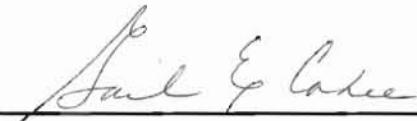


AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Valeria Biondo for the Master of Arts

in English presented on 27 July 1995

Title: "THAT WE WOMEN HAD MEN'S PRIVILEGE OF SPEAKING  
FIRST": SHAKESPEARE'S AMBIVALENT VIEW OF WOMEN IN  
*TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*

Abstract approved: 

This study examines Shakespeare's ambivalent treatment of the female characters, particularly Cressida, in his play *Troilus and Cressida*, within the context of Renaissance questions about the nature of women. The English Renaissance was marked by a number of significant social, political, and religious events which helped shape new ideas about the position of women in society; inevitably, these changing ideas became a source of tension for the patriarchal structure that characterized English society. The ensuing anxiety culminated with the proliferation of works by male writers which emphasized the conventional ideal images of women as chaste, silent, and obedient.

Engaged in re-telling the story of Cressida, a female character traditionally viewed as a symbol of female frailty, Shakespeare seems somewhat sympathetic toward

women. In this play he reviews the whole myth involving the war between the Trojans and the Greeks and, in the process, exposes the mechanisms of male power that oppress Cressida and force her to act as she does. By imbuing Cressida with a strong voice and an attitude of resistance to the powers that subject her, Shakespeare seems at first to challenge the assumptions that women are naturally chaste, silent, and obedient and seems to validate the period's apparent move toward new prospects for women.

Ultimately, however, Shakespeare betrays the same anxieties about women's potential shift of roles revealed by many of his male peers. After all the political changes he seems to propose in *Troilus and Cressida*, the playwright finally writes Cressida as a character who internalizes and affirms the traditional views of women held by the patriarchal culture in which he lived. This shift to the more traditional view of women reveals Shakespeare's own ambivalence about women's potential for independence and his own paternalistic need to keep women silent and out of the public sphere.

"THAT WE WOMEN HAD MEN'S PRIVILEGE OF SPEAKING FIRST":

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*TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*

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A Thesis

Presented to  
the Division of English  
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

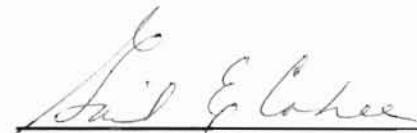
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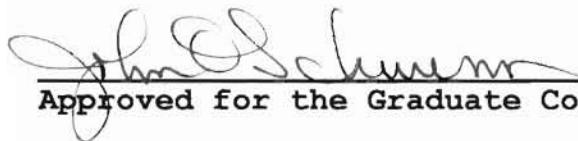
Valeria Biondo

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Thesis  
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Approved for the Major Division



Approved for the Graduate Council

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Any reading must be made from a particular position, but it is not reducible to that position, not least because texts are not infinitely malleable or interpretable, but often certain constraints and resistances to readings [are] made of them.<sup>1</sup>

This study examines the ambivalent nature of Shakespeare's treatment of women in *Troilus and Cressida*, a study made possible by the emergence of feminist theory and criticism during the 1970s and 80s which set new grounds for Shakespearean studies. As the editors of *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* point out, various feminist approaches began to analyze such "cultural phenomena as women's subordination and marginality, sex-role stereotyping, female bonding, and patriarchal structures," which allowed critics to "liberate Shakespeare's women from the stereotypes to which they have too often been confined."<sup>2</sup>

This liberation from stereotypes, in turn, came to confirm the complexity of Shakespeare's attitudes toward women, a complexity reflected in the often contradictory critical views of his works. It is widely known by now that the prevalent cultural expectations for women in the Renaissance assumed that the ideal woman should be chaste, silent, modest, and obedient to men, to whom they were inferior by nature, and that women who broke these rules were stereotyped as shrews, adulterers, and whores.<sup>3</sup> While some feminist critics see Shakespeare as bound to these predominant ideologies involving women in the Renaissance, ideas that he consolidates in his works, others see him as subverting those same views in his texts. Juliet Dusinberre, in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, for example, defines Shakespeare as essentially feminist in

sympathy. She argues that the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods bred conditions for a feminist movement because the breakdown of old ideas in religion and politics and the spirit of independence celebrated by Puritanism were powerful influences in shaping new ideas about the position of women in society. She sees the same influences throughout Shakespearean drama and therefore asserts that Shakespeare's feminism lies in his questioning of the widely accepted ideas about women. Lisa Jardine, however, in *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, does not share Dusi's optimism. Jardine argues instead that the emphasis on women in early drama reveals the patriarchy's unexpressed worry about the period's significant social changes.<sup>4</sup>

Living in a culture strongly engaged in questions about women, Shakespeare seems not to have been immune to the innumerable controversies involving women's nature and roles. But to assert that Shakespeare was a feminist, as Dusi does, is as slippery as affirming that he did not show any sympathy at all for "the woman question" that pervaded the Renaissance, as Jardine does.

*Troilus and Cressida* is a useful site from which to examine the ways that Shakespeare's treatment of women goes far beyond radical assertions. It is my purpose to examine how, on one level, Shakespeare's handling of Cressida calls into question accepted ideas about women, and on another level, how this same handling informs his reluctance as a

male writer to accept the very political changes he seems to propose.

Much has been written about Cressida as victim of a male world that markets her. This position, while essentially accurate, seems simplistic, for the power she is infused with by means of her language suggests that she is not a passive but is rather a resistant victim. Thus, on the one hand, by drawing on Cressida's language I intend to show that Shakespeare gives her a strong voice in a time when only silence was expected from women. On the other hand, Shakespeare also reveals a fear of women's potential power when he silences Cressida at the moment when she most needs her voice--after the betrayal. Before dealing with these specific questions, however, it is helpful to survey the Renaissance cultural context involving women.

As noted above, the Renaissance was a period strongly concerned with questions about women. Early studies with a historical focus have shown that this new concern about women was due to the various cultural changes that were occurring during the period.<sup>5</sup> According to Carroll Camden, the "rise of the middle-class, with its own culture, together with the changing attitudes implicit in the Reformation, brought forth a new kind of woman who could not be ticked off and classified in the same easy way as her medieval sister," and who caused a sensation which "mere man" did not like (9). Even though his "new kind of woman" does not reflect reality in historical terms,<sup>6</sup> Camden is

right to acknowledge a certain anxiety among men. Before the Reformation, power was concentrated with the Catholic Church and the aristocracy, both institutionalizing cultural ideologies that suited their interests. The patriarchal hierarchy operating within the Church also dictated gender hierarchy, and consequently, women's subordination to men. Because the Church defined women as Mary-like or Eve-like, and therefore good or evil, the ideal Mary-like woman was expected to be chaste, silent, modest, and obedient. As Camden has observed, however, things were changing during the Renaissance. The emphasis on education generated by humanism, the new religious ideas praising the value of the individual mind, the availability of the press, and the development of a new trading class all contributed to providing a few women means to establish themselves as public figures.<sup>7</sup> In addition, during much of the Renaissance in England, the country was ruled by female monarchs--Mary and Elizabeth Tudor. The reality of female rule was completely new and frightening to many men. After all, in Renaissance England, as Louis Montrose points out, "all forms of public and domestic authority were vested in men: in fathers, husbands, masters, teachers, magistrates, lords. It was inevitable that the rule of a woman would generate peculiar tensions within such a patriarchal society" (64-5). This kind of tension can be seen, for instance, in John Knox's attack on female rule in his *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of*

*Women*. For Knox, a woman ruler was simply unnatural.<sup>8</sup> According to him, "Nature . . . doth paint [women] forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish, . . . unconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment" (43). Thus, this new concern about women, far from being constructive, was often a misogynistic reaction to women's potential power.

In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt further delineates the Renaissance's strong tendency to construct identity. Greenblatt rejects the idea of the self as a fixed entity--that which was embedded in the monolithic cultural images of women propagated by the structures of power--in favor of the observation that "in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (2). Thus, it is not surprising that most of the literature of the period confines women within norms of acceptable feminine behavior.<sup>9</sup> The proliferation of conduct books for women written by male writers is a clear sign of men's apprehension about women's nature and potential power, and served as a psychological tool to keep women in their "proper" place, that is, outside the public sphere and essentially silent.

Even though chastity and obedience were the primary qualities expected from a woman, modesty and silence were also highly recommended by the patriarchal structure and male writers within it. Modesty and silence were culturally

identified as female ideals, reinforced and legitimized by the large number of conduct books which appeared during the Renaissance. Many of these writings directed women to remain safely enclosed within the domestic realm rather than engaged in the circulation of social signs or events. In *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, which Joan Larsen Klein names "not only the first but also the most influential Renaissance treatise on the education of women,"<sup>10</sup> Juan Luis Vives characteristically suggests that

it neither becometh a woman to . . . live amongst men, [n]or speak abroad, an [thereby] shake off her demureness and honesty, either all together, or else a great part; which if she be good, it were better be at home within and unknown to other folks, and in company to hold her tongue demurely, and let few see her, and none at all hear her.

(102)

Texts in the tradition of Vives' *Instruction*, then, attempted to use silence and modesty to fashion and control femininity at the same time that they betrayed a profound distrust of women's nature and a fear of women's potential power.<sup>11</sup>

From fashioning to misogynistic stereotyping was a short step. Women were not supposed to have a voice, but if they did have one they were seen as possessing a wanton spirit, for it was common in Renaissance culture to assume that a woman with a loose tongue had a loose sexual life as

well. The connection between speaking and wantonness is especially noticeable in the literature of conduct. For instance, Peter Stallybrass cites Francesco Barbaro's words in his treatise *On Wifely Duties*:

It is proper . . . that not only arms but indeed also the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs. (127)

As Stallybrass observes, "silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity."<sup>12</sup> The same attitude is found in Henry Smith's *A Preparative to Mariage*, when he points out the qualities a man should have in mind in order to search for a good wife: godliness, a modest look, and a modest speech, "or rather her silence, for the ornament of a woman is silence . . . As the open vessels were counted uncleane; so account that the open mouth hath much uncleanes" (cited by Karen Newman, 11). As Newman points out, "an open mouth and immodest speech are tantamount to open genitals and immodest acts" (11). The fact that the mouth, the source of speech, was invested with such images and meanings points not only to a violent misogyny but mainly to a veiled fear of women. Hence it is not surprising to find so many efforts to establish ideologies about women, to produce a normative woman with a closed mouth and confined in the safety of the domestic realm.

Since Shakespeare, on one level, imbues Cressida with a voice, uncharacteristically to the culture of his day, it is

important to consider why he does so, and also why he chooses the myth of Cressida to work with. For this purpose it is useful to survey Cressida's literary history.<sup>13</sup> The story of the war between the Greeks and Trojans dates back to Homer's *Iliad*, where we find Troilus but not Cressida. However, the germ of Cressida's story can be recognized in the characters of Chryseis and Briseis, who were valued for their beauty, economic usefulness, and sexual and decorative attributes. Thus, the *Iliad* already presented women being evaluated by, and handed about among, men without any consideration for their personal feelings. But the story of Troilus and Cressida itself is a medieval addition. Its first appearance is recorded in the twelfth century in Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, but not until the fourteenth century, with Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, was the full story told. Both texts focus essentially on Cressida's infidelity and popularize the Cressida-like figure.

Boccaccio's work was the main source for Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, which was published sometime between 1380 and 1387. Chaucer definitely treats the story in new ways. By creating a masculine narrator who manipulates the feminine and immobilizes female characters, Chaucer's aim seems to be to criticize patriarchal conceptions of language.<sup>14</sup> Even though Chaucer's approach to the story is revisionary, the final lines of the poem, as Carolyn Dinshaw points out, "reinscribe the authority and veracity of the essentially antifeminist tradition of representing Criseyde"

(65). The narrator says

every lady bright of hewe,  
 And every gentil womman, what she be,  
 That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,  
 That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me.  
 Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se;  
 And gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,  
 Penolopees trouthe and good Alceste. (5.1772-8)

Penelope, the faithful wife of Ulysses, and Alcestis, who laid down her life for her husband Admetus, represent faithful lovers, as opposed to the faithless Criseyde. Because Chaucer, through his narrator, says he would rather write about them, he is ratifying Cressida's image as an unworthy woman. For Chaucer, however, Cressida seems unworthy not quite in the sense that she has less value than Penelope and Alcestis, but rather because she is far more complex than the other two women. And following Dinshaw's interpretive line, Chaucer's male narrator who at first is sympathetic toward Criseyde, even seduced by her, at the end shows his disappointment with female nature. Because he does not want to deal with "the slippery feminine" anymore, "he wants his females simple, stable, and orderly" (66).

Considered as a kind of sequel to Chaucer's poem, Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* appeared around 1490. More moralistic than Chaucer's, Henryson's poem takes up the experiences of Cressida after her betrayal of Troilus. Abandoned by Diomedes, she becomes a whore to a

number of Greek warriors. Stricken by leprosy and reduced to beggary as divine punishment for her infidelity and lack of chastity, she dies lamenting her fate yet recognizing it as righteous. Henryson was largely responsible for the prevalent Renaissance image of Cressida as whore as well as for promoting the proverbial association between Troilus and Truth: "O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troilus!"<sup>15</sup>

By the time Shakespeare wrote *Troilus and Cressida* a profoundly negative image was already attached to Cressida's name. At this point, it is significant to speculate why Shakespeare decided to write about figures whose story had been told so many times and whose meaning therefore had been more than culturally legitimized. But Shakespeare is far from only telling the story once more. I suggest that his infusing Cressida with a strong voice is important not only in terms of the challenge it represents to the Renaissance construction and manipulation of women's image, but also in terms of the revisionary and interrogatory sense it brings to the myth as a whole. By giving his Cressida a voice, Shakespeare suggests that even though Troilus and Cressida's story has been told a number of times, the female point of view within it remains unheard. Thus, behind Cressida's words Shakespeare retrospectively echoes the voices of previous representations of this historically maligned female figure, redefining the terms through which her story has to be read, consequently redefining as well women's position and roles in the world.

That Shakespeare's is a revisionary reading of the Greek and Trojan legend is made clear from the opening lines of The Prologue:

In Troy, there lies the scene. From isles of  
Greece  
The princes orgillous, their high blood chaf'd,  
Have to the port of Athens sent their ships  
Fraught with the ministers and instruments  
Of cruel war. Sixty and nine, that wore  
Their crownets regal, from th' Athenian bay  
Put forth toward Phrygia, and their vow is made  
To ransack Troy, within whose strong immures  
The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' queen,  
With wanton Paris sleeps-and that's the quarrel.  
(1-10)<sup>16</sup>

As we know, the Homeric ideal is a sacred territory of accepted values and ideas. Shakespeare, however, calls this landscape into question juxtaposing words that have the effect of liberating the story from tradition. The stature of the terms "orgillous" and "high blood chaf'd," which Shakespeare uses to characterize the heroes, is suddenly undercut by the colloquial sense of the "quarrel" about somebody's wife sleeping with somebody else, in which those heroes are involved.<sup>17</sup> Not only does The Prologue create an expectation for a kind of liberatory approach, but it also introduces the idea that women are central to this story since the war between the Trojans and Greeks began because

Helen was ravished by Paris.

The fact that Helen is central to the matter between the Trojans and Greeks is not surprising since this is the very paradigm of women's role within patriarchal social structure. Heidi Hartmann defines patriarchy as "relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women."<sup>18</sup> If patriarchy is the system of bonds among men, where are women placed in this structure? Women are the ones who form the material base for these relations because, as Dinshaw points out, "women are the conduit by which power is passed on; they bear sons" (57). Thus, women constitute the very means which bond man to man. Gayle Rubin's study on the social construction of gender also helps answer this question.<sup>19</sup> According to Rubin, patriarchal structures survive through the "traffic in women." Drawing on studies by Marcel Mauss, who pointed out the great significance that the exchange of gifts had in primitive societies concerning social interchanges, and studies by Levi-Strauss, who added the idea that marriages are a most basic form of gift exchange, Rubin observed that throughout time the traffic in women has been regulating exchanges among men. As she points out, "women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favors, sent as tribute, traded, bought, and sold" (175), not only in primitive but also in civilized societies. Because patriarchal structures use women as

exchangeable property to cement bonds among men, women are at the center of those structures, symbolically feeding them. Thus, as noted earlier, Helen is at the heart of the matter between Trojans and Greeks because she fulfills exactly the function with which the patriarchal societies on both sides ascribe her. Rather than fighting for Helen, the men in the play use her as a pretext for exchanges among themselves.<sup>20</sup>

The pertinence of this paradigm to *Troilus and Cressida* is beyond question. Shakespeare explicitly develops the plot to expose the trafficking in women that pervades the society of the play. Helen is the prototype of this activity. She was taken in vengeance "for an old aunt whom the Greeks held captive" (2.2.77). The abduction of Helen for the "old aunt" suggests that the exchange of women between Trojans and Greeks is a fundamental activity. This is also true for Cressida, who is a woman traded between men at war.<sup>21</sup> The fact that Shakespeare does not mention anything about Cressida herself in The Prologue but instead mentions Helen turns out to be quite significant. Mihoko Suzuki suggests that Shakespeare "constructs a cardboard representation of Helen as a synecdoche for mystified tradition, which he criticizes through his newly conceived fiction of Cressida" (212). This is true, but even more crucially, by putting Helen into focus in the opening lines instead of Cressida, Shakespeare intended to dramatize the idea of women as constant subjects because there was an aunt

before Helen, and there is Cressida after Helen, and there will be many women after Cressida. Names hence are not as relevant as the condition in which these women are found. And, in light of the prospects for women in the Renaissance, as discussed above, Shakespeare seems to be denouncing a situation which is very much alive in his own society.

That is the reason we are introduced to Cressida through the interaction between two male characters--Troilus and Pandarus--in Act I, scene I, rather than by the appearance of Cressida herself. From the very beginning she is connected to the idea of bonding man to man as the conversation developed by Troilus and Pandarus makes explicit. Pandarus says at least three times that he will "meddle" in the matter no more. The matter, as the scene shows, is that Pandarus is mediating the courtship of Troilus for Pandarus's niece, Cressida. But Pandarus is not just a go-between in the matter: it is important to remember that Cressida's father is not in Troy, and that Pandarus is actually responsible for Cressida in place of her real father. Levi-Strauss propounds that "The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners."<sup>22</sup> Although the relationship discussed in the scene is not one of marriage, it involves the transaction of Cressida, and this is the point I want to emphasize. As Rubin observes, "If it is

women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it" (174). Thus in this scene Cressida is not even present.

Not only is Cressida trafficked as a woman, but also as merchandise, as this conversation between Pandarus and Troilus demonstrates:<sup>23</sup>

PAN. He that will have a  
cake out of the wheat must tarry the grinding.

TRO. Have I not tarried?

PAN. Ay, the grinding; but you must tarry the  
bolting.

TRO. Have I not tarried?

PAN. Ay, the bolting; but you must tarry the  
leavening.

TRO. Still have I tarried.

PAN. Ay, to the leavening, but here's yet in the  
word "hereafter" the kneading, the making of  
the cake, the heating the oven, and the baking;  
nay you must stay the cooling too, or ye may  
chance burn your lips. (1.1.14-26)

Pandarus reduces Cressida to food. He grinds, bolts, kneads, bakes, and sells his niece to Troilus so that he may eat her. Troilus, as well, also conceives of Cressida as a commodity: as he calls her a "pearl," himself the "merchant," and Pandarus the "bark" which will make the purchase possible (1.1.100-4).

The exchange between Troilus and Pandarus informs the essentially sensual nature of Troilus's interest in Cressida as well. The very cake-making sequence is packed with sexual punning, which invites Troilus to reveal his longing for Cressida not as a person, but simply as a body:

I tell thee [Pandarus] 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. (1.1.51-7)

Cressida figures in his speech in a typical blazon.<sup>24</sup> He not only commodifies her, but also tries to control her body, fragmenting it according to his hungry gaze, and hence producing Cressida as the object of his desire. As Troilus and Pandarus objectify Cressida by constructing her entirely within the economic discourses of commodity and property, the passive role women are assigned, in contrast to the active part of the agent informed by the image of men as merchants, becomes evident.

This first scene actually is a microcosm for the entire play, for it informs and establishes, in the realm of the particular, the kind of negotiations that will be found in the larger world of the play. At this point Cressida is the prey of two men; later, when she is exchanged for Antenor,

she will be the prey of two groups of men--Trojans and Greeks. Thus, simply by looking at this scene, one can not only learn a lot about the dominant male forces in the play, but also observe that Shakespeare is commenting on his own society. So far, all the action has developed with women as the subject matter, but no female character has yet appeared. This, I believe, is Shakespeare's way to bring into focus the idea that even though women can be discussed openly in the marketplace which constitutes the public sphere, they are not allowed to be physically present in it, but are confined to the domestic realm. Furthermore, the female physical absence implies silence as well. Even though Shakespeare seems to be reproducing his own culture and, consequently, reifying its validity, the way he does it, that is, depicting male oppression over women, tells us that his is a politics of what Jonathan Dollimore calls "transgressive reinscription."<sup>25</sup> Shakespeare appropriates, inverts, and perverts dominant structures: at the same time that Shakespeare reproduces patriarchy in *Troilus and Cressida*, he inverts it by revealing how this structure constructs women as subject, and perverts it by making Cressida resistant to her subjection and mercantilization.

After having depicted the kind of world in which Cressida lives, Shakespeare dedicates Scene II to showing that she is not a mere object to be subjected to, and handled by, men. This is immediately indicated in the exchange she has with Alexander at the beginning of the

scene. Alexander tells Cressida about Hector's anger at being struck by Ajax in the battlefield. The focus of their conversation is on Ajax, whose nature and attributes are described in detail by Alexander. According to Alexander, the common perception of Ajax is that he "is a very man *per se* and stands alone" (1.2.16), probably meaning that Ajax is a complete and incomparable soldier, famous for his bravery. Cressida's reply that "So do all men, unless th' are drunk, sick, or have no legs" (1.2.17), however, shows that she willfully takes another sense out of Alexander's observation. Her reply constitutes the first indication that she is not the voiceless and invisible figure who exists only within the exchanges between men, an empty sign within male discourse. Her witty words are evidence that she has a mind of her own and that she says what she thinks, for her response can very well be read as a sign of resistance to conventional ideas of manliness. After all, what makes a man to be a man *per se* and to stand alone? With her punning on "legs," Cressida is giving another sense to what a man *per se* is: anatomy, rather than bravery, distinguishes a man.<sup>26</sup>

Commenting on the same scene, Deborah Hooker suggests that Cressida actually is interrogating male identity as she dispraises the warrior, divesting him of any pretense of nobility of action.<sup>27</sup> This is an accurate observation, and one that is ratified a little later in the same scene, when Cressida and Pandarus are at the wall of Troy watching the

warriors who come back from the field. Pandarus is busy trying to praise Troilus above all the other soldiers. As Pandarus insistently tries to direct Cressida's gaze by praising Troilus, the text clearly suggests that Cressida has a gaze of her own. Cressida refuses to judge who is the best man among all of them, refuting the terms under which her uncle defines manhood:

PAN. Well, well! Why, have you any discretion?  
 have you any eyes? do you know what a man is?  
 Is not birth, beauty, good shape, discourse,  
 manhood, learning, gentleness, virtue, youth,  
 liberality, and suchlike, the spice and salt  
 that season a man?

CRES. Ay, a minc'd man, and then to be bak'd with  
 no date in the pie, for then the man's date is  
 out? (1.2.251-7)

Pandarus's description of a man's ideal attributes is a simplified but loyal reproduction of Castiglione's model for a courtier.<sup>28</sup> Coming up with another witty reply, Cressida calls into question the validity of this "ideal profile." It is the tone of the Prologue operating here as well. The Prologue calls into question the idealism connected to Homer's *Iliad* by disputing the nobility of a cause whose core is a matter of cuckoldry. Rather than the pursuit of personal honor, what drives the "heroes" is the threat to their male identity. Therefore, when Cressida also questions what really characterizes a man, whether honor or

manhood, she is echoing what has been already seen in The Prologue. The difference is that now it is a woman's mind and voice resisting conventions.

The verbal fluidity with which Shakespeare imbues Cressida allows her to question the values that direct her own society, and by the same token, his own society. It also implies that she is highly engaged in resisting dominant male patterns of discourse.<sup>29</sup> She is, as Hooker suggests, resistant to "immediate appropriation" (902). In other words, she resists the subjection that the exchanges between men place her under, and therefore undermines the authority of patriarchal law. Through her words Cressida simply rejects the silent role a male dominated world assigns her: she struggles to be an active participant in it as men are, and not just merchandise to be handed over.

Cressida's very awareness of the position women hold in the society of the play empowers her to resist subjection and mercantilization, and this bothers the men in the play as shown, for example, by Pandarus's reaction following her comment on the "minc'd man": "You are such a woman, a man knows not at what ward you lie" (1.2.259). The fear Cressida's resistance to authority provokes pushes Pandarus to appeal to misogynistic ideas about female nature. He accuses her of being unpredictable and beyond the realm of understanding, common attitudes found in the conduct books popular during the Renaissance.<sup>30</sup>

As pointed out above, Cressida is aware of the

mechanisms of male power pervading her society, and which also operate in courtship. She knows that Pandarus is trying to sell her an idealized image of Troilus--that of the courtly lover--which is not true at all. Even though she was physically absent in the previous scene, her soliloquy at the end of Scene II reveals that she is aware of the sensual nature of Troilus's interest in her as well as of the coy part women are supposed to play in a romantic relationship:

Words, vows, gifts, tears, and love's full  
sacrifice,  
He offers in another's enterprise,  
But more in Troilus thousandfold 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:  
Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is.  
That she was never yet that ever knew  
Love got so sweet as when desire did sue.  
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.

(1.2.282-95)

Cressida is uttering nothing more than the conventions of

her world: erotic desire is the primary characteristic of a man's interest in a woman, and a man loses interest in a woman who yields too easily to his desires. In addition, a woman is not supposed to play an active part in any situation, let alone in matters of love. We cannot forget as well that chastity, virginity, and obedience are all premises in the female ideal defended by patriarchy. It is the transgression of that ideal that men use to invest women with the stereotypical images of wantonness. Men's reaction, however, only masks the truth of the matter: their fear in sight of the inversion of the active-passive roles that the woman's yielding represents.

By vocalizing all the conventions linked to courtship and by saying that she is going to hold off, Cressida seems to be affirming the values that dominate her society. This is not true, however. Her intention is nothing more than to defend her own self and body as clearly demonstrated by her reply when Pandarus asks her at which "ward she lies"

(1.2.259):

Upon my back, to defend my belly, upon my wit, to defend my wiles, upon my secrecy, to defend mine honesty, my mask, to defend my beauty, and you, to defend all these; and at all these wards I lie, at a thousand watches. (1.2.260-4)

This moment, combined with her soliloquy, has generated the traditional reading of Cressida as a calculating woman who behaves exactly the way men expect her to do which,

consequently, emphasizes her participation in maintaining the *status quo*. Shakespeare's use of the word "ward," however, suggests the opposite. According to the OED, "ward" was used to denote a number of different senses during the Renaissance, notably the action of watching or guarding someone or something, and also as defining a defensive position or movement in fencing.<sup>31</sup> Both senses intertwine in Cressida's reply. Rather than the sexual and scheming sense traditionally seen, Cressida's reply suggests that her many moves and watches are exactly the same as those taken by someone who is fencing, and they serve the same end: defence of one's integrity. These same movements are symbolically represented in her verbal fencing. Her witty language does not expose feminine coquetry but makes it clear that in the world of the Trojans and Greeks, women's meaning and value are determined by men. Cressida therefore uses her voice as a shield for self-defence.

This very defensive attitude shows that Cressida does not ratify the conventions and values involving women in her world. On the contrary, it once more suggests her resistance to them. After all, those conventions and values are all products of a male-centered culture to which she denies subjection. Hence, her soliloquy is an indication, to cite Rubin again, that Cressida does not want to be the conduit for a relationship between men, but a partner in her own relationship with men; she does not want to be the merchandise, but the merchant. She utters, then, nothing

more than the exercise of her own will. In other words, she wants to give in because she truly loves Troilus. Yet she holds off not because this is what men expect from her, but because she will give in only when she wants to do so.

At this point, it is important to consider what happens when a woman starts to take responsibility for herself, to show her strength, to follow her own will and mind. For this is exactly what Cressida does the next time we see her, in Act III, Scene II, in the encounter between the two lovers, arranged by Pandarus. In keeping with his part in the transaction, Pandarus tries to increase the value of the commodity by describing Cressida in lavish terms to Troilus just before they meet:

She's making her ready, she'll come  
straight. You must be witty now: she does so  
blush, and fetches her wind so short, as if she  
were fray'd with a spirit. I'll fetch her. It is  
the prettiest villain, she fetches her breath as  
short as a new-ta'en sparrow. (3.2.30-4)

Jill Mann points out that "Instead of seeing Cressida blushing onstage, we have Pandarus giving Troilus an account of [Cressida's] blushes and short breathing," whose effect is "to raise her erotic appeal for her lover."<sup>32</sup> Two very important points stem from this: first, that again Cressida is not present, which exposes once more women's function of bonding men to men; and second that, actually, Pandarus is fashioning Cressida precisely in the coy manner that

conventions dictate. And because Troilus earlier referred to Cressida as "stubborn-chaste against all suit" (1.1.97), it is inferred that Pandarus describes Cressida exactly in the way Troilus idealizes her to be. Both men therefore continue to play their respective parts in the transaction of a once more absent Cressida.

As soon as Cressida appears, however, her resistance to subjection and commodification is again made clear, for while Troilus finds himself "bereft of words" (3.2.54) from the beginning, her very first line is to invite him to "walk in" (3.2.60). In the sequence of their dialogue, the couple having been left alone by Pandarus, Troilus continues to rhapsodize while Cressida invites him a second time to walk in (3.2.61-98). When Pandarus returns to the stage, he again describes Cressida as blushing. These are, in fact, conflicting attitudes which demonstrate an open struggle for power. Pandarus and Troilus attempt to preserve patriarchal structure by imposing on Cressida a role that she refuses vehemently to play. By taking the first step, that is, by inviting Troilus to walk in, Cressida is taking the leading role which, conventionally, men are supposed to take. Her resistance hence lies in her appropriating a male discourse and undermining its idealizing strategies, which she uses according to her own will and interest.

The social consequences that come with Cressida's rejection of passivity are as important as the rejection itself. Even though men attempt to control women's speech,

they surely cannot control women's thoughts. Cressida does think, and everything is quite fine as long as she maintains her thoughts to herself. Her earlier soliloquy represents her private thoughts about Troilus. By the time of their encounter, however, she not only takes the initiative but also makes public her feelings about Troilus, the public realm emphasized by Pandarus's presence as she confesses that "[she] ha[s] lov'd [Troilus] night and day / For many weary months" (3.2.114-5), and that she "was won . . . / with the first glance" (3.2.117-8). To this she adds that she can no longer "master" her feelings, which "like unbridled children [have] grown / Too headstrong for their mother" (3.2.122-3). For an audience in Shakespeare's day, this sequence of admissions could very well be seen as her movement from the private world of the home to the public world of the marketplace, which is precisely the way it should be read since this is nothing more than Cressida transforming into action what was already in her mind. She is literally in the marketplace, actively participating in a transaction instead of just providing the means for its existence.

The fact that Cressida regrets she has "blabb'd" (3.2.124) does not erase her resistant attitude or the culturally subversive ideas she is articulating. Actually, it emphasizes her awareness of the workings of her world. She knows that by making her thoughts public she might be exposing herself to a more strongly oppressive treatment

from the men around her. And as she acknowledges, were she "a man" or had women "men's privilege / Of speaking first" (3.2.127-9), she would not have to be concerned about the consequences she might face for openly expressing her mind. The interesting point here is that even when she seems to be denying her own mind, she once more transgresses the politics that confine her within a limitation of speech.

To return to the question raised above, in a patriarchal system, what happens to women who take responsibility for themselves, who try to establish themselves as public figures, is that they are feared, and men's immediate reaction is to force them back into the private sphere. That Troilus is annoyed about what he has been listening to is revealed by his complete silence throughout Cressida's revealing words, a fact that Cressida herself calls to our attention (3.2.131). Hence, in the sequence when Troilus kisses Cressida to "hold [her] tongue" (3.2.129) and "stop [her] mouth" (3.2.133), "albeit sweet music issues" (3.2.134) from it, it constitutes a very ironic and peremptory way to place her back within the private world, a most oppressive exercise of his power over her person and her body.<sup>33</sup> Troilus forces Cressida to silence, but more incisively, because of the cultural connection between verbosity and wantonness, he gives her exactly what every man would think she wants. Troilus has just devalued the "stubborn-chaste against all suit" woman into a whore. Furthermore, this one kiss foretells the many

kisses she is going to be given later in the Greek camp by the Greek generals. In both instances, the men involved want to show Cressida who really is in power. No matter how much resistance and subversion she embodies, at this moment she is the prey of two men; later she will be the prey of groups of men.

At this point, Cressida's resistance is obviously not as effective as before. This does not mean, however, that Shakespeare is taking power out of her--at least, not yet. It seems that his intention is, as pointed out before, to interrogate a situation alive in the society of his own day, a patriarchy that fashions women in ways that help maintain the *status quo*. He clearly calls the whole concept of women's ideal behavior into question. He also seems to suggest that women can, and do, fight the law of the father. The movement of the play, however, makes clear that women can fight up to a point only, for the patriarchal system is so pervasive that it catches and oppresses women sooner or later. Cressida's wit and courage to speak up have allowed her to be a tougher prey than if she were the passive ideal female, which signals that she does not acquiesce with the system; however, they have not prevented her from eventually becoming an object of prey.

Her commodification within the social sphere paves the way for her mercantilization in the political sphere, which becomes evident when Calchas, Cressida's father, demands of the Greek princes that he have her back:

You have a Troyan prisoner call'd Antenor,  
 Yesterday took; Troy holds him very dear.  
 Oft have you (often have you thanks therefore)  
 Desir'd my Cressid in right great exchange,  
 Whom Troy hath still denied, but this Antenor,  
 I know, is such a wrest in their affairs  
 That their negotiations all must slack,  
 Wanting his manage, and they will almost  
 Give us a prince of blood, a son of Priam,  
 In change of him. Let him be sent, great princes,  
 And he shall buy my daughter; and her presence  
 Shall quite strike off all service I have done,  
 In most accepted pain. (3.3.18-29)

Trafficking in women is really a way of life in this male society. The text is explicit in showing that this is not the first time that Calchas tries to have his daughter traded in. His speech, however, is a lot more problematic because by saying that Agamemnon has often "Desir'd . . . Cressid," and that Antenor shall buy her back now leaves the impression that "her presence [will] strike off [sexually] all [the] service" he has done. His role does not seem to be a bit different from Pandarus's since both of them function as pander. As Cressida's real father, Calchas's attitude is even worse because he uses his daughter's sexuality in the cruelest way possible, even after having abandoned her in Troy. This is a condition that even more emphasizes female powerlessness within patriarchy. And

either within the social or the political sphere, the end result of what Pandarus and Calchas do is the same: they market Cressida.

At this point, it is important to keep in mind, to borrow Jonathan Dollimore's term again, the idea of "transgressive reinscription" mentioned earlier. That Shakespeare is reinscribing patriarchy is evident. The subversiveness of this reinscription, however, can be observed in the way he moves within patriarchy to depict it as oppressive to women. No matter how much strength Shakespeare imbues Cressida with, he seems to be concerned primarily in revealing her powerlessness within her world. She is able to exercise power only in the realm of the particular, as seen in her interaction with Pandarus and Troilus. In the larger world of the play when there are groups of men turning her into a commodity, however, she is completely powerless.

Certainly, Shakespeare's best attempt to expose this condition lies in the second kissing scene, when Cressida is taken to the Greek camp after her exchange for Antenor. Ulysses's idea that "'Twere better she were kiss'd in general" (4.5.21) as a welcoming gesture, is an explicit display of male power and onerousness which Shakespeare denounces in his obviously deliberate use of the verb in the passive voice to characterize Cressida's position within the action: she is the object of the action and not its perpetrator. This kissing scene is a more sophisticated

version of the earlier scene when Troilus kissed Cressida. At that time Troilus "stop[ped] [Cressida's] mouth" because she was "blabb[ing]." At this time, however, Cressida does not utter a single word until she is kissed five times. Hence, as opposed to the previous kissing scene, the generals do not have to stop her mouth for she is already silent. The implication of the sequence of kisses therefore is that, speaking or not, she is seen as nothing more than an easy woman by the Greek generals.

The fact that she remains silent while she is kissed successively by Agamemnon, Nestor, Achilles, and Patroclus does not mean that she complies with the situation. On the contrary, it emphasizes her helplessness in the circumstances she finds herself in.<sup>34</sup> And as Lorraine Helms points out, the Greeks "are taking what Cressida, essentially a captive, has no real power to refuse" (37). It may be, however, that Cressida remains silent while she considers the situation and gathers up the force of her wit to avoid being kissed by Menelaus, and more importantly, by Ulysses, whom she makes a fool of, beating him at the very game he created:

ULYS. May I, sweet lady, beg a kiss of you?

CRES. You may.

ULYS. I do desire it.

CRES. Why, beg then. (4.5.47-9)

Cressida's display of awareness, strength, and resistance not surprisingly elicits a hostile and misogynistic reaction

from Ulysses:

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.

O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,  
That give a coasting welcome ere it comes,  
And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts  
To every ticklish reader! set them down

For sluttish spoils of opportunity,  
And daughters of the game. (4.5.55-62)

Ulysses completely misjudges Cressida; he intentionally denigrates a woman who dares to be as witty as himself. Because she has an open mouth, that is, she speaks up, Ulysses reads her whole character and body as wide open as well, an attitude toward women embedded in the Renaissance cultural landscape, as noted earlier. He literally categorizes her as a whore out of his own hurt ego. Since he cannot "stop her mouth," he judges her at his will, for the scene does not support any of his assertions. Cressida's "glib tongue" remains silent during most of the scene. She does not "welcome" anybody by her own initiative since she is kissed five times before speaking a word. And finally, the fact that she uses her wit to avoid being kissed by Menelaus and Ulysses does not mean that she "unclasp[s] the tables of [her] thoughts." The only ticklish reader here is Ulysses himself. Rather than

decoding Cressida's worth, he is constructing it. But when right after Ulysses's speech Hector's sennet is heard, and the Greek generals cry "The Trojans' trumpet" (4.5.63) it is clear that all of them share the same reading of Cressida as "the Trojan strumpet." This kissing scene actually brings together the different levels of trafficking in women found in the play: women as "things" to be handed among men, characterized by the graphic passing of Cressida from one general to the other; and women as the masked reason for contests when men have the chance to measure their manliness among themselves, as exemplified by who gets to kiss Cressida and who does not. Hence while men use women to insult one another, they also are allies when it comes to oppressing women.

It is also significant that Ulysses begins his condemnation of Cressida by using the third person singular, but toward the middle he slides to the third person plural. He suddenly condemns not only Cressida but apparently all women, an attitude that Cressida also will have when she explains her surrender to Diomedes. Conversely it may be as well that Ulysses condemns Cressida according to his view of women as a whole. In addition, Ulysses's fragmentation of Cressida's body is a repetition of what Troilus had already done in Act I when he mentioned "her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice, . . . her hand," as objects of his love. Both men read Cressida as an open book which invites such reading. Ulysses's antagonistic reaction in

sight of her display of strength also mimics Pandarus's earlier reaction to Cressida's resistance to sharing his idealization of Troilus. Even though this recurrence of the same kind of action involves different male characters each time, Cressida is consistently at the center in all of them. This picture, thus, attests to the validity of the idea that within patriarchy women are constantly subjected to male oppression, a condition which Shakespeare seems to be fighting.

Shakespeare finally does not hold to the political changes he seems to propose, however. No matter how positively he has portrayed Cressida so far in relation to her world, he literally abandons her, and as a male writer, he also seems to betray his own fear of women's potential power in sight of the shift of roles. It is obvious that he was constrained by a story whose ending was widely known in his own day. The fact that Cressida is unfaithful to Troilus is undeniable and immutable. In Shakespeare's version, as in the earlier versions of the story, she surrenders to Diomedes, but her reasons for doing so are incontestable. Alone in a society dominated by men who determine women's value at their own will, as demonstrated by the kissing scene, Cressida finds in Diomedes a protector who will allow her to be one man's lover, and not a woman handed around a whole camp.

Her reasons are clear and valid enough. Shakespeare, however, after having depicted the oppressive world Cressida

lives in, where men keep judging her for making the best of the constant subjection they force upon her, finally abandons the apparently liberatory tone he has set from the very beginning of the play. The clearest sign that his attitude toward her has changed is that he nearly erases her from the rest of the play: the kissing scene at the Greek camp constitutes the last moment in which we have the chance to see the witty and determined Cressida that Shakespeare has proposed since her first exchange with Alexander. The next--and the only--time she re-appears, in Act V, Scene II, she is already in the process of surrendering to Diomedes, and she clearly seems to have lost her identity. This loss of self is manifest in the incoherence that now pervades her once assertive language:

CRES. Here, Diomed, keep this sleeve.<sup>35</sup>

. . . . .

CRES. You look upon that sleeve, behold it well.

He lov'd me-O false wench!-Give't me again.

DIOM. Who was't?

CRES. It is no matter now I ha't again.

I will not meet with you to-morrow night.

I prithee, Diomed, visit me no more.

. . . . .

CRES. 'Twas one's that lov'd me better than you will.

But now you have it, take it.

. . . . .

CRES. Well, well, 'tis done, 'tis past. And yet  
it is not;

I will not keep my word.

. . . . .

DIOM. What, shall I come? The hour-

CRES. Ay, come-O Jove!-do come. (5.2.66-105)

Cressida seems to be uncertain as how best to proceed. She asserts something only to deny it a moment later. She appears to be not even the shadow of the former resolute woman. Her early defiant attitude has turned into a series of inconsistent thoughts which culminate with her entirely unexpected and unexplainable judgment on her own sex in general, betraying every one of all her previous actions in the play as she internalizes the patriarchal views of women:

Troilus, farewell! one eye yet looks on thee,

But with my heart the other eye doth see.

Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us I find,

The error of our eye directs our mind.

What error leads must err; O then conclude,

Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude.

(5.2.107-11)

Cressida has therefore joined men in stereotyping and blaming women. She has literally taken upon herself the submissive role the male-dominated society has assigned her. These are Cressida's last words. She thus disappears from the text, leaving us with a very uneasy sensation that after all her struggles she acquiesces to the system that has

oppressed her throughout the whole story.

How to come to terms with such a change is a complex task. While traditional readings conclude that Cressida is inconsistent and ambiguous by nature, it is crucial to remember that she is not a character invented by Shakespeare. Even though she is a traditional figure, Shakespeare rewrites her story, however, and although he cannot change her fate, he certainly can--and does--open new perspectives on how we judge it. The question arises as to why Shakespeare seems finally to change his attitude about Cressida, and seems finally to join in the behavior embodied by the male characters in the play, because he also begins to appeal to misogyny, and he also exercises his authorial power as he slides to construct Cressida's language according to that misogyny. After all, one speculates what women could do at the moment they were allowed access to the same power that men have, as well as if they had the same mobility from the private to the public world that men do. These and many other thoughts like them haunted many men during a period in which the ruler was a woman and when socio-political changes seemed to begin to open new prospects for women. These doubts might also have passed through Shakespeare's mind, and might have contributed to his sudden change of sides. Hence, instead of characterizing Cressida as incoherent, we should first consider the inconsistency of Shakespeare's own attitudes.

It is useful to examine Shakespeare's apparent

inconsistency in the light of Dinshaw's differentiation between reading as and reading like a man. As she suggests, a male author reads as a man when he "position[s] himself as feminine," attempting "to envision fully the place of the Other in patriarchal society".<sup>36</sup> Reading like a man, on the contrary, informs a gender-biased attitude which posits women as the Other, which reifies assumptions and prejudices against women. By changing his approach toward Cressida, Shakespeare slides from reading as a man, when he considers her position in her world, to reading like a man, when his response toward her falls back into the traditional views of her as frail and inconstant.

At this point, one wonders if Shakespeare's intention from the very beginning is to set Cressida up. By now it is clear that she has slipped in rank: from being strong minded she has turned into a fallen woman who does not own any discourse of herself. When Cressida admits that "the error of [her] eye directs [her] mind" she is, to use Judith Fetterley's term, "immasculating" herself. As Fetterley points out, "women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny" (xx). Cressida reads herself exactly the way the men in the play do: as a whore. Had Cressida recognized the betrayal but maintained the idea that she had been compelled to do it by the very circumstances men had forced upon her, we could have come to

terms with it. But at the moment she declares that unfaithfulness is already in women's nature--"Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us I find,"--we wonder about the meaning of this. Even though it is clear that Shakespeare wants to give the impression that Cressida does herself in, it is a deceptive idea because, in fact, Shakespeare has more than schooled her. He imbues Cressida with a voice that she ends up using to betray herself, only to show her that she has no potential to subvert patriarchal authority, but rather to ratify and reinforce it, doing patriarchy a favor.

But Shakespeare reserves his most puzzling, yet nakedly oppressive, attitude in relation to Cressida for the end. In her last chance to say something to erase the bad impression her previous appearance has left, she is literally shut up:

PAN. Do you hear, my lord? Do you hear?

TRO. What now?

PAN. Here's a letter come from yond poor girl.

TRO. Let me read.

PAN. . . . What says she there?

TRO. Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart;

Th' effect doth operate another way. [*Tearing the letter*]<sup>37</sup> (5.3.97-110)

As is evident, Cressida is pointedly not allowed to speak for herself in the script imposed by Troilus, and consequently, by Shakespeare as well. As her letter is torn

up, her words are suppressed, a moment that should bring back to mind Troilus's similar earlier attitude when he kissed her to "stop [her] mouth."

The tearing of the letter together with the two previous kissing scenes constitute what I referred to earlier as "Cressida's schooling" by Shakespeare as they map her slide first into a male discourse, as noted above, and second, into imposed silence. Just as before Shakespeare has had Cressida set herself up; this time he wants us to believe that it is the men in the play rather than Shakespeare himself who silence Cressida. Shakespeare's attitude is just another version of what Susan Schibanoff calls "authorial apology."<sup>38</sup> Having created expectations of liberating Cressida and women in general from the conventional images connected to them, and of redefining women's status in society, expectations which Shakespeare does not fulfill by the end of the play, his apology lies in the fact that the characters are the ones to blame and not himself. We know that this is not true, however. Terry Eagleton suggests that "the criteria for defining what counts as [truth] are already in the hands of patriarchy."<sup>39</sup> As part of the patriarchal structure, Shakespeare has control over language. Therefore, he has total control over the script. Shakespeare shuts Cressida up illustrating what Gary Waller describes as "structures of power within the language . . . that create [women] as subjects, denying them any owned discourse" (246). Thus when women speak they

reify the very discourse of patriarchy just as Shakespeare has Cressida do.

It is impossible to determine which voice Cressida would have spoken with had she been allowed to do so, whether the formerly defiant or the latter acquiescent one. This, however, is not as important as the fact that she is forced into silence, and accordingly, confined in the realm of the private. And this is a most naked manifestation of an oppressive exercise of power. The Cressida who once claimed, and appropriated, "men's privilege of speaking first," is now deprived of the very action of speaking, even in a letter. No matter how much Shakespeare's portrayal of Cressida, on one level, seems to call into question accepted ideas about women, on another level, he reifies those same ideas at the moment he betrays toward her the same misogynistic responses shown by his male characters. But if before he seemed to be criticizing men and patriarchy, now he has joined them in categorizing Cressida as "a daughter of the game," modest, obedient, and silent, as it was assumed to become a woman within the world of the play and Shakespeare's as well.

Elizabeth Freund observes that Shakespeare

In no other play take[s] on the redoubtable task of refashioning, decomposing, vulgarizing, declassicizing precursor texts quite so canonical and powerful, and nowhere does he strip both his sources and his own text of their "original"

substance with such spirited iconoclasm.<sup>40</sup> (35)

Quoting Cressida, this is, "To say the truth, true and not true" (1.2.97). Even though Shakespeare gives flashes of a revisionary reading, at the end he reads the story as much like a man as the authors of previous versions, therefore keeping with the story's original substance.

As I have attempted to show in this study, Shakespeare handled the story of Troilus and Cressida at two quite different and even conflicting levels. By revealing how the patriarchal system fashions and manipulates women's image to fit its own interests, by showing how this same system traffics in women in order to establish and strengthen bonds among men, and by making Cressida resistant to all this, Shakespeare's iconoclasm is undeniable. By exposing the truth of the matter, that is, that men act as agents and women as objects, but empowering Cressida with a strong voice with which she appropriates and subverts the language of patriarchy, Shakespeare implicitly denounced the terms of what it has become: a discourse of oppression.

It is true that Shakespeare has given many of his female characters powerful speech, as can be seen in Kate, Rosalind, and Beatrice. Kate, for example, is straightforward in her very first words in *The Taming of the Shrew*: "I pray you, sir, is it your will / To make a stale of me amongst these mates?" (1.1.57-8). As Karen Newman observes, "Kate's linguistic protest is against the role in patriarchal culture to which women are assigned, that of

wife and object of exchange in the circulation of male desire" (39-40), a condition we saw Cressida fighting against as well. However, it is one thing to call the institution of patriarchy and the mechanisms of power into question by using a completely fictitious character such as Kate; it is a very different act to try to do the same thing using a traditional symbol of female frailty, such as Cressida.<sup>41</sup>

On the one hand, the use of Cressida suggests thus that hers is in reality a collective voice echoing all the voices of her previous representations by other authors, redefining the terms under which her story and women's story as a whole must be read. In addition, by having Cressida invert the agent/object roles within social relationships, therefore having her move from the realm of the private world to the marketplace, Shakespeare informed his challenge to the conventional Renaissance prospects for women. On another hand, however, who Shakespeare uses to challenge patriarchy is not relevant because, no matter how powerful, witty, courageous, and independent minded he portrays his female characters, they are all brought to conform to the subservient role the patriarchal structure ascribes them. *Troilus and Cressida* seems to be just a more sophisticated version of the same old thing. Shakespeare has given Cressida apparent new colors only to have her do a better service to patriarchy. Because Cressida had been portrayed as such a strong minded woman, when Shakespeare finally has

her articulate the very oppressive discourse she had been fighting against, he shows clearly in whose hands power is. Just as he had Pandarus, Troilus, and Calchas do, he also turns away from her, betraying his own fears in sight of the political changes he seemed to propose, confining her to the very roles he seemed to challenge. At this level, his iconoclasm is lost, and from a potentially feminist and liberatory reading, his text has turned into one more example in the tradition of antifeminist, but pro-patriarchy, literature that permeated the Renaissance.

From all this there remains something to be said. There is more complexity in Cressida than the authors who have represented her and most of the critics who have analyzed her conceive of. Women are far beyond the simplistic definition of either/or, Mary or Eve. Cressida embodies complexity, and for this reason she has been the target of many gendered readings, by men and women, who rather than disputing patriarchal interpretive systems, comply with it out of their own biases. These "immasculated" readers, to use Fetterley's term again, contribute to legitimate a tedious monolithic approach of literature, which reinforces female subjectivity. And, still quoting Fetterley, the political function of literature is erased "When only one reality is encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted and when that limited vision endlessly insists on its comprehensiveness" (xi). As readers, male and female, we have to resist the "constraints

and resistances" to a liberatory mode of reading.<sup>42</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, "Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Contexts of *The Tempest*," *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985) 193-4.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth S. Lenz et al. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1980) 4. Cressida perhaps best exemplifies this change of perspective. With a name traditionally known as a synonym for frailty, under the light of feminist approaches which take into consideration the world in which she lives, Cressida was exonerated from many of the images with which commentators have invested her. Even a brief survey of criticism of Cressida in the past two centuries reveals a radical shift. Criticism depicting Cressida as a whore pervades the nineteenth century and a good part of the twentieth. In the nineteenth century, W. C. Hazlitt, for instance, sees Cressida as a "giddy girl, an unpractised jilt" (as cited by Priscilla Martin in *Troilus and Cressida: A Casebook* [London: Macmillan, 1976] 36). Coleridge contrasts the "profound affection represented in *Troilus*, alone worthy the name of love" with the "vehement passion" that Cressida displays (the emphasis is his), positing that the roots of this passion are in "warmth of temperament," that is, in her sexuality (also cited by Martin, 41). The twentieth century still presents criticism following the same line. E. M. W. Tillyard calls Cressida "shallow, hard,

and lascivious" in *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1949) 90. To L. C. Knights, she is "the wanton of tradition" (see "Troilus and Cressida Again," in *Scrutiny* 18 1951-52) 154. A. P. Rossiter describes her as "a chatty, vulgar little piece," in *Angel With Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures* (London: Longman, 1961) 102. The advent of feminist theory and criticism, then, changes the range of perspectives. Jan Kott is one of the first critics to draw attention to Cressida's position as a woman destitute of protection in the middle of a war, in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York: Chatto and Windus, 1969). R. A. Yoder also interprets Cressida in relation to her world, where she is "marketed and sold" (21), in "Sons and Daughters of the Game: An Essay on Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*," in *Shakespeare Survey* 25 (1972): 11-25. Gayle Greene comments on Cressida under the light of Simone de Beauvoir's statement that a woman is produced by civilization as a whole, relying on the concept of a cultural construct of gender affected by patriarchal biases, in her article "Shakespeare's Cressida: 'A kind of self'," in *The Woman's Part* (cited above) 133-49. Deborah A. Hooker explores the idea of Cressida's behavior as a defensive strategy in her article "Coming to Cressida through Irigaray," in *English Literary Renaissance* 20 (1989): 899-932.

<sup>3</sup> For extensive treatment of the ideals of chastity, silence, modesty, and obedience, images of and attitudes

toward women see Ruth Kelso's *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1956); Ian Maclean's *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980); and Suzanne W. Hull's *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> For other readings in line with Dusinberre's view, see Judith Cook's *Women in Shakespeare* (London: Harrap, 1980) and Marilyn French's *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (London: Summit, 1981). For readings more in line with Jardine's, see *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn R. S. Lenz et al. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1980) and Kathleen Mcluskie's essay "The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: King Lear and Measure for Measure," in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Allan Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Alice Clark's *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Dutton, 1919), and Mary Beard's *Woman as a Force in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), cited by Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987) 21.

<sup>6</sup> Various recent studies have suggested that women actually had more mobility during the Middle Ages than during the Renaissance. See Joan Kelly's essay "Did Women Have a

Renaissance?," in Kelly's *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 19-50. Kelly argues that the division of life into private and public spheres, which occurred with the formation of the secular nation-state in the Renaissance, restricted female activity to the domestic realm. Even though her views have been debated by many scholars, the fact that Renaissance women did not have the right to own property, and most of them were financially dependent on fathers, husbands, or brothers, reinforces Kelly's point of view. Camden's "new kind of woman," then, is a categorization which does not truly reflect the complexity of questions concerning women in the Renaissance.

<sup>7</sup> The emergence of feminist studies during the 1970's and 80's allowed the recognition that at least a few women were playing important roles in the political, social, religious, and economic realms during the Renaissance as patrons, translators, and writers. See Mary Beth Rose's *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986) and Margaret L. King's *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> With regard to the references I make throughout to Renaissance antifeminist literature I am profoundly indebted to my thesis director, Dr. Gail Cohee, who allowed me to use material from her dissertation on the construction of gender in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

<sup>9</sup> The fashioning of identity was not restricted to women

alone. The ideal gentleman was a focus of attention as well. However, all the literature of conduct displayed a patriarchal discourse which maintained women's image within the current cultural ideologies.

<sup>10</sup> See Klein's *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992) 98. Even though Vives' *Instruction* first appeared in English in 1528, it was widely influential during the entire Renaissance period. Klein points out that "after its initial publication in English, there followed eight other English editions" by the end of the sixteenth century (98). This means that *The Instruction* was still read during the time Shakespeare was writing his plays. The ideas it advocated were obviously still present in the culture.

<sup>11</sup> Even works like Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women* and Edmund Tilney's *The Flower of Friendship*, which are not as harsh toward women, do not, as Gail Cohee points out, present "any real threat to the patriarchal status quo" (34).

<sup>12</sup> See Stallybrass' essay "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy Vickers (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) 127. Actually, women's genitalia and mouths were socially encoded as equivalents; in a surprising number of Renaissance texts women are depicted as a

voracious and thirsty mouth. Given the connection between bodily orifices, it is hardly surprising that silence was recommended as a means of insuring sexual reputation.

Thomas Becon, for instance, affirmed that "there is nothing that doth so commend, avaunce, set forthe, adourne, decke, trim, and garnish a maid, as silence" (cited by Kelso, 50).

<sup>13</sup> There are innumerable sources one can draw on to perform this task. I find Piero Boitani's *The European Tragedy of Troilus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) particularly helpful.

Boitani traces the development of the myth from antiquity to the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the centuries from the seventeenth to our own. Although the title gives the impression that the focus is solely on Troilus, Cressida is given major treatment as well.

<sup>14</sup> For a thorough and very useful discussion on this subject see the first chapter of Carolyn Dinshaw's *Chaucer's Sexual Politics* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> I am quoting from *The Testament of Cresseid* as edited by R. K. Gordon, in *The Story of Troilus* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1978) 365.

<sup>16</sup> William Shakespeare, "The History of Troilus and Cressida," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974) 448-94. All further textual quotations are taken from this edition, hereafter cited by act, scene, and line number.

<sup>17</sup> The Prologue, as a matter of fact, sets up a series of juxtapositions that recur throughout the play. Notice, for

instance, the elaborate and elevated discourse of the Greek generals in contrast with Thersites's debased and infected language.

<sup>18</sup> Cited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 3.

<sup>19</sup> Gayle Rubin's essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," appeared in 1975 and has become very influential in many subsequent studies of gender as a socio-cultural construct. Rubin coined the term "sex/gender system" with reference to "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (159). See her essay in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975) 157-210.

<sup>20</sup> Notice, for instance, the scene when the Trojan council discusses whether to surrender Helen or not (2.2). Troilus refers to Helen as "a theme of honor and renown" (2.2.199), "of a promis'd glory / As smiles upon the forehead of this action / For the wide world's revenue" (2.2.204-6). In other words, Helen is just a means for men to show off and measure their manhood among themselves. Her abduction by the Trojans provides the opportunity for the war which is, according to Carol Cook, "essentially a masculine ritual to establish difference . . . between those who possess and those who lack Helen, . . . victor and vanquished" (39).

<sup>21</sup> Even though Cressida is traded for Antenor rather than for another woman, their equivalence lies in the fact that both of them are betrayers. Antenor later would betray the Trojans and allow the fall of Troy.

<sup>22</sup> *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon, 1969) 115; quoted in Rubin, "Traffic in Women," 174.

<sup>23</sup> Jan Kott was the first critic to point out the mercantilism that pervades *Troilus and Cressida* (in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, cited above). Many followed him and, nowadays, this view is indisputable.

<sup>24</sup> The blazon is widely found in Renaissance literature as part of a rhetorical disciplining of the female body through its fragmentation (see Newman's *Fashioning Femininity* and Stallybrass' "Patriarchal Territories," cited above).

"Anatomization," Newman points out, "was a strategy for managing femininity and controlling its uses" (10).

<sup>25</sup> See Jonathan Dollimore, "Subjectivity, Sexuality, and Transgression: The Jacobean Connection," *Renaissance Drama* 17 (1986): 53-81.

<sup>26</sup> This does not mean that Cressida is positing the phallus as sexual signifier. On the contrary, as will become clear in the sequence of the scene, she refuses to affirm it exactly because it is a representative of the law of the father.

<sup>27</sup> See Deborah A. Hooker's "Coming to Cressida through Irigaray," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 (1989) 899-932. Hooker is one of the very few commentators who have

discussed Cressida's language, and one with whom I share many views. But rather than concentrating on the cultural context involving the text, Hooker is more interested in the mechanisms of language itself as a male-centered construct which generates a "phallogocentric bias" at work in the play.

<sup>28</sup> Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* was one of the most influential works in the Renaissance within the realm of fashioning male identity. Castiglione's views on the perfect courtier spread throughout Europe and echoed in the works of many writers. Spenser, for instance, wrote that

Above all things it importeth a courtier to be graceful and lovely in countenance and behavior; fine and discreet in discourse and entertainment; skilful and expert in letters and arms; active and gallant in every courtly exercise; nimble and speedy of body and mind; resolute, industrious and valorous in action; as profound and invincible in action as is possible; and withal ever generously bold, wittily pleasant, and full of life in his sayings and doings (as cited by John Hollander and Frank Kermode, 85).

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault's suggestion that discourse is produced by the mechanisms of power is enlightening here. Since patriarchy constitutes the dominant realm in the world of the play, the discursive practices serve it. Excluded from that realm, the only way Cressida has to participate in it

is by opposing its forms through her own voice. She is therefore moving from the private to the public sphere. See Foucault's *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

<sup>30</sup> It is important to keep in mind that Shakespeare is going to betray the same kind of attitude toward Cressida. I will discuss this topic below.

<sup>31</sup> See the entry for "ward" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 895-9.

<sup>32</sup> See Mann's essay "Shakespeare and Chaucer: 'What is Criseyde Worth?'" *The Cambridge Quarterly* 2 (1989) 122.

<sup>33</sup> Although the act of kissing is not a negative gesture, here it seems clear that Troilus's intention tends to be one of shutting Cressida up. Furthermore, in sight of the cultural linkage of prolixity and wantonness, by kissing her, Troilus is re-affirming the validity of this idea for him. So, in his mind, he is giving her exactly what she is asking for. Either way, whether he tries to silence her or interprets her in a misogynistic way, the result is the same: he still considers her a commodity under his control.

<sup>34</sup> The kissing scene is usually read as one more proof of Cressida's wantonness. Even commentators who are sympathetic with Cressida fail to see her powerlessness in sight of her position as the only woman at the mercy of at least seven men in enemy territory, who do not even bother to ask her whether she wants to be kissed or not, completely disregarding her feelings. Carolyn Asp, for instance, writes that "Once [Cressida] reaches the camp of the 'merry

Greeks' her clever wit and wanton spirits gain the ascendancy, and she engages in a round of raillery and kissing with the Greek generals," in "Th' Expense of Spirit in a Waste of Shame," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 4 (1971) 356. Gayle Greene points out that Cressida "allow[s] herself to be 'kiss'd in general'" (cited above, 143). Janet Adelman refers to the same moment as the scene "when [Cressida] kisses the Greek camp generally," in "'This Is and Is Not Cressida': The Characterization of Cressida." *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. ed. Shirley Nelson Garner et al. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 127. These three commentators refer to Cressida as if she were kissing the generals instead of being kissed by them, almost justifying the generals' view of Cressida as "The Trojans' trumpet" (4.5.63), with a pun on "strumpet."

<sup>35</sup> The dialogue between Cressida and Diomedes is eavesdropped on by Troilus, Ulysses, and Thersites, who frequently comment on what they see, which turns this into a problematic scene as the constant interruptions leave a sense that something from the main dialogue is being missed. I am reproducing only part of the dialogue here, omitting the eavesdropping comments indicated by ellipses.

<sup>36</sup> See Dinshaw's *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, cited above, 10. Dinshaw analyzes E. Talbot Donaldson's and D. W. Robertson's readings of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in order to show how each critic performs a "masculine" reading of the poem. Both turn away from the feminine as they establish a textual

meaning which articulates patriarchal discourse.

<sup>37</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> See Schibanoff's article "Taking the Gold Out of Egypt: The Art of Reading as a Woman," in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, ed. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986) 84.

<sup>39</sup> Cited by Mihoko Suzuki in *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989) 233.

<sup>40</sup> For similar views see Mihoko Suzuki's "'Truth Tired with Iteration': Myth and Fiction in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*," *Philological Quarterly* 2 (1987): 153-74, and Linda Charnes's "'So Unsecret to Ourselves': Notorious Identity and the Material Subject in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 4 (1989): 413-40.

<sup>41</sup> I use Kate to build this comparison. But the same task could be done by using other unruly women characters which are fairly typical in Shakespeare's plays, such as Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, cited in the epigraph that opens this study.

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"THAT WE WOMEN HAD MEN'S PRIVILEGE  
OF SPEAKING FIRST": SHAKESPEARE'S  
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