

Shakespeare's „Troilus and Cressida“, and the Development of the Troilus-Legend.

It is well known how the most renowned critics and commentators of Shakespeare's plays differ in their explanations and criticisms of „Troilus and Cressida“. There is especially the partiality, which Shakespeare shows towards the Trojans, in drawing and developing the characters of their heroes, his evidently taking an opposite point of view to Homer's Iliad, which early became points of controversy and a topic to learned researches and philosophical investigations among Shakespeare critics, and it has always been considered an open question, whether the great dramatist intended to parody Homer's Iliad by his play „Troilus and Cressida“. In latter times there seems to be a tendency to decide that question in the negative.

The probability of this assertion increases if we consider the sources of the Troilus-legend and their relation to Shakespeare's „Troilus and Cressida“, and how that legend was developed during centuries not only independent of Homer, but in a contrary sense. ¹⁾

I attempt to give first a short survey of the history of the origin and the development of the Trojan legends, in mentioning but those authors who have most contributed in moulding them into a form so widely different from Homer's. Thereby we may be aided in explaining the fact, that many of the Greek heroes in Shakespeare's „Troilus and Cressida“ appear in so unfavourable a light, otherwise than by an intended parody on, or even an opposition of the great dramatist to, Homer, and so we shall perhaps be able to come a little nearer the general understanding of this singular play.

¹⁾ Shakespeare-Jahrbuch B. III. Die Troilus-Fabel etc. von Carl Eitner und B. VI. Die Quellen der Troilus-Sage von Hertzberg.

The most remote origin of the medieval legends which afforded the material to „Troilus and Cressida“ must be looked for in ancient Rome. The Romans considered their city as the heiress of Troy, and it was a national dogma with them that Rome had a claim on the universal monarchy promised to Troy. The Cesars, boasting of descending from Aeneas, thought themselves the legitimate successors of the Trojan dynasty. These ideas may be found in the authors of the Augustan age, and they lie, for instance, in the background of Virgil's Aeneis. The same ideas gave the impulse to those elaborations of Homer, which have been passed off as contemporary memoirs of the Trojan war, and which partly appeared in Nero's reign, as for instance that of the Pseudo Dictys of Creta, which makes no notable change in Homer's tradition. It has been translated from the Greek language into Latin by Q. Septimius, in the reign of Constantinus the Great. Septimius gives in his preface the following story of the genuine text: Dictys of Creta, a follower and fellow-warrior of Idomeneus, on the suggestion of his prince, had written the book in Phenician. It had been buried according to the author's will. A certain Praxis had found the book after an earthquake in Nero's reign. Having translated it into Greek, Praxis brought it to Nero, who rewarded him liberally.

According to Mr. Hertzberg, nothing of the story has been found true, save the book having been written in Greek in Nero's time, and Septimius having rendered, it into Latin.

Of great importance for our purpose is a bad compilation of the Trojan legends, which an unknown impostor who had the impudence of calling himself Cornelius Nepos, presented to the public about 630, as a translation from a pretended Greek original by Dares of Phrygia. In this compilation, Homer's legend is hardly discernible, so many are the alterations, some of which became of much consequence for the formation of our medieval legend. As for instance, Telamon eloped with Hesione, who was reclaimed in vain by her nephew Paris; and so we must see in this refusal the principal reason of the war. Troilus whom Homer mentions but once, becomes a great hero and chief-champion of Troy. Achilles' indolence is caused by his passion for Hecuba's daughter Polixena. Kalchas, a Trojan by birth, goes over to the Greeks in the beginning of the war, and stains for ever his character by becoming a traitor to his country. It is obvious by these and many other innovations which may be traced in all the representations

of the Trojan war, transmitted or elaborated by authors of the western nations, that no other but Dares has given them the frame, which they filled up, and transformed by new inventions. Why those authors chose the coarsest of all narrators of the Trojan war, cannot be sifted thoroughly, but one circumstance will throw some light on the question. The westerly nations, since they had entered into close connexion with Rome, indulged in thinking themselves related to the world-ruling people, and therefore made it a point of honour to derive the origin of their ancestors from the same Troy from where Rome is said to have been populated, and its princes to have got their grandsire. We need not wonder therefore at their authors preferring as annalist the Trojan Dares, their countryman, to Dictys and Homer, both Greeks. It becomes also obvious, that, by the same reason, poets as well as chroniclers throughout the middle ages up to Shakespeare side with the Trojans, without being conscious of any opposition to Homer, whose immortal epos most of them did perhaps not even know.

The Norman, Benoît de Sainte-More,¹⁾ trouvère to the court of King Henry the II., composed about 1175 a poem, shining in all the splendour of the romantic spirit, the *Histoire de la guerre de Troye* in 30,000 verses, which soon became very popular among his countrymen. Benoît remains in the outlines of Dares, but he aggrandizes their dimensions, and deepens the subject.

He draws his heroes from nature, shows their inward life, their passions, longings and strivings, all this, as we may easily imagine, in the character of his own chivalrous time, and there love was sure not to be forgotten. In „Dares“ Benoît did not find much of that, but he seized on the portrait of Briseis, which his author had drawn without any connexion with the story. In Benoît's *Histoire*, she is the daughter of Kalchas, who, when going over to the Greeks, left her in Troy. Here Troilus falls in love with her, she returns his passion, and a love-romance begins, which shows nearly all the principal features of the Troilus-legend, as it was transmitted to Shakespeare.

Guido de Colonna, a judge at Messina, borrowed the historical material for his *Historia Trojana* — 1287 — directly from Benoît's *Histoire*, and wrote his book in a bad Latin and a pompous style. But Latin having become the second mother tongue of educated people all over Europe, and Guido's *Historia* justly deserving to be praised as far

¹⁾ or: Sainte-Maure.

as concerns conciseness and easy arrangement of matters, it soon became the most popular authority in regard to our legend, and continued so during the middle ages, and Benoît was almost forgotten. But we must not forget that Guido's still more decided partiality for the Trojans contributed certainly not in a small degree to that otherwise strange fact. We see this especially in his describing Achilles as a bloody, brutish, insidious barbarian, whose character we shall find reflected in the same personage of Shakespeare's „Troilus and Cressida“. Guido's *Historia Trojana* was translated into, and elaborated in all European tongues belonging to civilised nations.

Remarkable as the first step of our legend on English soil is the *Gest Historiale of the Destruction of Troy*: it is a paraphrastic translation of Guido's *Historia*, and belongs to the latter half of the 14th century.

One of the most graceful productions, and of the highest importance for the development of the Troilus-legend, is Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. The Italian poet changes „Briseida“ into „Griseida“, and „Troilus“ into „Filostrato“. He creates a new person, Pandarus, the youthful friend and confidant of Filostrato. Pandarus, being a cousin of Griseida, prepares for Filostrato the way to his mistress, advises and aids him, and stands by the unhappy lover as a true friend in good and bad times. By the love-romance of Filostrato and Griseida, Boccaccio gives his own burning passion a poetical expression. Intending to present in Griseida a portrait of his own mistress, he could not make her a flirt from the beginning. She appears first maidenlike shy and reserved. Also when she was obliged to part with her suitor, and had entered the Greek camp, she resisted the flatteries of Diomedes, who but by continual base artifices, and abusing her helpless and sad state of mind, succeeded in leading her astray from the path of fidelity.

The poem having an eminent lyric character, the epic part must fall off, and the war of Troy is hardly visible in the outlines.

By intrinsic reasons it does not follow whether Boccaccio has taken the principal of his poem from Benoît or Guido, but the latter being his countryman, and the Latin language better known to him, we may be allowed to suppose he preferred Guido.

Geoffrey Chaucer's „Troilus and Creseide“ follows in the principal lines Boccaccio's „Filostrato“. Although Chaucer

has translated his model for the greatest part of its extent, sentence by sentence, and often word by word, yet his poem may fairly be considered a new, and, in many respects, an original work, so strong was the creative power of this great English poet, who, like Boccaccio, gives but a sketch of the Trojan war, and those heroes who do not act a part in the Troilus-legend; but he alters the characters and situations of „Filostrato“ in changing its lyric strain into a decided objective one. As Chaucer had no personal conditions in view, and his purpose was not to express his own feelings or passions, he could work more freely, and thus we see the persons of his poem, having left the aërial world of a lyrical inspiration, leading a life of substantial reality; and if they lose by this some of their ideal beauty, they inspire more interest, as one feels generally more interested in any thing appearing in the shape of reality. The relation between the two lovers does not lose its noble strain. Chaucer describes their mutual love as pure and harmless as possible, yet their unhallowed secret union appears to the English poet, contrary to the Italian, as their first fault. In order to explain this fault to his readers, and to awake at the same time their sympathy for the lovers, he makes them fall less a victim to their passions than to the intrigues of a seducer.

He wanted therefore a character different from Filostrato's youthful, sentimental friend. Chaucer's Pandarus, the uncle and tutor to Creseide, is an elderly man, well experienced in love-affairs, who partly by a certain kindness for Troilus, but still more by a cynic concupiscence feels induced to assist the young man not only in obtaining the object of his wishes, Creseide's love, but such favours as the unexperienced youth had never dreamed of. Thus Pandarus is a real bawd, and his name „pandar“ has, by the popularity of Chaucer's poem, become in the English language for ever a term of that vile trade.

How far Chaucer used Benoit and other sources, and who that Lollius is whom he mentions as being one of his authorities, cannot here be my purpose to explain. It will suffice to state that by Chaucer the Troilus-legend itself is finished in the principal lines, and ready for Shakespeare's use.

The Troilus-legend, originally forming an episode in the romantic elaborations of the Trojan war, has become with Boccaccio and Chaucer the principal subject of their poetical works. Out of the number of authors who after

Chaucer applied themselves to the Trojan legend, I mention three as having become of some consequence for Shakespeare's „Troilus and Cressida“. Those three, contrary to Boccaccio and Chaucer, kept more in that part of the legendary circle, which relates the Trojan war, the deeds and fates of its heroes.

The Troye-Book otherwise called the Siege of Troye by Lydgate in the first half of the 15th century is a translation in heroic verse of Guido de Colonna.

Raoul le Fèvre's: Recueil des histoires de Troyes in three books was written 1463—1464. Although Raoul tells us that Troy had been destroyed three times, and in spite of some alterations, and his referring to Dares, his Recueil has been proved to be on the whole a translation, and, for the greatest part, even a verbal one of Guido.

Raoul le Fèvre's Recueil has been rendered into English by Caxton in his recuyell of the historyes of Troy, translated and drawn out of the Frenche into English about 1471.

As I said, the Troilus-legend, i. e. which relates the love between Troilus and Cressida, was finished by Chaucer's poem, and ready for Shakespeare, who indeed took the principal part of the love episode in his play from Chaucer. As for the Trojan war, its heroes and their deeds he had resource to Lydgate's Troye-Book, and principally to Caxton's translation.

Thus the Trojan legend had been transmitted from Dares in a continual succession down to Shakespeare altogether setting aside Homer's Iliad. We see how the tradition, that the Trojans had been the ancestors of the Romans, suggested to the latter their breaking with Homer, and adopting as documents, doubtful and even falsified sources such as Dares, and how, during the middle ages, authors of civilised Europe, which had succeeded to the Roman civilisation, preferred for a similar reason that imposition as an authority. Most of them multiplied it by more or less free translations and elaborations, others remodelled and moulded it into quite new and almost original forms of poetical productions, the former as well as the latter bearing all the same stamp of the chivalrous spirit of the middle ages. By this transmission, the ancient Trojan legend was so much altered that but the frame remained, and, had the names of the heroes been changed into those of christian knights, and the geographical as well as the historical denominations

altered accordingly, the whole might pass as a medieval romance. Thus the transmitters of this legend had unconsciously turned it into what might be called a parody on Homer's Iliad.

There is no reason, why Shakespeare should have deviated from his sources as far as regards their partiality for the Trojans. One could rather justify his showing the same sympathy for the champions of the beleaguered city: Why should he not have partaken of his countrymen's favourite tradition which permitted them to delight in believing themselves related to the Romans and Trojans? Also Dares, the Phrygian, was probably by the scholars of his time still considered as an authority with respect to the Trojan war. On the other hand it may be thought very doubtful, whether Shakespeare knew the whole poem of Homer, when he composed his „Troilus and Cressida.“ The King's New School of Stratford upon Avon,¹⁾ which he attended when a boy, had most likely never been of such an extent as to afford a great proficiency in Greek, and if it did, Shakespeare left it at an age when he could hardly have acquired much of Homer's language. We cannot suppose him to have found afterwards in his active life leisure enough to increase his linguistic abilities. Thus it is generally believed as a fact, that he was not able to read Homer in the original.

Of Chapman's translation but the first seven books were then finished, and its very bad metrical form prevented him from enjoying the beauties of that celebrated epic poem, and to draw his attention to it.

Yet „Troilus and Cressida“ exhibits different variations from the above mentioned sources, which might lead to suppose his having known and used Homer. But there were other sources nearer to his reach whence he could have taken those alterations which most likely were suggested to him by mere dramatical considerations. He knew Ovid's Metamorphoses, and we read of a play, entitled „Troilus and Cressida“, published some years previously to his own by an author of inferior fame, and which had been acted by his own company.

If therefore it is almost certain Shakespeare did not know the whole of the Iliad, and still more certain that

¹⁾ Edward the VI. — 1547/53 — having bestowed a patent (Freibrief) on the Grammar School of Stratford, it was since then called, The King's New School of Stratford upon Avon.

there was no reason which could have induced him to pay particular attention to it, the supposition of his having intended a parody could then, as far as I can judge, be altogether given up as unfounded. But if an intended parody must needs be found in this play, we could with more reason consider it a parody on the chivalric time, a travesty of those adventurous feuds and wars of the middle ages, which were begun by mere passion for warfare, a caricature of that romantical love founded on self-deception, and ending in disappointment.

But instead of attributing to this play a design of which we cannot prove more than the possibility, it seems to me more consistent with Shakespeare's genius to think, the great dramatist looked upon his subject as one which he intended to apply in general to human life, as it is said in the preface to the Q. Ed. of Troil. and Cress.: „this author's comedies, that are so framed to the life, that' they serve for the most common commentaries of all the actions of our lives, showing such a dexterity and power of wit, that the most displeased with plays are pleased with his comedies“, and as John Aubrey — 1627/97 — says: „His comedies will remain wit as long as the English tongue is understood, for that he handles mores hominum“.

We are now arrived at the point, where we can consider the play itself. I think it would not be unfitting for this purpose to give a short analysis of its principal characters.

Achilles and Ajax.

Achilles, a giant by bodily strength, and still more formidable by his skill in fighting, is considered the best warrior among the Greeks. But his broad chest is the abode of fermenting passions. His uncontrolled stubbornness, his insolence and envious temper do not allow his recognizing any one superior to him or above his rank. He treats with haughtiness Agamemnon, the chief of the army, and with contempt Ulysses and Nestor, who, as true patriots, do their best in maintaining discipline, and in strengthening the authority of the chief-commander. Achilles's secretly keeping company with Polyxena, Hecuba's daughter, together with his envious character, have induced him to leave the danger of battle to the rest of the army, and to remain idle in his tent.

The same evening, when he had accepted Hector's challenge, a letter from Hecuba and Polyxena prevailed with him to form the resolution of staying away from the following day's battle:

Here is a letter from queen Hecuba;

A token from her daughter, my fair love;

Both taxing me, and gaging me to keep

An oath that I have sworn. I will not break it:

Fall Greeks: fail, fame; honour, or go, or stay,

My major vow lies here, this I'll obey. A. V, Sc. 1.

Achilles hates Hector, less with that noble wrath which a soldier bears to the enemy of his country, but his aversion partakes more of base envy, because he knows him to be his rival in fame, and his superior in dauntless courage and knightly bravery.

When Hector was heartily welcomed by Agamemnon as well as by the other Greek princes, Achilles kept aside, and, unknown by his adversary, contemplated him a while, then his dark hatred broke forth:

Tell me, you heavens, in which part of his body

Shall I destroy him, whether there, or there, or there?

That I may give the local wound a name,

And make distinct the very breach, whereout

Hector's great spirit flew. Answer me, heavens!

A. IV, Sc. 5.

The following morning when the Greek ranks were decimated by the Trojans, Hector and Troilus at their head, Achilles remained in his tent, and was going to forfeit his honour for his paramour's sake, when they announced him the death of his friend Patroclus whom Hector had slain. Then we see one noble feeling gleaming through the darkness of his character, like the broken glimpses of the sun through the rising clouds of a storm: Friendship moves Achilles to revenge his bosom-friend; he makes his appearance in the battle-field, crying:

Where is this Hector!

Come, come thou boy-queller, show thy face;

Know what it is to meet Achilles angry.

Hector! where's Hector! I will none but Hector.

A. V, Sc. 5.

He meets his noble enemy, and proves that a cruel man seldom has true courage at his command, accepting Hector's generous offer „Pause if thou wilt“ with a boasting, flat excuse:

I do disdain thy courtesy, proud Trojan.
 Be happy that my arms are out of use:
 My rest and negligence befriend thee now,
 But thou anon shalt hear of me again;
 Till when, go seek thy fortune. A. V, Sc. 6.

After which he goes looking for his Myrmidons, and, having found them, reveals the deep cowardice of his heart by bidding them execute his infamous scheme:

Come here about me, you my Myrmidons;
 Mark what I say. — Attend me where I wheel:
 Strike not a stroke, but keep yourselves in breath;
 And when I have the bloody Hector found,
 Empale him with your weapons round about;
 In fellest manner execute your arms. A. V, Sc. 7.

Achilles finds the exhausted hero who has put off shield and helmet, and laid aside his sword, trusting to his generous heart that cannot admit the suspicion, any one could be capable of attacking an unarmed adversary.

But generosity is unknown to the prince of the Myrmidons, he orders them, as if they were not soldiers but a band of assassins:

Strike, fellows, strike! this is the man I seek.

— — — — —
 On, Myrmidons; and cry you all amain,
 Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain.

— — — — —
 Come, tie his body to my horse's tail;
 Along the field I will the Trojan trail.

A. V, Sc. 9.

Ajax, another chieftain of the Greeks, has like Achilles an ambitious character which leads also him to question Agamemnon's authority, and to stir up a crowd of followers against the head of the army. His gigantic frame bearing however but a narrow understanding, he is less dangerous than Achilles. He is with all his bearish bravery no more than a self-conceited fool who by his boastings and braggings makes himself ridiculous, and whose weakness of intellect makes him a fit tool in Ulysses's hand to serve in his plot against Achilles.

Agamemnon, Nestor,
 Ulysses.

Agamemnon is a well-meaning, and would, in the common course of his former station, perhaps be an excellent man,

but in the extraordinary circumstances where we find him, he is neither capable of choosing, nor of carrying into effect, the measures which the condition of the Greek army requires. He knows well how to observe the solemn appearance becoming his dignity. Yet, although his authority would probably never have been questioned in his own country, and by his own soldiers, he was not gifted to command such an army as had been gathered from so many independent tribes; nature had not bestowed on him that keen look which enables man to penetrate into the real state of things, and, whenever he guessed it, he had not the courage of owning it to himself.

Ulysses discerns the cause of the disorder which undermines the strength of the Greeks. He is the head which must think for all, the soul that alone is able to bind together into one living body the different parts of the army. He knows the persons whom he has to deal with, and is not ignorant of Agamemnon's weakness, hidden by his dignified and somewhat pompous manners; he is also aware of Nestor's foible to hear himself speak, and to give his advice on everything, an innocent habit which honourable and petted old age contracts. Thus we must take the flatteries he bestows on both of them as a *captatio benevolentiae*, to secure a good reception to the truth which he is going to reveal:

Troy, yet up on his basis, had been down,
And the great Hector's sword had lack'd a master,
But for these instances.
The specialty of rule hath been neglected:
And, look, how many Grecian tents do stand
Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions.
A. I, Sc. 3.

Then he unfolds his sound political understanding by a speech which the English are fond of proclaiming a master-piece of political wisdom.

Having thus prepared his hearers, he reverts to his particular case and purpose. He knew nothing would more surely induce Achilles to abandon his idle reserve, than opposing to his pride a cold neglectful behaviour. Being aware, however, of Agamemnon's aversion to any decisive acting, he intends to stimulate him to that effect by telling him how Achilles makes it his pastime to have Patroclus

mimicking and turning into ridicule the most venerable persons, Agamemnon and Nestor. Thus what in ordinary circumstances would have been little more than woman's gossip became by his calculation an artful blow which did not miss its aim.

Hector's challenge, brought by Aeneas, serves Ulysses's purpose, and while Agamemnon enters the camp with the herald in order to make known the challenge to the Greek knights, Ulysses has already found out how to make use of it, to realize his plan regarding Achilles. In A. III, Sc. 3 we see that plan executed by the Trojan princes, Achilles is standing at the entrance of his tent, while Agamemnon and the other princes pass near him conversing, and without taking any notice of him; they answer his salute with indifference, and Ajax who is at the height of his wishes, cannot help showing his silly impudence. The lesson does not fail to produce its expected effect:

What mean these fellows? Know they not Achilles?

What! am I poor of late?

'T is certain, greatness, once fall'n out with fortune,

Must fall out with men too: What the declin'd is,

He shall as soon read in the eyes of others,

As feel in his own fall; etc. A. III, Sc. 3.

Anon comes Ulysses apparently absorbed in reading. Achilles who cannot find any support in his own conscience, feels wretched when he thinks himself abandoned by the assent of others, and the giant, helpless as ivy that clings round the oak, seeks consolation of Ulysses, who avails himself of the favourable moment to finish the cure of his pride-sick patient.

Shakespeare has drawn Ulysses's character with visible predilection. Ulysses, always just and generous in passing his judgment upon the Trojans, is with all his eminent intellectual power devoted to the cause of his nation. We must esteem him still more, when we see that he withdraws into the background, as soon as his interference in the conversation cannot avail anything; in doing so he proves the important truth, that eminent men will best find a willing ear to their wise advices and designs, when they themselves are without self-interest and personal pride. As a true patriot he always acts accordingly, and never makes a show of his person, or betrays any wish to satisfy his own ambition.

The clown Thersites.

This character could be regarded as a medium to fill up to a certain extent the place of the chorus in the classical drama of the ancients. He illustrates indeed by his witty remarks and glosses the characters and actions of the different personages. But he has also a purpose of his own: He is a fair specimen of those cowards who will shrink from every action, whether good or bad, if it is accompanied by trouble or danger, who are too vile to conceive any noble purpose, and who therefore see every where, and in every body but wickedness and meanness. Thus he cannot fail hitting sometimes the truth by his mockery, yet this is not his aim; his only wish is, to defile all by his slanderous tongue. He discharges his invectives against every one and every thing, good or bad, he travestises the Greeks and the Trojans, the motive of the war, and all those who make it.

In this way the character of Thersites contributes not a little to the parody-like nature of this play.

Hector.

While the Greek camp presents a sad spectacle of envy and discord, in Troy unity prevails, which is founded on the mutual affection between the members of the royal family, and the respect which is unanimously paid to king Priam. Hector and Troilus are the most prominent characters among the Trojan heroes. We had already occasion to see that Hector, by his daring courage, his generous and amiable character, is the very reverse of Achilles. His domestic virtues deserve also to be praised, he is a good son and a tender husband. Yet he erred in one point in spite of his better feelings, and betrayed the very same principles he held so high. The Greeks sent a proposal of peace the condition of which was, that the Trojans should deliver up Helen. Priam assembled his sons Hector, Troilus, Paris and Helenus, that they might decide the important question of war and peace. He addresses himself first to the support of his throne. Hector is inclined to yield to the demand of the besiegers; he says Helen is not a price for all the blood shed and the lives lost, he declares the sacred union between husband and wife to be inviolable:

. . . Nature craves,

All dues be render'd to their owners: now,
 What nearer debt in all humanity
 Than wife is to the husband? If this law
 Of nature be corrupted through affection,
 And that great minds, of partial indulgence
 To their benumbed wills, resist the same,
 There is a law in each well-order'd nation,
 To curb those raging appetites that are
 Most disobedient and refractory.
 If Helen then be wife to Sparta's king,
 As it is known she is, these moral laws
 Of nature, and of nation, speak aloud
 To have her back return'd. A. II, Sc. 2.

And yet, not heeding Cassandra's warnings, he gives way to Troilus and Paris, who resolve upon war, the former being guided by hateful revenge, and the latter by wanton passion for his paramour. And what could move Hector to betray thus his moral principles?:

For 't is a cause that hath no mean dependance
 Upon our joint and several dignities — A. II, Sc. 2.

It is the wrong idea of thinking his and Troy's honour and fame depending on retaining the unworthy cause of that bloody war, and on vanquishing the Greeks.

Troilus and Cressida.

The love between Troilus and Cressida appears in proportion to the whole play an episode. Cressida is a woman destitute of those qualities which are inseparable from the fulfilling of her high calling. She has lost the purity and innocence of heart, the strongest ramparts of woman's honour; how could she otherwise bear and answer the equivokes of Pandar?

She herself confesses to have become a coquette by way of experience:

— — — — —
 But more in Troilus thousand-fold I see,
 Than in the glass of Pandar's praise may be.
 Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing:
 Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing:
 That she belov'd knows nought, that knows not this, —

— — — — —
 Therefore, this maxim out of love I teach, —
 Achievement is command; ungain'd, beseech:
 Then though my heart's content firm love doth bear,
 Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear. A. I, Sc. 2.

Such is the object of Troilus's prodigal first love. The poet has given this youth the fanciful early love of growing puberty, when violent sensuality is hidden by mental superabundance. He idealizes his mistress in a manner common to that kind of lovers; he describes her charms in poetical images, some of which belong to the finest that Shakespeare ever used, f. i.

. O! that her hand,
In whose comparison all whites are ink,
Writing their own reproach; to whose soft seizure
The cygnet's down is harsh, and spirit of sense
Hard as the palm of ploughman. A. I, Sc. 1.

To him she is an angel of chastity, and in his impatient passion he thinks that pimp-like Pandar too slow for a match-maker:

And he 's as tetchy to be woo'd to woo,
As she is stubborn-chaste against all suit. A. I, Sc. 1.

We believe therefore fully his calling himself an honest fellow to whom falsehood is unknown:

I am as true as truth's simplicity,
And simpler than the infancy of truth. A. III, Sc. 2.

The description which Ulysses gives of him, is so much like a portrait, that it almost suggests the idea Shakespeare had had a living model whence he drew the character of Troilus:

The youngest son of Priam, a true knight;
Not yet mature, yet matchless; firm of word,
Speaking in deeds, and deedless in his tongue;
Not soon provok'd, nor, being provok'd, soon calm'd:
His heart and hand both open, and both free;
For what he has, he gives; what thinks, he shows;
Yet gives he not till judgment guide his bounty,
Nor dignifies an impure thought with breath. etc.
A. IV, Sc. 5.

This noble youth the worn-out epicure tries to couple to the coquette; he does so not out of friendship to him — it would at least be a peculiar kind of friendship — but as it seems from an instinctive inclination to enjoy young people's sensual pleasures, which he himself can no longer taste.

Cressida loves Troilus sincerely, if it be permitted to call the affections of such a woman by a name that should only be applied to a nobler feeling. When she was forced to part with him, her passionate grief was unfeigned, and her promise of remaining faithful no doubt truly meant. This is the principal difference between her and a prostitute by profession. She soon proved to be void of any moral strength, in short a woman who loves not the person but the sex in man. On her way to the Grecian camp, Diomedes had already succeeded in soothing her grief by flatteries, in as much that she could willingly present her cheeks to the kisses of the Grecian princes. Here then Ulysses passed a severe but striking judgment upon her:

Fie, fie upon her!

There 's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body. etc.

A. IV, Sc. 5.

The same evening she gave admittance to Diomedes. In her conversation with him she exhibited at once her coquettish desire to excite her new suitor, and some regret for her deceived lover whom she did not suppose to be a witness of her falsehood. At last she gives herself to Diomedes.

Good night: I pr'y thee, come. —

Troilus, farewell! one eye yet looks on thee,
But with my heart the other eye doth see.

A. V, Sc. 2.

The poor abused youth can hardly believe what he sees and hears, that all his dreams of eternal love, happiness, faith and truth are vanished.

In Cressida Shakespeare introduced a personage on the stage, that certainly could not be acted in our time. We cannot imagine how an honest woman could assist at the representation without blushing, and what actress would degrade herself by acting such a part.

The less refined customs and the uncouth character of Shakespeare's time are not a sufficient explanation of the ethic deficiencies which, in the Troilus episode, hurt our

feelings; our delicacy will probably not exceed that of Shakespeare's contemporaries as far as moral principles are concerned. But methinks the consideration of the condition in which we find the English theatre under Elisabeth and her successor, will throw a better light on the question.

The propagation of the puritan doctrine was then at its highest flight, and puritanism was from its severe character an enemy to the stage. Most of the middle classes, and a great many of those who held a higher station, abhorred therefore theatricals as being dangerous to morality. The auditory of the theatre consisted of very different elements. There were first the young men of the nobility and the gentry, the beaux and lions of the capital, then those who by their occupation stood in any connection with the stage; the bulk of the auditory belonged to the lower classes, as artisans, workmen, apprentices, sailors, and at last women of doubtful character.

No woman who cared for her reputation, would venture to go there, and if there was one who could not refrain her curiosity, she would not have been seen without having hidden her face behind a mask.

If, moreover, we remember that the female parts were then acted by boys, it becomes at once clear, Shakespeare was more than any modern dramatist unhindered to form the characters of the women, and when we see what kind of spectators he had partly to deal with, then much what, here as well as in other plays, seems to prove a want of decency and modesty is, although not justified, at least not without apology.

But Troilus, the noble and highly gifted youth, abused by a coquette, strikes in a rude manner the most tender strings of the heart; it is almost like a satire on that feeling so dear to mankind, — first love, which hundreds of poets have idealised and sung of in all languages. It is obvious, Shakespeare did not intend here to idealise first love. On the contrary, we see in Troilus the degeneration of that premature feeling into boundless passion, which hides under a romantical strain the most dangerous sensual affections. In „Romeo and Juliet“ we see the same but in a tragic form, while in „Troilus and Cressida“ Shakespeare views his subject from the comical side. Therefore he placed in direct opposition to the downright, honest youth with his high flight of blind passion the cunning, experienced coquette, and the common bawd, who by his witty but licentious jokes teaches that there is no such thing, as what people call pure love, and

who leads the deceived youth through all degrees of the passion of love to the unblest union with his mistress.

Another doubtful point is the end of noble Hector. The generous Trojan sinks shamefully under the foul stratagem of that bad man, Achilles. This is indeed an unharmonious conclusion, and yet we see in several plays of Shakespeare the virtuous and innocent suffer persecution, and even a violent death: Cordelia was hanged in prison, Desdemona strangled by her husband, Ophelia went out of mind, and committed suicide. In all this, the poet follows but the course of reality in this world, where the righteous so often fall into the snares of the malevolent, and suffer all kind of calamities and evil, while the wicked not seldom enjoy life in the happiest circumstances.

That this perception does not overthrow the existence of providence is as true as it is evident that Shakespeare could not show his faith in a supreme ruling power nor his poetical justice by having always rewarded the good at the end of the play, and punished the bad. I say, he could not do so, or he would have been constrained to give up that principle in the observing of which he in a high degree owes his greatness, and this principle was, to remain always true to reality in representing the world and human life on the stage.

Besides, Hector is not altogether guiltless. He had it in his power to finish the bloody war, in doing justice to the Greeks, yet, induced by false pride, and in spite of his better conviction, he decided for war, the responsibility of which he took thus upon his conscience, and made the crime of Paris partly his own. But if we allow that his death was not quite undeserved, we presume to say, every reader and every spectator of the play will be shocked at his being murdered in such a vile manner; this conclusion is more than tragical, it is frightful; had he fallen in an open duel, fighting face to face with Achilles, his fate would not thus surpass the limits of the tragic.

After having considered the whole fable of the play, I think one does not venture too much in maintaining that the tragic element predominates there; and yet the treatment of the tragic subject is decidedly of a comic character: There are Thersites and Pandarus with their satiric illustrations, there is Ajax, managed in such an excellent comic way by Ulysses. All this becomes the more bewildering, and gives this play an almost enigmatical character, when we remember

Homer's ideal figures, as one is naturally inclined to do. But I tried to show in the first part of this short essay, that Shakespeare was quite alien to Homer, when he wrote this piece. It seems to me, therefore, not unreasonable to pass over Homer altogether, in estimating „Troilus and Cressida.“ Shakespeare simply borrowed the fable to his „Troilus and Cressida“ from the medieval Trojan legend. What then is the purpose of this play?

Lessing says, the action of a dramatical piece has a twofold design, there is, besides the intrinsic intention of the play itself, the particular purpose the poet aims at. The intention of the play is, no doubt, the representation of the struggle for Helena. The spectator expects therefore the natural end of it to be the decisive victory of one or the other party. But the action finishes abruptly with the murder of Hector, and leaves the question unanswered, who will finally conquer. This apparent carelessness suggests to me the supposition, that the poet had his own purpose so much in view, that he neglected the design of the play. But there remains still the question, what has the poet's purpose been? I cannot flatter myself to answer that question sufficiently. All that I dare do is, to give my opinion on it. I refer again to Lessing; he says: The principal intention of a dramatic poet is to excite passions. What passions then will be excited by „Troilus and Cressida?“ Thersites, Pandar, Cressida will move us to contempt. Achilles' character we can but hate; the other personages will stir up a mixed feeling: we admire and love Hector, and are shocked by his terrible end, yet we regret that he does not always remain faithful to his integrity. We take interest in Troilus, but this interest will be paralysed, when we see him giving away the prime blossom of his heart to a coquette.

Nearly all the characters of this play exhibit either a vicious side, or some foible or other, they show more or less the depravity of human nature. Pandar and Thersites are mere dregs of human kind, the minds of Achilles, Ajax, Cressida are so ill regulated, that all their inclinations become passions, and all their passions partake of the character of moral disease; the others have their weak point, Ulysses, excepted; the best natured among the Trojans, Hector, is not without guilt.

But in forming these characters, Shakespeare shows more than in any of his plays, his power of acute observation, his instinctive knowledge of man, his penetration

which enabled him to decipher the most secret pages of the human soul, like those of an open book. Thus it may be understood, that while our ethical feelings and expectations are not satisfied, our interest is charmed by this dissolving of psychological questions, this abundance of sentential wisdom and wit.

I may be permitted to conclude with a supposition: It is as if the poet had assumed in this play a mode of representing human society from its reverse. And this very dark scene of the world and life is only illuminated by the dazzling rays of a keen and often satirical wit.

J. Sturm.



