



LOVE AND SEXUAL INFIDELITY IN *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*

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ABSTRACT

The cardinal theme of Troilus and Cressida is sexual infidelity. The Prologue of the play proclaims it as the pivotal subject of the play's action. The discourse between love and war is made overt in the beginning lines of the play, asserted by Troilus himself: "Call here my varlet. I'll unarm again. / Why should I war without the walls of Troy / That find such cruel battle here within?" (I.i.1-3). Troilus's love for Cressida is depicted in dismally carnal terms. He asserts explicitly of the "monstrosity in love" and "that the will is infinite and the execution confined; that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit", and Cressida reacts to him, "They say all lovers swear more performance than they are able, and yet reserve an ability that they never perform."

Keywords: *love, lust, politics and sexual infidelity.*

INTRODUCTION

In all Shakespeare's plays, perhaps *Troilus and Cressida* is the bleakest play that shows itself as a violently humorous farce of great heroes of the past. The ambience is quite strange and unusual that we see in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and so diverse that various critics can show the change graspable merely by assuming dashing hopes in love experience by Shakespeare. This play encloses an exceptional poetry and it is one of those plays that appear incomprehensible to classify as either comedy or tragedy. If *Antony and Cleopatra* transfuses longing for the past in us, this play is the renewing of that precarious feeling. In this play Shakespeare depicts the past, but it is unsure that nothing is left abiding. In this regard Allan Bloom indicates that, "Nothing is left standing in the eyes of those who regard glory and love as the

two greatest and most interesting human motives” (80). In this play Shakespeare suggests that wisdom, crude and outwardly distasteful, is the one object everlastingly accessible to human beings that is dignified and pleasing. The quandary Shakespeare has in depicting this subject is the old Platonic one. Bloom writes that, “Glory and love, always attractive and interesting, are central to *Troilus and Cressida*, but their splendour is dimmed by the corrosive of reason, and they become in the plot means to the ends of Ulysses” (80).

Most of the love discourse in this play, “rings false, and at best reminds us of a Ginger Rogers-Fred Astaire romance” (83). After Troilus’s solemn but silly love conversation in the opening of the play, we observe Cressida performing the perfect coquette, prior to her fall into dissipation, with Pandarus. Whatever our grudges about the precise conduct for men and women, we notice instantly that someone who converses like Cressida cannot be sedate. She performs the part of not discussing Troilus earnestly. In this context Bloom hints that, “She is much too experienced with sexual acts and sexual organs to be thought to be in any way innocent or to respect their deeper meaning and mysteriousness” (83).

When Pandarus says that Helen loves Troilus, Cressida retorts, “Troilus will stand to the proof” (I.i.131). Pandarus describes Troilus as a person of genial nature, Cressida comments that these are the virtues of “a minced man; and then to be baked with no date in the pie, for then the man’s date is out” (I.ii.261-262). Bloom points out that “Cressida speaks frankly in a “pagan” style; it is that this is all common currency for her. Hers is a lustful statement of what we know as the sexual teachings of Masters and Johnson” (84). At the end of scene ii, Cressida speaks in aside and which she acknowledges her seriousness for Troilus. She describes her diffidence as a tool to warrant Troilus’ sincerity. Through experience, Cressida understands that men are probably to loathe what they attain without effort. She desires to seem deep in order to poise both hands. She knows common sexual associations to be a possible rendering of supremacy and slavery. The covering of her desires is merely the healthier to satiate them. Bloom suggests that “This is a parody of a serious woman’s reflections on her vulnerability” (84). For Cressida, it is merely an act in sexual worldliness. How antithetical she is to Juliet, who perceives the vulnerability in offering herself so candidly, but admits it.

Act IV is dedicated to presenting the two indispensable pairs—Troilus and Cressida, Achilles and Hector—together in the parallel action. They portray the two meaningful purposes in this play, love and glory, and they both are dispirited by Ulysses. Bloom writes that “War, in its unerotic necessity, separates Troilus and Cressida” (99). It is always the comedy of this play that Troilus is devoted and keenly romantic in backgrounds and with types of men more applicable to sexual parodies. His buried jealousy for her is of the dignified order. He fears that Greeks are more fascinating than he is and instantly encounters the Diomedes, who is sent to get ownership of Cressida, and who lures Troilus with threats of duping before his



beloved. When the Troilus has seen the Cressida with Diomedes, Ulysses asserts: “All’s done, my lord?” and Troilus admits it is. And Ulysses entreats, “Why stay we then?” Troilus is forced to remain there in order to brood on the conception of what he has noticed with his eyes.

What we have seen is an epic climax of the play’s pivotal subject, the tussle between longing and logic. Troilus has always thought of his love as though it were parallel or transcendent to the love of godly beings. In this regard Bloom hints that “Belief or faith is his profoundest longing, although for him it is faith in the imaginations that emanate from his eros” (102). He says faith gives birth to a trust that is “so obstinately strong” that it “doth invert th’attest of eyes and ears”. He sums up on the ground of this reason of the heart with the query, “Was Cressid here?” Ulysses briefly answers that he cannot press. Troilus importunes he is not insane, but goes on to persuade distrust of what he has just witnessed for the sake of “womanhood” (V.ii.114-132). The outcome he describes from Cressida’s betrayal is the betrayal of all women, particularly the disloyalty of mothers. *Troilus and Cressida* shows how love can at times almost end up as a mockery. Human beings are at times not big enough to keep it up gracefully.

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