” (396-97). I find it impossible to accept this supposition, considering the significant changes Shakespeare did make to the story. Additionally, Chapman and Dryden produced even more dramatically altered versions of the story, making Cressida in the first case a traditional comic heroine, and in the second a tragic heroine who is no more a “loose woman” than Desdemona is. Since other seventeenth-century writers did make radical changes to Cressida’s character, it is implausible to suggest that Shakespeare could not have done the same.

Despite the evidence that the Troilus and Cressida story was not unalterable, this assumption has affected interpretations of the play, because it leads to the further assumption that Shakespeare must be making his heroine a “loose woman”. As Donaldson points out, this theory, “while purporting to explain after the fact why Cressida is an unattractive character ... works equally well to force the reader to find her unattractive” (78). Although Cressida may have been traditionally been indefensible, she is not necessarily so in Shakespeare’s play, any more than Achilles’ historic heroism automatically makes him a hero.

Critics’ interpretations of Cressida are varied and frequently extreme. She is read by some critics as a whore, in accordance with Ulysses’ assessment of her. William Hazlitt writes that “[h]er head is as light and fluttering as her heart ... Shakespeare’s

Cressida is a giddy girl, an unpractised jilt, who falls in love with Troilus, as she afterwards deserts him, from mere levity and thoughtlessness of temper” (*Characters* 68-69). Rollins describes her as “a wanton” and “a woman of loose morals” (Rollins 383). Robert Presson is perhaps the harshest:

Shakespeare has portrayed Cressida from the start as a prostitute. By her words, and the words of others—their like is not to be met with in the poem—her nature is clearly revealed. Her conversation with her uncle while the pair wait for Troilus to return from the battle, suggests her type; Paris does not deny the impression she first makes on us; Ulysses is outspoken. But Troilus is blind to what she is. He alone fails to spot her as a daughter of the game. (132)

Una Ellis-Fermor, like many critics, reads Troilus and Cressida as binary opposites, writing of their “violently contrasted characters”; they are “a serious man, by nature heroic and an honest if confused idealist, and a light woman, equally by nature a ‘sluttish spoil of opportunity / And daughter of the game’” (119). Presson, in addition to describing Cressida as a prostitute, states that Shakespeare “wanted to show Cressida thus since his intention was to show how infatuation could blind Troilus ... In place of the ardor of Chaucer’s lover, there is in Shakespeare’s Troilus a sensual dotting which seals his eyes” (181). He views the play as being about Troilus, with Cressida as a plot device to demonstrate his character.

Other critics defend Cressida with varying levels of enthusiasm. Lawrence reluctantly admits that “[p]erhaps we may concede that, wanton as she is, Shakespeare meant us to believe that she is touched for a brief time to something finer by the devotion of Troilus” (428). Others, like Janet Adelman, consider that “[c]ritics frequently dismiss Cressida as ‘the wanton of tradition,’ but when we first meet her, we feel her presence not as a stereotype but as a whole character” (120-21). It is hard to

believe these critics are all talking about the same character, and indeed I do not think they are. They are reacting to all the Criseyde/Briseida/Cressidas, not just to Shakespeare's character. This disagreement over what Cressid is shows how she has lost her exemplary function, since exempla are dependent on clarity of meaning. Audiences, including critics, bring their previous experience of the Troy story, and of Cressida specifically, with them to a reading of *Troilus and Cressida*.

This act of interpreting Cressida in relation to her other incarnations is not always overt, but at times it becomes so. In his defence of Cressida, Donaldson notes the tendency to interpret Cressida in relation to Chaucer's Criseyde:

[t]hat, from the beginning of the play, Cressida is not a nice girl is a proposition that seems to have great appeal for moralistic critics, who find even so natural an act as her having fallen in love—and at first sight!—proof of her innate light-mindedness. Though she has never been without her defenders, until recently the weightiest critics of the play seem to have been followers of Ulysses, the first high-minded intellectual to settle Cressida's business by calling her a slut. At least he is terse about it, whereas some of her modern non-admirers go on at great length demonstrating the badness of her character, as if they felt obligated to stop the reader from wasting his emotions on the wrong kind of woman ... I can think of no literary characters who have been subjected to criticism less cool-headed than Criseyde and Cressida; and when they are treated together they tend to become the two halves of a companion picture, in which the good qualities of the one are exactly balanced by the bad qualities of the other. Criseyde is written up at Cressida's expense, and Cressida is written down to Criseyde's advantage. (85-86)

Criseyde and Cressida are set up as polar opposites; good and bad versions of the same person. There is no room in this critical interpretation for indeterminacy.

Cressida is contrasted not only with the other Criseydes, but also with Troilus. He is often "written up" at Cressida's expense, portrayed as an idealistic romantic in opposition to Cressida the whore. René Girard is the only critic to take the opposite

approach, writing Troilus down to Cressida's benefit. Girard is harshly critical of Troilus' behaviour the morning after he and Cressida consummate their relationship, writing that

[n]ot only does he [Troilus] fail to take offense at the bawdiness of Pandarus, but he is spurred into a sense of emulation ... Traditionally, the critics of the play have shut their eyes to the behaviour of Troilus on that early morning. They demanded a 'positive' hero, and if none was there to be found they did not hesitate to make one up. ("Politics" 190-91)

Girard considers Troilus' behaviour to be the cause of Cressida's later betrayal, saying, "[n]ot only did he betray Cressida too, but he betrayed her first and her own betrayal can be read, at least in part, as an act of retaliation, of vengeful escalation, and therefore as an *imitation* of what Troilus has done to her" ("Politics" 197). It is interesting that he casts her betrayal as imitation: as with Ajax's emulation of Achilles, Cressida's actions demonstrate the potential for emulation to unsettle the social order. Girard reverses, but reproduces, the critical tradition of treating the lovers as binary opposites and demonizing one at the expense of the other. Like Cressida's detractors, he neglects to consider the way that both lovers base their reactions to the other on their stereotyped expectations rather than the individual they are dealing with.

Cressida and Troilus react to each other based on their prejudices. Troilus assumes that Cressida, like all women, is incapable of faithfulness, saying to her,

O, that I thought it could be in a woman—
As, if it can, I will presume in you—
To feed for aye her lamp and flames of love,
To keep her constancy in plight and youth. (3.2.153-56)

If it were possible for a woman to be constant, Troilus would assume Cressida was so, but, it must be inferred, since it is not possible he assumes she will be unfaithful. He

acts on this assumption later in the play when, after promising to “corrupt the Grecian sentinels, / To give [her] nightly visitation,” he goes to the Greek camp, but instead of making his nightly visitation he watches her secretly to see if she will be unfaithful (4.4.71-72). Similarly, Cressida assumes Troilus will abandon her, saying she loves Troilus, but “Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing; / Things won are done; joy’s soul lies in the doing” (1.2.277-78). In examining how Cressida is characterized, Adelman writes that the soliloquy reveals

her entire assumption that he will no longer love her once he has possessed her. In a declaration of passion filled with calculation, a statement of love from which Troilus himself is notably absent, replaced by abstract dicta about the typical behavior of men ... Cressida reveals the way in which her awareness of the crippling malaise of this world, the gap between expectation and performance, colors her own expectations about Troilus and hence her behavior. (121-22)

Troilus is absent from Cressida’s declaration of love because she has never met him; she only knows of his reputation and the “typical” behaviour of men, so he as an individual is absent not only from her soliloquy but from her love. While Chaucer’s Criseyde reflected on romantic stories and songs in deciding whether to begin the love affair, Shakespeare’s Cressida lives in a more cynical world, and is left with cautionary maxims rather than literature to provide guidance.

Troilus contemplates love in the same way, considering its effect on him rather than the specifics of the woman whose reputation and appearance he has fallen in love with. It is evident from the first scene of the play that Cressida as an individual is not the focus of Troilus’ love; his love of Cressida is entirely focused on his feelings and reaction to her. Troilus tells Pandarus how he is suffering with love, and when Pandarus responds by saying that Cressida “looked yesternight fairer than ever I saw her look, or

any woman else”, Troilus ignores this piece of information and continues, “I was about to tell thee—when my heart, / As wedged with a sigh, would rive in twain / Lest Hector or my father should perceive me ...” (1.1.30-31, 32-34). He is not interested in the fact that Pandarus has just seen his beloved, but immediately turns the subject back to himself. And later, immediately before meeting Cressida for the first time, he says, “expectation whirls me round” and compares the expected pleasure to battle, but does not mention Cressida herself in the soliloquy (3.2.16). And finally when they are to be separated, he is not concerned that Cressida is about to be delivered to the enemy encampment, but with his achievements. He interprets love as an individual undertaking with an object, not as a relationship with another individual.

Given their negative expectations of each other, and the way in which their desire seems to exist separately from its object, it is surprising that the love affair takes place at all. There is little explanation for why Troilus and Cressida have fallen in love, other than the Petrarchan clichés they spout to describe each other’s virtue, clichés which must be based on image rather than reality because they have never met and because the love-objects they describe bear little resemblance to the individuals. It is also worth noting that both their negative expectations are quickly realized. Troilus does seem to be weary of Cressida the morning after they consummate their relationship, telling her to go back to bed, and saying,

O Cressida! But that the busy day,
Waked by the lark, hath roused the ribald crows,
And dreaming night will hide our joys no longer,
I would not from thee. (4.2.9-12)

“Ribald crows” is hardly a romantic image. His professed desire for secrecy is suspect because in the scene immediately preceding this, Paris tells Aeneas that Troilus has

spent the night with Cressida and Aeneas replies that “Troilus had rather Troy were borne to Greece / Than Cressid borne from Troy” (4.1.48-49). Obviously their love affair is common knowledge, even though it has just begun. As well, when Aeneas enters Cressida’s home looking for Troilus, Troilus reveals himself quickly even though Cressida has just told him, “I would not for half Troy have you seen here” (4.2.42). Despite having just used the need to “hide their joys” as an excuse to leave, Troilus makes no attempt to hide and shows no concern for Cressida’s desire for secrecy. This suggests she was right to suspect he had another motive for wishing to leave so quickly; perhaps he is indeed weary of Cressida already. He certainly does not hesitate to hand her over to the enemy, where Cressida complies with his low expectations by immediately beginning a relationship with Diomedes.

There are a remarkable number of ways in which what happens within the play is mirrored by critical reaction to it. Just as Cressida and Troilus react to each other based on their preconceived notions of what men or women are like, so too the critics have reacted to Cressida, and other characters, based on their own prejudices. The extreme differences in interpretation can be explained in part by the ambiguity of the play, but also by the different assumptions that are brought to it. Harold Bloom writes that “if normative standards could apply to anyone in this play (and they can’t), then Cressida is a whore, but who isn’t, in *Troilus and Cressida*?” (334). He does not elaborate what “normative standards” are, but it is clear that critics make different assumptions about what these standards are. Robert Kimbrough applies his own normative standards, writing,

[b]ecause Troilus lacks wit or depth, the audience is able to judge him directly; because Cressida is complex, Shakespeare had to exploit her

lack of imagination to develop through irony the grounds for evaluating her. When she finds that she must go to the Greeks, her response would be touching—were it not for the fact that she is not legally married. (85)

Kimbrough seems to assume either that because she is not married her attachment to Troilus is not important, or that her place is with her father.

R.J. Kaufmann describes *Troilus and Cressida* as “the dramatic equivalent of a colossal Rorschach inkblot test... each reader[,] confronted by separate alternatives, identifies where he must, and thereby pragmatically indicates his own sympathetic stance within the heteronomy of its suspended judgments” (159). This certainly rings true, and is particularly relevant to Cressida. The ambiguity of her actions makes it impossible for either audiences or the other characters to interpret her character without recourse to their particular sympathies or prejudices.

The diverse perspectives brought by critical reactions to Cressida mirror the variety of viewpoints from which she is observed within the play. More than any other of Shakespeare’s plays, *Troilus and Cressida* thematizes vision, and Cressida in particular is defined by the male gaze as she is read or misread by others (O’Connell 135). Within the play, her position as object of view and interpretation is stressed by the structure of act 5 scene 2, in which Thersites watches Ulysses and Troilus while they watch Cressida and Diomedes. All the men watching her agree that she is a whore, even though their perspective is incomplete because parts of her conversation with Diomedes are inaudible. As well, Troilus is not aware of what happened on Cressida’s arrival, when she was passed around and kissed by all the generals except Diomedes. This experience certainly helps explain why she would refer to Diomedes as her “sweet guardian” and require his protection (5.2.8). Ulysses was there, of course, and although

he was rejected by her he does not hesitate to inform Troilus that “She will sing any man at first sight” (5.2.10-11).

Despite his limited viewpoint, Troilus insists on interpreting the scene as Cressida’s betrayal. When he receives a letter from her, he refuses to accept her own reading of her situation, tearing up her letter and refusing to divulge the contents, denying the audience access to Cressida’s own interpretation of herself. Troilus shares the cultural bias observed by Derrida of privileging speech over writing; he sees Cressida speaking to Diomedes and assumes that is the truth. Yet when he gets her written message in a letter it is mere words. Her spoken words were also mere words but are assumed to be truer. There has been surprisingly little critical speculation on the contents of the letter; perhaps critics share Troilus’ assumption that the letter is mere words and her actions speak for themselves. However, Cressida’s actions are subject to many possible interpretations, the most striking of which Dryden imagines when he rewrites the story so that Cressida’s apparent betrayal is staged for Diomedes’ benefit. She did not really intend to betray Troilus, only to trick Diomedes into believing she would so that she could escape back to Troy. Sergio Rufini argues that Dryden’s rewriting of the play was based on his reading of this scene: “the whole operation may have arisen also from the much more striking one of redeeming Cressida. Might not Dryden’s undoubted theatrical genius have glimpsed this second possibility in the peculiar ways to which Shakespeare had resorted when restaging her betrayal?” (247).

One of the major reasons Cressida is dismissed by her detractors, within the play and outside it, is her language and wit. In the general kissing scene her witty rebuffs of Menelaus and Ulysses are read in different ways: “[f]or the senilely chivalric old

Nestor, Cressida is ‘a woman of quick spirit’, which for Ulysses means being a ‘sluttish spoil of opportunity’” (Bayley *Division* 205). Ulysses “reads” Cressida in his famous condemnation of her:

There’s language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
 Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
 At every joint and motive of her body.
 O, those encounterers, so glib of tongue,
 That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
 And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
 To every tickling reader! Set them down
 For sluttish spoils of opportunity
 And daughters of the game. (4.5.56-64)

To Ulysses, glibness of tongue is indivisible from sexual looseness, “sexual immodesty is also textual immodesty”; perhaps the prevalence of this association is the reason why critics seize on his point of view (Cook 192). Thompson, for example, sides with Ulysses in this, writing that Cressida’s “witty and crude replies to the Greeks are in total contrast to her stunned silence in Chaucer and again show Shakespeare taking the worst possible view of her medieval character, foreshortening events to make her seem even more fickle and heartless” (Thompson 139). However, she can be read in other ways. Other critics note “the defensive function of her wit” or compare Cressida’s witty banter to other Shakespearean heroines: “[c]ertainly there is no need to assume Cressida is sexually experienced because of her talk. Playful bawdry and sharp passion are commonly found in the speeches of Shakespeare’s virginal heroines, Rosalind or Juliet, for example” (Adelman 121, Yoder 122). Considering Ulysses’ misreading of Achilles’ motives in abstaining from the war, and his bias against Cressida after she rejects him, I am reluctant to accept his assessment. As well, since Cressida uses speech to reject Ulysses, his reading appears to be a counterattack; in her absence he can read her in a

way that overrides her own interpretation of herself, and thus avenge the slight.

Interestingly, Cressida is also concerned with her loose language. She regrets speaking frankly to Troilus, saying, “Why have I blabbed? Who shall be true to us / When we are so unsecret to ourselves?” (3.2.120-21). Although Ulysses accuses her of loose language, she frequently chooses not to speak, but to remain secret to herself throughout the play, particularly the latter half. To Cressida, it seems that speech does not signal sexual infidelity, as Ulysses claims, but infidelity to herself. Through the second part of the play, she avoids articulating her feelings and thus avoids the risk of self-betrayal.

It could be that critics read back: how else can one explain her behaviour with Diomed unless it is assumed that she is ‘impure’ before becoming Troilus’ mistress?” (Oates Smith 179). Critics are “prejudiced by their knowledge of her ultimate treachery, and perhaps put off by her irreverent flippancy, [they] seem at times to go to unusual lengths to establish the bawdy side of Cressida’s conversation” (Donaldson 87). However, as he notes there are often two possible interpretations of her speeches: “the wit with which she tries to defend herself in a world full of snares for beautiful young women often invites, if it does not require, a secondary bawdy interpretation” (Donaldson 87).

As well as these critical prejudices, the ambiguity in many of her speeches is a possible explanation for the divergent readings of her character. Donaldson describes Arnold Stein’s interpretation of Cressida’s ambiguous speeches, and provides his own counter interpretation. Donaldson quotes Stein’s statement that Cressida

‘... has a trick, which might have provided Freud with useful examples, of slyly provoking indecent jokes at which she can be embarrassed.’ Stripped of its prejudice—‘slyly’ and ‘can be’—this is a just remark: Shakespeare does indeed present Cressida as one *fated* to provoke

indecent jokes at which she *is* embarrassed. Indeed, the double entendres and potential double entendres that her witticisms so often suggest that it is by a kind of extended use of double entendre that Shakespeare imparts to her much of her ambiguity. Shakespeare keeps giving us images, in microcosm, of her history. She is fated ultimately to show the world two different sides of her personality, a good one and a bad one.
(94)

It has often been assumed by critics, as it is by Ulysses and Thersites, that the bad side of her personality is the “real” Cressida. No doubt the major reason why this view is so readily accepted is that Cressida is not given the opportunity to express her opinions or reactions after she leaves Troy, to show the good side of her self and explain her actions. As Adelman says, “Ulysses’ assessment of her as merely a daughter of the game (4.5.63) is disquieting partly because it offers us an explanation for her behaviour just when we are feeling the need for one, in the absence of one by Cressida herself” (127). This is particularly disorienting because at the beginning of the play, the audience has “a keen sense both of Cressida’s inwardness and of our own privileged position as the recipient of her revelations” (Adelman 122). Her opening soliloquy reveals her feelings, and shows a very different side of her character than she has revealed to Pandarus and Alexander; though she banters light-heartedly with them, she reveals that she is deeply in love with Troilus, and deeply afraid to give in to love. This soliloquy establishes “not only some sense of Cressida but also the expectation that we will be allowed to know her as a character” (Adelman 122). When she ceases to explain herself and that expectation is disappointed, it is difficult for the audience to know how to interpret her. Although critics have attempted to read her straightforwardly as a negative exemplum, Cressida’s character is more complicated than such a reading will allow, and she cannot be read either as a negative or positive exemplum.

A further reason Cressida remains unreadable to others is her refusal to define herself as a coherent individual. She describes herself as irreconcilably divided, saying to Troilus, “I have a kind of self resides with you, / But an unkind self that itself will leave / To be another’s fool” (3.2.143-45). Similarly, after she has decided to leave Troilus for Diomedes, she says, “Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee, / But with my heart the other eye doth see” (5.2.113-14). Her manner throughout the play is inconsistent—she jokes with Alexander, calls Pandarus a bawd and yet acquiesces to his plan, confesses her love to Troilus yet goes silently to the Greek camp and takes up with Diomedes. It is difficult to construct a single character who would have behaved in all these ways in such a short span of time. As Carol Cook notes,

[i]t is striking ... how resistant Cressida is to a consistent psychologizing, how frequently she seems to expose the mechanisms of ‘psychological illusionism.’ A kind of bizarre textual psychosis seems to voice itself through her; she is a creature of intertextuality, of Chaucer, Lydgate, Caxton, Henryson, and others (‘the wanton of tradition,’ L.C. Knights has called her), endowed with self-consciousness and wondering what makes her do the things she does. She stands in the same relation of exteriority to herself that the critics do, and, like them, speculates on her motives. (193)

Many critics do not share this acknowledgement of her complexity, but try to come up with a theory of her character which adequately explains all her behaviour, saying she is a wanton or victim and ignoring some of her behaviour in order to understand her as one kind of self. However Cook’s notion that Cressida has no defined self has some appeal. Stephen Collins sees Cressida’s indeterminacy as defensive, arguing that “Cressida self-consciously defends herself by maintaining as fluid a self-definition as she can ... her chameleonic personality protects her against those who try to limit and define her actions” (59). Cressida does not to attempt to reconcile her kinds of selves,

accepting that she will be divided and “refus[ing] to be ‘read’ through the drama in a way that would give a secure and coherent sense of her personality” (Mann 109).

Cressida maintains a fluid, fragmented identity because her precarious situation forces her to take on multiple roles; she seems to adopt a different personality in different settings. She describes herself in terms of doubleness, but it is unclear whether she has a divided self or whether she adapts herself to every situation, playing roles behind which there is no consistent self. Howard Adams explains her inconsistent behaviour by suggesting that it “shows her appreciable skill in adapting to her audience ... she adeptly picks up her identity clues from whatever person she is with” (75-76). Cressida sees herself as divided and wants to avoid speaking her thoughts because, as she tells Troilus, she identifies speaking and being unsecret with being untrue to herself (3.3.120-21). In the uncertain world of the war, she cannot afford to invest her sense of self in one relationship. If she were to define herself in relation to her father, her identity would be undermined when he leaves and betrays Troy; if she defines herself as a Trojan, that self would be undermined when she is sent away to the Greeks. Anything she could tie her identity to is subject to change, so she can only respond by refusing to develop a stable identity which would be subject to destruction. She succeeds in being different people in different situations; as Collins notes, “Cressida is someone else to everyone, just as she knew. Identity can only be negotiated in social intercourse”, and in an unstable world at war, Cressida must constantly renegotiate her identity (60). She has to destabilize herself in order to adapt, acknowledging her kinds of self rather than claiming a singular identity as Troilus does when he says he is “as true as truth’s simplicity, / And simpler than the infancy of truth” (3.2.164-65). Considering Troilus’

reversal in his first scene where he claims he cannot fight then does, his claim to consistency is questionable at best, whereas Cressida's acknowledged dividedness is in keeping with what we have seen of her and her world. Instead of being the exemplum of faithlessness, Shakespeare's Cressida "eludes signification: she is unidentical not only to the storied figure she inhabits but to any self that she or Troilus can construct" (McCandless 21).

Cressida's position on the sidelines of her society is particularly significant given the play's concern with kinship and identity. As Vivian Thomas points out, "[v]irtually every character in *Troilus and Cressida* is identified in terms of kinship and several implications are suggested. Even the illegitimate Margarelon and Thersites emphasise the kinship network, and the one man who relinquishes his place in this pattern, Calchas, virtually loses his identity" (Thomas 19). Agamemnon calls Calchas "Trojan" rather than calling him by name; he is only a Trojan but no longer even that because "[i]n his quest for safety he has relinquished his identity" (Thomas 105). According to the Prologue, the war has been going on for seven years, so Cressida must have been fairly young when it started. Though the details of Calchas' betrayal of Troy are not given here, in the other versions he abandons Troy near the beginning of the war, so Cressida has likely been on her own since the war began.

Cressida holds a uniquely precarious position in both the Trojan and Greek societies. Heather James notes that "Cressida realizes that she belongs to herself tenuously, at best", a reality which is certainly illustrated by her exchange for Antenor (107). Neither Calchas nor the Trojans have asked Cressida's opinion in the matter of whom she belongs to. It is assumed that she belongs either to Troy or to her father, and

it is for them to decide whose Cressida she will be. In older versions of her story she asks for Hector's protection after her father betrays the city; here this is not mentioned. As the daughter of a traitor in a city at war, "brought up by and getting her early idea of men from a lecherous uncle", apparently without any other relatives, she is very much alone (Adams 88). She does not appear to have any friends; unlike Chaucer's Criseyde who has a large household with female friends and relatives, Cressida has only Pandarus and one servant. Criseyde can ask Antigone for advice, whereas Cressida has only a brief monologue in which to wrestle with her feelings. Not only does her lack of female friends emphasize how alone she is, but it limits the audience's perspective, because unlike most of Shakespeare's heroines, "Cressida has no female friends or relatives ... with whom she might reveal a more intimate self" (Mann 116). There is no one with whom she can safely be unsecret.

Once she acquiesces to the transfer she remains largely silent, as if she, like Calchas, loses her identity when she leaves her home. When the Greeks arrive to take her away in act 4 scene 4, "[a]s Troilus and Diomedes quarrel over her, she stands silent, as though she has become merely the object of their desire (and their competition), as though she has no voice of her own" (Adelman 127). In act 4 scene 5, the "general kissing" scene, she does not speak until Menelaus asks her a question, at which point she briefly displays the wit that marked her earlier conversations with Alexander and Pandarus. And, as noted above, after she leaves Troy we are not given access to a soliloquy or the letter that would explain her actions.

In the Greek camp, she is surrounded by the Greek kings and princes and is isolated by being Trojan, having no rank or title, and apparently being the only woman

in the camp. Her formal status in the camp is not clearly described, though the way she is passed around in the general kissing scene does not suggest that she will be treated with respect. Adams refers to her as “a female prisoner of war vulnerable to the Greek army”, while other critics who view her harshly presumably believe she has some choice in her behaviour and is not a prisoner (87). She does not speak or act until she is asked for her opinion, which contrasts her behaviour in Troy, where she initiated conversations with Alexander, Troilus and Pandarus. This suggests that she sees herself as less autonomous than she was in Troy, or at least that she is uncertain as to her position. Once she arrives in the Greek camp Cressida is “caught in an economy of giving and withholding, one she embraced earlier with Troilus, that now confines her to an unappealing choice between being promiscuously used or accepting the protection of a predatory male. Moreover, Ulysses, having with the others encouraged her flirtatiousness, then condemns her for it” (Engle 162). She had certainly attempted to withhold herself to gain some measure of advantage while in Troy, holding off with Troilus because, she says, “Men prize the thing ungained more than it is” (1.2.280). This is noteworthy because of the suggestion that she believes Troilus to be prizing her above her worth, and that she is a “thing” which “gains its value not through any intrinsic merit but through its market value, determined by its scarcity” (Adelman 122). However, she later berates herself, saying, “O foolish Cressid, I might have still held off, / And then you would have tarried!”, so it seems that though she acknowledges her position in the economy of withholding, she is unable to use it to her advantage (4.2.18-19).

Her sustained doubleness and detachment can also be seen as part of her participation in the economy of withholding. R.A. Yoder notes that “[i]f passing from one man to another is her role in the ceremony of war, she plays it; but unlike Troilus she holds something back, and in this withholding, this wandering or double vision, her critical faculty is sustained” (123). Because of the precariousness of her position, she cannot invest herself wholly in any single self or viewpoint, and attempts to withhold as much as possible.

All these things work together to undermine her potential for exemplarity. Her identity is indeterminate and dependent on her circumstances—she cannot work as a negative exemplum because her character is so inconsistent that she does not present any clear wrong way to be. It might be possible to view this inconsistency as the negative exemplum she represents, except that no one in the play, including those characters who are traditionally positive exempla, is any more consistent. Cressida, like the other characters, appears as a contingent product of her circumstances, not as an immutable exemplum.

Chapter 3: Indeterminacy Throughout the Play

Like Cressida, the play as a whole resists any singular interpretation. Cressida “embodies the play’s central metaphysical question: is value a quality intrinsic in the object or is it a variable, fluctuating with subjective appreciations and perspectives?” (Asp 407). John Bayley sees Cressida, like the play, as inherently inconsistent, saying, “in this metaphysical hiatus of a play, chopped out, discontinuous with its element, a play in which ‘violent sorrow seems a modern ecstasy,’ it is right that Cressida too should be discontinuous with any notion of personality” (*Shakespeare* 116). Jill Mann writes,

the reasons why Shakespeare denies us access to Cressida’s inner life lie in her crucial role in relation to a central theme of the play, the problem of value ... On which of her two selves are we to base our estimate of her? It is here that our lack of access to her inner thoughts and feelings becomes crucially important, for only through such access would we feel confident in identifying the ‘real Cressida’ as (say) a calculating siren, a fickle whore, or a helpless victim of circumstance. By denying us this possibility, Shakespeare frees us to notice that the question ‘what is Cressida worth?’ has two problematic aspects, not one. Cressida is one element in the problem, the question of what constitutes worth is another. (117)

Audiences’ perspectives on the play as a whole are limited by the omission of key scenes and perspectives, in the same way their view of Cressida is limited by her silence after she leaves Troy. The question of worth and identity, the “is and is not” motif, bedevils the play. Troilus and Pandarus both describe Cressida’s appearance in terms of comparison; she is like Helen, or her hand is praised because next to it “all whites are

ink” (1.1.53). This method of describing value by comparison is applied to others as well—Troilus is described as a second Hector, valuable because of his resemblance to someone else. Aeneas cannot tell which of the Greek leaders is Agamemnon; the supposed “god in office, guiding men” is indistinguishable from those he guides (1.3.230). This type of comparison undermines the idea of exemplarity because it means that value is relative and dependent, not absolute or inherent.

Caxton saw the story of the Trojan War as exemplary and hoped it would provide an “ensample to all men duryng the world how dredefull and Jeopardous it is to begynne a warre and what harmes losses and deth foloweth ... whyche doctryne for the comyn wele I beseche god maye be taken in suche place and tyme as shall be moste nedefull in encrecyng of peas loue and charyte” (702). Henryson similarly writes that his poem was “Maid for 3our worschip and instructioun”, but in Shakespeare’s play these instructive examples collapse under the weight of a surplus of misguided imitation (Henryson 611). In *Troilus and Cressida* identity is a slippery thing, and none of the characters are exclusively themselves. As Thomas succinctly puts it, “[t]he wholeness of humanity is apparent only in its fickleness” (95).

Like Cressida, Achilles participates in the economy of withholding by withdrawing from the war, and gains value by refusing to participate in battle as Cressida seeks to increase her value by withholding herself from the sexual marketplace. It is the possibility of re-entry into the marketplace that increases his value. His use of withdrawal from battle to increase his value undermines his position as an exemplum because his failure to enact his purported heroism ensures that no one imitating his inaction could be heroic. In *Troilus and Cressida* Achilles is most often

read as “a braggart soldier elevated to myth by display and attribution, a legend he sustains through absence from the war and then degrades once compelled to return”

(McCandless 25). In the *Iliad*,

Achilles emerges as the exemplum of the proud, emotional man whose judgment is not infrequently overcome by passion ... Shakespeare ... accepts the pride as the basis of his exemplum. But what is especially interesting in Shakespeare’s reading, and confirms our idea of the dramatist’s intention, is his removal of a justifiable cause of Achilles’ pride. (Presson 184)

If this assessment is true, then it is fitting that the warrior who has done nothing to merit his reputation has his importance further enhanced by doing nothing. Despite his questionable merit, Achilles is “universally accepted as the general equivalent of heroic products” both by literary tradition and by both sides in the war (James 105). He maintains his status as an exemplary warrior, a position emphasized by the Greek leaders’ concern about others’ imitation of him. The exemplary warrior is the equivalent of heroism, without actually being heroic. His status is enhanced by his refusal to be a hero; when he withdraws from the war the other Greek leaders turn their attention away from defeating the Trojans towards luring Achilles back into the conflict.

While audiences must guess at Cressida’s motives, Achilles is given an overabundance of motives for withholding himself: he is too proud, he is in love with Patroclus, he is in love with Polyxena. Despite being given so many motives, there is still critical debate over the *real* reason he does not fight, his relationship with Patroclus being the most contentious point. Kimbrough states with assurance that “it ought to have been unnecessary, but H. B. Charlton was forced to note that Achilles’ ‘homosexuality is nothing but the report of a known slanderer.’ Even ‘objective’ textual criticism of the play has been seduced by the power of Thersites’ rhetoric into finding

more decadence than the play warrants” (139). On the other hand, Northrop Frye is just as certain that the opposite is true, saying, “Achilles’ alleged love for a daughter of Priam is a coverup for his homosexual infatuation with Patroclus” (*Myth* 68). As with Cressida, critics cannot agree on which of his selves Achilles is, and he himself does not know, stating, “My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirred, and I myself see not the bottom of it” (3.3.309-10). Achilles is the only one of the heroes who bothers to speculate on his own mind; the others ignore their contradictions, confident that they know themselves. Troilus, for example, even while he swiftly changes from being too weak to fight to eagerly joining the battle, remains confident as to his own constancy. Achilles lacks this assurance; he is aware of his interiority and knows there is more going on than he is able to articulate.

Achilles is undergoing a “crisis of exemplarity”, which “disables Western civilization’s greatest warrior as a character in the play and a usable exemplum in late Elizabethan England” (James 1, 2). The main way in which Achilles is disabled as an exemplum is the depiction of his conduct in battle. He is widely condemned for it by critics: Thomas calls him “a ruthless coward” whose “only superiority lies in a willingness to put aside all principles of ‘fair play’ in order to murder the pillar of Troy. Judged in terms of effectiveness, therefore, Achilles is the ‘better’ man” in comparison to Hector, who fails to kill Achilles when given the opportunity (112). And he is criticized within the play for his withdrawal from the war, though as Roger Stilling notes, “Troilus and Paris can use the excuse of love to drop out whenever they wish, and there is no dissension, no jealousy, no embarrassment” (139). Graham Bradshaw is more sympathetic to Achilles than most, and as he notes,

the play's most decisive action is the butchering of Hector: Achilles' design is conceived, carefully explained, and then executed some twenty lines later. So much for the Greek commanders' pretension to be the nerves and brain of the great enterprise. All that the superfluous Agamemnon can do, when he has heard the news, is send someone off to 'pray Achilles see us at our tent' and announce—mustering as much dignity as he can manage—that 'Great Troy is ours, and our sharpe wars are ended' (5.9.6-9). (148)

He may not be an attractive character, but Achilles certainly proves himself a better leader than any of the Greek generals, who cannot convince their warriors to fight, much less carry out their plans swiftly and efficiently. Agamemnon admits at the beginning of the play that all the Greek plans have failed, saying, "every action that hath gone before, / Whereof we have record, trial did draw / Bias and thwart, not answering the aim" (1.3.13-15). Achilles is a more successful leader than the other Greek commanders, but the question is on what terms actions in battle should be judged. Achilles' actions certainly are deplorable if Hector's value system is accepted; however, while Hector is motivated by the desire for honour, Achilles' motives are more personal. Though Ulysses tries to manipulate Achilles into fighting by appealing to his pride,

[w]hat finally drives the raging, weeping Achilles onto the field is not Ulysses' elaborate machinations, but the ruin of a love relation which might, if we judged it by its devastating consequences, be seen as more deeply felt than any other in the play ... Achilles is not playing a game, and has not the slightest interest in establishing whether he or Hector is the 'better man': he wants Hector speedily and efficiently disposed of ... The play is effectively over, when somebody at last refuses to treat either war or love as a 'sport'. (Bradshaw 139)

Seen from that perspective, Achilles is certainly more sympathetic. But if he is acting purely from a desire to avenge Patroclus and end the war, the question becomes why he tells the Myrmidons to announce that he has killed Hector. Is it because "[I]ike

Cressida, he is convinced that he must rely on observers to confirm his worth, and perversely, at the end of the play, uses the false report of the Myrmidons to re-establish his reputation”, or is it that he is their leader and, like the general of an army, feels entitled to take credit for the successful completion of the mission he orchestrated (Asp 416)? Either reading seems plausible, and since Achilles himself is unsure of his own mind, it is impossible to definitively choose a single interpretation of his actions.

In the same way that Cressida and Achilles participate in the economy of withholding, Shakespeare withholds key scenes that would allow us to understand what it is we are seeing, forcing the audience to rely on other versions of the story to form their assumptions about what is happening. Like the characters within the play, the audience has an incomplete perspective on events. There is no context for the characters as they appear in the play, and key questions go unanswered. When did Troilus and Cressida fall in love, and why does Troilus need Pandarus’ help? Did Cressida, as she does in Chaucer and Boccaccio, ask Hector for his protection? And what of the war story? Was Helen abducted or did she choose to flee Sparta with Paris? And what is the current status of the war?

The state of the war and the timeline of events are quite confused. The play’s first scene closes with Troilus and Aeneas going off to battle, and the next scene shows the Trojans returning, but in act 1 scene 3 Aeneas issues Hector’s challenge to the Greeks, saying that Hector “in this dull and long-continued truce / Is resty grown” (1.3.262-63). Before the challenge has ended the supposed truce, Ulysses tells Agamemnon,

Please it our great general
To call together all his state of war.

Fresh kings are come to Troy; tomorrow
We must with all our main of power stand fast. (2.3.253-56)

No fresh king has been mentioned in Troy, so it is unclear where Ulysses is getting his intelligence, or who the kings are. Paris reports in the next scene that “Hector, Deiphobus, Helenus, Antenor and all the gallantry of Troy” are afield, so it seems that the war is continuing before the challenge, though none of the Greek leaders appears to be participating, as they are all discussing the next day’s battle (3.1.129-30). However, someone must have been fighting, because when Calchas asks Agamemnon to exchange Antenor for Cressida he says that Antenor was taken prisoner the day before. When Diomedes arrives at Troy to exchange Antenor for Cressida, Paris says to Aeneas, “You told how Diomed, e’en a whole week by days, / Did haunt you in the field”, and Aeneas replies to Diomedes, “Health to you, valiant sir, / During all question of the gentle truce” (4.1.10-11,12-13). Apparently Diomedes has been haunting Aeneas in battle for the last week, during which they have enjoyed a gentle truce. If the question of whether the war is continuing were not already, irrevocably confused, it is after this exchange. There is and is not a war going on. Different accounts of the Trojan War order the events of the war differently, and here Shakespeare appears to be doing more than just compressing the events of the war. He combines the various timelines without attempting to reconcile them, so that it is impossible to say how much time passes in the course of the play or what is happening offstage. External accounts of the Trojan War cannot wholly explain the action of the play when the characters themselves cannot agree on what is happening.

As well as omitting the beginning and ending of the story, Shakespeare does not show us how key decisions in the play are made, including the Trojan decision to trade

Cressida for Antenor, and Cressida's decision to promise herself to Diomedes. When Cressida is brought to the Greek camp and kissed by the generals, Diomedes stands by silently. His only lines in the scene are "Even she", his terse introduction of Cressida, and "Lady, a word. I'll bring you to your father", after Cressida rebuffs Ulysses (4.5.18, 54). He is the only Greek leader who does not attempt to kiss her. This must be the point at which Diomedes elicits her promise; they have no other opportunity to talk unless the play covers a longer period of time than is apparent. But Shakespeare does not let the audience hear their conversation; instead of hearing Cressida's words we hear Ulysses giving his harsh assessment of her.

Shakespeare thematizes the issue of perspective, using the audience and the absences in the play to include all the perspectives that have been written or performed, every reader bringing a different experience of the story to read it in a new way. In Derridean terms, it remains undecidable and the play necessarily contains a trace of all the versions that are not told. Without the absent scenes it is impossible to say definitively which version of the story Shakespeare is telling; he is, in effect telling all the versions, and it is up to the readers—or director, or actors—to choose which version of the story it will be.

The undecidability of the story is also apparent in the inconclusive ending, which avoids the moral judgements of other versions in which Troilus dies heroically and ascends to heaven, or Cressida ends as a leprous beggar. Troilus' potentially tragic and heroic quest for revenge after Hector's death is interrupted by Pandarus, so that Troilus is denied a heroic ending and "never achieves the status of metonym for fallen Troy, as he does in kindlier sources" (James 95). Troilus and Cressida are still alive, but

“their situation too has come to an end. The rest of their lives, as the audience knows, will be an afterthought and anti-climax, the one killed in some obscure scuffle with Achilles, the other ending up as a leprous beggar” (Bayley, *Shakespeare* 97). The irony of accepting these traditional ends for the characters is that they are mutually exclusive; Henryson places Troilus’ final encounter with the leprous Cressida after Chaucer has had Achilles kill him in the obscure scuffle. Even the external traditions cannot provide the answers that Shakespeare has failed to offer. Kimbrough writes that “there is no handling of the Troy legend before Shakespeare’s which does not try to point the story with some kind of moral or ethical observation” (Kimbrough 73). But instead of providing a moral, Shakespeare ends the story quite deliberately without any point, leaving the audience to consider what exactly they have seen rather than suggesting what moral they ought to draw from it.

In rewriting a story with such a long literary history Shakespeare was himself engaging in “pale and bloodless emulation” and is one of the “thousand sons / That one by one pursue” (1.3.134, 3.3.157-58). His heroes are indeed pale imitations of the ideals they have traditionally embodied. And like the characters, Shakespeare participates in the economy of withholding by withholding key scenes and information from the audience and by beginning in the middle of the story. Audiences will fill in the blanks with the popularly-known story, which works up to the point at which traditions conflict. Among Shakespeare’s plays,

Troilus and Cressida is unique in enacting only a small part of a story that was very well known, and in its frequent appeal to the legend as established by time in the consciousness of the audience. The action is incomplete in the sense that, as a literate audience would know, the war went on, and that, before it ended, in the fall of Troy, most of the play’s characters, including Troilus, Paris, and Achilles, were dead; and I think

it is impossible for an audience not to relate what the play shows to the rest of the story as they know it. (Foakes “Reconsidered” 151)

We are removed from the expected privilege of the omniscient audience, hearing characters’ private thoughts and seeing all endings, and are placed like participants in the drama in a limited viewpoint where we remain frustrated at the limits of our understanding. There is no way to know what is “really” happening or what characters’ motives “really” are. Indeed, because there are so many versions of the Troilus and Cressida and Trojan War stories there is no single true version of either. In reproducing the conflicting aspects of all the previous versions of the story, *Troilus and Cressida* demonstrates how emulation can lead to confusing and unanticipated results unlike the original exempla.

Similarly, within the play, emulation is always deeply problematic. In the Greek camp emulation is presented either as a joke or as a symptom of disease. This is most obvious in Patroclus’ mocking imitation of the generals and in Ulysses’ manipulation of Ajax, which leads Ajax into imitation of what Ulysses views as Achilles’ worst aspects. The problem of emulation begins with Patroclus parodying the Greek generals for Achilles’ amusement, so “[t]he problem is one of unlicensed reproduction rather than ‘slandorous’ inaccuracy” because the generals’ descriptions of themselves are already so inflated that they leave little room for parody (James 99). Ulysses “diagnoses and so recreates the problem that Achilles has caused” when he enacts Patroclus’ imitation of Agamemnon and Nestor, though he avoids referring to any imitation of himself (Mallin 153). Ulysses reproduces the problem of emulation a second time when he tries to use it against Achilles: “[i]n fashioning the doltish Ajax in Achilles’ image, Ulysses gives Achilles a taste of the degrading impersonation he so gleefully inflicted on the Greek

generals ... Achilles finds himself replaced by a caricature of himself” (McCandless 132). However, he fails because Achilles is unconcerned with the Greeks’ opinion, and despite Ulysses’ best efforts Achilles does not rejoin the war.

When Ulysses first mentions emulation, it is as a sign of sickness so severe that it has stopped the progress of the army. Ulysses insists that people should maintain stable identities and stick to fixed places within the social order, because “when degree is shaken, / Which is the ladder to all high designs, / The enterprise is sick” (1.3.101-03). However, he contradicts this when he advises Achilles that

... emulation hath a thousand sons,
That one by one pursue. If you give way,
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,
Like to an entered tide they all rush by
And leave you hindmost. (3.3.157-61)

When it suits his purpose, he argues just as fervently that there is no fixed order, and Achilles must continually strive to maintain his position or he will quickly be replaced. As well, Ulysses is not afraid to usurp Agamemnon’s position as general by determining the Greek course of action, nor does he hesitate to advance Ajax in an attempt to solve the problems caused by Achilles’ example. Or the problem Ulysses claims Achilles has caused. When Agamemnon asks why none of the Greek plans have come to anything, Ulysses replies that “The specialty of rule hath been neglected”, and goes on to blame Achilles, although it would seem more logical to hold the leaders responsible for how well or poorly the Greeks are ruled (1.3.78). And although Ulysses assumes that the challenge, “However it is spread in the general name, / Relates in purpose only to Achilles”, it was Ajax who “coped Hector in the battle and struck him down” to his great shame (1.3.323-24, 1.2.33-34). Ulysses can be seen as “the villain of

the piece”, as Harold Goddard suggests, because “[a]s a deranger of degree and fomenter of the very anarchy he pretends to hate, he turns out to be an advance agent of his own Universal Wolf. Could irony go further?” (401). The way he argues different positions in different situations suggests that he does not believe anything he argues, he simply chooses the argument that is most likely to be believed and get him his desired result. But the effect is to derange degree, which has unsettling effects on the Greek camp, as it does on the Trojans.

In the play, no one can emulate another without threatening to usurp his or her authority. Ulysses is so successful in turning Ajax into another Achilles that Ajax too refuses to fight, though unlike Achilles he seems to have no motive other than his pride. Ajax bases his performance as a warrior on the flawed exemplum of Achilles, and ends up reproducing his failings but not his success. Though Thersites is hardly a reliable source, he is the only one to comment on Ajax’s withdrawal from the war, and he says, “now is the cur Ajax prouder than the cur Achilles, and will not arm today” (5.4.14-15). It is questionable whether Ajax’s refusal to fight is truly an imitation of Achilles, or an imitation of Agamemnon and Ulysses. Both Agamemnon and Ulysses are accomplished warriors as well as leaders in other versions of the Trojan War, and there is no explanation for why they do not join the battle here.

It is clear that this destructive emulation is taking place in Troy as well. In Troy imitation is a way of life. Heroes emulate Hector, and all lovers emulate Helen and Paris; all desire is mediated through Helen and thus can only lead to disaster. This is what Kaufmann describes as Shakespeare’s depiction of Troy as a brilliant critique of a “theory of personality which defines a protagonist’s essential self as in any way stably

equivalent to his chosen mode of self representation” (143). Unfortunately for the Trojans, they do not seem to recognize any distinction between self and self-representation. While Achilles acknowledges his conflicted nature and interiority the Trojans do not show awareness of any conflict: when Troilus begins his first scene by saying he is too weak to fight, and concludes it moments later by running off to battle, there is no suggestion that he is aware of any contradiction. And when Hector is killed while pursuing an anonymous soldier for his armour, after having let Achilles live until a fairer fight could take place, none of the Trojans’ reactions suggests a belief that his death was anything less than perfectly heroic.

The certainty expressed by the Trojans is undermined by the contradictory tensions within the story. By introducing elements from different versions of the story and omitting any version of other sections of it, the play draws attention to the fact that the Trojan War story has been rewritten so many times with so many contrary interpretations that it has ceased to have any inherent meaning: “[w]hile history deepens the tradition’s authority, it also disperses it” (James 22). The story has become more authoritative with time, but it has also become less clear what it is the authority for, so “when Shakespeare selects multiple authorities and highlights the differences among them, he repudiates the kind of imitation that honors its model and hopes to transport some essential value from the original” (James 31). The Trojan War story is left as nothing more than the values imposed upon it; it is a slate so packed with possible meanings that anything could be found in it and any essential value is erased by the multitude of possible meanings. *Troilus and Cressida* undermines the idea of exemplarity by presenting exempla whose meaning is irrevocably elusive, open to

debate, and ultimately undecidable. They can be read to illustrate opposing ideas, ultimately reaffirming those ideas the audience brought with them because they have no internal meaning or stable identity. Although the audience approaches *Troilus and Cressida* with the expectation, based on previous versions of the story, that characters will be heroic and idealized, those expectations are constantly undermined by the play.

Even those characters who may initially seem to be identical to their exemplary counterparts are not, as they all fail to consistently live up to their values and maintain stable heroic identities. Donaldson points out that “[i]n her inconsistency she [Cressida] is in excellent company; Alexander’s description to her of Ajax in the play’s second scene is a not unapt description of almost everyone concerned: ‘There is no man hath a virtue that he [Ajax] hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attainment but he carries some stain of it’ (I.ii.24-26)” (79). Since the traditionally exemplary heroes contain traces of all qualities, it is left to the audience to decide which is important, or worthy of emulation, making it impossible for the story to hold any fixed exemplary purpose.

Hector is supposed to be the embodiment of chivalric virtue, and is treated as such by the other characters, but he fails to live up to this ideal. Alexander tells Cressida that Hector, “whose patience / Is as a virtue fixed, today was moved. / He chid Andromache and struck his armourer” because the previous day Ajax “coped Hector in the battle and struck him down, the disdain and shame whereof hath ever since kept Hector fasting and waking” (1.2.4-6, 33-35). We are introduced to the legendary knight by being told he has been beaten by the Greeks’ second-best warrior and reacted to this defeat by being rude to his wife and hitting his servant. This may be an understandably human reaction, but it is not the behaviour of an exemplum of chivalry. It seems

Hector's virtue is not so fixed after all, and perhaps his motives when he later refuses to fight Ajax in single combat are not purely altruistic. His motives in issuing the challenge in the first place are also open to debate; Bradshaw points out that "[f]ar from wanting to end the war, Hector's concern had been to end the 'dull and long-continued truce' (1.3.261)" (133). Hector does not seem at all concerned with winning the war; rather he wants to exploit every opportunity to increase his honour. In Caxton and Lydgate Hector loses the war because he chooses to give up the advantage and does not burn the Greek fleet; here he displays the same questionable judgement. Hector says his actions are fair play, but he shows no concern for fairness when he covets another soldier's armour, and is unconcerned about the fact that if Achilles lives he will inevitably kill more Trojans.

Another instance of Hector's ambivalence is in act 5 scene 3, when Andromache and Cassandra are trying to persuade him not to fight that day. He ignores their warnings and insists on fighting but instructs Troilus to disarm, saying,

No, faith, young Troilus, doff thy harness, youth.
 I am today i'th' vein of chivalry.
 Let grow thy sinews till their knots be strong,
 And tempt not yet the brushes of the war.
 Unarm thee, go, and doubt thou not, brave boy,
 I'll stand today for thee and me and Troy. (5.3.31-36)

This could be merely concern for Troilus' safety, which would be understandable if Troilus were in fact the young boy Hector describes. However, Hector's description of him is dramatically at odds with Ulysses' description of Troilus as "a true knight" who is "[m]anly as Hector, but more dangerous" (4.5.97, 105). Ulysses' judgement is suspect because of his misreading of Cressida and Achilles, but this is what he has been told by Aeneas, lending the opinion somewhat more credibility. When we finally see

Troilus fight in act 5 scene 6, he seems more like a “true knight” than a “brave boy”; he is attacked by Ajax and Diomedes together and holds his own. If the Trojans are describing Troilus as more dangerous than Hector, and “a second hope”, Hector may have more selfish reasons than concern for Troilus’ safety for wanting to keep him from the battle (4.5.110). It is Troilus who goes to save Aeneas from being captured by Ajax, who we are told had previously defeated Hector, while Hector hunts an anonymous soldier for his armour. Aeneas reappears in act 5 scene 11, so it seems that Troilus must have defeated Ajax, though this, one of the most purely heroic actions of the play, occurs offstage while Hector is killed. The “second Hector” threatens to overtake the original Hector as the hope of Troy. If this were to happen, what would the original Hector be, having been superseded by his emulator? Hector is caught in a catch-22: as a great hero, and as commander of the Trojan forces, he must be a model of heroism and inspire others to emulation. But in doing so, he runs the risk that someone will supersede him, and he will cease to be the model of heroism.

This is one of the many problems with exemplarity introduced by *Troilus and Cressida*; there is no reason, other than the tradition of the story, that Hector and not Troilus, or Paris, or some other character, is the exemplum of heroism. If Hector is successful at modelling heroism for others to emulate, there is the possibility that one of those imitators may outstrip him—this is what Ulysses seems to hope will happen when he encourages Ajax in his emulation of Achilles, though it does not occur in that case. But the possibility that an exemplum may be superseded calls into question the authenticity of the exemplum itself; since the possibility exists that someone else will

better embody virtue, the validity of an exemplum as a reliable signifier for virtue cannot be relied on.

The imperfection of Hector as a model of heroism is enacted in the ambiguity of his death. His actions cannot be considered chivalrous when he hunts an anonymous soldier for his armour, and as Bradshaw notes,

[t]he freshly killed man who had seemed ‘so faire without’ is already rotting, a putrid, mysterious thing ... Indeed, it is tempting to see this curious episode as a grisly, surreal *Gestalt*, which reflects our continuing doubts about what Hector’s own fair exterior conceals, and also vividly actualises that process of ruthless unpacking which the whole play so persistently enacts, in pursuing its strict enquiry into motive. (137-38)

This death illustrates the fact that not even Hector, whose name, according to the external legend and characters in the play, should be synonymous with chivalry, cannot consistently live up to his own ideals; he too has two kinds of selves. He can be read either as a true knight who is killed because of his momentary greed, or simply as a failure, for “when he risks prolonging the war by declining to kill Achilles, Hector makes himself responsible for the deaths of countless Trojans as well as Greeks” (Bradshaw 139).

While Hector is a failed attempt to be an exemplum of chivalry, Achilles embodies the opposite extreme; if he is concerned for his reputation he does not act on those concerns, and his actions in battle are aimed solely at accomplishing a goal. He takes everything seriously and acts out of utility. It can be argued that because his actions will ultimately end the war, they are superior, and that because he masterminded the assault on Hector he should take credit, as a general takes credit for the success of the army as a whole. However, even if we recognize the rationality of his action, it does not become less ugly. Achilles comes across as an unattractive hero who does not seem

designed to inspire emulation, though since most people would accept that war is inevitably an ugly business, perhaps it is preferable to present a warrior no one would wish to emulate.

Examining the relative merit of Hector's and Achilles' approaches to the war leads back to the question of value that recurs through the play. Is there an objective standard against which to judge them, or are all values wholly subjective and socially constructed, as Troilus suggests when he asks, "What's aught but as 'tis valued?" (2.2.52). While the Trojans do not recognize that something may have inherent value beyond what society ascribes to it, and the action of the play does not refute this belief, the legend that exists beyond the play does contradict it. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Antenor is described as

such a wrest in their [Trojan] affairs
That their negotiations all must slack,
Wanting his manage; and they will almost
Give us a prince of the blood, a son of Priam,
In change of him. (3.3.23-27)

However, Antenor is completely silent as he is returned to Troy and exchanged for Cressida, and does nothing to demonstrate his value. Clearly, the Trojans do value Antenor more than Cressida, because they quickly consent to the trade and not even Troilus objects. Perhaps, as Eric Mallin suggests, "Troilus raises no objection to her exchange for Antenor because he is conditioned to think of an exchange of a woman for a man as a good trade" (162). But in doing so, they have undeniably made a mistake. After Antenor returns to Troy, he will betray the city, precipitating its destruction. After Cressida leaves Troy, she will betray Troilus. Had they left Antenor in the Greek camp and Cressida in Troy, neither Troy nor Troilus would have been betrayed.

This also raises the question, which is not really addressed in any version of the story, of whether the Greeks were aware that Antenor would betray Troy. Do they make what seems to be a poor trade out of loyalty to Calchas, and later benefit when Antenor decides to betray Troy, or do they agree to the trade so they have a pretext for returning Antenor to Troy where he can help them take the city? There is no hint that Antenor is known to be a traitor, and the only stated motive for the trade is Calchas' desire to retrieve Cressida, but in this play no one's motives can be assumed to be simple and transparent. As Agostino Lombardo points out, in the uncertain world of Troy, "[t]he only certainty is Hector's death and the end of a past to which no alternative had yet been found by those able to face the present" (215).

Like the characters, the play as a whole seems resolutely ambivalent, "designed at once to invite and to frustrate judgement: to insist upon the relative at the expense of the absolute" (Thomas 137). This is evident right from the Prologue's indifferent-sounding declaration that the audience "Like or find fault; do as your pleasures are" which "seems menacingly prophetic when we notice how many critics have fallen in, then fallen out—disagreeing about *which* characters invite approbation and sympathy, but rarely asking how the play is *designed* to frame and generate such disagreements" (Prologue line 30, Bradshaw 131). Bloom suggests that this indeterminacy is common to Shakespeare's plays: "[w]e can keep finding the meanings of Shakespeare, but never *the* meaning: it is like the search for 'the meaning of life'" (730). However, *Troilus and Cressida* goes further than other plays in its indeterminacy by actively working to avoid any singular interpretation of the characters or their actions. The play

draws us into concurrence with many of the characters' thoughts and feelings while constantly undercutting and contradicting every single

ultimate ‘truth’ on which the mind might quietly repose. Many readers and audiences and producers have found the strain too much: the play is so full of frictions and unresolved conflicts that some find irresistible the temptation to flatten it into a neat pattern, to simplify what is so disturbingly multitudinous. Other feel impelled (again, like the characters) to fasten on to a supposed truth-source or a closed-circuit system of ideas which the play is thought to propound—even when this involves blocking out of consideration other elements which contravene or complicate or cast doubt upon this. (Adamson 60)

Certainly many critics fall into this trap, as noted above in the discussion of critical reaction to Cressida. Unlike most drama, *Troilus and Cressida* lacks “a single major character on whom our imagination may fasten (instead, there is an exceptionally large number of important speaking parts)” (Ure 33). There is no one whom the audience can identify with and root for without reservation, though critics have made a variety of assumptions about which character has an authoritative viewpoint the audience can rely upon. Bloom assumes Thersites speaks for the play, and Bayley does the same, writing that “Thersites ... seems at times virtually to ‘speak for’ the play in a Brechtian sense, a sense unique in Shakespeare” (“Time” 64). Thomas assumes the opposite, writing, “Pandarus and Thersites are key figures in ensuring that the audience is not afforded the luxury of identifying too closely with any of the characters” (16). Since some of Thersites’ slanderous insults have no observable basis, and since the play is not as wholly negative as he is, I see no reason to assume that he speaks for the play. Other critics take Ulysses’ or Troilus’ statements at face value and assume they provide objective commentary on the play. However, since neither character is as trustworthy as he considers himself, this is questionable. Ulysses’ elaborate scheme to get Achilles to fight fails utterly; perhaps he is not as good a judge of character as he believes himself to be. In his first scene Troilus goes from saying he “cannot fight upon this argument / It

is too starved a subject” to running off to “the sport abroad” of battle (1.1.88-89, 111).

As Kaufmann notes,

Troilus and Cressida provides no secure point of vantage from which to evaluate the action. There is no single, reliable choral observer within the play who can orient our responses. The overall strategy of *Troilus and Cressida* not only refuses us this positive convenience, it repeatedly builds up moments or issues tempting us to make such an identification only to violate it in some way. (156-57)

As all the characters prove unreliable and inconsistent at some point in the action, it is “‘multiplicity’ rather than any one character’s ideas governs the viewpoint of the play” (Yoder 111). That multiplicity takes many forms, both in the multiple viewpoints the play provides, and within the divided character of Cressida.

As well as the number of viewpoints and value systems, all of which prove limited, *Troilus and Cressida* proves ambivalent because it contains elements of all the conflicting accounts of the Trojan War. Other Renaissance writers “deplored the deficiencies of chronicles and histories, which disagreed in their accounts of the same event, and they sought to rewrite those events to *remove* such conflicts. The task facing the Elizabethan author was likewise not the discovery of new facts, nor the reweaving of the old into new cloth, but the harmonizing of conflicting accounts” (Woolf 34). Shakespeare, however, is engaged in the opposite process, including all the contradictions contained in his sources, and in doing so removing the heroism of all of the sources, making the characters disappointingly human. Incorporating all the legends into one causes the story to collapse in on itself and robs it of its power as an exemplum and as Tudor myth. In Shakespeare’s retelling, the story of Troy “has survived all additions and modifications to maintain still the ready image of Hector and Achilles as types of warriors, Helen as a type of beauty. This vision modifies our attitude to the

play, so that we see constantly beyond the ‘extant moment,’ and know, as Achilles does not, ‘What’s past and what’s to come’” (Foakes “Reconsidered” 153). The audience’s vision is, like Cressida’s, divided, with one eye looking on the story before them while another looks back to the legend.

Many critics have seen *Troilus and Cressida* as bleak or nihilistic because of the way it undermines exempla and the values they represent. Bloom writes that “a purely personal bitterness energizes the play” and that “Shakespeare’s generous rancidity here stems from a powerful insight that the mind itself is profoundly contaminated by lust” (328, 339). Similarly, J. Oates Smith is one of many critics who have seen the play as undermining all values: “[i]nfidelity is the natural law of the play’s world and, by extension, of the greater world: woman’s infidelity to man, the body’s infidelity to the soul, the infidelity of the ‘ideal’ to the real, and the larger infidelity of Time, that ‘great-sized monster of ingratitude’” (168). In deconstructing the exemplary nature of the characters, Shakespeare’s play amplifies the moral of Chaucer’s poem that all things human are unreliable, but it seems to lack a higher vision of constancy. The gods are names mentioned in passing, not real beings to have faith in. Troy seems to have gone from a world in which you can be sure of nothing but God, to a world in which nothing is sure but death and taxes. Having lost faith in the gods, the Trojans and Greeks are left floundering, trying to find some reliable alternate value system. In the earliest versions characters’ choices were dictated by the gods—in Sainte-Maure, for example, Calchas says he acted against his will and followed Apollo’s orders—but here the gods are absent, and their representatives less prominent than in other versions of the Troy

legends. However, they are still present: Helenus, Calchas and Cassandra all appear, all divinely inspired to prophesy Troy's fall, and all ignored by the Trojans.

Despite the undermining of the value systems exposed in the play, there are ultimately hints that a reliable value system does exist, though it is not visible to the characters; it is outside the scope of the action, just as key parts of the story are outside the frame of the play. The Trojans have no way of recognizing value that is not created in the marketplace. This failure in their value system becomes obvious when they make the catastrophic decision to exchange Cressida for Antenor, and is embodied in the character of Cassandra, who, in *Troilus and Cressida* as in all other versions of the legend, is the exemplum of someone whose value is unrecognized by those around her. Apollo gave her the gift of prophecy, but cursed her with never being believed, and although this is not explained in the play it is a well-known aspect of the Trojan story, and her presence in the play proves to an audience familiar with her story that someone may be valuable without being valued.

In act 2 scene 2 Cassandra enters as Troilus has finished arguing that Helen “is a pearl / Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships / And turned crowned kings to merchants” (2.2.81-83). It takes a moment for the other characters to recognize her—Priam asks, “What shriek is this?”, Troilus replies, “’Tis our mad sister”, and Hector adds, “It is Cassandra” (2.2.97, 98, 100). It is peculiar that they take so many lines to identify their daughter and sister, who should be familiar, if identity were a straightforward question anywhere in the play. Cassandra speaks briefly (in comparison to Hector and Troilus), and leaves, having concluded simply, “Troy burns, or else let Helen go” (2.2.112). Hector asks Troilus whether he will consider what she has said,

but Troilus dismisses her quickly, saying she is mad, and “Her brain-sick raptures / Cannot distaste the goodness of a quarrel / Which hath our several honours all engaged” (2.2.122-24). Cassandra’s prophecy is ignored as cavalierly as Hector ignored his own stated belief that the war is wrong, and they resolve to continue the war.

Cassandra reappears in act 5 scene 3, prophesying Hector’s death and joining Andromache in her attempt to keep him from the battle. She tells Priam to support them, saying, “He is thy crutch. Now if thou loose they stay, / Thou on him leaning, and all Troy on thee, / Fall all together” (5.3.60-62). Priam briefly attempts to persuade Hector not to fight, telling him,

Thy wife hath dreamt, thy mother hath had visions,
Cassandra doth foresee, and I myself
Am like a prophet suddenly enrapt
To tell thee that this day is ominous. (5.3.63-66)

Despite these warnings, Hector is determined to fight, and Priam cannot seem to contradict him, so lets Hector go despite all the warnings of his impending death.

Like Cassandra, who is divinely inspired, Helenus and Calchas are priests and know that Troy will fall. Calchas says he abandoned Troy “through the sight I bear in things to come” (3.3.4). Helenus is introduced in act 1 scene 2, when he passes by Cressida and Pandarus among the other princes. Pandarus is not interested in him, and only identifies him, repeating, “That’s Helenus” three times (1.2.211-13), and saying he is a priest who will “fight indifferent well” (1.2.215). Helenus has a mere four lines in the council scene, in which he tells Troilus that Priam should listen to reason, not Troilus, advice which naturally goes unheeded (2.2.33-36). He appears but does not speak for the single combat in 4.5. He is notable for being unnoticed. However, though these warning are ignored, it is significant that they are present. And although the gods

are not named, there are constant references to higher powers. As Jonathan Dollimore notes, readers are “compelled by the apparent fact of chaos to think critically about the way characters repeatedly make fatalistic appeals to an extra-human reality or force: natural law, Jove, Chance, Time and so on” (RT 44).

Despite the apparent chaos, the gods’ representatives see the situation more accurately than anyone else in the play, suggesting that they may be connected to a true reading of the situation. There are hints, but although the audience knows the story and knows that Cassandra will be proven right, there is no way for the characters to know that; within the confines of the play, there is no way to distinguish truth, even when it is available. The play leaves the audience with the inescapable indeterminacy of the world, where characters are faced with the impossible task of constructing a stable self in an unstable world, and where there are no recognizable, reliable values, although ultimately, there is value that is inherent and separate from what is established in the market place. The question in *Troilus and Cressida* is how people, without the benefit of knowing the outcomes of their decisions and with limited perspective, can identify value; that is the problem the play poses, but does not attempt to answer, leaving it for the audience to consider.

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