A Socio-Sexual Topography of Desire in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

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Abstract: *This paper delves into the intricate maze of Shakespearean modes of sociability using* Troilus and Cressida *as a case study to better identify and explore alternative relationships and interactions located at the heart of functionally impossible pairings of characters in the play. The aim of the article is to prove that analogue character doubles built on mutual fallacies do not disengage from the extant social realm, but rather cancel their impossibilities out in an attempt to create and explore novel relational modes and unconventional social realms. Such humane modes of sociability undoubtedly overlap the ones already in place, therefore challenging the structures of the dominant social hierarchies that govern not only Greek and Trojan societies, but also the Elizabethan social norms and regulations. Contrary to the expected outcomes, character doubles such as Troilus and Cressida and Achilles and Hector, to name a few, overcome the social hindrances by means of deliberately converting the ingrained, opposite social components into sexual heterogeneities, asocial patterns without undergoing mutual destruction in the process, thus opening unorthodox paths towards new manners of expression and interaction that subvert the dominant heteronormative discourses of early modern England.*

Keywords: *social world, sexual expression, homosociality, desire, relationships*

It is neither an early, nor a modern secret to any of Shakespeare's readers that the Stratford-upon-Avon bard often employed playwriting as a witty means of bringing sexual expression into the social spotlight. The knowledge he sought to attain by writing and staging various suchlike plays had a multifocal nature; it did not simply entail the notion of sexual-*qua*-bodily denominator. Seeing that it was also a matter of the social dynamics of male, female, cross-gender or even same-gender relationships, the Shakespearean coinage of sexual expression was not based exclusively on either the implied heterosexual, or the alluding homosexual consummation of the mind's desire. More often than not and especially in *Troilus and Cressida*, such balanced socio-sexual relationships are expressed through and mirrored by the female characters in the play, thus adding to Shakespeare's main purpose of establishing the sexual dimension of *ars erotica* as a public pillar of (anti)social conventions.

Given that my argument will employ the uselessness of heteronormative and homosocial bonds as the main causes for the conversion of the social component into the sexual one throughout Shakespeare's play, it

is worth mentioning that any future mention of the sexual relies heavily on Michel Foucault's view of sexuality in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, as an intimate personality, something that is assimilated as a truth belonging to oneself alone, as part of a heterogeneity of sexualities, something that is spared from the constant surveillance of the social component (Foucault 36–39). As such, the sexual discourse in the play is established as a temporary oscillation between opposite modes of experiencing and perceiving the (homo)social relationships and the social universes they have forcefully built.

Within the larger context of the cruel Trojan War, while social interactions follow a well-known and all-seeing rank matrix, sexual connections are born out of the undivided and inhuman ashes of the social battlefield. As a result, the feeling of social unattainability, along with those of anxiety and honour enable and fuel the powerful sexual interlinks between the main characters. This shift proves to be more than a one-way circuit breaker, an oscillation between the social and sexual realms in the play, and it is – ultimately – a reversible connection, hence the justification of the hyphenated term in the title of the present article. As stated earlier, the Shakespearean socio-sexual scheme in the play is solely based on rank and status, and therefore easily applicable to male, female, cross-gender and same-gender relationships. Yet, this applies differently and takes distinct effects for each of the aforementioned gender categories. For instance, the fact that Cressida relies only on her beauty and charm amounts to the heteronormative and patriarchal background she is tied to, not to mention that this not so unusual fact almost disables part of the homosocial bonds in the play.

Moreover, once the reader is served the immutable prioritization of heterosexual bonds over the homosocial ones, and once the procreant logic kicks in, Troilus unwillingly falls into the category of the feminine and no longer considers his beloved Cressida an asset of men-exchange, but rather a first-hand sexual device. However, since homosocial links are the suns and stars of the patriarchal galaxy, deleting their social outcomes would be considered pure anarchy, not to mention that what validates Troilus and Cressida's sexual interaction is – paradoxically – its short inexistence in the social sphere. If Shakespeare's portrayal of sexuality is indeed undergirded by a fundamental oscillation and reversal of the approaches and criteria which bring people together, just so that it could drive them further apart into a narcissistic and disillusioned climax, then the animosity between the social and the sexual realms is no longer pending our approval. As such, the degree of functionality is non-existent in Troilus and Cressida's relationship and the characters blindly seek and experience the inconsistency and duality that models their social interactions.

What's more, both characters' attempts at accessing interactions that do not rely on joint and practical connections are not only the makeshift, but the

constant result of their socio-sexual interaction. Even though homosociality is slightly avenged when the prisoner trade occurs and Cressida ends up in the Greek camp, as a lesser avatar of Helen, the females in question function as merging social patterns and thus trigger the sexuality which challenges the homosocial logic of the play. Following the same logic, part of the manner in which Aeneas greets Diomedes, i.e. "By Venus' hand" (4.1.24), only mirrors the blueprint of Troilus and Cressida's relationship, in that it masquerades the clash between rank and merit, between modern, humane interactions and medieval, aristocratic worldviews. This is exactly why Troilus eventually associates the consummation of the long-awaited intimacy with a mined battlefield, full of dangers and hidden traps: "That I shall lose distinction in my joys, /As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps/ The enemy flying" (3.2.25–27). Clearly, the long-desired intercourse with Cressida becomes the thing he fears most, as the potential roughness implied by sexual gratification might overshadow Trojan nobility.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare's mediation of socio-sexual interactions in the play is created in a way that overcomes the attachment and closeness shared by the "couple," since all rules which stand within the social realm are bended and ignored by the influence emanating from the sexual one. Pastoral logic aside, it is pretty obvious that Troilus' "distinction" is only a hollow façade for his feral self, as he often self-associates with simplicity and lack of refinement, claiming that Cressida is the better half who possesses more polish and elegance. While the self-disavowal of rank and status is meant to radically imbue the relationship between the lovers with meaning, it is not without fault, if Troilus is "weaker than a woman's tear" (1.1.9) and thus downgrades women, Cressida in particular, just because he is unable to process fear and desire. The fact that Troilus constantly perceives Cressida's humane and refined behaviour as unreachable only amounts to his socio-emotional blockage, as neither rank, nor learning have anything to do with it.

The socio-sexual impossibility of their relationship is conferred by the lack of a common meeting plane, given that status and kindness are both ruled out; Troilus' alienation from Cressida is attributed entirely to her humane behaviour. Placing her under the scrutinizing lens which belongs to supposedly isolated elite accessible only by birth causes him to affectively translate the social discrepancies into sexual gratification. Their relationship can be truly accessed by Troilus only when voided of social interactions and anxiously instilled with his duality-generated fear that is inevitably associated with Cressida's person. Something as innocent as a basic look thrown in his beloved's direction can (re)awaken contradictory feelings of inferiority:

> Even such a passion doth embrace my bosom.
> My heart beats thicker than a feverous pulse,

> And all my powers do their bestowing lose,
> Like vassalage at unawares encount'ring
> The eye of majesty.
> (3.2. 33–37)

So as to create the emotional illusion of love, Troilus positions Cressida above his social status; he acts as her inferior loyal servant and symbolically adorns his socio-sexual fears with some of the most exquisite early modern jewels, i.e. humane behaviour, elegance and gentleness, therefore separating himself from the high, courtly standards that his beloved unwillingly embodies. By invalidating Cressida, Troilus (in)voluntarily overrules all types of practicable social interactions, including the war-born homosocial connections with male characters through the token of female bodies. The sexual realm becomes accessible to Troilus only by the dramatic downgrading of his nobility, in exchange for the hasty upgrading of Cressida's inferior status, thus causing the male counterpart to give up not just plain war, but also the complicitous homosociality, and denounce Helen who "needs be fair" (1.1. 89). While man to man rivalry for a woman's attention and love is definitely what awakens the male ego's desire, Shakespeare offers a mocking display of the fact that Troilus does involve Cressida in the male-dominated homosocial equation; Pandarus' utilitarian view of women is the supreme indicator and the nemesis of the Trojan prince.

A believer and a strong supporter of homosocial bonds, Pandarus establishes a connection with Troilus *via* Cressida whom the early modern degenerate uncle uses as leverage at the allegorical poker table of the (homo)social realm. When the moment arises and Cressida must be "flipped over" to the Greeks, Pandarus unilaterally validates the homosocial nature of his interaction to the Trojan prince and chastises his niece, wishing that she had "ne'er been born!" (4.2.87), so that Troilus would be spared of any love induced suffering. As a prefiguration of Pandarus' abusive words, the dysfunctional character of the Pandarus-Troilus homosocial relationship is announced way earlier in the play when the prince observes that his attentions to Pandarus must meet the same high standards as those he directs towards Cressida, that the uncle is "as tetchy to be wooed to woo" as Cressida is "stubborn-chaste against all suit" (1.1.95–96). Pandarus' epilogue at the end of the play turns the good old uncle into an avatar of his whoring niece, revealing that the nature of the homosocial connection and interactions between him and Troilus is structurally – and not tangentially – socio-sexual. Similarly, Troilus uses the process of *courting* Pandarus as a way out from engaging in the real war, that of the solid homosocial competition which involves other, more eligible male figures, without realizing that he only fuels his own fears and low self-esteem.

In opposition with Troilus' socio-sexual fears, Hector considers the homosocial rivalry on account of Cressida worth his precious time and effort, and even publicly upholds the view that Greek men ought to protect the integrity of their lovers as if their own dignity. Not only does it not help the Greek soldiers that women are the alluring epitomes of charm and manners, but this actually means that Hector would be privileged through the course of such an essentially homosocial "challenge" (1.3.272), therefore achieving a higher symbolic status among the rest of the "ceremonious courtiers" (1.3.234). The challenge posed by Hector is just another version of war, a more refined one, where social interactions are not governed by rank and status, but by the most difficult and subtle art, that of conspicuous, witty and refined conversations which Troilus refuses to engage in. The bait that lures the fearful Trojan prince back into the homosocial battlefield is not merely Cressida's shift to the Greek camp, but also the self-awareness concerning his own lack of elegance in comparison to the Greek youth who are so "full of quality" (4.4.75) and skilled when it comes to refined behaviour and courtship.

Without a doubt, Troilus notices that his beloved is more likely to be won over by some Greek warrior than by him, as she naturally possesses an abundance of the same humane and civilised qualities as the "Grecian youths" (4.4.75) do. In René Girard's words in "The Politics of Desire in *Troilus and Cressida*," Troilus' acts and words only confirm "the mimetic nature of his relationship to the Greeks" as "he certainly wants to acquire the talents and achievements that he admires in them" (198). In order to be able to rid himself of anxiety, fears and envy, the Trojan prince should educate himself to acquire the social skills and wittiness of the Greek, a Sisyphean task in such a short time. The undertone of the play is actually its focal point, namely Troilus' sexual anxiety and fear which is only the consequence of his social inability to properly and humanely pursue Cressida. Troilus' lack of a functional connection with his beloved is also a part of this cyclic merry-go-round, straining Troilus to its limits so as to be capable of guarding the sexual connection between him and Cressida. For this to happen, he must deny the previously mentioned education that could cause him to continuously relegate the humane attributes which constitute dividing lines between him and Cressida, as well as between him and the Greek enemy.

Troilus' apparent refusal of the civility skills that Cressida and the Greeks successfully master without even trying is a way to keep intact the sexual relationship between him and Cressida, no matter her whereabouts. Technically speaking, if there is no one to compete against, there is no competition taking place, despite the Greeks being in possession of the woman he loves. This is why I believe that Troilus' love for Cressida is merely an exacerbation of his oscillating feelings concerning the Greeks, a walking facsimile of his violent envy, hatred and – dare I say – love. At this point,

Cressida is the one who upholds the homosocial view against the perpetual narrowing of the sexual realm, since her insignificant position in a men's world renders her unable to access the type of relationship that should actually occur between men and women, a connection on which social gains leave no stain. Paradoxically, Cressida's social validation and standing does not depend on the breaking of the deeply-rooted homosocial world view, but on how skilfully and delicately she ingratiates herself to the powerful and protective male figures in the play, thus submitting to the patriarchal worldviews that govern her surroundings.

Similarly to Troilus' perception of desire-*qua*-danger, Cressida also regards their sexual relationship as a threat to her social realm and she is not willing to assume it and risk what little standing and majesty she still has. The understanding is that women's only option is to uphold a pedestal position, an unreachable one, where changing male thoughts cannot accede and interfere with the social realm. By wishing that she were a man who "had men's privilege / Of speaking first" (3.2.125–126), Cressida not only claims that men have more legitimacy when it comes to wooing, but she also suggests that men can risk more than women and may succumb to the temptation of discrediting women's social standing and words. Thus, gender is the main reason behind Cressida's failed attempts at not giving in to an innate flux of feelings which Troilus' also experiences and fails to resist. The sexual encounters smooth Cressida's path towards the seducer avatar she eagerly claims once she arrives in the Greek camp, having no trouble to playfully and skilfully accommodate the desires of the Greek's *elite*.

While this facet does not hold for long if we are to closely examine Ulysses' reaction to her attitude, Cressida might just be toying with her available chances, a most pragmatic decision which leaves her with almost no arguments when faced with the accusation of unfaithfulness, despite the closely guarded lack of alteration concerning her feelings for Troilus. This is what sparks Cressida's inner fight when she asks Diomedes for a favour, in spite of her actually acquiescing instead of resorting to self-harm. This highest bidder policy is no reason for womanly pride and self-esteem, especially in the context of having mentioned to Diomedes that the vow he elicited from her was also freely offered by her to someone "that loved me better than you will" (5.2.96). Cressida eventually has to choose the one who can provide her with protection in the Greek camp over the one for whom she has genuine feelings and vice-versa, being subjugated into the homosocial logic instead of willingly engaging with the non-existent, erotic potential. Her decision functions as an incentive for the Trojan price, dragging him into the homosocial battleground that he so gracefully avoided due to his affection and desire for Cressida.

Troilus secretly being witness to Cressida's unfaithful behaviour and his ambitions of revenge towards Diomedes is nothing more than an energetic

reversed reflection of the actual love triangle in the play, i.e. Helen-Menelaus-Paris. Moreover, the scene which takes place between Troilus and Hector confirms the recently acquired energetic nature which now casts Troilus into the homosocial game that he so decidedly refused to engage in, until the need for "venomed vengeance" (5.3.47) to ride upon his sword actually makes its presence felt. While, at the play's debut, Troilus had no wish for bloodshed and fighting, he now turned into a strong supporter of war, and even suggested that his brother should disregard the honour code which is no longer reflecting the homosocial reality of the *battle*. Ulysses' remarks that "With such a careless force and forceless care / As if that luck, in very spite of cunning, / Bade him win all" (5.5.40–42) are proof enough of the Trojan's anger which might easily override his Greek cunning and wit, and there is no mistaking the fact that both men are equally aware of the socio-sexual desires which fuel Troilus' crusade.

The battle illustrated in the fifth act of the play is the best illustrator of Troilus as an exponent of the actual war going on, as Ulysses' words also show a mutual influencing report and a never-ending oscillation between the (homo)social and the sexual realms. He observes that the Trojan prince's aggressive involvement in the war may be more bark and less bite, an act of self-chastising where the hatred and the sexual are willingly indistinguishable as they both fuel his rash actions. This state does not go entirely unnoticed by Troilus who claims that his fury and bravery are of a somewhat reckless nature, yet – upon Hector's passing – none other than Troilus refuses to identify with his brother and consider himself a rightful ruler over their people. In fact, the abovementioned socio-sexual fuel works so well that Troilus ends up identifying with a witty bringer of the apocalypse: "Sit, gods, upon your thrones and smite at Troy! / I say once: let your brief plagues be mercy, / And linger not our sure destruction on" (5.11.7–9), thus suggesting that there is a very thin line between being a hero and being dead.

The homosocial battlefield engrosses the Trojan prince's frustrated, sexualized behaviour with open arms, becoming a place where he can freely look for and enact a vendetta on account of his beloved's unfaithfulness without being held accountable for his violent actions. In this context, I wonder whether the Trojan War as illustrated throughout the fifth act in the play does indeed nurture and support homosocial bonds as the best version of socio-sexual interactions available. Judging by Achilles' support of the war, in spite of his firm denial of getting involved in the actual battle, I argue that the very denial in question functions as a pathway towards the exclusively sexualized manner of interaction. Then, it is no surprise that this way of engaging with the social realm is built upon the same model of paradox between the bygone and the modern, poles which define the relationship and subsequent interactions between the infamous couple of Troilus and Cressida. Even though Achilles' case proves to be a mirror in itself, the said interactions take place between

same gender representatives and not between opposite genders, as it so happens with the trouble couple in the play.

There is no doubt that such an inviting devaluation of socio-sexual connections is a clear example of a non-standard mode of social interactions, one that entirely uproots the patriarchal, homosocial habits and rules. Through one of the most famous Shakespearean golden trios, i.e. Troilus-Hector-Achilles, the playwright realistically manages to awaken in our imagination – albeit for a short time – the picture of a *clean* war, one that does not find validation in socio-sexual realm's reversal or its perpetuation, but rather in the erection of a whole new social under structure. Similarly to Troilus' anxiety, Achilles' ego is what results from the endless oscillation between multiple social realms, as the latter remains oblivious to its social surroundings and automatically voids the social universe he inhabits of the more or less obvious possibility that implies identifying the heroic stance and reflecting on the implications of its virtue. Thus, according to Ulysses' perspicacious observations, to Achilles status and rank are not connected to homosocial challenges and confrontations, since "no man is the lord of anything, / Though in him and of him there be much consisting, / Till he communicate his parts to others; Nor doth he of himself know them for aught" (3.3.116–19). Such words are a written demonstration of how little Achilles is concerned with bestowing praises and glorification upon his fellow comrades, proving that the superfluous, homosocial order is not the only available option, in any kind of war there might be.

Shakespeare's portrayal of the sexual realm within the play is built to be mutually determinative with that of pride, an encompassing architecture which defines Troilus and Cressida's sexual relationship as interchangeable with their failure in the social realm, or even the inclusion of the first structure by the second one. The sexual nature of pride as part of the social realm springs from precisely the impossible character and demands of the realm in question, as Shakespeare regards ego as a form of aporia, as something that renders one in a state of structural impossibility and uselessness. Moreover, while anxiety functions as a destabilizing agent of the social realm in the play, ego claims that the resulting climate of more or less real insecurity and self-imagined social anarchy are to be subjected to the only available blueprint, namely same-gender interactions. One such example is Achilles whose ego marks all his interactions with other characters in the play, adorning them with a sexual contour, therefore paving the way for his ego to reach out and define his interlocutors as well, as the oscillation between the social and the sexual realms is gradually replaced by the strategic overtaking of one by the other, i.e. the merging of the sexual into the social. Such vanquishing or – if you wish – finite fusion between the two figurative power poles of the play only replicates, in turn, Achilles' behaviour, causing other characters who have had interactions

with him to grow such an ego and, consequently, to enable the sexualized nature of their social interactions with yet other characters.

As the reservoir of examples in the play is of a somewhat bottomless nature, I will retort to one of the many observations made by Ulysses, only to reveal exactly how such a replication of the ego is at work from the beginning of Act 1, ever since the non-social pairings that the playwright presents us with constitute the archaic version of modern-day gangs. Now, while gangs of Greek soldiers who keep to their tents and feel nothing but "envious fever / Of pale and bloodless emulation" (1.3.133–134) may be perfectly adaptable to present-day political ideals, such an image inspired by Achilles' behaviour does not fit the general war-themed first layer of Shakespearean décor. Not only is the ego contagion within the Greek camp unstoppable, but it also threatens the victorious nature of the war going on in the background, extending the sexual realm's non-relational borders, just as in the case of Troilus and Cressida where the asocial component is the secret ingredient of their relationship. Thus, I would be justified in assuming that the sexual pattern enabled by Achilles' ego does not target Greek authority, but instead converts it into fuel for upgrading the asocial nature of the social realm, as rightfully observed by Ulysses in his complaints that "The great Achilles, whom opinion crowns / The sinew and the forehand of our host, / Having his ear full of his airy fame, / Grows dainty of his worth in his tent / Lies mocking our designs" (1.3.142–146).

At this point, the Elizabethan influence over the play is obvious, as the mental picture of Achilles "on his pressed bed lolling" who "From his deep chest laughs out a loud applause" and "Cries 'Excellent! Tis Agamemnon just. / Now play me Nestor…'" (1.3.162–165) is similar to that of the rambunctious Elizabethan court whose legitimation is directly proportional with its degree of availability to the population whose only purpose in life is to adulate a non-existent mystery and make empty suppositions related to it. The relationship between the court and its subjects is best illustrated – once again – by Ulysses' wise words in the third act, as he states that "There is a mystery – with whom relation / Durst never meddle – in the soul of state, / Which hath an operation more divine / Than breath or pen can give expressure to" (3.3. 203–206). Shakespeare's more or less explicit evocation of the divine-right monarchy whose path was sketched during the Elizabethan era and built throughout James' rule is a multifaceted mirror of the play's specifically intended, loose threads of disengagement with the public social realm, that is of Troilus' lack of words upon meeting his beloved Cressida and even of Achilles' bedroom scene, though admittedly as a manner of using the topos to oppose the so-called representations of the basic populace to the elites by means of the theatre-*qua*-pleasure, i.e. Patroclus' bad acting skills.

The relationship between Achilles and Patroclus does not target the state, but merely employs it as a metaphorical weapon, not to mention that all present in the Greek camp are aware of the undeniably sexual nature of the purposely asocial relationship going on between the "masculine whore" and "Achilles' mal varlet" (5.1.15–17). Paradoxically, Thersites' description refers to nothing else but the practice of sodomy, one that is subtly linked to the antisocial nature of none other than Thersites himself, considering that the mocking remarks he emits are characteristic of Renaissance's looking down on suchlike ungodly practices, all the while seeking to reinforce the heteronormative discourses, practices and hierarchies across all society. As such, Thersites regards the interaction between Achilles and Patroclus as an abomination of the normative body discourse and politic, such a practice only attesting the hard blow to the pillars on which the Greek social realm was erected. Apart from Thersites' accusations of destroying all of Greek society directed at the homoerotic affair, Nestor's use of Patroclus' passing as a means of drawing Achilles back into the homosocial battlefield by instructing soldiers to "bear Patroclus' body to Achilles" (2.2.17) is another attempt of closely guarding the sexual order, not dissimilar to Thersites'.

Undeniably, both of the discussed attempts refer to a relationship that emerges from a dysfunctional social realm that is dismissed, only to be replaced with one that bears the possibility of much more profuse social outcomes, be they positive or negative in essence. Clearly, the Greeks are too preoccupied with Ulysses' wish to eradicate Achilles' ego and spare no tactics to reach their goal, including the choice of Ajax to the detriment of Achilles when it comes to Hector's provocation to guard women's honour. Nonetheless, the antidote to the issue of Achilles' ego and its exhibitions within the social realm is not yet anther Machiavellian plot, but affection as the character himself states in Act 3: "I have a woman's longing, / An appetite that I am sick withal, / To see great Hector in his weeds of peace, / To talk with him, and to behold his visage / Even to my full view" (3.3.239–243). Despite Achilles' appetite being driven by his ego and slowly drawn entirely towards the enemy, desiring someone – enemy or not – in his weeds of peace, on account of gentle and humane sociability is an open critique of the war and bloodshed going on in the background, a critique that spares a small modicum of humanity and moderation from being torn to pieces.

The meeting that occurs between Hector and Achilles is that between two attractive males who admire one another as suggested by Achilles' visual feast in the fourth act of the play: "I have fed mine eyes on thee; / I have with exact view perused thee, Hector, / And quoted joint by joint" (4.5.231–233). In a not so unexpected manner, he extends his gaze further as he attempts to draw Hector closer by means of praise and –some might say – passion, his ego nowhere to be seen:

Tell me, you heavens, in which part of his body
Shall I destroy him? Whether there, or there, or there?
That I may give the local wound a name
And make distinct the very breach whereout
Hector's great spirit flew. Answer me, heavens!"
(4.5.242–246)

The unilateral foreplay as wordplay temporarily spares both men from actually engaging in nay war like activities, functioning as an invitation for Hector to admire, in turn, Achilles' physique: "Behold thy fill" (4.5.236). Whereas Hector mentions that he has seen all there is to see, Achilles is convinced that Hector is visually feasting on the physique of the man who so gently launched the rather sadomasochistic invitation of using that very physique to extort pain from him. Nevertheless, as Hector anxiously observes, engaging in such a relationship with Achilles and replying to his ego-centred invitation would "discredit the blest gods" (4.5.247) and it could just as well confer an endless nature to their interactions, by means of the asocial component, as Hector makes clear upon leaving Achilles with a not-so-delicate and yet equally passionate promise: "Henceforth guard thee well; / For I'll not kill thee there, nor there, nor there, / But, by the forge that stithied Mars his helm, / I'll kill thee everywhere, yea, o'er and o'er" (4.5.253–256). If the component of the ego was exhibited by Achilles alone so far, it now becomes a necessary precondition both for social survival and the physical destruction of the Hector-Achilles pair, as the social realm has definitely shifted its focus and successfully subverted the homosocial essence of war.

Shakespeare's masterful rewiring of social relationships emerges from the transparent creation and identification of analogue pairs, i.e. Troilus and Cressida, Troilus and Ulysses, Achilles and Hector, absolute similitudes built on mutual fallacies, on functional impossibilities that cancel one another only to allow novel relational modes, new types of social relationships whose sole purpose is to challenge the dominant systems and hierarchies at work. At the time of Shakespeare's writing of *Troilus and Cressida*, the early modern period had yet to witness the complete merging of desire and self, and so the homosociality was highly valued for its capacity to reflect more than the bonds of men into the social realm, it could also reflect the on-going character of man to man sexual interactions, mostly through women-*qua*-screens. Best formulated by Jonathan Goldberg in the Introduction to *Queering the Renaissance*, "male sexual desire can take both boys and women as its object" while "same-sex and cross-sex relations can be thought of in less deforming ways" (8), theoretical statements which Shakespeare exquisitely toys with, only to show – surprisingly – that sexual relationships and interactions could

be levelled to an entire array of relationships, sexual or not. While the playwright may have put more than a pinch of sadomasochism in the composition, the result overtakes the old recipe, especially when thinking not only of Achilles and Hector, but of Diomedes and Aeneas, as well as of Troilus and Cressida, self-contradicting doubles where the refusal of one half to engage with the existing social realm gives birth to a new type of social field, one that is not scattered with red-ironed rules and regulations to be forcefully and blindly obeyed. Such challenging interactions and relationships derive their value from their ingrained structural impossibilities, causing the birth of an alternatively shared humanity which does not meet the pre-imposed criteria of the extant society and its so-called civilizing goals, but relies exclusively on one particular affect, regardless of its form and recipients – love.

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