

Troilus and Cressida.

If, about to write an essay on a Shakspearean drama — as a proem to the annual account of our public school —, I almost may fear to carry coals to Newcastle. since there have been made so many sound, critical and philosophical examinations about this poet's plays as to make every further attempt to this end, a little gratifying undertaking; yet this very drama takes, methinks, so singular a place, as well in the series of Shakspeare's plays as in the literature of the drama, and those treatises I mentioned, are chiefly relative to the brighter stars in the circle of his poetical productions: that from this point of view I ventured to treat this drama somewhat amplier than I found it done with any English or German commentator. — As to the time of the origin of *Troilus and Cressida*, with great accord and still greater probability, 1609 has been assumed as the year of its first public representation on the stage.*) Neither are there different opinions about the foundation of the play since, evidently, Chaucer's epic poem *Troilus and Creseide* has supplied the main materials to the poet who, besides, found many accessory helps in the *Troye Boke* of Lydgate, Caxton's *History of the Destruction of Troy* and Chapman's version of Homer. The difficulties, and there are a great many of them, which present themselves to the examiner, are referable to the ethic and dramatical character of this play. Indeed, the first English editors did not know how to classify it. In the first quarto-edition of 1608 it is called a famous History, in the title-page; but in the preface, it is repeatedly mentioned as a Comedy. In the folio-edition of 1623, it bears the title of the Tragedy of *Troilus and Cressida*, and was intended to follow *Romeo and Juliet*. But the editors found that this extraordinary drama was neither a Comedy, nor History,

*) cf. Collier's *Shakspeare* VI., 5. Charles Knight, *Shakspeare's Illustrated Works* II., 3. Nic. Delius, *Shakspeare's Werke* II., preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, p. II.

nor Tragedy, and they, therefore, placed it between the Histories and Tragedies, leaving to the reader to make his own classification. *)

So we find it alternately, both by English and German commentators, called a comedy, tragedy, historical-piece. N. Delius takes it to be a tragedy-comedy.

Corresponding with those heterogeneous denominations, the views of the literary value set on this play, show no greater congruity. Among the English, it is, above all, Knight and Coleridge who go farthest in their eulogies of this dramatical production; the former writes: In no play does he appear to us to have a more complete mastery over his materials, or to mould them into more plastic shapes by the force of his most surpassing imagination. The great Homeric poem, the rude romance of the destruction of Troy, the beautiful elaboration of that romance by Chaucer, are all subjected to his wondrous alchemy; and new forms and combinations are called forth so lifelike, that all the representations which have preceded them, look cold and rigid statues, not warm and breathing men and women. — Coleridge thinks it a grand history-piece in the robust style of Albrecht Dürer, intended to translate the poetic heroes of Paganism into the not less rude, but more intellectually vigorous, and more featurely warriors of Christian chivalry, and to substantiate the distinct and graceful profiles or outlines of the Homeric epic into the flesh and blood of the romantic drama. — These rather extravagant theories of Shakspeare's main object in his drama, which are based, after my belief, on that enthusiastical commendation with which the first quarto-edition was set forth — Eternal reader etc. —, have been followed by Tieck and Ulrici who, moreover, vindicates to the poet the far higher standpoint of a christian moralist, while Gervinus, putting the love-tale of Troilus and Cressida into the centre of the plot, finds but comical elements in the whole. — In order not to be left to probability and conjecture, as to Shakspeare's ruling principle in this drama, I shall try to consider it with regard to its single scenes and characters the analyzation of which, I suppose, may best give us the necessary means to judge rightly of the poet's scope.

Act I, 1 **) Troilus owns his love to Pandar, in the most exaggerated

*) Knight, preface to Troilus and Cressida.

**) Shakspeare's Werke, herausgegeben und erklärt von Dr. Nicolaus Delius. Elberfeld 1855. B. II. „Troilus and Cressida“ p. 12.

terms. „I am weaker, he says, than a woman's tear, tamer than sleep fonder than ignorance etc. Pandar, hinting at his niece's leaving Tröy, and following her father Calchas to the grecian camp, stimulates the poor lover still more and drives him almost to despair. His love is that fantastical passion of a pubescent youth, full of a violent sensuality and an overflowing of feeling, joined with the desire to signalize himself in deeds of heroism. (cf. IV., 5*) „The youngest son of Priam“ etc. In Cressida he owns having found the long desired-for ideal of his soul; mad in her love, he idealizes her eyes, her hair, cheek, voice; in comparison with her hand, all whites are ink. to its soft seizure the cygnet's down is harsh, and spirit of sense hard as the palm of ploughmen. Besides, he thinks her stubborn-chaste against all suit; and in a most beautiful manner, worthy of a better object of his love, he allegorizes himself and his mistress:

Her bed is India, there she lies, a pearl:
 Between our Ilium and where she resides
 Let it be call'd the wild and wandering flood,
 Ourself the merchant, and this sailing Pandar
 Our doubtful hope, our convoy, and our bark. —

Roused from his amorous dreams, by Aeneas, whose report of Paris' being hurt in the battle, by Menelaus, gives only rise to his witty, but indecent observation: Let Paris bleed etc.: he follows the Trojan leader to the field of battle. — Curious to make the acquaintance of Cressida, the chaste pearl of India, we feel highly disappointed in our expectations, when finding this ideal beauty and chastity to be nothing but a sharp and cunning woman whose language wittily plays with shallow and equivocal expressions without any profoundness: a mere coquet of the lowest rank. Thus the poet has painted her portrait I., 2.,**) as such a one she appears in the dialogue with her uncle Pandar whose character, as that of a confounded pimp, is drawn with eminent art. Both are looking at the Trojan warriors as they are returning home from the field; Pandar slyly trying to extol Troilus' virtues in comparison with those of any Trojan hero; even Hector comes short of him in bodily strength, beauty and bravery; Helena is fond of him; paralleled to him: the eagle: all other heroes are crows and dows. „I do not understand,

*) p. 97. cf. Richardson's Essays London 1784, p. 114 Rob. Chambers Edinburgh 1801

**) p. 18 ff. Richardson: Ueber W. Shakespears, Zürich 1787, p. 233

he addresses his niece, „why you too are not fond of him; you are such another woman! one knows not at what ward you lie.“ Cressid's answer: „Upon my back to defend my belly“ etc. together with her reasoning on love, after Pandar left her, evidently proves her mean, vulgar character. Confessing to love Troilus: „Then though my heart's content firm love doth bear“ — as if such a being ever really could love a man — yet she holds off by the mere effect of her cold understanding and experience in love-matters, that needs must have been considerable since she seems to be in full possess of all those proverbial sentences upon the practice of which the whole mystery of coquetry is based, as b. i.: Women are angels, wooing — Things won are done — Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is — Achievement is command; ungain'd, beseech — With such a vile female Troilus is in love; her very slave, he languishes in the ties of his amorous passion. Are we able to have any feeling of real pity for him when, at last, he finds himself disgracefully betrayed and forsaken by her whom, once, he called the chaste pearl of India? There is no tragical moment at all in this love-tale A. III., 2*) presents Troilus as, burning with amorous rapture, he is about to pluck the fruit of his ardent love. He stalks about her door „like a strange soul upon the Stygian banks, staying for waftage. O! be thou my Charon, he addresses Pandar, and give me swift transportance to those fields, where I may wallow in the lily beds propos'd for the deserver.“ And now ensues a scene so full of the grossest sensuality as, in vain, we look for in any other Shakspearean play.***) Even that brothel-scene, in Pericles, compared to III., 2 of our drama, preaches, we dare say, mere morality, keeping within the bounds of decency. Pandar's language here is so far from any respect paid to the female sex that, even considering this part of the spectators, in Shakspeare's time, ***) having worn masks in order not to betray their blushings, in such a disguise, we cannot help thinking our poet to have most excessively passed the bounds of moderation — After many extravagant assurances of mutual love and faithfulness, on Troilus' asserting to be: as true as truth's simplicity and simpler than the infancy of truth — as steel, as plantage to the moon, as sun to day, as turtle to her mate, as iron to adamant, as earth to

*) p. 64 ff.

**) cf. Richardson's Essays London 1784, p. 114. Rob. Chambers. Edinburgh 1844 I. p. 180.

***) Eschenburg: Ueber W. Shakspeare, Zürich 1787, p. 223.

the centre: Cressid, not willing to stay a whit behind her lover, declares herself ready to become a proverb of falsehood: yea, let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood „as false as Cressid“, if she be false or swerve a hair from truth. —

Let us follow Cressid to the Grecian camp, where she is to be delivered for Antenor. After fully having enjoyed the first night's pleasures, when Troilus is going to leave her, she will not let him go. „Are you weary of me?“ she asks him, and: Night has been too brief, for men will never tarry: My lord come you again into my chamber: you smile, and mock me, as if I meant naughtingly. —

When, at last, she is obliged to comply with the necessity of circumstances, by following the Grecian messenger, she seems to be thrown into the utmost despair. But since we are folly persuaded of her mastery in the art of dissembling, we feel strongly tempted to laugh at that sighing and sobbing of a heart, breaking almost under the load of affliction, and those doleful outcries uttered by a soul dying of grief. „Thou must be gone, wench — thou art changed for Antenor“ — with these words Pandar communicates to her the meaning of Diomedes' arrival. O, you immortal gods! — Cressid exclaims — I will not go, I will not, uncle, I have forgot my father — make Cressid's name the very crown of falsehood, if ever she leave Troilus — Tear my bright hair, and scratch my praised cheeks — Crack my clear voice with sobs, and break my heart with sounding Troilus. — Scene 4, *) the two lovers part with each other and prove much calmer than before. Troilus beseeches her to be true to him, showing it to be no easy task, as the Grecian youths, full of quality, their loving well composed with gift of nature, flow and swell o'er with arts and exercise. Alas, he cries, a kind of godly jealousy makes me afraid. Cressid feigns anger at his doubting of her faithfulness. O, heavens! you love me not, she complains — At length Troilus delivers her to Diomed, begging him to entreat her fair. A few hours only may have elapsed, after her leaving Troy, when Cressid makes her appearance before the chief generals of the Greek army IV. 5. **) Now you may perceive, how her very nature, viz that of a lustful coquet, breaks forth, when suffering herself to be kissed by every man present, in his turn, she provokes their

*) p. 78.

**) p. 94.

sensual desire by longing looks and equivocal expressions. Most artfully she deceives all others but Ulysses; the crafty fellow — πολυμήχανος, — who πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἔθεν ἄστυα καὶ νόον ἔγω — pierces into the very bottom of her soul, characterizing her in sentences most appropriate for all females of that species. „Fie, fie upon her! he cries. 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! these encounterers, so glib of tongue, that give a coasting 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.“ — According to his promise, given to Cressid by her leaving him, in the morning, Troilus, in the eve of that same day, sets out to pay a visit to his love, when not knowing, where to direct his paces to, he is met by Ulysses who accompanies him to Calchas' tent. Here they discover Diomedes having a tête-à-tête with Cressid. V. 2*) The conversation which the new lovers now enter into, puts her faithlessness in its proper light. Just after bidding farewell to Troilus, she must have got, still that same morning, dotingly fond of her new companion, and promised to receive him, in the night-time, which results from his reminding her of something similar. Upon his putting the question: What did you swear you would bestow on me? she replies: I prythee, do not hold me to mine oath; bid me do anything but that, sweet Greek. But Diomedes fully understands how to treat such a wench. He, most unlike Troilus, does not allow himself to be amused with fair hopes and fine promises; of course, he is a man of fact, „I do not like this fooling“, a realist and likes to be treated that way. So, at last, he easily overcomes her pretended scruples; even he gets from her Troilus' sleeve as a counter-pledge for the fulfilling of his desire. Though fully aware that she wrongs Troilus, yet she excuses herself with the common fault of her sex: The error of our eye directs our mind: Minds, sway'd by eyes, are full of turpitude.

Appearing thus in the total nakedness of her shameless and voluptuous mind, she shows herself a real prostitute, not by profession but by nature, which fact the spectator is, by no means, astonished at, since, from the very beginning of her appearance on the stage, her nature could not be mistaken. I do not find so much art having been displayed by the poet, in the drawing

*) p. 107. ff.

of this character, as some of Shakspeare's commentators might believe.*) There is no rising love, no growing up passion, no striving of different affections and principles,**) no intrigues, in short: there is no plot in these love-scenes, whose only connexion is a mere carnal appetite. When first Cressid appears on the stage, she is a cunning, lustful coquet, then she is Troilus' concubine; the third time, she is kissed by the Greek generals, and when we see her last, she is about to become Diomedes' bed-mate. So Cressid's character, as being a prostitute, we find, with great consistency, kept up through this play. And by this reason, I do doubt very much, whether any one, reader or spectator of our drama, be able to perceive any feeling of real compassion for Troilus who, the band having been torn from his weak eyes, is compelled, with bristling hair, to acknowledge a fact that, in vain, he tries to deny. He has seen with his own eyes, and heard with his own ears, and yet: Shall I not lie in publishing a truth? Sith yet there is a credence in my heart, an esperance so obstinately strong, that does invert the attest of eyes and ears; as if those organs had deceptious functions, created only to calumniate. Was Cressid here? he asks Ulysses. — As to the interest if any be possible, we take in Troilus whose character appears to be drawn best of all others, are we not far more inclined to feel highly satisfied with his having got rid of such a woman, even more contemptible than the old lecher Diomedes? In this point of view, Cressid's way of acting can not be taken for a satire on the inconstancy of women: it is rather a parody of the whole sex' depravity. A constant prostitute — what curios contradictio in adjecto! —

As for Shakspeare's deviations from Chaucer's epic poem, Creseide there is cut of another stamp. Chaucer represents her as a widow of great beauty, simple in her manners and language, without any tincture of coquetry. „And as a widdow was she, and all alone, — and

Most fairest ladie far passing every wight
So angelike shone her native beaute
That no mortall thing seemed she:
And therewith was she so perfect a creature,
As she had be made in scorning of nature.

*) cf. Knight and Gervinus.

***) cf. A. W. von Schlegel: Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur, Heidelberg 1817. II. 80.

Neither enticed by the impulse of sensuality, nor in consequence of her being captivated by Troilus' high rank and riches, she had fallen in love with him, no, she loved him on account of his good qualities of character, his moral virtue. —

For, trusteth well, that your estate royall,
 Ne vein delite, nor only worthinesse
 Of you in werre or turnay marciall,
 Ne pompe, array, nobley, or eke richesse
 Ne made me rue on your distresse,
 But moral vertue, grounded upon trouth,
 That was the cause I first had on you routh.

And that your reason bridled your delite,
 This made aboven every creature,
 That I was yours and shall white I may dure.

Here we find no exaggeration in the expression of her feelings, all is just the hearty language of a good humoured woman, far from any ardent passion; why not, she is a widow who learned to distinguish truth from flattery, and chose true Troilus more as a good friend than lover. This natural intelligence and sound sense of hers, cautiously weighing and taxing persons and circumstances, brings on the cause of the breach of her vows. So we find her, after she left Troy, sitting in her father's tent, and musing on Diomedes' wooing, whose seducing flatteries seem not to have made the desired impression upon her heart, but wrought upon her understanding as to furnish her the necessary means of protection:

Retourning in her soule aye up and down
 The wordes of this suddaine Diomede,
 His great estate, and perill of the toun,
 And that she was alone, and hat nede
 Of friendes help, and thus beyan to brede
 The cause why the soothe for to tell,
 She tooke fully purpose for to dwell.

Thus, she forsakes her lover, and lives with Diomed, but still the former possesses her heart which but then she bestows on the Greek, as, for her sake, he was wounded by Troilus:

When through the body hurt was Diomede
 Of Troilus, tho wept she many a tere — —
 And for to healen him of his smart
 Men saine, I n'ot, that she yave him her herte. —

On the whole, we dare say, that in Chaucer's poem, in spite of its epic form, there are more dramatical elements to be found, than in Shakspeare's play. Chaucer's Creseide is worth to be loved, for she is no prostitute, but an accomplished lady; and Troilus, when loosing her, may really claim our sympathy; besides, she trespasses not from a mere pleasure of doing so, as Shakspeare makes his Cressid do, but actuated by the impulsive force of circumstances, after a heavy conflict in her mind. Just that want of any dramatical conflict, either tragical or comical, as the only source from whence the unity of action must proceed, is one of the most considerable deficiencies in this play. Although Troilus and Cressid's love-adventures are put in the centre of our drama, yet there are so many additional incidents running along and crossing them, that one hardly knows whether Troilus and his mistress, or those scenes in the Grecian camp before Troy, are meant to form the foundation of this singular dramatical production. As Chaucer provided our poet with the materials for the love-tale we endeavoured to examine in its detail, and which Shakspeare transfigured as far as to retain only the outlines of the story: in the same absolute manner we find him having managed the matter with regard to those historical facts and statements he found in Lydgate's *Troye Boke*, Caxton's *Recuyles* and Chapman's version of Homer. It is the siege of Troy by the Greeks, the inner state of their army, the discord of their leaders, the speeches held in the camp in order to take measures conformable to their object in view, battle-scenes in the field, in short, the whole history of the Trojan war which he rolls down in living and characteristic pictures before the eyes of the astonished spectator who looks with more than wondering at those singular figures that fill the stage, and listens to an unknown language which hardly he would have thought fit for being spoken in public. — Shakspeare's peculiar conception and strange representation of the Trojan war is chiefly founded on his views about the person of Helena and the part she performs in the Trojan combat. Since, from Homer up to our days, there have been made so many different characterizations of this Greek princess that there is now almost a complete Helena-literature existing: I do not think it inconsistent with my task to show in what way the acknowledged three principal heroes of poetry of all times — Homer, Goethe, Shakspeare — have deviated from each other in their views on this illustrious Greek. After Homer's *Iliad*, Paris, son to Priam king of Troy, a man of exquisite beauty, undertakes a naval expedition to Greece. On his

arrival in Lacedemon, he is hospitably received by king Menelaus whose consort Helena, daughter to Leda and Zeus, he carries off with many treasures.

In the isle of Kranæ they celebrate their nuptials, and after a landing on Sidon's shores, they arrive in Paris' native town. In order to revenge himself on the seducer of his wife for the violated law of hospitality, Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon gather the bravest heroes in all Greece. After a ten year's siege Troy sinks, and Menelaus returns home with his recovered wife, where they live together in peace and concord. Thus Homer tells the story. But we should be mistaken if thinking Helen guiltless and having taken no share in her ravishment even though, Iliad II., 356 and 590 she is said to have been sighing and longing after her former husband:

— *τίσασθαι δ' Ελένης ὀρμήματά τε σιτοναχάς τε.* —

Notwithstanding, she had followed her lover voluntarily which to prove I cite II. III., 173, where she addresses old Priam, bitterly repenting of her having followed his son, and abandoned her only child and companions, the recollection of which makes her melt into tears:

*ὡς ὄφελεν θάνατός μοι ἀθεῖν κακός, ὀππότε δεῦρο
ὑιῆϊ σὸν ἐπόμην — — — τὸ καὶ κλαίουσα τέτηκα.* —

In the like manner, she is touched to tears and seized with a longing after Menelaus when looking from Troy's walls, with Iris, in the shape of Laodice her sister in law, at the Trojan and Grecian troops. III. 139.

*ὡς εἰποῦσα θεᾷ γλυκὴν ἔμβαλε θυμῷ
ἀνδρός τε προτέροιο καὶ ἄστεος ἠδὲ τοκήων.* — — —

— *τέρειν κατὰ δάκρυ λέουσα.* — However guiltly she may appear, yet on the other hand, she is most excusable since it was Venus, the goddess of love whose divine influence she had not been able to withstand. From this point of view she is addressed by Priam III. 162: —

*δεῦρο πάροιθ' ἔλθοῦσα, φίλον τέκος, ἴζεν ἐμεῖο,
ὄφρα ἴδῃ πρότερόν τε πόσων πηροῦς τε φίλους τε. — — —
οὐ μοι αἰτή ἔσσι, θεοὶ νύ μοι αἰτίοι εἶσιν.* —

Like old Priam, so Hector, her brother in law, treats her with kindness, as to him she has unbosomed herself, with bitter tears complaining of her unhappy fate: οὐπω, she says XXIV., 767, *σεῦ ἄκουσα κακὸν, ἔπος οὐδ' ἀσύφηλον.* — Thus in the whole Iliad, nowhere we read of any scolding or reproach, on account of her having forsaken her husband, although her coming to Troy bereft many noble families of their bravest sons. Homer who is the represen-

tative of the popular sentiments, finds so little crime in her conduct because, in his eyes, she is a high queen, daughter to Zeus, and endowed with irresistible beauty. In this quality she got afterwards a religious service and temples were built for her honour in many parts of Greece, b. i. in Lacedemon, as we read in Herodot I, 61 *ἐφόρει αὐτὴν ἀνὰ πᾶσαν ἡμέραν ἐς τὸ τῆς Ἑλένης ἱερόν τὸ δ' ἔστι ἐν τῇ Θεράπνῃ καλευμένη, ὑπερθε τοῦ Φοιβηίου ἱεροῦ.*

Striking congeniality with Homer, relatively to his conception of Helen's person, we find in Aeschylus' fictions. This poet, too, puts all blame on Paris, the violator of hospitality, — Agam. v. 370, 450, 519 and Choëph. v. 922 — since his noble and pious mind always thinks most respectfully of the sacred beings his nation adored.*) —

The two most celebrated poets of the Greek antiquity, Homer and Aeschylus, are not the only adorers of Helen as a goddess of beauty and grace: our Goethe likewise, in the second part of his Faust, Act III., closely follows their lofty conceptions, by representing her as the personified ideal beauty whose irresistible influence neither gods nor men are able to withstand:**)

„Halbgötter, Selden, Götter, ja Dämonen,
Sie führten mich in Irren her und hin.“

Still a very young girl, she was carried off by Theseus who first experienced the magic power of her charms. Soon delivered from captivity by her brothers, she kindled the flame of love in Patroclus' heart; but the stern will of her father gave her, in spite of her feeling, in marriage to Menelaus. p. 176.

In his palace she dwelt, a faithful wife and loving mother, until, on her visiting Cythere's temple, Paris, the Phrygian robber, ran off with her to Troy's shores. p. 164. Here the enchanting power she exercised on Achilles, was so great that, even after his death, his soul could not find any rest; up he went out of the realm of shades, p. 177, and their spirits, as idols, united in mutual love: representing the union of the most beautiful man to the most beautiful woman:

„Ich als Idol, ihm dem Idol verband ich mich.“

*) cf. Prof. Lehrs. Populäre Aufsätze aus dem Alterthum vorzugsweise zur Ethik und Religion der Griechen. Leipzig 1856, p. 18. Fr. Jacobs, Nachträge zum Sulzer II. p. 391.

**) cf. Goethe's sämtliche Werke in 40 Bänden 1854. XII. p. 194.

After Troy's destruction, she is led back by her husband according to whose command she shall die the death of a victim, for:

Untheilbar ist die Schönheit; der sie ganz besaß,
Zerstört sie lieber, fluchend jedem Theilbesitz.

But since she, the goddess of beauty, is faultless in the poet's eyes, her very destiny being to pierce every thing with the almighty influence of her charms, she is sayed and meets, in his palace, Faust who, after my belief, here is representing the romantic principle of the middle age. The palace where he is residing, bears the emblems and symbols of romanticism. p. 185.

„Da seht ihr Säulen, Säulchen, Bogen, Vögelchen,
Altane, Galeri'en zu schauen aus und ein,
Und Wappen. — and

„Da seht ihr Löwen, Adler, Klau' und Schnabel auch,
Dann Büffelhörner, Flügel, Rosen, Pfauenschweif,
Auch Streifen, gold und schwarz und silbern, blau und roth" etc.

Lynceus, keeper of the tower of Faust's castle, succumbs to Helen's divine beauty, and intoxicated with love, he praises her charms in those wonderful verses p. 192

„Laß mich krien, laß mich schauen,
Laß mich sterben, laß mich leben,
Denn schon bin ich hingegeben
Dieser gottgegebenen Frauen — etc.

Now Helen approaches Faust, and the classical beauty of the Greek antiquity melts, as it were, into one with the grand but formless beauty of romanticism. Euphorion, the offspring of their union, having perished by his heaven-storming presumption, Helen, the tie of love and life thus being torn, bids farewell to Faust, and dissolving into air, she leaves him her garments which having turned to clouds, envelop him, and lifting him up, they pass with him: an air-shaped figure. p. 222. — Homer's influence upon Goethe's Helen is evident; but this very influence the father of all poetry got with Aeschylus and Sophocles, soon ceased to work upon the compositions of the later Greek poets. Surely, we read with surprise how much Euripides' opinion, in his dramas, differs from his elder fellow-poet's. Less ideal in his flights of fancy, and far from Sophocles' piety, he does find in Helen but a common paramour Orest. v. 128. Electra exclaims: „Look kow she cuts off only the tips of her hair, sparing her charms.“ etc. — After him, her mother Leda and

her two brothers Castor and Pollux are so much ashamed of her that, from this motive, they are said to have committed suicide. Helen v. 132. These invectives of his against Helen are to be found almost in every one of his tragedies, and seem to have arisen from his intention to revile, in her only person, the whole female sex of Sparta because of the hostilities between that country and Athens.*)

If, in his tragedies, Euripides can not refrain from injuring Helen's memory, we do not wonder on finding her to be the main object of many comedies and satyr-plays. His Cyclops, the only drama comico-satyricum that entire has been handed down to posterity, contains the following passage where Helen becomes the laughing-butt of the spectators. V. 161, a conversation takes place between a chorus of satyrs and Ulysses who, after Troy's destruction, on his return to Ithaca, had been driven out of his course to the island of Polyphemos. v. 165.

οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ τὴν νεᾶνεν εἴλετε,
 ἅπαντες αὐτὴν διεκροτήσατ' ἐν μέρει,
 ἐπεὶ γε πολλοῖς ἤδεται γαμουμένη;
 τὴν προδότιαν. — — —

Euripides' drawing of Helen's character we find followed by almost all poets that, after him, took up the matter; not only the Greek but the Roman poets, too, as of later times Ovidius, Vergilius and Horatius: all adopt the very same idea whenever mention is made of our heroine's name. — In the most striking opposition to Homer's and Goethe's Helen, and closely, though unconsciously, following the footsteps of Euripides, Shakspeare has drawn, in Troilus and Cressida, the picture of Helen. Act II., sc. 2.***) Priam inquires after his sons' opinion whether they think it seasonable to deliver Helen or to keep her back. Now Hector votes for yielding her up. „Let Helen go, he says, „for, since the first sword was drawn about this question, every tithe soul, 'mongst many thousand dismes, hath been as dear as Helen; I mean of ours: If we have lost so many tenths of ours, to guard a thing not ours, nor worth to us, had it our name, the value of one ten.“ — He is scolded by Troilus who, driven by his eager desire to fight, quarrels with his brother on account of his fearing and reasoning; for though fully convinced himself

*) cf. A. W. von Schlegel I., 250 ff.

**) p. 42 ff.

of her not being worth the loss of blood, yet, he says, „we turn not back the silks upon the merchant, when we have spoiled them.“ Thus, in his eyes, Helen is: spoiled silk and remainder viands, that are not to be thrown away because the eater's stomach is filled. Now to furnish further evidence, he tells us the story of Helen's ravishment. Here Shakspeare evidently follows Lydgate's statement who relates that Paris made his voyage to Greece, with full consent of all Trojans, in order to do some vengeance on the Greeks who held captive Hesione — after Lydgate, Exiona — an old aunt of his. Instead of her, he had brought home a Grecian queen — „a pearl, whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships, and turned crowned kings to merchants.“ Paris, of course, against Priam's and Hector's proposition follows his brother's opinion of the matter, but his father, reflecting on the nature of his motives, reproves him saying: „Paris, you speak like one besotted on your sweet deligts: You have the honey still, but these the gall; so to be valiant is no praise at all.“ At last they all agree on keeping Helen still, as she be a theme of honour and renown, a spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds although, on the other side, the moral laws of nature and of nation speak aloud to have her back returned. However little the interest be that the Trojan king's family, except her paramour, seem to take in Helen's personal fate; at however low a rate her value be taxed, — were it not glory, I would not wish a drop of Trojan blood spent more in her defence“ —: yet there are no open, defaming and slandering speeches to be heard such as they are belched out in the Grecian camp. IV., 2. *) Diomedes, upon Paris' question, whether he or Menelaus merited Helen most, abuses her so awfully and with so much exasperation, that even the blasphemes of Euripides' sharp tongue, sound like innocent infant's language compared with Shakspeare's bulky outrages. „Both, Diomedes says, Paris and Menelaus, merit her alike, for he merits well to have her, that doth seek her not making any scruple of her soilure, with such a hell of pain, and world of charge; and you as well to keep her, that defend her not palating the taste of her dishonour with such a costly loss of wealth and friends: „He, like a puling cuckold, would drink up the lees and dregs of a flat tamed piece; you like a lecher, out of whorish loins are pleas'd to breed out your inheritors: Both merits pois'd, each weighs nor less nor more; but he as he, the heavier for a whore.“

*) p. 82.

Paris, struck with the immensity of these reproaches, replies: „You are too bitter to your countrywoman.“ „She's bitter to her country, Diomed returns. „Hear me, Paris: For every false drop in her bawdy veins a Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple of her contaminated carrion weight, a Trojan hath been slain. Since she could speak, she has not given so many good words breath, as for her Greeks and Trojans suffered death.“ — Such a speech, I suppose, would have gladdened Euripides' ears, and surely he would have hugged in his arms the congenial fellow-poet, if he had been allowed to attend the performance of our play. But, how does Shakspeare present Helen herself? Once she makes her appearance III., 1 *), with her husband Paris, in Priam's palace, where we get a little specimen of their family-life. Silly Pandar pays them a visit, and now ensues a conversation of so dry and dull a character, enlivened, now and then, by some equivocations, the grossest of which is Helen's, insomuch that we dare not make any doubt, for a moment, on having before us a second Cressid in Helen's person. Love is the main object of their talking. Helen: „Let thy song be love: this love will undo us all. O Cupid, Cupid, Cupid!“ — Pandar: „Love! ay, that it shall, i'faith.“ — Paris: „Ay, good now, love, love, nothing but love.“ — So Paris ends the conversation, as turning to his wife, he exclaims: Sweet, above thought I love thee! — I have tried to show from what point of view Shakspeare considers the character of Helen because, the Trojan war being carried on in order to recover her, she sets the whole affair in the relative light and modifies the character of all partakers of it. Thus we find Homer having sketched the figures of both the Trojan and Greek great warriors according to his high ideas of fair queen Helen. With what enthusiasm does he delineate those grand and noble characters, those „heroes bold of noble enterprise“ that he fills his epic stage with: Agamemnon's high dignity of a commander in chief, old Nestor's apothegms, sweet as honey, Ulysses' confounded stratagems, Achilles' noble heroic form, Hector's bold exploits pervaded with that tender love of wife and family: in short, the high weightiness of what he is celebrating in his songs, keeps Homer's moral purity in a mighty awe. To Shakspeare Helen is nothing but a faithless wife, a common adulteress, and all efforts to recover her, are a nonsensical humbug, the more repugnant to common sense, the greater expense of time and labor is

*) p. 60 ff.

made to attain that aim. Under these circumstances we do understand the manner in which Shakspeare was obliged to transfigure the characters of the Homeral heroes; we do comprehend, why Shakspeare became a caricaturist, in our play. — I. 3 *), we make the acquaintance of Agamemnon, Nestor, Ulysses, Menelaus and other Grecian generals who are meeting before Agamemnon's tent in order to confer with one another about some matters of war. Agamemnon the magnanimous, and most illustrious six-or-seven-times honoured captain-general, perceiving the dull looks and pale faces of most of them, inquires after the cause of their sadness. Though, after seven years' siege, he finds Troy's walls still standing, yet he does not find fault with their own manner of carrying on war, but puts the blame on the father of gods: Jove will find, by these protractive trials, persistivè constancy in men. His opinion follows Nestor, reasoning in the same silly manner. With a more practical knowledge of the state of affairs, Ulysses, whose character is mostly corresponding to that which Homer confers upon him, takes up the matter, proving that nothing but the many hollow factions, in the Grecian army, make Troy stand upon her basis. Pale and bloodless emulation among the war-leaders and neglect of degree, that, he says, is the cause why Troy is still living, not her strength. Now he unrolls a nice picture of Achilles and Patroclus' domestic amusements, how, upon a lazy bed, the livelong day, they are breaking scurril jests and jeering at Agamemnon's topless deputation and the faint defects of Nestor's age. Coinciding with Ulysses' statement, Nestor adds, about Ajax' demeanor, that he too is grown self-willed, making factious feasts, railing on their state of war and setting Thersites to match them in comparisons with dirt, to weaken and discredit their exposure. — Their lamentations are interrupted by the sound of a trumpet. Aeneas has arrived and challenges every Greek warrior to fight with Hector. Now, as there are different opinions whether Achilles or Ajax be to face that terrible hero, cunning Ulysses, in order to abate Achilles' pride, presents Ajax as the most qualified for that purpose; he proposes to make a lottery and, by devise, to let blockish Ajax draw the sort to fight Hector. His proposal being closed with, and a duel taking place, IV. 5 **), instead of fighting, they, after some blows, embrace each other since they prove to be cousins. Hector is welcomed

*) p. 24 ff.

**) p. 97.

by Agamemnon and invited to dinner by Achilles. The latter behaves here as a most arrogant and impudent fellow. Having most haughtily regarded Hector's strong form: Tell me, you heavens, he cries, in which part of his body shall I destroy him, whether there, there or there? — Without any bloodshed, we have seen, Shakspeare ended this single combat between Hector and Ajax; but soon we get fighting enough as, on the following morning, a general battle takes place between the two hostile armies. Seven scenes of the fifth act are filled over and over with murder and manslaughter. Troilus is fighting with Diomed. Patroclus has been slain, and the enraged Achilles raves over the field, like a fury, searching for Hector. We get rather curious to see those two most eminent and celebrated heroes meeting; but once more, we are to fall short of our expectations. The Greek having, at last, espied Hector, rushes upon him, and now a combat, we think, is unavoidable. — Not at all: it would be little consistent with Shakspeare's intention to have Hector slain here by his opponent in fair combat. No, Achilles is not allowed to earn any glory, he must prove a coward. Most ridiculously the poet supposes him to have lost the practice of his arms. „Be happy, Achill exclaims, upon Hector's offering him a pause, „that my arms are out of use: my rest and negligence befriend thee now, but thou anon shalt hear of me again.“ And away he hastens; with what design, we soon shall come to know. Instead of respiring and reposing himself, which an unprepossessed spectator might imagine perhaps, he gathers the band of his Myrmidons in order to charge them with the execution of his bloody desire. Why, since he likes to serve his own ease and conveniency, why should he not be spared the trouble of killing Hector: the more, as most likely he could get a blow. Thus comparable to mean highway-men, Achilles leading the gang, they set off to look for their victim. They find Hector having just put off his helmet and laid his sword aside to take some breath; in a trice, he is surrounded and notwithstanding his objection to be unarmed, on Achilles' command: „Strike, fellows, strike! this is the man I seek“: he is slain like a dog. Not enough; however cowardly he may have acted, yet fain he would take upon himself the glory of this deed and, as the vainest brag, he bids his Myrmidons cry: „Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain.“ — In fact, Shakspeare seems not to have let slip any occasion to make the most contemptible wretch of that chief representative of the Greek heroism. Surely there exists much analogy in the characters both of Achilles and Helena: both

come off worst of all other persons Shakspeare has caricatured in this drama. — One of the most, if not interesting, at least, remarkable parts, that we did not yet speak of, we find performed by Thersites, the outlines of whose character Shakspeare found in Homer's *Il.*, 225, where he is described as a little, crook-backed and ill-tongued fellow. Basing upon this statement and amplifying it with an astonishing predilection, the poet has drawn in Thersites a figure that undoubtedly belongs to the strangest the extravagancy of his imagination ever brought forth. Thersites appears to me as taking, in some measure, that part in our play which, in the Greek drama, the chorus performed. But this play not being a comedy nor tragedy because of the prevailing of entirely satirical moments in it, Thersites merely supports the character of a sarcastic wit-cracker, bearing a great resemblance to those satyrs Euripides has brought upon the stage in his *Cyclops*. As to the fools, clowns and buffoons the Shakspearean pieces have to exhibit a good stock of*), there is no possibility of comparing, any way, Thersites with any one of his kindred, whereas he takes one of the most important places in our drama. Closely following the development of the action, he does not spare his scandalous tongue as well in reviling the whole Trojan war as uttering his sharp invectives against every one of the Greek heroes. And what a master of his art he is! Surely, I dare say, with such a kind of wits never the ears of the spectator were cheered, not even in those extravagant farces Shakspeare's successors filled the stage with. Thersites' language, with little exception, where- and whenever he may open his mouth, is that of the most impudent and shameless blackguard who may find his most proportionate auditory rather in London's dirtiest city-street than on a public stage. Our poet bestowed so much industry upon this character, by putting in his mouth this astonishing copiousness of obscene and beastly expressions combined with so much wit and acuteness that he almost seems to have used up the whole fund of indelicate words the knowledge of his mother-tongue provided him with. First this awkward fellow makes his appearance *Il.*, 1**) in Ajax' tent, and that colloquy of theirs is so much interlarded with the coarsest abuses as to make it wholly insup-

*) cf. Francis Douce, *Illustrations of Shakespeare and of ancient manners*, London 1807. II., 300. Nicol. Delius's short but ingenious essay on Shakspeare's clowns and fools, published in the *Cologne News-paper* 1860.

**) p. 38 ff.

portable: Shakspeare's fancy seems to creep there in the smuttiest dirt, revelling, as it were, in it. — Abstractedly from that nastiness in Thersites' language, his manner of observing and characterizing gives evidence of his sharp and piercing understanding. Mocking at Ajax' dull stupidity he calls him a beef- and sodden-witted lord with not so much brain as will stop the eye of Helen's needle; and sneering at his rivalship with Achilles: Thou grumblest and raillest every hour on Achilles; and thou art as full of envy at his greatness, as Cerberus is at Proserpina's beauty, ay, that thou barkest at him.“ Neither Achilles is secure from his invectives: „A great deal of your — viz Achilles' — wit too lies in your sinews, or else there be liars. Hector shall have a great catch, if he knock out either of your brains: a were as good crack a fusty nut with no kernel. There's Ulysses, and old Nestor, — whose wit was mouldy ere your grandsires had nails on their toes, — yoke you like draught-oxen and make you plough up the war. And moreover V., 4 *): O' the other side, the policy of those crafty swearing rascals, — that stale old mouse-eaten dry cheese, Nestor, and that same dog-fox, Ulysses, — is not proved worth a blackberry. Worst of all comes off Menelaus as he, with Helen, represents the predisposing causes of the Trojan war. V., 2 **). „Here's Agamemnon, — an honest fellow enough, and one that loves quails, but he has not so much brain as ear-wax: And the goodly transformation of Jupiter there, his brother, the bull, the primitive statue, and oblique memorial of cuckolds; a thrifty shoeing-horn in a chain, hanging at his brother's leg; — — for I care not to be the louse of a lazar, so I were not Menelaus.“ — Patroclus, Achilles' masculine whore — will give me anything for the intelligence of this whore: the parrot will not do more for an almond, than he for a commodious drab.“ Pretty fellows, indeed, those Greek generals! — Consistent with Thersites' characterization of the single partakers of the Trojan war, is his exposure of the whole affair. II., 3. ***) „Here is such patchery, such juggling, and such knavery! all the argument is a cuckold and a whore; a good quarrel, to draw emulous factions, and bleed to death upon. Now the dry serpigo on the subject, and war and lechery confound all. V., 1. „Nothing but lechery: all incontinent varlets — V., 2. „Lechery, lechery; still,

*) p. 119.

**) p. 105.

***) p. 52.

wars and lechery: nothing else holds fashion, a burning devil take them. — With Hector's death our play ends but without any hints being given whether Troy shall be surrendered; for as, on one side, Agamemnon exclaims „great Troy is ours, and our sharp wars are ended“: so, on the other, Troilus bids his troops „strike a fresh march to Troy — with comfort go: Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe. — Finally Shakspeare cannot help bringing, once more, Pandar upon the stage in order to let the piece not loose its peculiar character. Pandar addresses an epilogue to the traders in the flesh in which he complains of the little thanks his business is followed by, wishing to bequeath his diseases to his brethren and sisters of the hold-door trade. These bawds, pimps and Winchester geese whom Pandar bids farewell, appear to me as the very spectators who best may understand to value the beauties of this satirical farce which begotten in an evil hour, surely belongs to the minor and not the most durable monuments of Shakspeare's genius, and in which, more than in any other one, he seems to have been obliged to please the lowest of the people, and to keep the worst of company. *) We may readily believe this play having been written when the poet, whose mind, in his last fifteen years, appears overshadowed with a feeling of sadness and discontentment with all earthly things — high power, beauty, love, friendship — brought forth those two bitter satires on woman and man's inconstancy viz Troilus and Cressida, and Timon of Athens. **) Both pieces are pervaded with a tone almost of despair which, totally overwhelming the poet, caused that extreme neglect or rather contempt of every law concerning the dramatical unity of the action. Soon, however, his genius, after the poet had changed the exciting bustle of his fatiguing profession for the ease and tranquillity of a pleasant country-life, in his former home, showed an other disposition, as, under the soothing influence of nature and solitude, his anxiousness and despair gave way to calmer and more settled feelings the harmony of which is to be perceived in the last productions, — as they usually are taken for — of his munificent Muse, I mean Cymbeline, Winter's Tale and The Tempest. ***)

*) cf. Al. Chaulmers, London 1856. p. 11.

**) cf. As you like it, II., 7. R. Chambers I. p. 106.

***) cf. W. Spalding Halle 1854 p. 233.