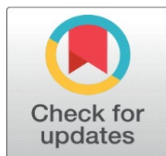
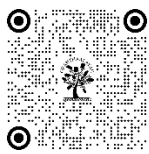


SHAKESPEARE'S TROILUS THROUGH FEMINISM

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to examine the character of Shakespeare's Troilus from Troilus and Cressida in the light of feminism. Though a number of studies have been conducted on the play with special focus on the character of Troilus but finding them lacking in the feminist perspective either entirely or not sufficiently enough this study undertakes to establish Troilus as a weak, emotional and feminine male.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Troilus, Cressida, Feminine, Masculine, Parasitism, Separatism

Like many of Shakespeare's plays, his *Troilus and Cressida* has also received a huge response from scholars and critics. There are a number of books and articles in the academic realm that record varieties of response given to the play. If on the one hand we have critics like William Hazlitt who observes the play to be "one of the most loose and desultory of our author's plays" (Hazlitt 221), on the other hand we have critics like S.L. Bethell who holds the play to be "probably the most intellectual of Shakespeare's plays" (Bethell 261). Among many other aspects of the play, it is the character of Troilus that has drawn much attention from the scholars. D. J. Snider views him as "the lover pure and simple, the Romeo of the world" (397) and as "a man of action, a warrior second only (if not equal) to Hector, and a patriotic defender of his country" (398). George C. Taylor says, "Troilus..., though irreproachable as a warrior, in his relation with her (Cressida) hardly warrants our sympathy" (782). Wilbur D. Dunkel evaluates his character in the following words - "However false may be his way of thinking, Troilus is not a dolt one may say that Troilus is brave" (334). For J. C. Oates "Troilus is the hero" (149) and a "victim" (150). Emil Roy observes that "Torn by ambivalence, Troilus is immobilized both as lover and warrior" (110). Stephen J. Lynch's observation about Troilus goes this way - "his ideals ... do not rise above the corruption of his world but are an integral part of it, ultimately as misdirected and self-serving as the pride of Achilles or the honor of Hector" (19). Gary Spear sees him as "completely effeminate" (420). Laurie E. Maguire finds him "fairly innocent about women, war, and ethics (229).

What we find missing in the above observations about Troilus' character is that the feminist lens is completely ignored in evaluating his character. The present paper attempts to investigate the character of Troilus from feminist perspective. Troilus is the youngest prince of Troy. Act I scene i, of the play opens with his speech. The very first speech of his reveals that he is an emotional man. Because of his emotional anguish he avoids going on the war:

Call here my varlet: I'll unarm again.
Why should I war without the walls of Troy
That find such cruel battle here within?
Each Trojan that is master of his heart,
Let him to field – Troilus, Nalas, hath none. (I. i. 1-5)

Under the influence of these emotions he seems weak and this is revealed in the following lines:

The Greeks are strong, and skilful to their strength,
Fierce to their skill, and to fierceness valiant;
But I am weaker than a woman's tear.
Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance,
Less valiant than the virgin in the night,
And skillless as unpractised infancy. (I. i. 7-12)

Through the conversation between Pandarus and Troilus it becomes evident that the cause of his emotional crisis is his love for Cressida.

O Pandarus! – I tell thee, Pandarus –
When I do tell thee there my hopes lie drowned,
Reply not in how many fathoms deep
They lie indrenched. I tell thee I am mad
In Cressid's love. (I.i 47-51)

Apart from being an emotional man Troilus has a romantic disposition. In his keenness to meet Cressida he reveals his romantic nature.

O gentle Pandarus,
From Cupid's shoulder pluck his painted wings
And fly with me to Cressid! (III. ii. 12-14)

When Pandarus tells him that very soon he would bring Cressida to him he gets excited and becomes happy. He is overwhelmed with the joy of meeting Cressida.

I am giddy. Expectation whirls me round.
Th' imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense. What will it be
When that the wat'ry palate tastes indeed
Love's thrice repured nectar? - death, I fear me,
Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,
Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness,
For the capacity of my ruder powers.
I fear it much, and I do fear besides
That I shall lose distinction in my joys,
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps
The enemy flying. (III. ii. 16-27)

Troilus appears to be deeply in love with Cressida, but his love seems to result from his attraction for the feminine aspects of Cressida's personality. He has nothing to do with her inner qualities. He focuses only on her physical appearance. Only those aspects of Cressida's personality are important for him which can be perceived through his sense organs; and which can arouse and satisfy his sexual desires.

I tell thee I am mad
In Cressid's love. Thou answer'st she is fair,
Pourest in the open ulcer of my heart
Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice;
Handlest in thy discourse – 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! (I. i. 50-58)

To Troilus, Cressida is only a bundle of sensual pleasures. In his love for Cressida Troilus is not sincere but sensual. He is unable to control his emotions. It is quite interesting to observe here what Hyder E. Rollins says about Troilus' love for Cressida, "Troilus may protest as much as he wishes about the purity of his love for Cressida, but we cannot help feeling that his animal nature is most deeply stirred by her loss" (P 384). The observations of Laurie E. Maguire are also very much pertinent to mention here.

He does not talk of love, although he talks much of passion and desire, of truth and faith, nor does he talk of marriage to Cressida. He talks, as he thinks, of self and the senses. He wants to "wallow" in the lily beds of Cressida's environment (3.2. 12). He will "stalk" about her door (a verb from the territory of sexual harassment; 3.2.8). His "imaginary relish" is not of the spiritual but the sensual (3.2.18-29). Even as he and Cressida exchange confessions of love, he turns the conversation to himself. With six personal pronouns in thirteen lines (3.2.158-70), he extols his personal merits and belittles woman's constancy (and thus Cressida's) - a sobering start to any relationship. Not one of his romantic [sic] speeches can match the simple sincerity of Cressida's "I have lov'd you night and day / For many weary months" (3.2.114-15). He is indeed full of "brave oaths," but if we look ahead to act 4, scene 2, we see how little substance there is behind his sentimental protestations. (Laurie E. Maguire 166)

As Troilus' emotion of love is free from the restraints of rationality likewise, his anger is also free from the control of reason. When Hector proposes to return Helen to the Greeks, in order to save the country from the destruction of war, Troilus gets furious and starts denouncing Hector.

Fie, fie, my brother!
Weigh you the worth and honour of a king,
So great as our dread father's, in a scale
Of common ounces? Will you with counters sum
The past-proportion of his infinite,
And buckle in a waist most fathomless
With spans and inches so diminutive
As fears and reasons? fie, for godly shame! (II. ii. 24-31)

Troilus' denunciation of Hector's views shows him an irrational man. His irrationality has been best expressed in the words of Helenus –

No marvel though you bite so sharp at reasons,
You are so empty of them. (II. ii. 32-33)

Had Troilus been a little rational, Hector could probably have escaped untimely death and it is possible that Troy would not have been destroyed

Apart from being an emotional and irrational figure, Troilus is a patriarchal man. It is his patriarchal spirit of brotherhood which leads him to rely on Pandarus for wooing Cressida. He takes men's help and helps them. To win Cressida's love he needs Pandarus's help. As he says:

I cannot come to Cressid but by Pandar,
And he's as tetchy to be wooed to woo
As she is stubborn-chaste against all suit. (I. i. 93-95)

With the help of Pandarus, he succeeds in winning Cressida's love and the possession of her bed.

The other instance of his sense of brotherhood is seen in the case of Cressida's exchange for Antenor. Though he poses to be in love with Cressida, he does not take even a single step to save her. What to talk of his effort to save Cressida, he does not utter a single word against the decision of Cressida's exchange. On the contrary he gets ready to bring Cressida for the exchange. As he says, "I'll bring her to the Grecian presently...." (IV. iv. 7). His behaviour in the episode of Cressida's exchange reveals his patriarchal spirit. Troilus' remark about the general decision of Cressida's exchange - "How my achievements mock me?" (IV. ii. 69) – reveals that Cressida is only an object for him, which he has achieved. Again, there is a clear indication that Troilus treats women as objects.

When Cressida comes to know about the general decision of her exchange for Antenor, she wants to know the truthfulness of this information. Arguably, she asks Troilus (Act IV, Scene iv, 28), "And is it true that I must go from Troy?" Troilus registers his response in the following words - "A hateful truth" (IV. iv. 29). He identifies this "truth" as "hateful truth", not because he is sorry about Cressida but because he will have to suffer separation from her. This separation

seems more of a physical nature. For his sexual pleasures as well as emotional needs he depends on Cressida. Strange as it may appear, Troilus' love for Cressida cannot be considered the love of one who is a true lover. It is not like Romeo's or Antony's love that results in the death of these two. Through this separation he will not be able to satisfy his lust. Although, to strengthen the patriarchal structure of brotherhood, Troilus lets Cressida be exchanged for Antenor, he seems to realise that his separation from Cressida will jeopardize his sexual interest. Accordingly, he decides to give her nightly visitations in the Greek camp. As he says to Cressida:

I will corrupt the Grecian Sentinels
To give thee nightly visitations.
But yet, be true. (IV. iv. 71-73)

He seems to fear this separation only because it denies him access to Cressida. His access to Cressida refers to his power over her.

Moreover, Troilus is scared that Cressida could abandon him and choose a new lover in the Greek camp. The male ego's resistance to such an action, has been a subject that Shakespeare often turned to. The point that we are made to think on is whether Troilus is disturbed only because of his love for Cressida or also because his male pride is crushed by Cressida's crossing over. He repeatedly tells Cressida to remain faithful to him. The parasitism of Troilus on Cressida is "demonstrated by the panic generated in" (Meyers 406) him from the fear of being abandoned by her.

"Contrary to the popular" (Meyers 406) patriarchal "belief that women are dependent on men," (Meyers 406) Shakespeare seems to suggest "that men are profoundly dependent on women" (Meyers 406) Shakespeare shows that "separatist initiatives" by women "jeopardize men's interests in emotional substance and various material services. To secure these interests, men must have access to women, and since separation denies them access, they resist separatism" (Meyers 406).

Cressida's disloyalty towards Troilus, which is a form of feminist separatism, provokes his anger against Diomedes. In rage he says:

As much as I do Cressid love,
So much by weight hate I her Diomede (V. ii. 165-166)

Cressida's infidelity makes him abnormal. His abnormality can be taken as evidence of his male pride. He becomes cynic and speaks in a way he had never done.

This she? No; this is Diomed's Cressida.
If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
If there be rule in unity itself,
This was not she. O madness of discourse,
That cause sets up with and against itself!
Bifold authority, where reason can revolt
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
Without revolt! This is, and not, Cressid. (V.ii.135-144)

In rage he starts charging Cressida of falsehood.

O Cressid! O false Cressid!
False, false, false! (V. ii. 175)

The rage and hysteria generated in Troilus by the infidelity of Cressida again shows his parasitism on Cressida.

Through the panic, rage and hysteria generated in Troilus Shakespeare shows the parasitism of males on females. It is through the feminist separatism that Shakespeare shows how men are dependent on women.

In a nutshell it can be said that Troilus is an emotional, and to a large extent an irrational figure. He is a romantic man. He has a romantic attitude towards love and war. He is a sensuous lover. For his emotional sustenance he depends on Cressida. He is a strong supporter of patriarchy. For him women are secondary to men and they can be sacrificed in the interest of men. He "views sex as sport ...women as goods ... and he finds marriage fit only for violation ..." (Maguire P 166).

In Troilus' characterization Shakespeare seems to have a feminist bent of mind. He has made his masculinity vulnerable. As is stated by Gary Spear:

He (Troilus) has abandoned his position on the battlefield and thus lies "weaker than a woman's tear," completely effeminated by his excessive desire for her, identifying so thoroughly with her that he compares himself to a "virgin in the night." (P 419- 420)

The feminine traits – such as emotion, irrationality and romanticism, – which are generally associated with the female sex are found in Troilus' personality. Here Shakespeare seems to suggest that there is no natural relation between sex and sex-roles. Sex role is something socially constructed. One is either male or female but not man or woman. To be a man i.e. to have masculine qualities is not a matter of sex but of socialization.

In the light of the above discussion about the characteristic traits of Troilus it can be said that he possesses both masculine and feminine qualities. Through Troilus Shakespeare seems to say that nothing is entirely either manly or womanly. He seems to favour only that which is human. George Bernard Shaw seems right in maintaining that a man is simply a woman without petticoats (Ruthven 11) when seen against the character of Troilus.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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