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MYTH AND ANTI-MYTH IN "TROILUS AND CRESSIDA"
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Of all Shakespeare's plays "Troilus and Cressida" is the one which has probably provoked the most extreme controversy¹. It even sometimes baffled critics. Edward Dowden omitted all consideration of it from the first edition of his "Shakespeare: His Mind and Art", because as he admitted he did not know how to interpret it².

The first full-length study of "Troilus and Cressida" was published in 1931 by William W. Lawrence, who claimed that its essential characteristic was "that a perplexing and distressing complication in human life is presented in a spirit of high seriousness" and "that the theme is handled so as to arouse not merely interest or excitement, or pity or amusement, but to prove the complicated interrelations of character and action, in a situation admitting of different ethical interpretations"³.

Although some critics have disagreed with W. W. Lawrence's description⁴ it is interesting that the majority of them deal with the "different ethical interpretations" trying to see "Troilus and Cressida" in the light of the nature of values.

¹ See J. Wilders, *The Problem Comedies: "Troilus and Cressida" "All's Well That Ends Well", "Measure for Measure"*, [in:] *Shakespeare: Select Bibliographical Guides*, ed. S. Wells, OUP, Oxford 1973, p. 94.

² E. Dowden, *Shakespeare: "A Critical Study of His Mind and Art"*, Kegan Paul, Trubner and Co., Ltd, London 1875, p. vi.

³ W. W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, New York 1931, p. 5-6.

⁴ See E. Schanzer, *The Problem Plays*, London 1949, p. 48-49.

George Wilson Knight⁵ says that in this play Shakespeare contrasts human values with human failings and the two opposing camps present two opposing sets of principles. He equates the Greeks with "reason and intellect" and the Trojans with "emotion and intuition", stating that:

[...] "intellect", is considered here as tending towards "cynicism", and "intuition" in association with "romantic faith" - a phrase chosen to suggest the dual values of, Love and War. We can then say that the root idea of "Troilus and Cressida" is the dynamic opposition in the mind of these two faculties: intuition and intellect⁶.

Samuel L. Bethel regards "Troilus and Cressida" as "a consciously philosophical play"⁷ and although in his work "Shakespeare the Popular Dramatic Tradition" he analyzes it mainly from the point of view of medieval English theatre, he also touches upon the problem of the relationship between "sense-experience" and value with regard to the main characters.

Una Ellis-Fermor sees the play as an attempt by Shakespeare "to find the image of absolute value in the evidence of man's achievement: in the sum or parts of his experience, or if nowhere else, in the process of creative imagination"⁸. Thus, according to her Troilus's love, Agamemnon's chivalry and Ulysses's vision of the hierarchy of state are experimental images in which the absolute value of man's passion, intellect and imagination are tested. All of them, however, fail this test as "there is no absolute quality the evidence for which does not resolve itself into a mere subjective illusion of blood or fancy, a "mad Idolatrie. To make the service greater than the God" (II, ii, 58-59)⁹.

Kenneth Palmer takes up the problem of value through iden-

⁵ G. W. Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, London 1949, p. 48-49.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁷ S. L. Bethel, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*, London 1944, p. 69.

⁸ *Shakespeare's Drama: Una Ellis-Fermor*, ed. K. Muir, London 1981, p. 129.

⁹ *Ibid.*

tity and identity through attributes in his introduction to the Arden edition of the play¹⁰. He says:

It is easy to move from the objective position - of recognizing attributes, and judging what they are - to the subjective - of dealing at large with a reputation unanalyzed, and allowing all (objective) attributes to be judged in terms of that reputation¹¹.

This article is an analysis of the relationship between absolute values as I see it in myth, understood in the literal and metaphysical way and identity and value of the characters of "Troilus and Cressida".

When in act I, scene ii Pandorus asks his niece "Do you know a man if you see him?" (63-64)¹², he begins a complex chain of similar queries all of which pose the problem of how to recognize one man from another and how to establish a principle of identification. Since one definition of identity is "The sameness of a person or thing at times or in all circumstances, the condition is that a person or thing is itself and not something else"¹³, it would seem that in this play the problem must remain unsolved. For, in "Troilus and Cressida", absolute value is shown, both literally and metaphorically to be a myth, and the central question of how the true identity of an individual is ever to be firmly established if that identity depends upon fluctuating value judgements remains unanswered.

In an attempt to deal with the near chaos of conflicting attitudes towards value and the self, it is perhaps useful to see Troilus and Thersites as standing in polar positions, although the shifting, evasive nature of the play determines that any such definition will be a limited one.

Thersites sees no value in anything, he reduces and cheapens

¹⁰ K. Palmer; The Arden Shakespeare: "Troilus and Cressida", Methuen and Co. Ltd, London 1982.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 76.

¹² "Troilus and Cressida", [in:] The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. B. Evans, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1974. All the references to the text will be to this edition.

¹³ The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, OUP, Oxford 1971, Vol. 1, p. 1368.

all to the basest, most physical level, all is negative to the extent of nihilism. He is always "lost in the labyrinth of the fury" (II, iii, 1-2), and his attitude is that "all the argument is a whore / and a cuckold, a good quarrel to draw emulous faction and / bleed to death upon. Now the dry Serpigo on / the subject, and war and lechery confound all!" (II, iii, 72-75). He seems to have almost no conception of his own individuality, and it is very difficult to agree with Alvin Kernan, who states that Thersites sees himself as "subtle and intelligent", and that his "scheming has no other end but self-glorification"¹⁴. On the contrary, Thersites never engages in introspection, his whole basis of existence is formed by his concrete evaluation of things external to himself. In attribution to his behaviour a psychologically consistent motive, Kernan forces a principle of identity upon Thersites which his role surely rejects. His quoted words represent one possible value judgement against which all others in the play must stand.

At the opposite extreme, Troilus strives for sense of absolute value, nearly always abstracted from the object upon which that value is endowed. Moreover, all of his evaluations are primarily concerned with a need to discover an identity for himself. It is fundamental to his attitudes that the basis for Shakespeare's plot lies in myth¹⁵. In his evaluations and expectations Troilus seems continually to pre-empt that myth. He yearns to be a figure of a legend, a feeling which is perhaps accompanied by some subconscious awareness that his mythical role is already pre-determined. Of course, the irony behind this is that the basis of all myth is said to lie partly in fiction¹⁶.

Troilus's desire for fame is expressed during the Trojan debate, in characteristically self-centred but abstracted language:

¹⁴ A. K e r n a n, The Satiric Character of Thersites, [in:] Shakespeare: Troilus and Cressida, ed. P. Martin, A. Casebook Series, The Macmillan Press Ltd., Hong Kong 1975, p. 89.

¹⁵ G. B u l l o u g h, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, London 1966, Vol. 6, p. 87-92.

¹⁶ H. A. F r a n k f o r t, Myth and Reality, [in:] H. A. Frankfort et al., Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, Penguin Books, London 1961, p. 11-36.

She is a theme of honour and renown,
 A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds,
 Whose present courage may beat down our foes,
 And frame in time to come canonize us

(II, ii, 199-202).

However, on a more pervasive level, Troilus's self-evaluation seems to be determined by the fact that his role in the myth is most importantly that of the betrayed hero-lover. It is thus that he takes truth as the absolute value around which to structure his identity. His insistence on the supremacy of this value in himself is frequently repeated in such terms as:

I am as true as truth's simplicity,
 And simpler than the infancy of truth

(III, ii, 169-170).

Here he shows his naive approach to the world of which he is a part. Truth in "Troilus and Cressida" is always very far from simple, indeed the play questions whether man is ever capable of grasping a complete truth.

Troilus's naiveté is a symptom of his entire attitude towards value and identity, an attitude which he confidently voices in the Trojan debate. Whilst Hector claims that all worth is relative, and that Helen's value is too slight to merit the death of many men, Troilus stands fast by his belief in myth-like absolutes. Value is not a matter of perception, it is a quality conferred from outside. After all, he says, "What's aught but as 'tis valued?" (II, iii, 52). Value is created by the combination of will and choice, and must be held stable if honour is to be preserved. Just as "we turn not back the silks upon the merchant / when we have soiled them" (II, ii, 69-70), so Helen, once valued so highly, cannot be returned with her own worth diminished. Against this, Hector's argument that:

But value dwells not in particular will,
 It holds his estimate and dignity
 As well wherein 'tis precious of itself

As in the prizer. 'Tis mad idolatry
To make the service greater than the god"

(II, ii, 53-57)

sings out its balance, and reason, especially for an audience already aware of the mistaken value Troilus is to place upon his affair with Cressida. But, ironically, the reasonable argument proves the weaker and it takes only a reminder that to give up Helen would mean the loss of honour to sway Hector.

As far as his relationship with Cressida is concerned, the question of value remains an important one for Troilus. However, it does seem that the worth he confers is not so much upon the woman as on the quality of the love. In particular, the affair is important for the way in which it nurtures his sense of absolute identity. These values, to which Troilus devotes his life, make him a rather isolated figure, he is probably the only character in the play who closes his eyes completely to the sordid reality, until he is given a rude awakening with the death of Hector. It is this quality in Troilus which lends him some tragic status. Northrop Frye comments:

The basis of irony is in the independence of the way things are from the way we want them to be; in tragedy a heroic effort against this independence is made and fails; we then come to terms with irony by reducing our wants¹⁷.

It is part of Troilus's longing towards myth that he should strive for tragic status which he can never fully achieve. "Troilus and Cressida" is not a tragedy¹⁸; Troilus lives on, still clinging to an absolute purpose in life, even though his attitude to value has been painfully revealed as naive and inadequate. It is the motivation behind his actions which partly

¹⁷ N. Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearian Tragedy*, Toronto 1967, p. 213.

¹⁸ J. Janicka-Świdorska, (Troilus and Cressida: A Reinterpretation, "Zeszyty Naukowe UŁ" 1978, Ser. 1, z. 46, p. 3-27), has given an amply and scholarly proof that "Troilus and Cressida" may be called a "hybrid play" because it contains a mixture of genre including elements of the morality play.

deprives him of tragic status, his self-regarding search for the infinite through the exercise of his will.

In his argument for the existence of an absolute value, Troilus takes this hypothetical example:

I take to-day a wife, and my election
 Is led on in the conduct of my will,
 My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,
 Two traded pilots 'twist the dangerous shores
 Of will and judgement: How may I avoid,
 (Although my will distaste what it elected)
 The wife I choose?

(II, ii, 61-67).

Will frequently carries the meaning of determination, but here Troilus sets it in a context of sexual relations, where the connotation of lustful appetite is bound to be a strong one. It is interesting to see how this hypothesis relates to his affair with Cressida.

It is obvious that Troilus is primarily drawn to Cressida through sexual lust. His anticipation of possessing her develops into erotic fantasizing in which death as orgasm and will as appetite are intertwined with yearning for infinity:

I am giddy; expectations whirls me round;
 Th' imaginary relish is so sweet
 That it enchants my sense; what will it be
 When that wat'ry palates taste indeed
 Love's thrice-repured nectar? Death, I fear me,
 Sounding destruction, of some joy too fine,
 Too subtle, potent, tun'd too sharp in sweetness
 For the capacity of my ruder powers

(III, ii, 18-25).

This desire is accompanied by a frustrated awareness that in all probability the act itself will not equal his expectation. As far as sexuality is concerned, the absolute value he seeks is beyond human capacity and belongs to infinity:

This is the monstrosity in love, lady, that the will
is infinite and the execution confined; that the desire
is boundless and the act a slave to limit

(III, ii, 81-83).

The same idea is expressed in a more knowing tone of acceptance by Cressida when she determinates to hold back:

Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing
That she belov'd knows nought that knows not this:
Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is

(I, ii, 287-289).

This involves, however, a totally different system of evaluation from that of Troilus. Cressida's is a far more realistic attitude, and one which takes for granted an inconsistency in love. She believes that value is unstable, a man over-values a woman before he has conquered her, and having satisfied his "will" as fast as possible, her value inevitably diminishes in his eyes. But, as far as Troilus is concerned, there seems to be some degree of self-deceit involved. This is due to the fact that the knowledge that "execution" will disappoint does not exist comfortably side by side with a protestation of constancy in value. From the evidence of the play it seems that the keenness of Troilus's desire is much reduced once he has slept with Cressida. When he departs in the early morning "Dear, trouble not yourself; the morn is cold" he seems distinctly offhand, an impression confirmed by his reaction on hearing that she must return to her father, when all he can say is "It is so concluded?" and "How my achievements mock me" (IV, ii, 1, 67, 69). To our eyes it appears that his interest has slackend, but, as with his hypothetical example, he clings determinedly to a fixity of value. Throughout the whole affair, whenever a difficulty is encountered as far as response is concerned, Troilus's reaction is to stick fast to his "truth". Cressida claims that men's sexual prowess falls short of their boasting; Troilus replies that she most values him as she experiences him, but she will find that:

[...] Troilus

shall be such to Cressida as what envy can say worst
shall be a mock for his truth, and what truth can speak
truest not truer than Troilus

(III, ii, 95-98).

Cressida claims that he cannot be both reasoning and in love; Troilus denies any logical progression of thought and desires only:

That my integrity and truth to you
Might be affronted with the match and weight
Of such a winnowed purity in love

(III, ii, 165-167).

while at the same time claiming that he is "as true as truth's simplicity" (169). When Cressida retorts "In that I'll war with you" (171), she again pre-empts the myth; Troilus yields readily to her war, and makes his oath, which is self-indulgent, literary and trite in its abundance of metaphor and in its claim for Troilus as "Truth's authentic author" (181).

As the lovers part he charges her to be true, and notes that "sometimes we are devils to ourselves" (IV, v, 95), thus introducing the idea of duality in the self, as well as setting the pattern of the myth before our eyes. His truth is to such a degree his absolute value that it is not only his virtue, but also his "vice", and here again he insists upon the plain simplicity of his embodiment of truth. However, as he is to learn when he watches Cressida betray him, she can only be the object of his truth if he can keep up the pretence of her remaining constant with the value he once saw in her. When that pretence is utterly shattered his crisis is succinctly conveyed with the words "O withered truth" (V, ii, 46). He desperately struggles to keep his values stable by declaring that "this is Diomed's Cressida" (137), and that "this is, and is not Cressid" (146) but the "Bifold authority" (144) which he tries to set up collapses, and the vision of a love in which he and Cressida were "ties with the bonds of heaven" (154) is forced to surrender to a picture of all-consuming appetite:

The fractions of her faith, arts of her love,
 The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics
 Of her o'er-eaten, are given to Diomed

(V, ii, 158-169).

Troilus fights to preserve some sense of self-value against his disgust at the base sexuality to which Cressida has descended. His concept of an absolute identity through value shattered, he tries again myth-making through his words, to create a new value for Cressida:

O Cressid! O false Cressid! False, false, false!
 Let us untruths stand by thy stained name
 And they'll seem glorious

(V, ii, 178-180).

In addition, the sense of his identity is shaken, and the truth of his love for Cressida redirected into hatred for Diomed, even Cressida is forgotten as Troilus devotes his life anew to being Achilles's "wicked conscience" (V, x, 28). At the end, as at the beginning, Pandarus remains to make his ironic remarks on idealistic youth. Troilus leaves the stage with "Hope of revenge" (31), and rejects Pandarus forever. The myth it played out for this voyeuristic old man, he has become his name: Pandarus the eternal bawd, and as if to symbolize this, the mythologizing process has been speeded up. He is vastly aged, and riddled with venereal disease; in his case the myth is far from Troilus's ideal.

As far as Pandarus sees this, value is to be judged according to one's position and one's purpose. He too pre-empts the myth, by taking on his role as eternal bawd as his role in life, and by making all else seem irrelevant. Thus, while waiting to show Troilus, "the prince of chivalry" (I, ii, 229), to Cressida, he sees no harm in praising the merits of the other warriors, that she may "mark Troilus above the rest" (187-188); but, once Troilus has appeared, "Paris is dirt to him" (238), and the identity of all the others, now that the task in hand is accomplished, is by comparison, worthless:

Asses, fools, dolts! chaf and barn, chaff and barn!
porridge after meat!

(I, ii, 241-242).

Pandarus's attitudes to the identity of those around him are a source of great amusement to both the audience and Cressida. However, his incessant chattering about the qualities that define manhood cause us to question the premise by which men are valued, and to consider whether value judgements can ever be completely reliable. Much of the conversation between Pandarus and Cressida in Act I, scene ii verges on the ridiculous:

Pandarus: [...] Do
you know a man if you see him?
Cressida: Ay, if I ever saw him and knew him?
Pandarus: Well, I say Troilus in Troilus.
Cressida: Then you say as I say, for I am sure he is not Hector.
Pandarus: No, nor Hector is not Troilus in some degrees
Cressida: 'This just to each of them; he is himself.
Pandarus: Himself? Alas, poor Troilus, I would he were!"

(II, ii, 63-72).

Pandarus turns the idiom "he's himself" into matter for serious consideration. What makes one man different from another, and if a man is not himself, then who is he? The quickfire exchange between Pandarus and Cressida superficially looks like manipulation on the part of Pandarus to plead for Troilus, and mere flippancy on the part for Cressida for whom such comments as "An't had been a green hair, I should have laugh'd too" (152-153) set the tone. But what is here the subject for jovial repartee surely turns later in the play when Ajax is made, by Ulysses, into a synthetic hero, and so loses his sense of himself that he "foams at mouth" (III, iii, 254). Ironically Pandarus's babbings are far closer to those problems which motivate the play than any of the pieces of rhetoric produced by the self-conscious debaters. That which seems nonsensical, for example, Cressida's mocking "To say the truth, true and not true" (I, ii, 97) is exactly the attitude required to comprehend her world.

Pandarus may be unaware of the aptness of his commentary;

Cressida is rarely so. She is actually conscious of her place in a world of fluctuating truths. She will herself be valued according to her reputation even though that estimate of her worth may not comply with her true self. Since she will depend "upon my secrecy, to defend mine honesty" (I, ii, 261-262), she will be reputed chaste without truly being so.

Cressida seems to be a deliberately enigmatic figure owing perhaps to the combination of myth-like absolute and fluctuating values. This is a result of the paradox that the very quality for which she is fixed in myth is her inconstancy. There is often, with Cressida, the sense that the myth is already in existence and must therefore be played out. But alongside this stands an implicit commentary upon how the myth has been made, leading us to the viewpoint from which we can see the inadequacy of those permanent value judgements forced upon an individual by time and reputation.

Cressida is aware of a division between the self she is now and the self she will be: this seems to be the only way which she can deal with concepts of value. Time erodes all, and that which seems true at one moment will almost inevitably have altered by the next:

I have a kind of self resides with you;
 But an unkind, that itself will leave
 To be another's fool

(III, ii, 148-150).

The inevitability of Cressida's betrayal casts an ironic shadow over the scenes of oath-making and parting. Of course, the myth is being anticipated in the oath-making scene, but whereas Troilus's images of truth and constancy are as staid as "as true as steel" or "as iron to adamant" (III, ii, 177, 179), Cressida's oath disturbs one with its vision of an age where myth is irrelevant:

When time is old and hath forgot itself,
 When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy,
 And blind oblivion swallowed cities up,

And mighty states characterless are grated
To dusty nothing

(III, ii, 185-189).

This vision of a world descending into nothingness seems to determinate Cressida's attitude, the sense of inevitability in almost everything she does. What power does she have over her own identity when the world is heading for a chaos in which standards of truth and values have no meaning? Ironically Cressida is far more sensitive to such ideas than Troilus, in his simple naivete, can ever be.

Perhaps the only way to understand Cressida is to question the basis of value judgements made both by ourselves and by other characters. This involves a re-evaluation of what we understand to be truth and identity. If we ignore such problems and try to see Cressida from a consistent viewpoint as a cheap little tart, (she has none too rarely been classed as such¹⁹) we are ignoring the depth of emotion she displays on preparing to leave Troy:

[...] Time, force, and death,
Do to this body what extremes you can;
But the strong base and building of my love
Is as the very centre of the earth,
Drawing all things to it

(IV, ii, 101-105).

The huge discrepancy between this expression of grief, and her behaviour immediately she arrives in the Greek camp cannot be satisfactorily explained. Cressida speaks of duality in the self, so one possible view is that the Cressida of the Greeks is a different woman from the Cressida of Troy, or perhaps the idea of myth is in the air in that she is now in the company of those who expect her to behave as a drab. But the truth of her declaration of love for Troilus is not denied by her immediate inconstancy, her symbolic prostitution. It rather stands as a

¹⁹ F. S. B o a s, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, London 1896, p. 375-376.

touchstone against which to set her degeneration into Diomed's mistress.

As Cressida finally betrays Troilus she momentarily struggles against yielding fully to her mythical falseness, but she is now a changed woman and her surrender follows inevitably. Once she has given in she laments her inconstancy, but her language is trite, and seems little more than a feeble excuse to relieve any sense of guilt that may remain. Whereas before she has expressed her duality with regret, she now takes it for granted, and her tone is consequently complacent:

Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee,
 But with my heart the other eye doth see,
 Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find,
 The error of our eye directs our mind,
 What error leads must err; O then conclude,
 Minds sway'd by eyes are full of trupitude
 (V, ii, 107-112).

Cressida is far too aware of both herself and her world to estimate her value too highly. It is perhaps for this reason that, in a world of flux she turns to Diomed, who claims that "To her own worth she shall be priz'd" (IV, iv, 133-134). This idea of "own worth" is fully explored in the plot devised by Ulysses and involving Achilles and Ajax.

Ulysses's speech on degree is a magnificent piece of rhetoric delivered in a tone of immense self-satisfaction. He argues that, as in the "heavens", so on earth, there is a set order for all things, a ladder of ascending "priority" upon whose rungs all men have their place. Value and identity should remain stable, being dependent upon "the prigomenity of due and birth" (I, iii, 106). Without such adherence, in the microcosm, to a system mirroring that of the macrocosm, the world will be consumed by appetite and descend into chaos.

This philosophy forms interesting parallels with the speeches of Troilus and Hector in their debate. Like Troilus, Ulysses advocates the need for man to establish a set of values and to stand by them; like Hector, he asserts the presence of an intrinsic, even pre-ordained value in all things by which we can

be fixed in a hierarchy. But, just as Hector performs a complete volte-face, so Ulysses reveals the petty-mindedness motivating in his speech when the name of Achilles is introduced. A system in which identity is determined by one's "authentic place" may sound impressive, but its enactment remains an "unbodied figure of the thought" (I, iii, 108, 129).

Ulysses argues that the Greeks are weak in war because 'opinion' (142) has disturbed the true order. In particular, Achilles's "airy fame" (144) has made him proud and disdainful of those above him in station. However at this point the inconsistencies in Ulysses's philosophy manifest themselves. If Achilles is to be the object of petty anger because he has moved out of order, then surely Ulysses's presumptuous command of the Greeks is no better. To penetrate behind the brilliant rhetorical facade is to find that Ulysses's philosophy is a mere instrument through which to enjoy the sound of his own voice, and most importantly, through which to batter out his small-minded hatred and indignation.

Having declated the contempt for the power of "Opinion" to raise man above his fixed station, Ulysses reveals the weakness of his own system by attempting to counteract one value judgement with another. In so doing he effectively shows the all-pervasiveness of value judgements; that is, just how much a man's worth depends upon subjectivity. In a world of this kind, how can the set hierarchy of degree be expected to shine through? Aeneas's visit to the camp makes an implicit statement on this, since he cannot distinguish Agamemnon, "the glorious planet sol" (89) of the microcosm, from the rest.

In contrast, Achilles is instantly recognisable, although the estimate which he has of his own value does not agree with that of Hector, who after a moment's view can say "Nay, I have done already" (IV, v, 236). Thersites makes a similar point when he calls Achilles "thou picture of what thou seemest" (V, i, 6). Achilles exists by the pride he takes in his apparent greatness. But he is not insensitive to the power of other man to upset his secure sense of identity. When the Greeks insult him he clings feebly to the value behind his name, saying "Know they not Achilles" (III, iii, 69-70), though at the same time admitt-

ing an awareness of the precariousness of the relationship between man and man:

Tis certain, greatness, once fall'n with fortune,
Must fall out with men too

(III, iii, 75-76).

However, there is a blind circularity in his argument. He asserts that worth is not intrinsic but is esteemed by external possessions such as "place, riches, and favour" (82). Here we have another attitude towards value, where man's identity is determined by his fortune. Agamemnon and Nestor had earlier claimed the presence of fortune as a prime mover in the war. But, whereas they claimed that fortune established a man's value by exposing to the trials of adversity, Achilles uses fortune as a means of self-assurance. Having admitted that value is susceptible to fortune's whims he retreats from any self-examination:

[...] But tis not so with me,
Fortune and I are friends, I do enjoy
At ample point all that I did possess
(III, iii, 87-89),

This system of value through which Ulysses attempts to demolish this self-esteem is carefully constructed for emphasis whilst at the same time displaying the complexity involved in establishing what identity is. At first Ulysses uses a book to introduce the supposition that man:

Cannot make boast to have that which he hath not,
Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection;
As when his virtues aiming upon others
Heat them, and they retort that heat again
To the first giver

(III, iii, 98-102).

The word "reflection" brings in the association of mirrors, but, in this case, where the reflector is another man, the objective mirror image is not possible. As all the references to imitation

in the play reveal, the means by which man sees through others is highly subjective, and necessarily involves value judgements. The subject of Ajax, introduced as part of a logical sequence of thoughts, highlights the distortion of truth which such judgements may bring. Ulysses now claims that the way to know one's own identity is to put oneself in the position where other men are led to evaluate one. Here lies the basis of a contrast between Ajax and Achilles:

[...] Nature, what things there are
 Most object in regard, and dear in use!
 What things again most dear in the esteem,
 And poor in worth!

(III, iii, 127-130).

This thought leads directly on to his line of attack, which is to assert the total instability of a value from one moment to the next, and which is therefore totally opposed to Troilus's argument:

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
 Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
 A great-siz'd monster of ingratitude,
 Those scarps are good deeds past, which are devour'd
 As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
 As done

(III, iii, 145-150).

As opposed to Troilus's mythical concept of time, where absolute indentity will become man's claim to immortality, Ulysses here describes a process of eroding time in which nothing is stable, and where identity depends upon a constant reassertion of worth. Time thus becomes a series of interconnected "extant moments" in all of which there may exist a different evaluation of one object. As Agamemnon says to Hector:

What's past and what's to come is strewed with husks
 And formless ruin of oblivition;
 But in this extant moment, faith and troth,
 Strain'd purely from all hollow bias-drawing,

Bids thee, with most divine integrity,
 From heart of very heart, great Hector, welcome
 (IV, v, 166-171).

Reputation is thus not a cumulative process, but a value judgement is made when the "present eye praises the present object" (201).

Ulysses's argument, in its completeness, is difficult to comprehend, and the central issue of how man is to have his true value established is certainly evaded. The idea of value being communicated by one man to another necessarily involves a notion of intrinsic worth. Ulysses says:

[...] No man is the lord of anything -
 Though in and of him there he much consisting -
 Till he communicate his parts to others
 (III, iii, 115-117).

But the second stage of his argument, in which value is totally the victim of time, moves away from the possibility of intrinsic value, and makes the true nature of identity most difficult to ascertain.

The case of Ajax demonstrates the power of value judgements wrongly cast to disturb a man's sense of his own being. As far as Thersites is concerned, Ajax is the perfect target, since he does not have wit to do any more than bawl insults. Using Ajax for his example, Thersites brings into focus the problem of how man is to estimate his worth, and what it is which determines that a man is precisely himself and no more:

Thersites: [...] whomsoever you take him to be, he is Ajax,
 Achilles: I know that, fool.
 Thersites: Ay, but that fool knows not himself!
 (II, i, 64-66).

But is Thersites right here? Although Ajax does not involve himself in psychological examination in any way that can protect him from Ulysses's manipulations, and although his loud demands about the terms of the proclamation show as inflated of his own

importance, it is surely because he does have some sense of his own identity that his values are utterly confused when the Greeks treat him in an unexpected way. He becomes preoccupied with what a man is, and how, one man is to be defined as better than another:

Ajax: What is he more than another?
 Agamemnon: No more than what he thinks he is.
 Ajax: Is he so much? Do you not think he thinks
 himself a better man than I am?

(II, iii, 142-145).

Thersites is the most reliable witness to what Ulysses has done to Ajax's sense of value. He comments that "Ajax goes up and down the field asking for himself" (II, ii, 102) and that:

I said "Good morrow,
 Ajax"; and he replies, "Thanks Agamemnon". What
 think you of this man that taken me for the general?
 He's grown a very land-fish, languageless a monster.
 A plague of opinion! a man may wear it on both sides,
 Like a leather jerkin

(III, iii, 260-265).

Opinion has the power to manipulate, but whatever external opinion you carry, however reversible your reputation, your inner value (or lack of it) remains unchanged. As this cynicism implies, the whole plot is a ludicrous waste of time, and, when it finally fails and Achilles can only be roused by the death of Patroclus, Thersites can revel in the disaster, and from his own "opinion":

[...] the policy of those crafty
 swearing rascals, the state of old mouse-eaten dry
 cheese, Nestor, and that some dog-fox, Ulysses; is not
 prov'd worth a blackberry. They set me up, in policy
 that mongril cur, Ajax, against that dog of as bad as
 kind, Achilles; and now is the cur Ajax prouder than
 the cur Achilles, and will not arm to-day

(V, v, 9-15).

Thersites may be a cynic, but is not a malcontent, and he is a nihilist only in the sense that he sees no value in his world, and in the modern sense of despair at the world's nullity. Thersites is far from despair; he relishes his means of existence; indeed, paradoxically, he values the world most for the thrill derivated in describing the worthlessness of its creatures. He feeds from watching "lechery fry", and his imagination is disgustingly vivid:

How the devil luxury, with his fat rump
and potato finger, tickles these together
(V, ii, 55-56).

But Thersites vision is limited, and ultimately self-defeating on any human basis. Thersites is scarcely human himself, he brings everything down to the level of bestiality, and though his reason is acute, it is like that of Satan, wrong reason directed away from spiritual enlightenment and positive intellect towards base and purely negative self-satisfaction. A. Kernan comments that:

"Troilus and Cressida" is an exploration of the validity of certain attitudes and modes of conduct. Many of these attitudes are revealed as illogical, brutal, or unrealistic, but they are not derided judged by any implicit or explicit moral standard. Instead, they are presented as various human attempts to deal with and identify the titanic forces of history and passion²⁰.

I would take this argument one step further and say that the attitudes of the characters represent a never-ending struggle to find a satisfying sense of value and of their own identity. The struggle cannot end because the world of "Troilus and Cressida" allows for no simplicity, stability, or absolutism. It is, ironically, a world of anti-myth from which a myth has somehow been made.

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²⁰ Kernan, *The Satiric Character of Thersites...*, p. 91.

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MIT I ANTYMIT W SZTUCE WILLIAMA SZEKSPIRA
"TROILUS I KRESSYDA"

Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą ustalenia stosunku pomiędzy mitem, w sensie dosłownym i metaforycznym, traktowany jako wartość nadrzędna a tożsamością i wartością bohaterów dramatu Szekspira "Troilus i Kressyda".

Analizując postawy bohaterów autorka dochodzi do wniosku, że w świecie pozbawionym prostoty, stabilności i wartości absolutnych, Szekspir nie pozwala bohaterom na ustalenie własnej tożsamości i wartości. W konsekwencji w sztuce "Troilus i Kressyda" mamy do czynienia z anty-mitem, z którego w paradoksalny sposób stworzono mit.