

PROSCENIUM

Troilus And Cressida

By William Shakespeare

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Wednesday 24th to Saturday 27th March, 2004,
Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

By

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Prologue Roderick Jones

THE TROJANS

Priam, *King of Troy*..... Keith Bayross

Hector } Mark Sutherland

Paris } *sons of Priam* Rob Hurcum

Troilus } Vincent Eavis

Aeneas } *Trojan leaders* Rod Moor-Bardell

Antenor } Alan Bobroff

Pandarus, *Cressida's uncle* Colin Hickman

Calchas, *Cressida's father, defector to Greece*..... Jim McDonald

Andromache, *Hector's wife*..... Anne Gerrard

Cressida Clare Wooster

Cassandra, *Priam's daughter*..... Janet Harrison

Alexandra, *Cressida's companion*..... Anne Gerrard

THE GREEKS

Agamemnon, *commander of the Greeks* Robert Ewen

Meneleus, *his brother, King of Sparta* Michael Gerrard

Ulysses } David Pearson

Achilles } Michael Williams

Ajax } *Greek leaders* Sam Thornton

Nestor } David Watkins

Diomedes } Paul Davis

Patroclus, *Achilles' companion* Charles Anthony

Thersites Duncan Sykes

Helen, *Meneleus' wife, living with Paris in Troy* Rosie Moutrie

Servants, Attendants and June Watkins

Myrmidons Jeanne Hawkes

..... Damian John Regan

..... Pauline Anthony

..... Charles Anthony

..... David Pearson

Directed by Kathleen Jones

Stage Manager Crystal Anthony

Assisted by Pauline Anthony

Set Design Colin Tufnell

Lighting and Sound Rachel Barnett

..... Arts Culture Harrow

Music and Effects composed by Duncan Sykes

..... Vincent Eavis

Properties Jane Inglese

Fight Arranger Sam Thornton

Wardrobe Evelyn Moutrie

The play takes place within and without the walls of
Troy during the eighth year of the Trojan war.

**There will be one interval of 15 minutes
between Part I and Part II**

The Story

For seven years the Greeks and Trojans have been at war following the Trojan prince Paris' abduction of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, from her Greek husband, Menelaus. The besieging Greek army is encamped under the walls of Troy and, at the point at which the play begins, the war has reached stalemate.

The Greeks are quarrelling among themselves. Achilles, their greatest champion, refuses to fight and has withdrawn to his tent with his lover, Patroclus. Ulysses tries to entice Achilles back to the field by arousing his jealousy against Ajax, a rival warrior, whom he acclaims as their new hero and elects to meet Hector, the Trojan champion, in single combat.

Equally at odds with themselves, the Trojans are debating the value of continuing the war merely for the sake of keeping Helen. Hector declares her not worth the lives she costs but when his brother Troilus contends that honour demands they continue to fight for her, Hector is brought round to his point of view.

Although the single combat between Ajax and Hector ends in a show of amity, hostilities are resumed the following day.

Troilus, however, is much distracted from these military concerns by his love for Cressida, the daughter of Calchas, a Trojan who has defected to the Greek camp leaving his daughter in Troy. The young lovers are eagerly abetted by Cressida's uncle, Pandarus, who acts as their go-between. However, after only one night together they are parted when, in exchange for the captured general Antenor, Cressida is sent to join her father in the Greek camp. Almost immediately she betrays Troilus with the Greek Diomedes and, discovering this, Troilus is plunged into despair ...

Stage History

Until this century 'Troilus and Cressida' was one of the least popular of Shakespeare's plays: it is even questionable whether it was performed in his lifetime, the contemporary evidence being ambiguous. The first recorded performance of Shakespeare's text was some three hundred years after its composition in Munich in 1898. However in the late seventeenth century John Dryden rewrote the play as 'Truth Found Too Late'. His reason: *the latter part of the tragedy is nothing but a confusion of Drums and Trumpets, Excursions and Alarms. The chief persons, who gave name to the Tragedy, are left alive: Cressida is false, and is not punish'd. Yet after all, because the play was Shakespeare's, and that there appeared in some places of it the admirable Genius of the Author; I undertook to remove that heap of Rubbish, under which so many excellent thoughts lay wholly buried. Accordingly I new model'd the plot ...*

However in the twentieth century there was an awakening of critical interest: E.K. Chambers in 1907 saw a contemporary relevance – *A disillusioned Shakespeare turns his back upon his former ideals and the world's ancient ideals of heroism and romance, and questions them.* There was a London production in 1907 with Lewis

Casson as Troilus and in 1912 with Edith Evans as Cressida, but the really groundbreaking production was Michael MacOwan's in 1938 *where the Trojans wore khaki drill and the Greeks pale blue uniforms...and nothing softened the sharply topical cry against 'cormorant war'*. From that date the play became increasingly popular with directors, no doubt because of its cynical, anti-heroic attitude to war, and the play seemed more and more contemporary. Joyce Carol Oates (1967): *'Troilus and Cressida' strikes the modern reader as a contemporary document – its investigation of numerous infidelities and its criticism of tragic pretensions are themes of the twentieth century.*

Genre

The play has always been difficult to categorise. It was first printed in the Folio as a tragedy and in the quarto editions first as a history and then a comedy. Later commentators became increasingly fanciful in their descriptions: *comical satire* (Campbell), *tragical satire* (Muir), *heroic comedy* (Schlegel), *problem comedy* (W. Lawrence), *problem play* (Tillyard) and *hybrid and hundred faced and hydra-headed prodigy* (Swinburne). Heine (1938) declares *Troilus and Cressida is neither a comedy nor a tragedy in the usual sense; it belongs to no special kind of poetry, and still less can it be judged by any received standard: it is Shakespeare's most characteristic creation,* and A.E. Dyson (1976) defines the problem *In a tragedy we should not expect such a continuous assault on the language of heroism and romance. Yet, in an age of black comedy, the humour of 'Troilus' looks particularly desolating.*

Greeks and Trojans

Some critics consider that Shakespeare's 'Troilus' takes a pro-Trojan view of the war. Neville Coghill, for example, saw the play as the tragedy of Hector. Wilson Knight (1930) is more extreme: *The Trojan party stands for human beauty and warmth, the Greek party for the bestial and stupid elements of man, the barren stagnancy of intellect divorced from action.* Coleridge in 1833 took a similar view contrasting *the inferior civilisation but purer morals of the Trojans to the refinements, deep policy, but duplicity and sensual corruption of the Greeks.* And Northrop Frye (1967) adds his voice: *...we prefer Hector and Troilus: as in other tragedies of passion, it is the greater and more heroic vitality that is destroyed, something colder and meaner that succeeds with the Greek victory.*

But other critics are more even-handed in their comments. Clifford Leech (1964) declares *'Troilus and Cressida' is no simple pro-Trojan, anti-Greek play ...we are reminded that the fighting men are 'Fools on both sides', and that suffering and destruction have through the long years of siege been impartially dealt out to Trojans and Greeks.* Kenneth Muir (1953) thinks *the debate in Troy enables the poet to show that the blame must be shared by all the Trojan leaders; and the Greek heroes are all presented in as unflattering light as possible.* While A.P. Rossiter asserts baldly *there is no such thing as true honour on either side, Trojan or Greek.*

Love and War

The emphasis placed by many twentieth century productions on the futility of war have made that, rather than the doomed love of Troilus and Cressida, the centre of the play. The *Times* on the 1938 production: *We compare the piece not with 'Romeo' but with 'Henry V'. The mood it imposes is the mood of frustration and anger, with war as the catastrophe to be feared and befooling love as one of the minor snares of life.*

And the same paper's review of a 1960 production: *The essential soundness of the production lies in its gradual isolation of Hector and Achilles, symbols of the conflict between chivalry and brutal opportunism, to which the ruin of Troilus by the faithless Cressida is secondary.*

But the two themes are in fact very closely linked. Wilson Knight: *..there are two primary values, love and war, but they exist in a world which questions their ultimate purpose and beauty.* That most perceptive and contemporary of critics, Jan Kott (1964) sees how the potential love affair is affected by the war: *There is no place for love in this world. Love is poisoned from the outset. These war-time lovers have been given just one night, and even that night has been spoiled.* And finally Kenneth Muir, somewhat provocatively, *War and sex are the two areas of human experience which are most likely to be glamorized and idealized; and one theme of the play is the attack on idealization. Shakespeare is doing what Ibsen was to do in such plays as 'A Doll's House' and 'Ghosts'.*

CHARACTERS

The Lovers

Troilus has had an almost universally positive press, from Coleridge: *alone worthy the name of love; affection, passionate indeed – swollen from the confluence of youthful instincts and youthful fancy.* to Symons (1907): *in Troilus we get the sensual man, brave, passionate and constant* and Campbell (1938), for whom Troilus represents *the educated sensuality of an Italianate English roue ..!*

There is much more divergence of opinion on Cressida and Pandarus. Dr Johnson pontificates: *his vicious characters sometimes disgust but cannot corrupt, for both Cressida and Pandarus are detested and condemned.* Several critics are indeed hard on Cressida. Hazlitt thought her *a giddy girl, an unpractised jilt, who falls in love with Troilus from mere levity and thoughtlessness of temper,* Swinburne found her *an utterly light woman, shallow and loose and dissolute in the most literal sense,* and A.P. Rossiter *a chatty, vulgar little piece.* Others are more understanding, *she is as genuinely in love with Troilus as her shallow nature will allow* (Kenneth Muir) and Jan Kott is as thought-provoking as ever: *She is inwardly free, conscious and daring. She belongs to the Renaissance ... and she is a teen-age girl of the mid-twentieth century....She is passionate, afraid of her passion and ashamed to admit it...She is our contemporary because of this self-distrust, reserve, and need of self-analysis.*

Bernard Shaw thought her enchanting and Shakespeare's first real woman (a

somewhat perverse judgment).

Jan Kott is also relatively kind to Pandarus. Although, he points out, he has procured Cressida *like a parcel of goods,* he describes him as *the sweet clown in Troy* (as opposed to Thersites, the bitter clown) *who is a kind-hearted fool who wants to do his best for everyone, and make the bed for every couple.* A.P. Rossiter is harsher: *a go-between, a mere broker of sexual stock....a buffoon with a knack of saying the wrong thing which reminds me of Groucho Marx.*

The Warriors

Just as Hector is the spokesman for sanity in Troy, so Ulysses speaks for sanity in the camp. But in both cases what they say has little effect. (Kenneth Muir). Certainly Hector is generally seen as the embodiment of courtesy, valour and the principles of chivalry, a warrior who can conduct himself like a gentleman. Ulysses is distinguished by the resourcefulness and versatility of his intelligence (he was responsible for the plan of the wooden horse), a master of rhetoric, who, like Hector, wishes to act in accordance with intelligence and moral sense.

For the rest, Charles Lamb is particularly astonished at the portrayal of Ajax and Achilles: *Is it possible that Shakespeare should never have read Homer, in Chapman's version at least? If he had read it, could he mean to travesty it in the parts of those big boobies, Ajax and Achilles.* Mark Van Doran (1939) is dismissive of every one of them: *Achilles and his brach, Patroclus, are such boors, Hector is so stuffed and stupid an orator, Agamemnon is such a mouther, Nestor is so tiresomely prolix, and Ulysses in spite of his golden tongue is so politic a rogue, that in order to sink beneath them Thersites must bubble in eternal mire.*

It is Thersites who gives the play its particular bitter, cynical edge. Joyce Carol Oates describes him running everywhere, *from scene to scene, hating what he see and yet obviously relishing it, for he is the very spirit of the play itself, a necessary balance to fraudulent idealism.* Alvin Kernan (1959) says he is *the most intense image of the satiric character in all Elizabethan literature who has absolute pride in self and absolute loathing of all other creatures.*

**Our thanks for their support for this production
and for other productions during this 2003/4 season to
Medical Technical Ltd.**

About Proscenium

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924.

The company's first production was the now little-known "The Tide" by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945.

In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

For more information on Proscenium, please visit our web site :

<http://www.proscenium.org.uk>

Our Next Production

Absent Friends

by Alan Ayckbourn

In this example of Ayckbourn's great talent for combining dark and light comedy, the fragility of relationships is wittily exposed when Colin's friends gather to comfort him in his grief over the death of his fiancée, only to discover that he is the only happy one among them. His happiness and insensitive analysis of their troubles bring matters to a head

Directed by David Pearson
June 9th to June 12th 2004
7.45pm Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre