

1964

Browning's Ambiguities and the Ring and the Book

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Recommended Citation

Truss, Tom J. Jr. (1964) "Browning's Ambiguities and the Ring and the Book," *Studies in English*: Vol. 5 , Article 3.

Available at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/ms_studies_eng/vol5/iss1/3

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TROILUS AND CRESSIDA AND ELIZABETH COURT FACTIONS

by James E. Savage

It is the purpose of this paper to suggest that there is much more reflection of contemporary events in *Troilus and Cressida* than commentators have noted and that this reference becomes most apparent when the assumption is made that not Achilles, but Hector, offers comment on the character and fate of the Earl of Essex.¹

Critical efforts to account for this puzzling play have almost always taken note of contemporary affairs, perhaps merely denying their relevance,² possibly seeing, as does G. B. Harrison, a rebuke to Essex under the recalcitrance of Achilles.³ The position which I wish to take is adumbrated, though not fully explored, by C. F. Tucker-Brooke, who sees these kinships: "Cecil-Ulysses" and "Raleigh-Diomed."⁴ He also suggests a foreshadowing of Puritan-Cavalier relationships to come. Surely, as Harrison says elsewhere, "no one . . . at the time could have failed to notice the striking

¹Some of the suggestions made in this essay have been put forth tentatively in *The Elizabethan Elements in Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida* by Merritt Clare Batchelder (Unpublished dissertation, University of Iowa, 1935). He sees the play as, to some extent, a commentary on the court factions, but his primary interest is in the contemporary ideas embodied in the speeches. He does suggest a strong resemblance between Hector and Essex; he finds in Troilus, in Cressida, and in Pandarus an indictment of the conduct of the courtiers and the ladies of the court. In Ulysses he sees the Machiavelian, the man of policy, with many suggestions of Robert Cecil; Thersites is to him the embodiment of the satirist of the time, under whatever name.

In his recent biography, *William Shakespeare* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), A. L. Rowse sees *Troilus and Cressida* as partly commentary on the court factions. Not only Sir Robert Cecil, but Shakespeare himself, speaks through Ulysses. Shakespeare, though his sympathies lay with the Essex faction, is under Achilles condemning the follies of Essex, and the Achilles-Patrochus relationship of the play is much like that of Essex and Southampton, though there is no "crude transcript" of a whole character. (pp. 338-349)

²W. W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 122-173, *passim*.

³G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare at Work* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1958), pp. 198-228.

⁴C. F. Tucker-Brooke, *Essays on Shakespeare and Other Elizabethans* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 76.

parallels between Essex's story and much of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*."⁵

The apparent failure of the great Earl's campaign in Ireland, the precipitate return to court, the increasing horde of visitors to Essex house, the abortive sally of Essex and his followers into the city, the trial of Essex, the nobility and the bathos of his death—all these were profoundly moving to the courtier, the Londoner, perhaps to all Englishmen. The uncertainty of the succession, the age and irascibility of the Queen, her grief over the death of her favorite—these too were matters that gave rise to alarm, to fear both personal and national, and to endless intrigues and jockeyings for position. That Shakespeare could write in the midst of them without taking them into account, as I am suggesting, in *Troilus and Cressida*, appears most unlikely.

In 1598, George Chapman dedicated the *Seven Books of the Iliades of Homer* to Essex as "THE MOST HONOURED NOW LIVING INSTANCE OF THE ACHILLEAN VIRTUES ETERNIZED BY THE DIVINE HOMER." In the dedicatory epistle he continues: "in whose unmatched virtues shine the dignities of the soul, and the whole excellence of royal humanity, let not the peasant-common politics of the world, that count all things servile and simple, . . . stir your divine temper from perseverance in god-like pursuit of eternity."⁶ While this, of course, has some of the fulsomeness of the usual Elizabethan dedication, it represents with reasonable fairness the attitude of many of Elizabeth's subjects toward her great favorite. But—the Achilles of the *Iliades* is most emphatically not the Achilles of *Troilus and Cressida*. To the Hector of the play such praise is due, and I submit that in the person of Hector the popular conception of Essex is embodied.

Robert Devereaux, the Earl of Essex, was not without the appurtenances in person, in character, and in exploits, to render him a popular hero. He was, to some extent, to the 1590's what Sir Philip Sidney had been to the 1580's. To the magnanimity and bravery of a Sidney, he could add a magnificent personal appear-

⁵G. B. Harrison, *The Life and Death of Robert Devereaux Earl of Essex* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1937), p. 347.

⁶Richard Herne Shepherd, ed., *The Works of George Chapman: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1924), pp. 7-8.

ance and a reputation for generosity and kindliness. That he was stepson to the great Earl of Leicester, as Sidney had been nephew, and that his wife was the widow of Philip Sidney were circumstances that contributed to the legend. There were, however, many other reasons for his popular appeal. The common enemy was Spain, and Essex had a great, though possibly undeserved, reputation through his participation in the Spanish expeditions. He was a profoundly religious man, though he extended more sympathy to the Puritan, and perhaps to the disaffected Catholic, than was approved by the policy of the state. His chivalric appeal attracted to him many of the younger nobility and gentry, men such as the Earls of Southampton, Rutland, Bedford. The number of knights he created on the field of battle was well over one hundred. Of those he created in Ireland, John Chamberlain dryly remarks: "... for what service I know not, but belike yt be *de bene esse*, in hope they will deserve yt hereafter."⁷ Courtiers disaffected to Raleigh and Robert Cecil of the rival court faction swelled the numbers of those who saw in Essex a leader for troublous times.

These court factions were a potent force in the waning days of the reign of Elizabeth. She had tolerated, perhaps even fostered them, as a deliberate means of curbing the power of any too-aspiring courtier or favorite. Their composition had crystallized early in the 1590's, and the principal adherents of each remained constant at least until Essex began to fall into disfavor. On September 28, 1599, after the return of Essex from Ireland, and before he came into complete disgrace, the principal members of both factions dined at court. The following account of that dinner, as gleaned from the *Sidney Papers*, is given by G. B. Harrison:

Then he [Essex] came down to dinner, where his friends joined him, the Earls of Worcester and Rutland, Mountjoy, Lord Rich, Lord Henry Howard, and many others. . . . The Secretary [Robert Cecil] and his party, the Earl of Shrewsbury, the Lord Admiral, Lord Thomas Howard, Lord Cobham, Grey, and Sir Walter Raleigh dined apart and aloof.⁸

⁷Norman Egbert McClure, ed., *The Letters of John Chamberlain* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939), I, 79.

⁸Harrison, *Essex*, p. 249.

Only one important name is missing from the list of the friends of Essex, that of Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton.

Animosity prevailed in varying degrees among the principals. Sir Robert Cecil could and did, by virtue of his office, befriend members of the opposing faction. Nor was the Lord Admiral particularly vindictive. But little quarter was given in the struggle between Raleigh and Essex, after Raleigh was reprimanded by Essex for an unauthorized action during the Cadiz expedition. Equal animosity arose between Essex and Lord Cobham in the struggle for the Wardenship of the Cinque Ports and continued unabated thereafter. Southampton reprimanded Lord Grey of Wilton during the Irish campaign; and thereafter, not even the commands of the Queen could prevent clashes between them.

There could be no neutral ground, no basis of friendship with members of both factions for those who frequented the court. This necessity of allegiance to one or the other can be exemplified by a letter written in 1598 by Lord Grey of Wilton to Lord Cobham:

Of late my Lord of Essex, doubting whereuppon
I should be so well favoured at Court, and
especially by her Majesty, has forced me to de-
clare myself either his only, or friend to Mr. Sec-
retary and his enemy: protesting there could be
no neutrality.⁹

Yet in all this struggle, the primary antagonists were popularly thought to be, and probably were, Essex and Raleigh. The lengths to which the animosity, at least of Raleigh, could go are suggested by this letter which he wrote to Sir Robert Cecil, probably in February of 1600:

I am not wise enough to give you advice, but if
you take it for a good counsel to relent towards
this tyrant, [Essex] you will repent it when it
shall be too late. His malice is fixed, and will not
evaporate by any your mild courses, for he will
ascribe the alteration to her Majesty's pusillani-
mity and not to your good nature, knowing that

⁹Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Salisbury Papers*, VIII, 269.

you work but upon her humour, and not out of any love towards him. The less you make him, the less he shall be able to harm you and yours, and if her Majesty's favour fail him, he will again decline to a common person. For after revenges, fear them not His son shall be the youngest Earl of England but one, and if his father be now kept down, Will Cecill shall be able to keep as many men at his heels as he, and more too. . . . But if the father continue, he will be able to break the branches and pull up the tree, root and all. Lose not your advantage. If you do, I read your destiny.¹⁰

The factional struggle in Elizabeth's court was literally a struggle to the death, and the multitudes with whom Essex was "popular" believed him to have been unjustly done to death by enemies at court.

What would Shakespeare have known of all these matters, and where would his sympathies lie? Such evidence as there is would suggest sympathy with the Essex faction as the more likely alternative, and even some perhaps inadvertant participation on the periphery of the great events. Some early relationship with Southampton is indicated by the dedications to him, in 1593 and 1594, of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. That Shakespeare had some direct and perhaps unpleasant experience with Lord Cobham of the Raleigh faction appears in connection with the Falstaff scenes of the *Henry IV* plays. I quote the analysis of that situation by E. K. Chambers:

. . . Shakespeare substituted Sir John Falstaff as his leading humorist for Sir John Oldcastle. As to the fact of this substitution there can be no doubt. Tradition as early as about 1625 records it, and it has left traces in the texts A reason for the change can readily be found in the fact that Sir John Oldcastle married an ancestress

¹⁰*Ibid.*, X, 439.

of the Lords Cobham, who were prominent at the Elizabethan court.¹¹

A direct and admiring reference to Essex is embodied in the Prologue to Act V of *Henry V*:

Were now the Generall of our gracious Empress,
As in good time he may, from Ireland comming,
Bringing Rebellion broached on his Sword;
How many would the peacefull Citie quit,
To welcome him?

The references in these plays would belong to the years 1597-1599.

After the return of Essex from Ireland and his subsequent disgrace, two contemporary records link Shakespeare, as a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, to the goings-on of the factions; and the association is with the followers of Essex. A letter of Roland Whyte notes that "My Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland come not to the court, the one doth, but very seldome, they pass the time in London merely in going to plays every day."¹² The other reference is contained in the well known deposition of Augustine Phillips on February 18, 1600:

. . . on Fryday last was sennyght or Thursday Sr Charles Percy Sr Josclyne Percy and the L. Montegle with some thre more spak to some of the players in the presans of thys examine to have the play of the deposyng and kyllyng of Kyng Rychard the second to be played the Saterdag next promysyng to gete them xls. more then their ordynary to play yt . . . at their request this Examine and his fellowes were Content to play yt the Saterdag and had their xls. more then their ordynary for yt and so played yt accordyngly.¹³

¹¹E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare* (2 vols.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1930), I, 381-382.

¹²As quoted by C. C. Stopes, *The Third Earl of Southampton* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), from *Sidney Papers*, 25 October, 1599, II, 132.

¹³As quoted by Chambers (*William Shakespeare*, II, 325) from *S. P. Dom.*, *Eliz.* cclxxviii 85.

In view of the circumstances which I have outlined, it seems useful to explore the possibility that under Shakespeare's Hector the Earl of Essex is adumbrated and that certain characters of the play stand in relation to Hector as certain members of the two factions of Elizabeth's court stood in relation to Essex.¹⁴

Perhaps to no other of his characters has Shakespeare allowed the unqualified praise which in this play is given to Hector. To foe and friend alike, to Ulysses, to Achilles, to Paris, he is "great Hector." To Ulysses he is "the gallant," "the valiant"; to Troilus he is "worthy" and "brave", though with an unfortunate "vice of mercy." He alone of the major characters is not besmirched by the foul tongue of Thersites. Even to Achilles, after the slaying of Patroclus, he is no more than "the bloody Hector," the "boy-queller."

The Hector of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* is more gentle, more magnanimous, more terrible in battle, more temperate in council, than the Hector of the *Iliades*, or of Shakespeare's other sources. He is much like the popular, though perhaps mistaken, image of the Earl of Essex. And certainly Shakespeare's arrogant, slothful, treacherous Achilles is not what the myriad friends and followers of Essex believed Essex to be.

One other suggestion of an analogy between the careers of Hector and Essex should be made at this time—the challenge. That issued in the play by Hector was of an essentially military purpose, though couched in terms of a lady's virtue and beauty, and was intended for Achilles. It was by the policy of Ulysses that Achilles was rejected; it was by the chicanery of Ulysses that Ajax was chosen. The essential purpose of Ulysses was the pitting against each other of Achilles and Ajax, rather than any immediate victory over Hector. In the circumstances of its issuance and the chivalric nature of its statement, Hector's challenge is unlike any found in Shakespeare's sources. Its circumstances do resemble those of a duel fought by Essex with Charles Blount, as a consequence of a favor shown to Blount by Queen Elizabeth.¹⁵ Essex

¹⁴If, as Alexander suggests ("Troilus and Cressida 1609," *Library*, 4th Series, IX; 278-279) *Troilus and Cressida* was written for performance at one of the Inns of Court, Shakespeare could have assumed in his audience a considerable knowledge of the personalities and relationships at court.

¹⁵J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1934), p. 304.

was wounded; but the two were soon reconciled, and thereafter Blount, later to be Lord Mountjoy and Earl of Devonshire, was a member of the Essex faction until the abortive rebellion. Soon after this duel, Essex issued a challenge to Raleigh, but the meeting was prevented by the Privy Council.¹⁶ In the Low Countries, in 1591, through a letter to the Marquis of Villars, Essex offered to maintain "that the King's quarrel is juster than the League's, that I am better than you, and that my Mistress is fairer than yours."¹⁷ Still a fourth challenge by Essex occurred in Spain: "Into one of the gates of the town Essex, as a parting gesture, thrust in his pike, 'demanding aloud if any Spaniard mewed therein durst adventure forth in favour of his mistress to break a lance.'"¹⁸ It is not impossible that Shakespeare had knowledge of some, or all of these circumstances, and that they may have suggested to him the formal and chivalric terms of Hector's challenge.

Hector is almost unique among the heroes of Shakespeare's serious plays in that he fails of being either fully heroic or fully tragic. As has been pointed out above, he is extravagantly lauded by all the characters in the play, Greek and Trojan alike. But he is not so treated in those things which Shakespeare has him say and do. Early in the play we are told that because Ajax has struck him to the ground, "he chid Andromache and struck his armorer." Such petty conduct would seem incongruous in a Brutus, a Macbeth, an Othello. In the Trojan council debating the question of returning Helen to the Greeks, it is Hector who speaks with reason, who sees the opposed factors in their true significance. But, though he knows that Paris and Troilus "on the cause and question now in hand/Have gloz'd, but superficially," he yields to their worser counsels. On the morning of his death, though Priam the King, Cassandra the Prophetess, and Andromache his wife persuade against his going to battle, and though he is urging Troilus to remain in Ilium, he goes forth to "Doe deeds of praise, and tell you them at night." Here too, to Andromache he is most ungracious: "you traine me to offend you: get you gone." In such scenes as these there are strong suggestions of inconsistency and irresponsibility in Hector's character.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Harrison, *Essex*, p. 62.

¹⁸As quoted from W. W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960), p. 144.

On the battle field on the fatal day, though Hector performs almost superhuman feats, ("Mangled Myrmidons/That noseless, handlesse, hackt and chipt, come to him/Crying on Hector") he exercises almost to the point of folly his "vice of mercy." Fully armed, he says to Achilles "Pause if thou wilt," a courtesy of which Achilles is glad to avail himself. Then he commits the further folly of pursuing the "One in Armour." After the pursuit, and the admonition "Thy goodly armour thus hath cost thy life," he then commits the further folly of disarming himself, for, "now is my daies work done." With the murderous blows of the Myrmidons, on the orders of Achilles, his day's work is indeed done. Such a sequence of events may well be sound comment on the real character and career of Essex, his peevishness and instability in council, his ill-fated Irish expedition, and the foolish uprising that was indeed a quest for "goodly armour."

If Hector reflects Essex, then Troilus reflects Southampton. His character is given in a set piece by Ulysses, who is quoting Aeneas:

The youngest Sonne of *Priam*;
A true Knight; they call him *Troylus*;
Not yet mature, yet matchlesse, firme of word,
Speaking in deedes, and deedelesse in his tongue;
Not soone prouok't, nor being prouok't, soone calm'd;
His heart and hand both open, and both free:
For what he has, he giues; what thinkes, he shewes;
Yet giues he not till judgement guide his bounty,
Nor dignifies an impaire thought with breath:
Manly as *Hector*, but more dangerous;
For *Hector* in his blaze of wrath subscribes
To tender obiects; but he, in heate of action,
Is more vindecatiue then jealous loue.
They call him *Troylus*; and on him erect,
A second hope, as fairely built as *Hector*.¹⁹ (IV, v,
111-125)

Such a description is undramatic and contrived, but it is not unlike the real character of Southampton, who was generous, loyal, per-

¹⁹*Variorum*, ed. H. N. Hillebrand (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1953). Unless reference is made to the Quarto of 1609, or to the Folio, the *Variorum* is the source of all quotations.

haps quick to anger. As early as 1591, he was a follower of Essex; he accompanied him in the attacks on Spain; he served, in spite of the disapproval of Elizabeth and her Council, as his general of the horse in Ireland. He took part in the councils which led to the abortive uprising in London, followed Essex in that sally, and was condemned at the same time, and by the same tribunal, to the same fate as Essex.

Southampton, as early as 1595, had in Elizabeth Vernon his Cressida. She was a cousin to Essex. John Chamberlain perhaps reflects general opinion of their relationship when he writes in 1598,

Mistris Vernon is from the court, and lies in Essex House; some say she hath taken a venew under the girdle and swells upon yt, yet she complaines not of fowle play but sayes the erle of Southampton will justifie yt:²⁰

Of Cressida, however, more later.

After a brief sojourn in the Fleet Prison, Southampton was on December 8, 1598, made general of the horse, and was soon serving with Essex in Ireland. Under his command was Lord Grey of Wilton. Grey exceeded orders in a charge and was disciplined (one night's arrest) by Southampton. As a result of this "disgrace," Grey became an inveterate enemy to Southampton. Grey returned to Court, and probably as a result of his demands and in view of the fact that Queen Elizabeth had disapproved of the appointment, Essex was forced to relieve Southampton of his command of the horse. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Diomides gets Troilus' horse, as indeed he does in most of the sources. Yet, curiously, in the final battle, though Diomides has also gotten Cressida, Troilus' final word to Diomides is this: "thy life thou owest me for my horse." (V, vi, 13)

The quarrel between Grey and Southampton over the matter of the disgrace in Ireland bore fruit for some months: a spirited exchange of letters about the arrangements for a duel; an encounter in the Low Countries, in spite of an express order forbid-

²⁰*Letters*, I, 43-44.

ding such a duel,²¹ an encounter in the Strand, on horseback,²² which resulted in the brief confinement of Lord Grey in the Fleet. He was out in time, however, to sit as one of the group of their "peers" who pronounced on Essex and Southampton the sentence of death. So—if Troilus resembles Southampton, Diomides resembles Lord Grey of Wilton.

Back now to Cressida. The penetrating comment of Ulysses can perhaps be taken in two ways: "'twere better she were kissed in generall." (IV, v, 26) Certainly it characterizes Cressida, almost viciously—but it may perhaps apply indirectly to many of the ladies of the Queen's Privy Chamber, the "Maids of Honor." Cressida herself perhaps makes such a general association in a speech to Diomides, about the sleeve Troilus has given her:

By all *Dianas* waiting women yond:

And by her self, I will not tell you whose. (V, ii, 108-109)

Commentators on this passage suggest some such an interpretation as moon and the stars, for Diana and her waiting women, with the actor perhaps pointing toward the heavens.²³ But an audience nourished on the "Cynthia" of *Endymion*, or the Cynthia-Diana of *Cynthia's Revels*,²⁴ or the "fair vestal" of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, would very likely see a reference to the Queen and the ladies of her privy chamber.

Elizabeth Vernon resembles Cressida in the early stages of courtship, but not thereafter, for she was apparently a good and faithful wife to the Earl. But a prototype for the later Cressida was certainly at court about 1600—in the person of Mary Fitton, who bore the Earl of Pembroke's child, was repudiated by him, and had thereafter a succession of husbands and lovers. I suggest that Cressida, though a magnificent individual portrait in the play, may be a composite of these and other young ladies of the

²¹*Ibid.*, I, 107.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 115.

²³cf. *Variorum, Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Hillebrand, p. 271.

²⁴In that play Jonson has Cynthia defend her action with reference to Actaeon, [Essex]. It is probable that the reference in *Cynthia's Revels* is not to the death of Essex, but to his disgrace after he presumed to "enter sacred bowers,/And hallowed places, with impure aspect,/Most lewdly to pollute." [C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, *Works of Ben Jonson* (10 vols.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932), IV, 176.]

court—even while her career in the play parallels that of her counterparts in Caxton and Chaucer.

Suggestions have been made that Hector, Troilus, and Cressida, of the Trojan group in the play have careers and characters remarkably analogous to those of Essex, Southampton, and Elizabeth Vernon. Almost equally striking is the analogy between the triangle of Penelope (Devereaux) Rich, Lord Rich, and Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, who later became Earl of Devonshire, and that of Helen, Menelaus, and Paris of the play. Penelope, married against her will to Lord Rich, became as early as 1595 openly mistress to Blount. The attitude of Elizabeth's court to this affair was remarkably like that of the characters in *Troilus and Cressida* to the Helen-Paris domestic arrangement. And throughout the play the utmost contempt is shown by almost all the actors for Menelaus. Cressida refuses to let him kiss her; Thersites would be anything "even a louse of a lazar," rather than Menelaus. Paris is of the Trojan councils—as Blount was of those of the Essex faction until the time of the rebellion, when he was conveniently in Ireland. But in the case of Lord Rich the analogy breaks down—for while Rich was of the Essex faction, Menelaus was of the Greeks. In the relationship in the play between Helen-Penelope and Paris-Blount, Shakespeare seems to be almost prophetic. Diomedes says to Paris "that you out of whorish loins are pleased to breed out your inheritors." Blount, after Penelope had been divorced by Lord Rich, married her in 1605. Says Chamberlain:

The earle of Devonshire is sicke of a burning fever . . . the world thinckes yf he shold go now, yt had ben better for him yf he had gon a yeare or two sooner.²⁵

Certainly, his will indicated some doubt as to the paternity of all Penelope's illegitimate children.

Such are the principal analogies between those of the Trojan group in *Troilus and Cressida* and certain prominent figures in Elizabeth's court. There are some almost equally striking parallels among those in the Greek group, in contemporary character and circumstance, to prominent courtiers. It has already been suggest-

²⁵*Letters*, I, 222.

ed that Diomides is to Troilus as Lord Grey of Wilton is to the Earl of Southampton.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, the most active of the Greeks in the struggle against the Trojans were Ulysses, Nestor, Achilles, Ajax, Diomides, and Agamemnon. The principals in the Court faction which opposed the Essex faction were Sir Robert Cecil, the Lord Admiral (Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham), Lord Cobham, Sir Walter Raleigh, Lord Grey of Wilton, and Lord Thomas Howard, afterwards Earl of Suffolk.

The relationships among the Raleigh faction in Elizabeth's court were not dissimilar to those outlined among the Greeks of *Troilus and Cressida* by the biting tongue of Thersites to Achilles and Ajax:

There's *Vlysses* and old *Nestor*, whose Wit was
mouldy ere their Grandsires had nails on their
toes, yoke you like draft-Oxen, and make you
plough vp the warre. (II, i, 101-103)

The Lord Admiral was of an older generation than most of those concerned in the great court struggle. Born in 1536, he was sixteen years older than Raleigh, twenty-one years older than Essex, and thirty-six years older than Southampton. Though of the Raleigh faction, he was not a prime mover in the conspiracy against Essex, nor was he one whom Essex regarded as a pronounced enemy; for though he names Cobham, Cecil, and Raleigh as enemies at the trial, he does not mention the Lord Admiral, Lord Grey, or Lord Thomas Howard.²⁶ To Nestor is given the only extended metaphor in *Troilus and Cressida* dealing with the sea.

How many shallow bauble Boates dare saile
Vpon her patient brest, making their way
With those of Nobler bulke?
But let the Ruffian *Boreas* once enrage
The gentle *Thetis*, and anon behold
The strong ribb'd Barke through liquid Mountaines cut,
Bounding betweene the two moyst Elements
Like *Perseus* Horse. Where's then the sawcy Boate,

²⁶Harrison, *Essex*, p. 305.

Whose weake vntimber'd sides but euen now
 Co-riual'd Greatnesse? Either to harbour fled,
 Or made a Toste for Neptune. (I, iii, 38-48)

Possibly this may be a tribute to the Lord Admiral as the hero of the Armada. If Essex is Hector—then the Lord Admiral may well be Nestor.

It is Ulysses among the Greeks of the play who diagnoses weaknesses in “degree,” who devises stratagems, who can give specious advice to Achilles and Ajax, who can befriend Troilus in the camp of the Greeks. Such a man in the Elizabethan court was Sir Robert Cecil, “Mr. Secretary.” It was through him that access to the queen might be had; largely through him preferments were granted and punishments alleviated. In fact, this stanza from a lampoon clearly emanating from the Essex faction, might with equal aptness be applied to the Ulysses of Shakespeare.

littel Cecil tripps up and downe
 he rules both court & croune
 with his brother Burlie clowne
 in his great fox-furred gowne
 with the long proclamation
 hee swore hee sav'd the towne
 is it not likelie?²⁷

In Shakespeare's sources, the combat between Ajax and Hector occurs merely in the course of battle. In *Troilus and Cressida* it is prearranged by Ulysses, with the help of Nestor, and only by trickery is Ajax made the combatant. Its purpose is, by setting Achilles and Ajax at odds, to rouse Achilles to battle. The failure of the ruse in the play is recorded by Thersites.

O'th'tother side, the pollicie of those craftie
 swearing rascals; that stole old Mouse—eaten dry
 cheese, *Nestor*: and that same dog-foxe *Vlisses*
 is not prou'd worth a Black-berry. They set me
 vp in pollicy, that mungrill curre *Aias*, against
 that dogge of as bad a kinde, *Achilles*. And
 now is the curre *Aias* prouder then the curre
Achilles, and will not arme to day. Whereupon,

²⁷Stopes, *Southampton*, p. 235.

the Grecians began to proclaime barbarisme; and
pollicie growes into an ill opinion.²⁸ (V, iv, 9-17)

In *Troilus and Cressida*, the major antagonist to Hector is Achilles. It is to him that Hector's challenge is directed. Says Ulysses,

This challenge that the gallant *Hector* sends,
How euer it is spred in general name,
Relates in purpose only to *Achilles*. (I, iii,
335-337)

It is to Achilles that Hector is in honor bound for the last day's conflict. It is Achilles only who seeks out Hector in the last day's battle, and it is by Achilles' device that Hector is treacherously slain on that day.

In the court of Elizabeth, it was Raleigh who was inveterate foe to Essex. Some of the implacable quality of his hatred has been indicated in the letter to Cecil already quoted—"his son will be the youngest Earl in England." At the trial of Essex, Raleigh was a principal antagonist—"What booteth to swear the fox?"²⁹

In the *Iliades*, Achilles keeps his tent because of an injustice perpetrated by Agamemnon. No such cause is given in *Troilus and Cressida*—for pride alone, according to the analysis of Ulysses, has placed Achilles out of "degree."

Rawleigh doth time bestride
he sits twixt winde and tide
yet uppe hill hee cannot ride,
for all his bloodie pride.
hee seeks taxes in the tinne
hee powles the poor to the skinne
yet hee sweares tis no sinne
Lord for thy pittie.³⁰

This stanza is from the lampoon noticed earlier—and it, like

²⁸If *Troilus and Cressida* was written in complete form by February 7, 1603, and if my assumptions have any validity, then Shakespeare is prophetic also in the Ulysses-Achilles-Ajax complication. By setting the new king against Raleigh and Cobham, and setting those two against each other in the matter of the "Spanish" plot and the "Bye" plot, Cecil was able most effectively to remove both from the Court.

²⁹Harrison, *Essex*, p. 301.

³⁰As quoted in Stopes, *Southampton*, p. 235.

Ulysses, makes much of the "bloody pride" of Raleigh. Of that quality in him says John Aubry: "He was a tall, handsome, and bold man; but his naeve was that he was damnable proud."³¹

There are in the text of the play two allusions which may point to Raleigh himself. He is "The great Myrmidon," and his followers are, of course, the Myrmidons. Shakespeare has only one other reference to Myrmidons: in *Twelfth Night*, "the Myrmidons are no bottle-ale houses." Leslie Hotson in *The First Night of Twelfth Night* takes this to be a reference to the Queen's guard.³² If members of her guard were indeed called "Myrmidons," then the Great Myrmidon could be only Raleigh, who from 1587 had been the captain of her guard.

The second of the two references is more tenuous, but it is perhaps worth mention, since it involves an interpretation of a much disputed passage, present in the Folio but omitted from the Quarto:

Aga. Speak, Prince of *Ithaca*, and be 't of lesse expect:

That matter needlesse of importlesse burthen
 Diuide thy lips; then we are confident
 When ranke *Thersites* opes his Masticke iawes,
 We shall heare Musicke, Wit, and Oracle.³³
 (I, iii, 76-80)

The word "Masticke" in this passage has been taken to be the same as that in the title "*Satiromastix*" and other plays; or to refer to the substance used to fill teeth.³⁴ Among the meanings given for *mastic* in NED are gum, wax, cement, etc. I suggest that the passage is a labored thrust at the incident in *Every Man Out of His Humour* in which Sir Puntaruolo (Puntal-Raleigh?) seals with

³¹John Aubrey, *Brief Lives and Other Selected Writings*, ed. Anthony Powell (London: The Cresset Press, 1949) p. 323.

³²Leslie Hotson, *The First Night of Twelfth Night* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), p. 150.

³³As quoted from the Folio text [*Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tradedies: A Facsimile*, ed. Kokeritz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 574]. Perhaps this passage is, along with the "Prologue, arm'd but not in confidence/Of Authors pen, or Actors Voyce," of the Folio text, a minor skirmish in the Poetomachia, through a thrust at *Every Man Out of His Humour*. That both this passage of the mastic jawes and the prologue are absent from the Quarto may be due to the fact that by 1609 the Poetomachia is forgotten, and that Shakespeare and Jonson are friends.

³⁴cf. *Variorum, Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Hillebrand, p. 50n.

wax the beard of Carlo Buffone to his mustache. That a suggestion of Raleigh may lie under this reference appears from this excerpt from Aubrey's *Brief Lives*:

In his youthfull time, was one Charles Chester, that often kept company with his acquaintance; he was a bold impertinent fellowe, and they could never be at quiet for him; a perpetuall talker, and made a noyse like a drumme in a roome. So one time at a taverne Sir W. R. beates him and seales up his mouth (*i.e.* his upper and neather beard) with hard wax. From him Ben Johnson takes his Carlo Buffono (*i.e.* 'jester') in *Every Man out of his Humour*.³⁵

Achilles is not by any means the fool that Thersites so frequently calls him; a man of wit and reason, he is, however, as the result of the manipulations of Ulysses, a thoroughly puzzled man. While the death of Hector is a good sought by all the Greeks, it is not the result of a concerted effort on their part, or even of anything they as faction have done. The death of Hector is the result of a murderous, treacherous assault, not even by Achilles himself, but by his Myrmidons, a process not sanctioned by any of the sources.

It is further suggested that the Ajax of the play looks remarkably like Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham.³⁶ Shakespeare may have given us a hint in the Quarto text, which has Thersites call him "Ai ax Coblofe." On the other hand, the Folio so handles the speech prefixes that Ajax is made to call Thersites "Coblofe." In many passages the Quarto has the better text, and it may be that

³⁵Powell, ed., p. 325.

³⁶That under the character of Ajax there is a satirical treatment of Ben Jonson is argued by William Elton in "Shakespeare's Portrait of Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida*" (*PMLA*, LXIII, 744-748). The passage spoken by Alexander, beginning "This man, lady, hath robbed many beasts of their additions", if taken alone, might be an account of Jonson. But the portrait of Ajax generally in *Troilus and Cressida* is that of an excessively stupid man, easily malleable by those of more wit than himself. Such a portrait is not applicable to the real Jonson. It is equally far from that given in Dekker's *Satiromastix*, where the farthest efforts of Crispinus, of Demetrius Fannius, and of the redoubtable Captain Tucca extend only to defending themselves from the barbs of Horace's wit.

this is one of them. "Coblofe" certainly has more significance as a suggestion of a title than as a most obscure epithet.³⁷

Ajax is regarded by his associates as "blockish," as "having his brains in his belly." Of Cobham, Anthony Weldon says:

You are now to observe, that *Salisbury* had shaken off all that were great with him, and of his Faction in Queen *Elizabeths* day, as Sir *Walter Rawleigh*, Sir *George Carew*, the Lord *Grey*, the Lord *Cobham*: the three first, very able men as the World had, the last but one degree from a fool, yet served their turns better then a wiser man, by his greatness with the Queen, for they would put him on anything, and make him tell any Lye, with as great confidence as a truth.³⁸

Alexander reports to Cressida that "he (Ajax) yesterday cop'd *Hector* in battell and stroke him downe, the disdaind & shame whereof, hath euer since kept *Hector* fasting and waking." (I, ii, 37-39) This encounter is not in any of the sources, and it is my suggestion that it may refer to the contest between Lord Cobham and the Earl of Essex for the wardenship of the Cinque Ports. Cobham wished it for himself, possibly because his father had held it; Essex wanted it for Sir Robert Sidney. That Cobham was

³⁷The passage in the Quarto reads thus:

Ther. Then gromblest and raylest euery houre on *Achilles*, and thou art as full of enuy at his greatnesse, as *Cerberus* is at *Proserpinas* beauty, I that thou barkst at him.

Ajax. Mistres *Thersites*.

Ther. Thou shouldst strike him. *Aiax Coblofe*, Hee would punne thee into shiuers with his fist, as a sayler breakes a biskit, you horson curre. Do? do? [*Troilus and Cressida*, First Quarto, 1609, with an introductory note by W. W. Greg (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), C4v.]

These are the corresponding lines in the Folio:

Ther. Thou grumblest & raillest euery houre on *Achilles*, and thou art as full of enuy at his greatnes, as *Cerberus* is at *Proserpina's* beauty. I, that thou barkst at him.

Aia. Mistresse *Thersites*.

Ther. Thou should'st strike him.

Aia. Coblofe.

Ther. He would pun thee into shiuers with his fist, as a Sailor breakes a bisket.

Aia. You horson Curre.
Kokeritz, p. 576.]

Ther. Do, do. [*Facsimile*, ed.

³⁸A[nthony] W[eldon], *The Court and Character of King James* (London: 1817), p. 6.

the choice of Elizabeth, perhaps through the offices of Robert Cecil, was a bitter blow to so proud a man as Essex.

It is tempting also to find a Thersites among the Raleigh faction at court. Thersites rails eloquently and viciously when he dares, but is most servile and cowardly when in real danger. He is with the Greeks, but he is not quite of them: he declares himself to "serve here voluntary."

The portrait of Thersites is not unlike another of the Howards, Lord Henry. He was for a long while attached to the Essex faction, but he had no part in the events leading to the rebellion; in fact, he was one of the peers who sat in judgement on Essex. Thereafter, he was closely associated with Robert Cecil in the intrigues to bring James to the throne, and he prospered mightily under the new monarch. The account given of him by Anthony Weldon is echoed in essence by most later historians of the period:

Northampton, though a great Clerk, yet not a wise man, but the grossest Flatterer of the World, and as *Salisbury* by his Wit, so this by his Flattery, raised himself of so venomous and cankered a disposition that indeed he hated all men of noble parts. . .³⁹

At first glance, the suggestions I have made seem to be to some extent brought into question by the fact that both Greeks and Trojans have apparent rulers. But a thoughtful examination of the language of the play reveals a marked difference in words used to, or about, the leaders of the two factions. Agamemnon, of the Greeks, is given none of the reverence due to a sovereign, nor is he addressed in terms other than military. Among the Greeks, Ulysses once makes reference to him in the phrase "topless deputation." Otherwise, he is "great" (five times), "captain-general" (once), "commander" (twice), or "general" (six times). Other references, notably those of Aeneas of the Trojan faction, are in their context deliberately insulting ("This Trojan scorns us"): "God in Office"; "high and mighty"; "most imperial looks."

There were among the Raleigh-Cecil faction in Elizabeth's court two men whose stature in military matters might be com-

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 5, 7.

parable to that given Agamemnon in the play. Both were Howards. The Lord Admiral, Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, was certainly the man of most distinction. He was, however, as I have pointed out, of an elder generation. The other Howard was Lord Thomas, Baron Howard de Walden, who was in naval matters second only to the Lord Admiral himself, co-equal with Essex as commander in naval expeditions, and in them always senior to Raleigh. He was the marshal of the forces which besieged Essex House at the time of the rebellion, and he was one of the peers who judged Essex and Southampton. Whether, like Agamemnon, he had "no more brains than ear wax" I do not know—nor whether he "loved quails." But I suggest that in such a hypothesis as I am building, he falls quite conveniently into the role of Agamemnon.

In Hector, the Trojans have a military leader comparable to Agamemnon. But behind Hector they have also sovereignty, even royalty, in the persons of Priam and Hecuba. Epithets and addresses to Priam are of an entirely different flavor from those accorded Agamemnon: "dread Priam"; "the past proportion of his infinite"; "royal Priam"; "my liege." Yet his authority is not sufficient to sway the council which debated returning Helen to the Greeks, or to dissuade Hector from arming for the final, fatal day .

Troilus predicts the effect of the death of Hector on Priam and Hecuba with these words:

. . . *Hector* is gone:

Who shall tell *Priam* so? or *Hecuba*?

Let him that will a screechoule aye be call'd,

Goe in to Troy, and say there, *Hector's* dead:

There is a word will *Priam* turne to stone;

Make wels, and *Niobes* of the maides and wiues;

Coole statues of the youth: and in a word,

Scarre Troy out of it selfe. But march away,

Hector is dead: there is no more to say. (V, x, 17-25)

Compare them with statements of the grief of Elizabeth over the death of Essex:

The Queen had no comfort after. . . . The people

were wrathful at the death of their favourite, and she lost their honour and glory The death of Essex, like a melancholy cloud, did shade the prospect of her people's affection. . . .⁴⁰

As the death of this nobleman was much lamented by the subjects whose love towards him was so ingrafted (as I think I may well say never subject had more), so her Majestie likewise having such a starre falne from her firmament, was inwardly moved and outwardly oftentimes would shew passions of her grief, even till the time of her approaching end, when two yeares after she laid her heade in the Grave, as the most resplendent sunne setteth at last in a western cloud.⁴¹

The similarities pointed out above between play and contemporary circumstance seem to suggest that *Troilus and Cressida* is not merely a reworking and modernization of classical and medieval sources, but a skillful adaptation of material from those sources toward a didactic and perhaps somewhat personal and embittered commentary on matters of profound and immediate concern to all Englishmen. As Essex was the central figure in the long factional struggle climaxed by the scene at the Tower on February 25, 1601, so is Hector the dominant figure in what is possibly a dramatic recapitulation. And as the great events of his last month overshadow the intrigues of the ladies and gentlemen of the court, so do the camp scenes of *Troilus and Cressida* rank first in importance, with the love scenes as commentary and partial explanation. The love plot, in the light of such an interpretation, appears to be the painting of a background in which such a sequence of events might be expected to occur. The court of Elizabeth did indeed contain, and condone, especially in the last years of her reign, such unwholesome episodes. Essex did, like Hector, countenance them in his sister, his cousin, his close friends.

Is Shakespeare saying in *Troilus and Cressida* that, given rampant court factions, luxury among the courtiers, and the magni-

⁴⁰As quoted in Stopes, *Southampton*, from *Osborne Essays*, p. 353.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

ficent but unstable character of an Essex, the fate of a Hector was inevitable?

Troilus and Cressida was entered in the Stationer's Register on February 7, 1603, to be printed by James Roberts "when he hath gotten sufficient authority for it." Apparently "sufficient authority" was not forthcoming, for printing did not take place until 1609. Is it possible that the matters I have proposed were the reason for the failure to gain authority? Or more plausibly perhaps, was that of Roberts merely a "blocking entry" to assure the suppression of matter dangerous during the life of the Queen?

After a proper entry, not to Roberts, in the Stationer's Register on January 28, 1609, the play came from the press with the title page in two states. On the title page of the first state it is called "*The Historie of Troylus and Cresseida*," "*acted by the King's Maiesties seruants at the Globe*." In the second state this title page has been replaced by a cancel which omits the statement of performance and substitutes "*Excellently expressing the beginning of their loues, with the conceited wooing of Pandarus Prince of Licia*." It is this edition which contains "THE EPISTLE." The writer of this foreward says that the play has never been "*clapper-clawd with the palmes of the vulger*," and implies that it has come to the printer by some means other than "*the grand possessors wills*." Sir E. K. Chambers suggests the Quarto "was printed from a transcript, perhaps made for a private owner"; and that the manuscript used for the Folio was probably the author's original.⁴² One wonders why, after the lapse of six years, *Troilus and Cressida* came to press in 1609, the year of the publication of the sonnets.

The court factions were not removed by the death of Essex, or even by that of Elizabeth. Their composition, however, and their leadership changed. In 1603, largely through the machinations of Robert Cecil, Raleigh and Cobham in effect destroyed each other. Lord Grey of Wilton soon joined them in prison, and Cecil and the Lords Howard, Henry and Thomas, had great influence with the new King.

James, who had been of good will toward Essex, did what he could to make restoration. The son of Essex, the young Robert,

⁴²*Shakespeare*, I, 440.

Third Earl, was restored in blood and honors; he was taken into the Royal household and became companion and close friend to Prince Henry. The King, in the hope of further resolving the factional quarrel, probably arranged the young Earl's marriage in 1606 to Frances Howard, daughter of that Lord Thomas, now Earl of Suffolk, for whom I have suggested the role of Agamemnon. Southampton was promptly released from the Tower by James, and was much in favor with the monarch, though the councilorship he sought was denied him. Through those years before 1609, James played, and Cecil and the Howards governed.

They governed, at least, until the appearance of the young favorite Robert Carr. The young Earl of Essex, who had been for three years on the continent returned in 1609, only to find his wife Frances indifferent to him, and enamoured of Robert Carr. Late in 1608, the estate of Sir Walter Raleigh, who was still in the Tower, fell "by reason of a flaw in the conveyance" into the hands of the King, who bestowed it on Robert Carr.⁴³ In 1609 Southampton, with some half dozen others of the old Essex faction, was founding a "Joynt Stocke" company for plantation in Virginia.⁴⁴

If, as I have suggested, *Troilus and Cressida* is an embittered account of matters of concern to Shakespeare, then the release to the printer of the play in the same year as the *Sonnets* was perhaps more than a coincidence. The sonnets were certainly very personal to him. As Chambers suggests—only Shakespeare himself could have kept them together. Could the release of the two works in the same year have been because of the possibility that their content might be considered to have value in the factional struggle which—though changed somewhat in complexion—still severed the English court? Is there something in the factional struggle to account for the considerable variations between Quarto

⁴³*Letters*, I, 280.

⁴⁴Alexander Brown, *The First Republic in America* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1898), pp. 100-104. Others of the charter members formerly associated with Essex are "Tho. La Warre," imprisoned after the rebellion; "Tho. Smythe," the Sheriff Smith also imprisoned then; "R. Lisle," the Sir Robert Sidney for whom Essex had sought the Wardenship of the Cinque Ports; W. Waade, the Lieutenant of the Tower who made Raleigh's imprisonment more severe; and "Pembroke," William Herbert, the Earl, one of the brothers to whom the Folio was dedicated.

and Folio texts? Is there in these conjectures perhaps a note of confirmation for those who consider Southampton to be indeed the friend of the *Sonnets*?