The Ripple Effect: Mirror Images of Helen of Troy

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Abstract

This thesis explores the concept of the uncanny as presented in three female characters that mirror Helen of Troy, Geoffrey Chaucer's Criseyde from *Troilus and Criseyde*, William Shakespeare's Cressida from the play *Troilus and Cressida* and Wolfgang Petersen's Briseis from the movie *Troy*. Through the use of Girard's theory of scapegoating and Freud's concept of the uncanny, these characters are compared and contrasted both with each other and with Helen to understand how they carry the burden of Helen's legacy and its meaning. In these texts feminine characters start as innocent, obedient women, but as the plots develops they go through a transformation process that ends leaving them as unfamiliar versions of themselves, unrecognizable to those who they pledged loyalty. Criseyde is subtly guided by her Uncle Pandarus to serve his purposes by loving Troilus and falling into a downward spiral of situations that affect not only her, but all those she claims to love and respect. Shakespeare's Cressida is constantly dealt with like goods to be sold on a market by those who were supposed to take care of her, pushing her into a series of decisions that once again leave her being the bad woman and Troilus the deceived, loyal lover. The Briseis in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* falls prey to a war that not only changes her physical circumstances but also her psychological understanding of war and men, altering her view of the world and her way of responding to the challenging circumstances that are presented to her.

Resumen

Esta tesis estudia el concepto de lo extraño y/o misterioso como se presenta en tres personajes femeninos que reflejan a *Helen of Troy*, *Criseyde* del clásico de Geofrey Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Cressida* de la obra de teatro de William Shakespeare *Troilus and Cressida* y *Briseis* del filme de Wolfgang Petersen, *Troy*. Utilizando la teoría de *scapegoating* de René Girard y la teoría de Freud sobre lo extraño y/o misterioso (*the uncanny*) estos personajes son comparados y contrastados entre sí (y con *Helen*) para así entender como perpetuán el legado de *Helen of Troy*, y lo que el mismo significa para ellas. En los textos mencionados, las féminas comienzan como personajes inocentes y obedientes, pero según se desenvuelve la historia pasan por un proceso de transformación que termina dejándolas como versiones extrañas de sí mismas, irreconocibles tanto para ellas como para los que le juraron lealtad. *Criseyde* es sutilmente guiada por su tío *Pandarus* a servir sus propósitos al enamorarse de *Troilus* y ser víctima de un espiral de situaciones decadentes que no solo le afectan a ella, sino a todos a los que ella declara amar y respetar. Por otra parte, *Cressida* es constantemente negociada como mercancía a ser vendida en un mercado por aquellos que se supone la protejan, llevándola así a tomar una serie de decisiones que la dejan ver como la mujer malvada y a *Troilus* como el fiel amante engañado. *Briseis* en *Troy* es víctima de una guerra que no solo cambia sus circunstancias físicas, sino que también transforma su manera de ver la guerra y al hombre, alterando así su visión del mundo y su manera de responder a las situaciones retantes que se le presentan.

Dedication

To my two families; for giving me space to grow, think differently and be myself.

Love you all with all my heart!

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Introduction:
Helen of Troy: A Woman that Defines Women

The recasting of legendary women, as we will see in the examples that follow below, is nothing new; authors and directors make new versions of traditional characters in a way that will fit the creative needs of the project at hand. Whether it is simply to bring in a character to complement a story line or one to send a message, feminine characters are constantly re-shaped in an attempt to present both reader and spectator with something that feels new and yet it is not. Helen of Troy is a wonderful example of this recycling, and that is why she is the head of the timeline in the study of the female characters that will be discussed in here. Why choose Helen? Well, I could mention lots of reasons, but I think Robert Meagher summarized it succinctly:

> Helen preserves the human record. She has become what others have said about her, done in her name, suffered in her stead, created in her honor. Her story and our story are not to be plied apart. More specifically, she is woman as we have idealized, worshipped, slandered, celebrated, constructed and deconstructed her. Helen for better or for worse in all her metamorphoses represents the complex intact fossil record of woman in Western culture. The story of Helen is the story of woman. (Meagher 1)

Helen is the Lilith[1] of a tendency; she has been the alpha of a feminine pattern of uncanniness that suffuses both literary periods and visual media. Helen and various other classical heroines created in her image are worthy of exploration given the remarkably stable traits common among them. Each *version* of Helen becomes more and more estranged from the original, allowing each

[1] Lilith is thought to be Adam's first wife, not Eve, who like Adam was made out of earth. It is written that Lilith was vanished from paradise for being disobedient to her husband. "In the traditional Aggadah, she is a demoness who kills newborn babies. But since she is portrayed as Adam's first wife who was created equal with him and who insisted on equality with him, she was a natural role model from the tradition for Jewish women seeking the depatriarchalization of Judaism." (Patai 277)

woman a distinct personality and context, but ultimately these different women are all forced to follow the same pattern. An origin of these new versions of Helen "made and molded from things past" can be traced back to Greek and Roman literature, which cast women as the human and immediate *causas belli*, finding them culpable for the downfall of man and of civilization. Taking a cue from René Girard, societies in general need to develop what I like to refer to as rifts, tears in the fabric of society via which pressures are allowed to escape (outcasts, sacrificial victims, etc) to achieve temporary conflict resolution, linking human causes with the divine and appeasing the masses. But in order for this to be achieved a vessel must be chosen, transformed into an odious object and then sacrificed and/or exiled. As I have found in the works read for this study, sometimes the best way to achieve that is by the selection of a female scapegoat, such that the figure becomes socially unacceptable within the social order. This process of ostracism then justifies her sacrifice through the production of an *unheimlich* double of the original Helens or Criseydes. Doubling is not a new concept. Freud discussed it from the perspective of psychic drives and linked the figure of the double to the self-destructive need to control or even abolish desire. Otto Rank, Freud's one-time student, also analyzed doubling; concluding that once the double surfaces it embodies repressed, destructive desires: the triumph of *Thanatos* over *Eros*. Therefore, a double, a persona that is formed by all the behaviors, ideas and actions that are suppressed by the civility of the social order surfaces to express the destructive side of the human psyche: two opposite sides of a single person, fighting over for definitive control. Why are such doubled personalities so often female characters? There can be a pool of reasons, but all of them come back to the simple fact that women have always been socially molded to accommodate the needs of the patriarchy represented by their fathers, brothers, masters, lovers, captors, etc. Virgil puts the theme of feminine mutability succinctly: "always fickle and changeable is woman"

(*varium et mutabile semper femina*) (Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.569), a rule also reflected in the bipartite Manichean archetype of the feminine which divides woman into a binary stereotype: good and bad, true and false, virgins and whores, Lavinias and Helens.

The construction of Helen as a double character can be traced back to the Greek and Roman traditions too. The conflict between humanity and divinity is a characteristic present in many representations of Helen. In the ancient texts in which she appears, Helen's birth and physical beauty belong to the divine, yet the flaws in her character strap her down to being human. This duality traps the figure in a constant empowerment/disempowerment circle she cannot escape. Like later feminine characters that mirror her duplicity, Helen represents power and its lack. Other ambiguities complicate the matter even further. She is Greek by birth, and yet she escaped with the Trojans. For the Greeks she is a traitor and for the Trojans a princess, for Paris a peerless lover and for Menelaus a debased wife.

The fourth-century BCE Greek sophist, Gorgias, gives us a revised Helen that is under the scrutiny of a skeptical eye. In the *Encomium of Helen* with a marvelous display of word play, logic, and rhetoric Gorgias puts the case that Helen was totally incapable of committing the heinous acts of which she is accused. Nonetheless it is through that same rhetoric and word play that he leaves in the reader's mind a glimmer of doubt that makes one think twice before judging Helen innocent or guilty. At times she seems guilty and a few sentences later she does not. Gorgias refutes the traditional view of Helen's perfidy but also casts doubt on his own arguments, creating a pendulum of perspectives along which Helen swings from victim to victimizer and back again. The rhetorical strategies of Gorgias provide perhaps the best-known early example of "the two Helens." The tradition of the two Helens allows the possibility that Helen was not the one who caused the war, for she never escaped with Paris and never betrayed

the Greeks. The woman that caused mayhem was an artifice of the gods, an unfeeling doll made out of thin air, or, as Gorgias' contemporary Euripides dubbed her, an *idolon*.

I would like to discuss the concept of doubling within the frame of a spectrum. A *spectrum* is a term often used when talking about colors, but it can also be defined as "a broad range of varied but related ideas or objects, the individual features of which tend to overlap so as to form a continuous series or sequence."[2] This makes it a useful tool to describe the gradations of Helen in different representations of the character. Within a spectrum of colors we have the two basic extremes, white and black, just like with human behavior patterns we have good and bad. It is in between extremes that all other colors develop because it is by moving away from one extreme and increasing the amount of the opposite color that new shades are created. With characters such as Helen it is no different, it all starts as opposing sides, one good the other bad, depending who you are and which side you are standing on; but, as situations develop and the need for adaptation in order to survive becomes imminent, new perspectives must arise. That is why we want to focus on the variations; the shades of gray that you get when black and white are mixed, because this is what happens not only with Helen, but with Criseyde, Cressida and Briseis. The tradition of "the two Helens" provides us with two extremes: an *idolon*, a well crafted deception representing the bad extreme, an empty and unfeeling Helen embodying man's worst fears and a chaste Helen, representing the good extreme, a woman who was played by the gods and hid away from the world unaware of the suffering being caused in her name. However, these two ideas of woman are only the starting point because, as we move on to later texts; we will find that there is more to such characters than meets the eye. Like Gorgias, Euripides invents a shade of Helen that is more of an Odysseus character than the Helen we remember from Homer. In this play Helen devises an escape plot and deceives the enemies at hand when in

[2]Spectrum. Dictionary.com. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/spectrum

reality her main goal is to find a way back home with her husband and his crew. Euripides clearly materializes both of the two Helens so that the flesh and blood Helen is not guilty but the *idolon* is.

The idea of an imaginary Helen, an *idolon*, is not simple fantasy when one considers the possibility of seeing the figure in a different light. What we see when we look at Helen is not simply an *idolon* but a *dolon*-- a stratagem or deception. Under the light of Virgil's observation on the changeability of women and the social rules of a patriarchal society, characters like Helen are not oddities, but rather canonical.

There is a saying that goes more or less along the lines that you must constantly repeat what you don't want to forget. By constructing mirror images of Helen you are providing new audiences with new characters that enforce old perspectives. This can also lead to old characters placed in situations in which they don't belong, where the specter is once again taken to such an extreme that in the end the product is an unrecognizable character forced into an environment in which she does not fit. This is the case of Virgil's Helen in the *Aeneid* and the Cressida of William Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*; these characters have been "made and molded of things past" in order to fit a new textual environment because a message has to be sent. It is not about the possibility of vindication for the female but about the exaltation of the virtues of the male protagonist. A paradigmatic example occurs when Aeneas finds a broken and terrified Helen in Vesta's temple:

> And now that I [Aeneas] am left alone, I see
>
> the daughter of Tyndareos [Helen] clinging
>
> to Vesta's thresholds, crouching silently
>
> within a secret corner of the shrine;

> bright conflagrations give me light as I
> wander and let my eyes read everything.
> For she, in terror of the Trojans—set
> against her for the fall of Pergamus—
> and of the Danaans' vengeance and the anger
> of her abandoned husband; she the common
> Fury of Troy and of her homeland, she
> had hid herself; she crouched, a hated thing,
>
> (trans. Mandelbaum, lines 762-776)

Helen is out of place in Vesta's temple, for Vesta represents everything Helen is not. In fact by situating her in a shrine for cloistered vestal virgins, the episode seems to mock the story of the two Helens circulated by Gorgias and Euripides. However, in this scene the focus is really on Aeneas and the temptation for an inglorious revenge this opportunity represents. Thus, the purpose Helen serves in this almost certainly forged addition to Virgil's *Aeneid* is not to be a symbol of hidden virtue, but rather to serve as a foil for the desperately strained piety of Aeneas. In his essay, *Forging Faithless Women: From Homer to Henryson* Haydock comments about the passage:

> Whether the episode represents authentic Virgil, marked for excision or revision, or a forgery positioned to smooth over a rough patch, it succinctly demonstrates the ubiquitous parallels between textual and feminine corruption in the matter of Troy. Repeatedly in this tradition, the will to punish feminine deceit inspires acts of textual deception, as doubts about the veracity of Trojan history are displaced into misogynist paratexts that hunt down and punish unfaithful women. (121)

However, Helen escapes physical punishment here and elsewhere in the tradition so that she can live in undying infamy. Even though they don’t end up burning on a pyre, Helen and her mirror images in the classical tradition do end up as social outcasts, a punishment that for female characters is sometimes worse than death, for death would put an immediate end to the situation, while exile puts them through a life of resentment and hardship. A good example of that is Henryson’s Cresseid. Only after she has been exiled from her world, separated from all she held dear and put through a life of hardships as a disfigured leper is Henryson ready to let the character die. Cresseid’s defiance must be punished, and what better way to do it than to leave her to fend on her own, away from the familiar and without any type of love or support from those for whom she has become *unheimlich*. In this aspect we can then add that for these characters it is considered harsher punishment to become an *azazel,*[3] a marked wandering outcast, than to be literally sacrificed; because as an *azazel* they are deprived of their lifestyles and social status but not of their lives.

Freud’s *unheimlich* (uncanny) helps us to characterize how Helen and her mirror images strike fear in the hearts of men by threatening the familiar and crossing boundaries. Freud tells us that the *unheimlich* causes fear because it threatens the limits of what we already know and consider normal. As he writes,

> The subject of the 'uncanny' is a province of this kind. It is undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror; equally too, the word is

[3] “Burket explains the relationship between sacrifice and scapegoating by reference to the ritual of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, described in the Old Testament. Two goats are presented to the priest by the community; one is sacrificed to Jahve, and the other, destined for Azazel, is loaded with the sins of Israel and led away into the dessert. Azazel stands for the other side in opposition to Jahve, as the dessert is the opposite to man’s fertile fields… The victim is selected on the basis of carrying marks of doubleness, of having contradictory traits… a woman as an object of desire and yet less valuable than a man (Suzuki 5).

> not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general" (Freud 930).

This unfamiliarity is constantly present in both Helen and her mirror images, Criseyde and Briseis. Like Helen, Criseyde and Briseis are well known by the men in their community (or so they think), but once they turn their backs on their countrymen to save their own lives, they are perceived as unfamiliar, threatening elements. Once they are removed from their place, their home, they become *unheimlich*, treacherous or frightening. Girard's anthropological theory of scapegoating and sacrifice provides the larger framework of my approach in which I embed Freud's notion of the *unheimlich*.[4] Girard claims that society always identifies a scapegoat to eliminate the tensions caused by mimetic rivalries. Someone needs to bear the mark. Blame must be vested within a single individual that will be sacrificed in order for conflict to dissipate.

> Those bearing the signs of victims do not differ in the right way -- in a way in keeping with the system's complex of differences; they are thus always potentially threatening and may be the object of persecution and mob violence, or they may be set aside as a pool of sacrificial victims. (Williams 107)

As mentioned earlier, the term sacrifice can have a broad definition. To sacrifice must not always imply death, but as it is the case of the characters in this study, the sacrifice comes when they are stripped of their dignity, their lifestyles and their reputation to be exiled and remembered as treacherous women. Though many studies have been done about representations of women in literary texts and films, the contribution my research provides focuses on two main ideas. The first idea is the reproduction of iconic female characters who themselves become split or doubled. These characters become object lessons in gender dynamics and the hierarchy of power.

[4] Girard rejects Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* in broad terms, but I think that the limited idea of the *unheimlich* can work well for this discussion.

Helen and her clones must comply with the roles assigned to them, even when those roles cost them their freedom, their dignity and their happiness. Their rights are easily denied to these women because they do not belong to themselves, they belong to the men in their lives, and as these women change hands they often change identities as well. These women, in a sense become slaves of the violence all around them and become exchange pieces, a type of currency for the men negotiating international conflicts under the cover of erotic relationships. The use of women as currency is nothing new. Men have been exchanging women for properties, riches and peace for quite a long time now. Maybe that is why the methods of rebellion used by the heroines being exchanged, the discovery and use of the power of their sexuality, comes as such an abominable surprise to the men in these narratives. However, as currency, their value is not fixed, for their worth becomes a function of economic exchange. As Shakespeare's Troilus puts it: "What is aught, but as 'tis valued" (2. 2. 1045) Victoria Wohl in her discussion of Helen in Greek tragedy says:

> Helen is said to be priceless, yet *Agamemnon* attempts obsessively to calculate her worth: Was she worth the life of Iphigeneia, who was sacrificed as "an aid in a war to avenge a woman" (γυναικοποίνων πολέμων ἀρωγὰν, 225-26)? Was she worth the lives of the Greek soldiers who fell fighting for her (62-67, 445-49, 1456- 67)? … If her worth can be evaluated in terms of some equivalent, then why not take a monetary compensation for her, a solution proffered by the *Iliad*, where a man can pay off the death of another and where Hector is worth his weight in gold?. (Wohl 83)

And just as it happens with Helen, Criseyde's value depends on the side and the men that possess her, she is worth as much as Antenor for the Trojans and worthless for the Greeks; worthy when

next to Troilus, worthless when next to Diomedes. The same dynamic affects Briseis, she is priceless as a virginal acolyte of Apollo but only temporarily valuable as Achilles' lover. Their degree of value, their worth, will depend on the men that assign them the value; it is not a decision the women can make by themselves.

The second idea correlates intrinsically with the first one for it deals with female empowerment and the opportunity to re-define and analyze myth from a different perspective-- a perspective more sympathetic and less judgmental. Helen of Troy has been stigmatized as an unfaithful and treacherous woman from the moment of her birth, turning her into a universal representative of *the shameless woman*.

> Helen will never die for her honor, as Achilles will, and a host of others, including Agamemnon, Patroklos, and Hector. Helen will lose neither life nor honor; instead, she will be given, according to the syntax peculiar to the Homeric epic, immortality in return for having no honor to lose. That is to be her sign for eternity: to be the woman with no shame. (Austin 26)

This stigma is also carried and openly expressed by Chaucer's Criseyde when she recognizes her passing into history as an infamous female. She dwells on the fact that she will be remembered as an illness that struck the heart of a good man, a disease that, just like Helen, caused widespread damage in both her life and in the lives of many others.

It is because of their scrutinizing under a patriarchal lens that any sign of empowerment and/or independence these females show gets misinterpreted by the patriarchal ideology. That is why when Criseyde uses her charms to win the favor of Diomedes she is immediately classified as treacherous and duplicitous. Likewise, in Wolfgang Petersen's film, *Troy*, Briseis' value dimishes when she abandons the virgin robes of Apollo's priestess and becomes Achilles' lover.

Their actions are not evaluated as desperate attempts to save their lives in wartime, but on the other hand they are considered acts of treason, committed against men who use women to quantify status, honor, and revenge. But are these really bad women? Or, have they become victims of a gender system that has graded them, determined their worth and then devalued that worth through a seemingly endless series of exchanges? As critical readers, we may find that things are not as black and white as they seem.

The following chapters consider three feminine characters who function as mirror images of Helen. In the first chapter I demonstrate how Chaucer's Criseyde—unfaithful to a Trojan with a Greek lover—serves to reflect in reverse Helen's infamous infidelity. The second chapter looks at Shakespeare's Cressida, who, as different as she is from Chaucer's version, does not stray far from her predecessor when it comes to emulating Helen. The third chapter analyzes Wolfgang Peterson's *Troy*, where the relationship between Achilles and Briseis mirrors that of Paris and Helen. Even though clearly a twenty-first century construction, Peterson's Briseis remains within the lines of the established Helen profile.

Chapter I:
“Al be I nat the firste that dide amys”: Chaucer’s Criseyde

Like Helen, Criseyde has been the catalytic agent of a tradition in which the female heroine endangers and contaminates the heroes involved in the conflict. Similar to the Helen of Troy tradition, as literary tendencies have changed, Criseyde has become a more indecent, powerless and less appealing character. It is worth highlighting that the character is a perfect example of degradation, sacrifice and exile in literary tradition. Chaucer presents a virtuous goddess-like creature that becomes a shameful shadow of her former self; however we can perceive as well the author’s attempt to exonerate his Criseyde of guilt, something that contributes to the character’s lack of stability throughout the text. In her book *Gender and Language in Chaucer* Catherine Cox gives her view on the subject explaining that:

> “The character of Chaucer’s Criseyde is mediated by layers of interpretation and perception; much of her history and profile are reported by the men of the narrative, and even "her" words are supplied by a narrator who, while claiming fidelity to his translation's source, nonetheless interjects with such frequency and zest that his professed ability to report without bias is obviously a fiction.” (40)

Criseyde exemplifies how identity can be fragmented by manipulation to the point of no return. To her, identities like lovers are temporary and therefore she can abide the use of temporary roles as she adapts to the reality around her. This characteristic however, is a common thread shared by all the Helen-like characters chosen for analysis in this study. The interesting component of Criseyde as a subject for study in this analysis lies in the complex psychology of Chaucer’s heroine. The character develops within and reacts to changing situations in such an enigmatic and poised way that she sets herself apart from her successors, Henryson’s Cresseid and Shakespeare’s Cressida, the latter of which we will discuss in the following chapter.

In Chaucer's work Criseyde is in all aspects a lady, as socially correct and sexually cautious as would be expected of a widow and a traitor's daughter. For the rest of the world she projects submission and powerlessness. She has successfully found a way to embed herself in the social order she has always known and respected, one in which, given her father's betrayal, now perceives her as foreign and threatening. As an individual, she does not boast about her physical attributes. Even though it is constantly implied by the narrator that she is beautiful, she prefers to be as invisible as possible given her current situation. Criseyde stays as close to her place as she can (both in the psycho-social and geographical sense), she does not express any type of interest in climbing the social ladder, but neither does she want to descend it. She wants to continue existing without being noticed. Given the gravity of the situation, survival becomes her main goal; she is not interested in power, personal or social recognition of any kind. She just wants to be left alone. In spite of that, the description of her that Chaucer provides is specifically based on her striking physical appearance, for these characteristics will catch the attention of her soon-to-be lover in the romance—characteristics that will also establish the connection between Criseyde and the stigmatized woman she mirrors:

> Criseyde was this lady name al right;
>
> As to my doom, in al of Troies cite
>
> Nas no so fair; for, passynge every wight,
>
> So aungelik was hir natif beaute,
>
> That lik a thing inmortal semed she,
>
> As is an hevenyssh perfit creature,
>
> That down were sent in scornynge of nature. (1. 99-105)

To link her as a mirror image for Helen, it is appropriate to highlight the importance Chaucer gives to the physical beauty of Criseyde. As happens in descriptions of Helen, the reader is invited to fall in love in Criseyde's beauty before she is even described. Clearly, the specter of beauty needs to be established before the physical details of the character are revealed. We perceive the need for the establishment of something both relatable and aesthetically pleasing in order for the character to develop a level of connection with the readers. This strategy also justifies the need for a mimetic rivalry that later on the male characters involved closely with the heroine will develop. The same happens with the Hellenic myths. Most of the myths tell us how men from near and far came to court a woman (Helen) they claimed to love without having laid eyes on her, therefore they had fallen in love not with a beautiful woman but with their personal ideal of divine beauty. But "the parallel between Helen and Criseyde [more than just a beauty contest] exposes the pretensions of the social order to whose interest it must give way" (Scanlon 219) (Brackets by me), letting us know that there is much more than just a mimetic representation of a character from the part of the author. Chaucer uses the same literary device to inflate the value of his character, to make her worthy of the place she will have in the eyes of her knight. Criseyde must be loved without being known, that way, when her true deceptive nature is revealed it should be easier to keep the empathic connection with Troilus and sever the one made with her. This way the reader does not only suffer the deception of Criseyde's fall as Troilus does but also accepts her sacrifice and justifies it as something necessary. By avoiding her detailed description Chaucer leaves a gate open to the personal interpretation every reader could give to their own ideal of divine beauty, therefore emphasizing the immortality of her supernatural beauty by leaving it undefined but present; just like other authors do with Helen.

The conventional description of Criseyde, however, seems almost designed to render her nondescript, just as her posture within the hall attempts to blend in with the crowd. But this does not stop those close to her from objectifying and putting a price on her beauty. Just as in later works, it is her Uncle Pandarus, the person whom she trusts the most, who (without hesitation) is determined to objectify and sexuate her against her wishes. Criseyde refuses the advances of her uncle on behalf of Troilus because she deems it inappropriate for a widow to be casted as a source of sexuality and enjoyment.

> Do wey youre book, rys up and lat us daunce,
>
> And lat us don to May som obsrvaunce."
>
> ……………………………………………..
>
> "I, god forbede!" quod she "be ye mad?
>
> Is that a widewes lif, so god yow save?
>
> By god, ye maken me right sore adrad,
>
> Ye been so wilde; it semeth as ye rave.
>
> It satte me wel bet ay in a cave
>
> To bidde, and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
>
> Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves." (2. 111-119)

She tries to hold fast to her place as a widow, insisting that her time as a sexual being has died with her husband. She is proper, respectful of her place and, as I mentioned earlier, does not want to be the center of attention. She prefers to leave that for *maidens* and *young wives*. It is her Uncle Pandarus who abuses both her trust and her good will and tricks her into thinking that if she refuses Troilus she is willfully signing his death sentence. As will be discussed later on, this reaction of Criseyde of hiding herself from the world in a way fits her outcast and *homo sacer*

status, for just like succubus's and mermaids (among other mythological beings which were considered beautiful but abominable at the same time) had a sort of divine status, they were protected from human wrath through shadiness and hiding, Criseyde protects herself by staying away from the public eye, by becoming a shadow. No one is supposed to hurt her, and yet those around her see her as a source of discomfort and would be glad to get rid of her. However, they know it cannot be through a blood sacrifice (they cannot kill her) so in this case they erase her from memory by exchanging her for someone more valuable as the reader finds out in later stanzas of the poem. But back to Pandarus' intentions: by tricking his niece, he is not only manipulating her good will but is also playing on her sense of familial loyalty.

Up to this point a sense of victimization is clear. Pandarus plays on Criseyde's fears in order to bend her to his will. He thus adds to the weight of her father's treason, burdening her as well with the metaphorical death of prince Troilus because she refuses to love him:

> But sith I se my lord mot nedes dye
>
> And I with hym, here I me shryve, and seye
>
> That wickedly ye don us bothe deye. (2. 439-441)

It is clear from the beginning that Pandarus' intentions are not in Criseyde's best interests[5]; he wants to serve the interests of Troilus not his niece. Therefore, Criseyde falls into a web of lies and manipulation that places her in the most dangerous position a woman of her times could find herself in, that of having to decide between virtue and family. As Fradenburg will also assert, the "good women" of mythology are defined by their choices[6]. They are those who chose virtue and

[5] In *Sweet Persuasion: The Subject of Fortune*, Scanlon mentions that Criseyde "is a social subordinate, whose powerlessness he [Troilus] and Pandarus exploit at every turn."(220).

[6] Louise O. Fradenburg in her essay "*Our owen woe to drynke*": *Loss, Gender and Chivalry in* Troilus and Cryseide argues that "women prove their honor, if they prove it at all, through the difficulty of their choices, through the heroic preservation of their chastity not through the practice of arms—i.e., they prove their honor though tests of faith, trials of consent."(95)

loyalty to their men over anything else and because of that, the use of deceptive ways is not only justified but necessary. The example we are presented of what a good woman is stays in the line of women like Penelope[7]; whose loyalty to their men exceeds expectations. Given the preservative nature of their actions is not selfish (they fight to preserve both themselves and their husband's property) the means to achieve it, no matter how deceitful, do not seem to be frowned upon. Criseyde does not follow this pre-designed mold. Even though the terms virtue and loyalty are not synonyms, for women, these concepts are often intertwined to the point of fusion: for a virtuous woman was a loyal woman and a loyal woman was seen as virtuous. In this context, virtue needs to be looked at as something more than just sexual purity; it includes proclaiming loyalty to a man by recognizing yourself as your lover's property and as such, protecting yourself from invasion and sabotage from ill-intentioned suitors. Virtuous women belonged to one man for a life time, and as so, no other man could claim them; for they would gladly choose death before dishonoring their lovers or their memory (if the men had perished before them). Criseyde, being a mirror image of Helen, does not follow this pattern; like Helen before her, she shows to be ripe and ready when the moment for choosing a new lover arrives. She displays both a lack of loyalty and an even bigger lack of virtue by the standards of the society and culture to which she belongs. Nonetheless, this state of mind is not shown throughout the whole romance. From the beginning of the text until well into book four Chaucer's Criseyde cares about honor, not only her own but that of the soldiers, Troilus and Troy:

> "So as I shal nat so ben hid in muwe,
>
> That day by day, myn owne herte deere, –

[7] Penelope is Odysseus wife in the Odyssey. After the Trojan War is over, Odysseus is thought to be dead, but Penelope refuses to believe that and choose a new husband. She tells suitors she would choose a new husband when she is done weaving a special tapestry, but every night in secret she would undo the weaving she had done the day before so the weaving was never finished.

Syn wel ye woot that it is now a trewe, –

Ye shal ful wel al myn estat yheere.

And or that trewe is doon, I shal ben heere;

And thane have ye bothe Anthenor ywonne

And me also; beth glad now, if ye konne. (4. 1310-16)

At an earlier point, she sees Troilus' affections for her as an inappropriate misfortune. She fears the situation threatens not only her life but her uncle's as well:

"A, lord! What me is tid a sory chaunce!

For myn estat lith in a jupartie,

And ek myn emes lif is in balaunce;

But natheles, with goddess governaunce,

I shal so doon, myn honour shal I kepe,

And ek his lif"; and stynte for to wepe. (2. 464-469)

Contrary to what we see in the end of the work, this passage shows a virtuous Criseyde, a pure-hearted woman who is a victim of her circumstances. She knows well enough that she is at the mercy of the men that swore to protect her, and now it is these same men who are conditioning her safe existence to her willing compliance with their bidding. It is in book 2 stanza 68 when her charitable/ virtuous nature is most noticeable. She prefers to sacrifice her beliefs in order to save the lives of her uncle and Troilus, choosing the lesser of two evils:

"Of harmes two the lesse is for to chese;

Yit have I levere maken hym good chere

In honour, than myn emes lyf to lese." (2. 470-473)

It is at this early point that she starts showing signs of what her future will be. In order for others to exist and be able to achieve their desires, she sacrifices her own, putting herself at risk. Even though she makes it clear that she will not encourage (Troilus) or lead him on, she agrees to let the attraction flow naturally, to be agreeable but not to engage in any type of interaction farther than that.

> " But that I nyl nat holden hym in honde:
>
> Ne love a man ne kan I naught, ne may,
>
> Ayeins my wil; but ells wol I fonde,
>
> Myn honour sauf, plese hym fro day to day.
>
> Therto nolde I nat ones have seyd nay,
>
> But that I drede, as in my fantasye.
>
> But cesse cause, ay cesseth maladie. (2. 477-483)

Up to this point, we have a very conventional feminine character. She shows all the characteristics we would expect from any heroine, beauty beyond comparison, virtue, loyalty, and she is willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of those she loves. Interesting enough, it is this decision of allowing Troilus to court her that marks her first steps along the road to becoming a sacrificial victim. Because of the scapegoat's dual identity as both cure and disease, in agreeing to serve as the former, she thereby makes herself liable to the latter charge as well. Even though it goes against every rule she should respect, Criseyde is willing to sacrifice her virtue and her loyalty to what she knows is socially and morally correct in order to keep alive the one which up to this point she pities. It is also worth highlighting that she does try to keep her word (acceptance but not encouragement of Troilus' affections) as much as she can, but her uncle

continues moving things forward according to his own plan. As a result Criseyde continues to compromise her values at the expense of her social image; increasing her level of voluntary involvement in the processes that change her and, how the literary world will see her in the future.

Even though Pandarus knows what Criseyde has specified as the conditions of her acceptance of the situation, he continues to bring to her love notes and letters that he tells Troilus to write. These importunities place Criseyde in an awkward position, she feels Pandarus is placing Troilus's interests before hers and rendering her impotent to escape the victim's role.

> …"scrit ne bille,
>
> For love of god, that tocheth swich matere,
>
> Ne brynge me noon; and also uncle deere,
>
> To myn estat have more rewarde, I preye… (2.1130-33)

This interaction is more or less like a Mephistopheles/Faust relationship. In Goethe's play it is Mephistopheles who places temptation in front of Faust, but it is Faust who gives in. So considering that every man and woman possesses free will, decisions are individual and so are consequences**.** For Pandarus and Criseyde guilt is distributed along similar lines. There is no denying that Pandarus tempts Criseyde, but it is Criseyde who accepts it. There is also no way of denying Criseyde's victimization, but as we approach the end of the romance that profile changes, turning Criseyde into both victim and victimizer.

The relationship between Pandarus and Criseyde is a marvelous optical illusion: each of them sees what he or she wants to see. Pandarus, whose only interest is to be the best "love strategist, the expert in the Ovidian *ars amatoria*" (Fyler 108),does not care about the damage he is doing to Criseyde, and Criseyde repeatedly casts herself as a victim of circumstances beyond

her control. Pandarus is dedicated only to Troilus, preying on his niece's fears in order to influence her decisions and bring her closer to the prince. To invent (as he does in book two) an imaginary conspiracy against her is a cruel and yet effective device to get his niece and Troilus together under the same roof. For Pandarus, the end justifies the means; his main goal is to demonstrate his mastery in the game of love-- that he can get Troilus what he so much wants whatever the cost. Not only is Criseyde manipulated into receiving Troilus into her good graces, but she is also tricked into comforting a lovesick Troilus in her Uncle's bed chamber, where no one listens and no one sees (or at least that's what Pandarus wants her to believe). She is misguided with trick after trick to be as "unthrift" as Pandarus' speech throughout the romance, and yet she is herself a co-conspirator in her entrapment, as deeply invested in the game of seduction as the men—a struggle between personalities for power in which she willingly engages[8]. For the niece to give in to the uncle's plot would not only get the young prince what he wished but would also make Pandarus proud of demonstrating he was powerful enough to bend her will to his will, even if she could maintain the façade of a plausible deniability in the carefully orchestrated assignation. For Criseyde to accept and act upon behaviors and precepts she knows inappropriate for a virtuous lady, places her in a private war with herself, every decision she takes moving her closer to her own destruction. While Criseyde debates within herself whether she should or should not love Troilus, she shows clear knowledge of the pros and cons of her decision. Within the benefits that would accrue with Troilus' love, lies protection and the ability to keep her good name, important details which she discusses in a monologue within stanza 101:

[8] Robert Edwards notes about the perception of Pandarus' speech throughout *Troilus and Criseyde* "Yet it is precisely as an "unthrift", a transgression or scandal that we must understand Pandarus' speech, for here he reveals the narrow conception of desire that has driven the poem thus far and to which the poems actions will return in succeeding events, namely the replacement of Troilus by Diomede"(78)

… "al were it nat to done,

To graunte hym love, yit, for his worthynesse,

It were honour with pleye, and with gladnesse,

In honestee with swich a lord to deele,

For myn estat and also for his heele. (2.703-07)

But she is also aware of the gossip and rumor that would surface in the court were her relationship with the young prince to become public knowledge.

"How bisy if I love, ek most I be

To plesen hem that jangle of love, and dremen,

And coye hem, that they seye noon harm of me.

For though ther be no cause, yit hem semen

Al be for harm that folk hire frendes quemen;

And who may stoppen every wikked tonge… (2.799-804)

Even though disadvantages are a clear and heavy burden to carry, it takes no more than a fake threat to get Criseyde to tilt the balance towards Troilus' desires. The ease and awareness with which she falls helps to establish the ambiguities between the victim/victimizer personalities in her. It also makes the reader question the motives behind her acceptance of Troilus: is she giving in because she has fallen in love with him or because it looks like the convenient thing to do? In her soliloquy, she consciously decides to accept the risks, claiming that "he which that nothing undertaketh,/ No thyng acheveth, be hym looth or deere."(2.807-08). However, given we know about all the meddling from Pandarus's part in the decision making process, the reader can't help but to doubt the nature of her decision. Even though Criseyde's decision might look unbiased as

readers we are fully aware of the puppetry behind the curtains, therefore, we know that her decision has been tainted by all the pressure applied by Pandarus and even indirectly by Troilus.

Within all this turmoil and manipulation created by Pandarus, Criseyde does not go unaffected. The character gradually starts getting used to change. It is easily observable that she starts getting used to the new personality she has created in accepting the love of Troilus. She makes promises to Troilus that are broken later on, she refuses to run away with him when she has the chance and she switches lovers in a heartbeat. Unfortunately, for this there is only her to blame. Criseyde is not a simple victim anymore; at some points it may seem that she is to be sacrificed in the same way Iphigenia[9] is sacrificed by her father, like an innocent lamb that has no suspicion that a knife is directed to its throat. But this episodic innocence does not last long enough to redeem her (Criseyde). Maybe that is why Criseyde's punishment must be her exile; and even in exile, as the *azazel* she is, she wanders from side to side making the best out of her exiled condition. However it is this opportunistic behavior after being perceived as innocent what makes the character a plethora of contradictions.

By the halfway point of book two Criseyde makes clear that if she has to choose between life and honor she would most certainly choose life and by doing that "she is revealed, finally, to be a thing of this unstable world…" (Dinshaw 31). By living she is choosing exile and she is allowing herself to become a destructive entity, a woman driven by her desires and not by her duties. This type of behavior takes us back to the female Criseyde mirrors for, Helen, who displays the same line of thinking when she chooses to let her desire define both her future and that of Trojans and Greeks. By leaving with Paris instead of staying in Sparta, Helen's decisions

[9] Iphigenia is Agamemnon's daughter, being her a complete stranger to the Trojan conflict, he kills her as an offering to the gods in order to get the winds he needed to leave with his troops to bring Helen back and take over Troy.

are also driven by her desires and not by her duties. Helen allows the fire of her irrational desires (*cupiditas*) to consume and destroy not only her, but everything around her.

However, by the time we reach Book V Criseyde's transformation from virtuous woman to disruptive entity is complete. She switches not only in loyalties but also in personality; it is from this point on that she becomes a kind of *homo sacer,* sacred and cursed at the same time. As Agamben writes in *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life* : "Sacer esto is in fact a curse; and homo sacer on whom this curse falls is an outcast, a banned man [woman], tabooed, dangerous." (Agamben 79). This is what happens to Criseyde. From the moment she is exchanged she becomes an outcast, a cursed object, what Suzuki, making the theoretical connections between scapegoating and sacrifice calls an *azazel*. Criseyde becomes what Henryson in his supplement to Chaucer's poem will explicitly characterize as an "odious abject" (*abiect odious*, line 133), a wandering vessel in which disruption is contained while at the same time holding the solution to a greater affliction, given its ambivalent status as a *sacer*. This could be a viable reason why all the promises made to Troilus seem to have been made by a woman that no longer inhabits the body of the Criseyde we find in Book V because at this point human needs and pleasures become unimportant, she now serves a higher purpose.

For comparison's sake, let's summarize the Criseyde we have seen so far. In book one we start with a kind and shy Criseyde who cares about her honor, her social standing and her family, a nearly perfect woman, except for one thing, her uni-brow, that spot of imperfection that separates her from the divine, the mark of doubleness. Once she falls in love with Troilus (who naively sees her as someone perfect), she appears to care for the honor of her knight more than anything else. By the time we are closer to the end of Book V what we have is a victimized Criseyde who believes herself not only a victim but also the source of malevolence. Therefore

we could argue that Criseyde's personality switch is a consequence of her victimhood. As if all situations around her have acted as a torture device, Criseyde has come to believe she is the source of the problem and as so she acts by becoming false and declaring she deserves punishment to the point of justifying her transformation into a scapegoat and her sacrifice for the greater good :

> Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
>
> No good word; for thise bokes wol me shende.
>
> O, rolled shall I ben on many a tonge;
>
> And wommen most wol haten me of alle.
>
> Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle! (5.1059- 1064)

Criseyde cares not about fulfilling all the promises made and the love left behind in Troy (for those are now irrelevant); Troilus must forget her and come to the realization that her sacrifice is necessary, the same way she has come to believe and understand it. It is not only the fact that she switches lovers that seems to present us with an uncanny Criseyde but the fact that she shares the objects that Troilus gave to her as tokens of affection with her new lover Diomede. This display of easy detachment opens the door for the discussion of Criseyde's final place in the story. Why would she do this unless these tokens meant nothing to her anymore? Does she come to the realization that she is no longer worthy of Troilus? Most certainly, this is not the Criseyde we are familiar with; this is not a virtuous woman but an unrecognizable double tainted by victimhood. The Criseyde we find in the last book is a woman that has internalized the notion of guilt. It all becomes a matter of balance; for once she, (a feeble woman) is exchanged for an able warrior, balance will be restored on both sides. As we see in Homer's *Iliad* in which Helen is a

causa belli, more or less in that same train of thought Criseyde is presented as a key pawn to conflict resolution. With her sacrifice she gives those she claims to love a chance at victory.

Another interesting detail from book five is that Chaucer's narrator does not specify how much time it takes his heroine to change.

> But, trewely, how longe it was bytwene,
>
> That she forsook hym for this Diomede,
>
> There is non auctour telleth it, I wene.
>
> Take every man now to his bokes heede;
>
> He shall no terme fynden, out of drede. (5.1086-90)

However, based on Criseyde's earlier conversation (before she is traded) with Troilus we can assume it is a ten day process, for ten days is the time Criseyde asks Troilus to wait for her return.

> And thenk right thus: 'Criseyde is now agon,
>
> But, what! She shal come hastely ayeyn';
>
> And whanne, allas? By god, lo, right anon,
>
> Or dayes ten, this dar I saufly seyn. (4.1316-20)

There are a lot of contradicting factors involved in Criseyde's decision, making the "What happened to Criseyde?" question inevitable. It seems we are presented with two different human beings, with twins who switched places or doppelgängers, perhaps, one representing virtue while the other represents the darkness within.

Shakespeare however, takes on these same interrogatives and works them to perfection in his concentrated vision of the events of the Trojan War in his play *Troilus and Cressida*. Just like with Chaucer we have a Cressida that is dual, indirectly manipulative, beautiful beyond

comparison but confusing and compromised as well. As it is mentioned earlier in this chapter, Chaucer's Criseyde not only fills perfectly the profile of a victim but goes beyond it by becoming a *homo sacer* and an *azazel*-- a creature that through her sacrifice and exile restores a balance at the cost of her place within society. Based on the pre-conceptions of the familiar and socially acceptable, Criseyde is expected to accept her sacrifice through exile as the correct thing to do but by doing so she becomes a complicated, multi- dimensional character that wears temporary identities, defies expectations and appears to adapt too easily to the situation at hand. Even when both the reader and the author do not seem to understand why Criseyde is acting the way she is or the motivations behind her actions, she does and apparently that is all that matters. Criseyde recognizes the extent of the damage she is causing both to Troilus and to her reputation and still she decides to carry on with it, as if the punishment could purge her and those around her of some earlier sin the reader does not know about but she and the author do.

She seyde: "allas! For now is clene ago
My name of trouthe in love for everemo!
For I have falsed oon, the gentileste
That evere was, and oon the worthiest.

…………………………………………

" Allas of me, unto the worldes ende,
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
No good word; for thise bokes wol me shende.
O, rolled shall I ben on many a tonge;
And wommen most wol haten me of alle.
Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle!

…………………………………………

"Thei wol seyn, in as muche as in me is,

I have hem don dishonor, weylaway!

Al be I nat the firste that dide amys,

What helpeth that to don my blame awey? (5.1054-68)

She laments everything that is going to happen but still goes on with it, like a moth that knows the flame will kill her but still flies towards it because it's her destiny. In fact, Criseyde's words, "Al be I nat the firste that dide amys," draw the implicit comparison with Helen. For Criseyde, sacrifice appears to be the last attempt to try to restore virtue and amend the damage she has done but at the same time it represents her perdition and she knows it. Curiously enough in the last two lines of the passage (1067-68), she recognizes her actions are not only her own, as if she understood that she was doubling for someone else, but being conscious of that will not save her from the damnation that would accompany her literary immortality. It is not rare for the character in a narration to be doubled, to recognize or confront his/her double and recognize it as a concrete manifestation of every action and behavior they should have avoided; Freud and Rank discuss this many times in their respective studies on the *dopplegänger* and the *unheimlich*. At some point of the narration, the double stops being a specter and becomes a materialized individual who is blamed for all amoral decisions and actions.

Another aspect important for the thorough discussion of Criseyde is the "unabashed amorousness" (Dinshaw 31) of Chaucer's narrator with his heroine. The omission of exact time lines for Criseyde's change of heart shows how for some reason (that is not shared with the reader) the author does not agree a hundred percent that the heroine is to blame about everything. I believe the best explanation on the subject is Haydock's take on it:

> Chaucer opens a gap between “his” Criseyde and what sources say about her—a impasse which he, the most loyal of her lovers, continues to defend even after the faith of lesser men has fallen into despair or open hatred. (214).

Chaucer and his narrator continue to trust and save Criseyde from public opinion despite the events told and other characters’ views on her actions, something that Dinshaw refers to as “a tendency to fill in the blanks where she[*Criseyde*] is concerned”(45; my emphasis). Haydock describes the affiliation between the author and “his Criseyde” as a lover’s relationship and I believe it to be an appropriate comparison for the author seems to do for “his Criseyde” what no other knight in her life does, he loves her unconditionally, despite her lacks. But there is much more behind this author/ character relationship. In the book *O Love O Charite! Contraries Harmonized in Chaucer’s Troilus*, Ida Gordon argues about the style of narration:

> the simultaneous coexistence of conflicting and often contrary meanings in the language and action of the poem, and argues that Chaucer deliberately employs a somewhat simplistic narrator who unwittingly speaks in "amphibologies" in order to force the reader to make his own intellectual and moral choice as to what is true and right.(Rowe 4)

Gordon claims that ambiguity and doubt are purposely placed in the narration, turning the reader into the judge and jury of Criseyde’s fate. Therefore we have a narrator that refuses to “give away the spiritual meanings of his tale” (Haydock 204), as if he is “intoxicated with the fleeting pleasures he translates” (Haydock 205)[10] but decides not to be the hand that administers the final punishment. Chaucer’s narrator appears to tell the story from an impartial point of view but yet

[10] In reference to Dinshaw’s book on *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, “it turns out to be a record of the narrator’s gradual seduction by the text’s letter, by its feminine charms. His involvement with the carnality of this text is apparent not only in this rhythms of the disposition of the narrative, the text’s eloquent surface; it is thematized as vicarious erotic response to the love story itself.”(42)

at times he takes Criseyde's side-- even including a warning to women on the dangers of treacherous men:

> N'y sey nat this al oonly for thise men,
>
> But moost for wommen that bitraised be
>
> Thorugh false folk - God yeve hem sorwe, amen! -
>
> That with hire grete wit and subtilte
>
> Bytraise yow. And this commeveth me
>
> To speke, and in effect yow alle I preye,
>
> Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye! (5. 1779-85)

This is something that can be understood as contradictory, considering the religious and didactic side of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (*caritas over cupiditas*[11]) and the anti- feministic tendency of much classical literature, which often presents women as the ones who are deceitful, fickle, changeable and desirous of multiple lovers. But on the other hand, as a scapegoat Criseyde is allowed to earn not only sympathy but the pity of her readers even though she also serves as a cautionary tale for other women to not follow in her footsteps. The reader is pushed to feel sympathetic towards Criseyde not only because of circumstances, but also because of the narrator's contradictory attitudes towards the character. At the end Troilus' sublime ascent provides an ironic distance on such worldly concerns, however, Criseyde herself remains alive and eternally ambiguous.

With openly expressed sadness, Criseyde recognizes it is this doubling persona who will make her mark in history. The woman who will be remembered and sung about will be the Criseyde who is a victimizer and not the one who is a victim. By recognizing that all incorrect

[11] *Troilus* is a medieval tragedy whose characters are motivated by cupiditas, misdirected love. Its "moralitee" is simple and absolute: love of earthly things for themselves (not in service of love for God) is sinful and destructive. (Dinshaw 32)

actions are not only her own but her double's, as well as other "bad" women before her, she is clarifying for the reader that it will be her double who will be immortalized for being inconstant and treacherous. The lines make it clear that Criseyde, just like all doubles, is fulfilling a purpose and therefore no matter how much she tries to escape from fate, it will always catch up with her, it will always be her role to be sacrificed in order for others to be saved. Because of those women who have been changeable before her, she is condemned and predestined to go into history as the woman who was loved in spite of her inconstancy and yet she betrayed the man who offered her a decent life. By making these decisions, Criseyde fulfills her purpose within the social structure (for without evil there is no good) but traps herself into the fate of those despised women who have been unstable before her; in this manner embracing her inner *bad woman*, her inner Helen of Troy.

Chapter II:
Unless she say 'My mind is now turned whore': Shakespeare's Cressida

Shakespeare presents us with a more mundane face of the Trojan conflict. The grandeur of the men and the battle are removed from center stage and we are left with a more debased and petty view of the situation. We encounter characters that "size each other up out of primordial habit as friend or foe, as harmless or potential threat" (Scheibe 2). Shakespeare's play deals with the notions of the fight for identity, opposing doubles, rivalry and mimetic desire. Even though Helen is not the focus of the text, she plays an important role, becoming the standard by which Cressida's identity and value are measured. She is Cressida's mimetic rival; she "becomes the imitator of [her] own imitator, just as the latter becomes the model of [her] own model" (Girard 12). Cressida's whole social existence revolves around surpassing Helen's beauty and value, as she constantly struggles to become (suggest in addition "and fears becoming") Helen's mirror image. At this point we could establish that identity and "identity markers" will become an important foundation for the discussion of Cressida for in this play "identities, because they are in constant flux and prey to an ongoing process of distortion, constantly require verification and adaptation" (Haydock 250). Cressida's character fits perfectly into that process. The repeated comparisons to Helen and the similarities of their situations force the reader to constantly verify which Cressida they are looking at and whether it is Cressida at all. Just as in a light spectrum, we have shadings back and forth in which the reader is never sure where Cressida ends and Helen begins.

The concept of "identity markers" plays an important role in my attempts to characterize the relationship of these two women in Shakespeare's play. "Identity markers" are defined by Karl E. Scheibe as "…provisional coordinates for locating one's self in the flux of changing circumstance, rather like gradual shifts in the surrounding terrain as we travel down a stream"(1).

In the case of Cressida, identity becomes one of the most important features to consider not only because she is Helen's mirror image, but because of the doubling she herself displays as her journey comes to a close in the play. Cressida is unable to establish a defined identity throughout the play, instead we identify her by the markers she provides according to the situation in which she finds herself. Initially, the set of markers include terms such as "lady" and most importantly "virgin." As the story progresses, the markers by which Cressida will be momentarily defined continue to spiral downward in both moral and social sense. Interestingly enough, she is not the only character who provides changing clues to a flexible identity. Markers of her rivalry with Helen are also provided by other characters in the play that share a connection with her in one way or another. Both Pandarus and Troilus make many comparisons between the beauty and personalities of these two women, using an array of common identity markers. For instance:

> Pandarus- Because she's kin to me, therefore she's not so
>
> fair as Helen. An she were not kin to me, she would be as
>
> fair on Friday as Helen is on Sunday. (1.1 39-44))

and:

> Servant- That's to't, indeed sir. Marry, sir, at the request of Paris, my lord, who is there in person; with him the mortal Venus, the heart blood of beauty, love's invisible soul.
>
> Pandarus- Who? My cousin Cressida?
>
> Servant- No, sir, Helen. Could you not find out by her attributes?
>
> Pandarus- It should seem, fellow, that thou hast not seen the Lady Cressid.
>
> (3.1 29-37)

Just as in passages mentioned above, there are many other examples throughout the play. As Suzuki in *The Metamorphosis of Helen* suggests, Pandarus' intentions in this dialogue are to

“inflate the price of his wares” (217). In order for Cressida to reach or surpass her rival Helen, her value must be repeatedly inflated. Up to this point, Cressida has already shifted from one identity marker to the next; other characters have started shaping her identity in ways beneficial for them. For Pandarus, she is no longer a human being that deserves respect and is capable of sensibility but she is now “merchandise” in need of promotion to be profitably sold to the highest bidder. And so, just like a merchant that promotes his/her product as the best on the market, Pandarus advertises his cousin Cressida to everyone he meets as the most beautiful woman--even better, more beautiful than the most beautiful. Thanks to Pandarus’ attitudes and interventions in the play, Cressida’s identity markers temporarily define her as Helen’s rival in the battle of vanity and social place. Her social stature depends on Helen being recognized as the gold standard of beauty. It is in that battle that without a doubt, for both Troilus and Pandarus, Cressida is most of the times the victor, for Cressida is the merchandise Pandarus advertises and the object of Troilus’ desires. Oddly enough, even though Troilus seems genuinely interested in Cressida at the beginning of the play, the language used to refer to the affair separates it from being a legitimate love interest and works to commercialize and commoditize it. To call himself *a merchant* and Pandarus *the vessel* that will take him to reach the exotic pearl that is Cressida’s virginity not only degrades the attraction and turns it into the hunt for the ultimate conquest, but it also turns Troilus’ interest into a matter of lust not love. This whole degrading process is ultimately reduced to a vulgar transaction between a client and a pimp. The language and attitudes of these characters towards Cressida allows the recognition of another temporary identity marker for her, that of the coveted prize. This identity marker also keeps her mimetically tied to Helen for up to a point in the play both women share the marker. These markers provide her with temporary identities that allow her to adapt to the situation at hand. Cressida has no

definitive identity; rather, as a mirror and a double, she not only rivals Helen, she seems doomed to repeat all of Helen's mistakes and to share her infamy.

Cressida's identity changes as her situation does; she assumes whatever identity marker will be most useful at the moment. An example of this is her non-hesitant switch of lovers in the blink of an eye, and her disingenuously reluctant surrender of love tokens given to her by Troilus. Cressida possesses not stable self, as a mimetic rival almost all of the components of her identity are borrowed from the character whom she doubles, Helen. There are also other defining characteristics that Cressida shares with Helen which affect the way in which Cressida is perceived. Recognizing Cressida's identity markers is important because these signs are also second-hand, borrowed from the type of Helen the author wants to immortalize through the creation of Cressida. As a double, her defining behaviors and characteristics are borrowed from Helen and so her fate is already fixed. She must imitate, follow like a shadow follows it source, Helen's descent into infamy.

The character's background seems to play an important role in the doubling process. To fully understand the extent of these details I believe a direct comparison between the characters is in order. As soon as Helen leaves the beaches of Sparta, she is perceived as what Freud would call an *unheimlich* character, an uncanny version of the woman Agamemnon and the great men of Greece promised to protect. The same thing happens with Cressida. For Troilus and Pandarus, who claimed to love her and declared themselves her protectors, she becomes *unheimlich* as soon as she forsakes Troilus and starts exchanging favors with Diomedes. Through these actions she perpetuates the reputation of her mirror image (Helen) while at the same time she perpetuates herself as double, but it is also this inability to untie herself from the image of her rival that makes her a perpetuator of Helen's curse by bringing death and dishonor to great men.

Shakespeare’s Cressida continues to carry the burden of the tradition, displaying a duality that mimics the Helen familiar from Greek texts. No matter how much she tries to fight the destiny that has been written for her, pre-destination, (honoring its name) is always one step ahead of her. An inexorable fate helps to determine the careers of men, such as Oedipus, Achilles and Paris himself, yet Cressida and Helen are no strangers to this curse either. Their pre-disposed fate labels them as characters with a purpose, a purpose that cannot be changed or altered no matter how many times the character is written. The fate of these two characters has been sealed in stone by the authors that write their stories over and over again for the sake of the fulfillment of social, moral and/or political purposes. Cressida’s purpose seems to incline more towards the moral and social purpose. She is pre-destined to be *that woman*, the one which tries to use her sexuality to exercise power over men and in the end fails, losing her dignity and credibility in the process. Her degradation becomes recorded in and accomplished by literary history, which gradually makes of her descent another cautionary tale. In Shakespeare’s play as in earlier texts like Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid*, Cressida recognizes that she is being untrue, but she seems powerless to do anything else. She acts according to the script that has been written for her and just like Helen before her, she is doomed to be loved and hated, powerful and powerless, priceless and valueless, encompassing herself in a never-ending duality that curiously enough comes to define this indefinable character.

Yet, Cressida’s duality is manifested in a number of different ways. She displays duality via her actions, her speech, and her body language as well. My first example highlights dualities in her actions and her words. When she finally confesses her love to Troilus, it sounds as though two Cressidas are struggling to be heard:

> Cressida: hard to seem won; but I was won, my lord,

With the first glance that ever— pardon me:

If I confess much you will play the tyrant.

I love you now, but not, till now, so much

But I might master it. In faith, I lie… (3. 2. 110-114)

She confesses that her former reluctance was a ruse, and then goes on even to expose this confession as misleading. She reacts as if there were two Cressida's inside her battling for supreme control over her body and her emotions, one who opens up and leaves herself vulnerable to the sexual advances of Troilus, willing to relinquish the power she has attained by the denial of her sexual desire, the other a chaste maiden who dissembles her sexual desires, and represses her sexual urges in order to conform to society and retain her power over the young warrior. Another example of this duality occurs in the first act when her Uncle Pandarus is trying to convince her that Troilus is the better man. As her Pandarus verbally decorates Troilus to make him seem better than he really is, she seems to be completely uninterested and yet her constant use of innuendos and sexually charged comments in the conversation suggest the contrary:

Pandarus: Who? Troilus? Troilus is the better man of the two

Cressida: O Jupiter, there's no comparison.

Pandarus: What? Not between Troilus and Hector? Do

you know a man if you see him?

Cressida: Ay, if I ever saw him before and knew him.

Pandarus: Well, I say Troilus is Troilus.

Cressida: Then you say as I say, for I am sure he is not Hector. (1.2 59-67)

Cressida's line " if I ever saw him before and knew him," according to editor David Bevington's annotations in *The Arden Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida*, suggests that Cressida is not only talking about knowing a man socially but also in the Biblical sense of carnal knowledge (142). The innuendo could even be taken to mean that not only she does want to *know* Troilus but that she already *knows* Hector and that this experience would allow her to compare both men and to conclude that Troilus will never measure up. With this bawdy comparison we fall again into the mimetic rivalry and competition that characterizes so many relationships in the play. But, as we have seen, these rivalries are also internal, as the virgin Cressida vies for predominance with the sexually experienced woman who "knows" men. Nonetheless, it appears that no matter what Pandarus says, Cressida is not interested in knowing about the virtues of the knight her uncle is trying to market as the best man on Earth. However, her attitude and the tone of the conversation allows the inference that she is indeed interested in Troilus but weary of her uncle's meddling, -- once again re-enforcing the virgin versus sexually experienced woman duality of the character. This double stance on her sexuality ultimately threatens to make Cressida a stranger to herself. It will be more clearly proclaimed by a disappointed and surprised Troilus later on. Shakespeare's Cressida is far more self-contradictory than Chaucer's version. She is able to setup a play within a play in which she tries to be both actress and director, a hunting game, perhaps, in which she is the predator and Troilus the prey; a situation interesting enough because, until they spend the night together, she is in firm control of Troilus. But her role as a master of her own life (and Troilus') is short-lived, because both control and passion are already cold the morning after.

The morning after the lovers seal their pact is another example of the two Cressidas. It would seem that Troilus went to bed with one Cressida and woke up with another, as if, through

the sexual act, the old Cressida has died and a new Cressida has replaced her. After she has lost her virginity to Troilus the type of language used by the heroine is far from maiden-like and inclines more towards the language of prostitutes. Her expressions once Troilus abandons her bed and tries to leave her chambers sounds more like that of a sex worker and not a virgin that has just had her first sexual encounter. The use of verbal expressions like "Prithee, tarry; you men will never tarry"(4.2 17) and "My lord, come you again into my chamber"(4.2 37) suggests the appearance of a more sexually charged and experienced double of Cressida that has risen after the consummation of the sexual act. This is important because it is in this very moment that Cressida's double is completely released and appears to be in complete control of actions. From here on, it will be this Cressida who ensures the continuance of the tradition, sealing her fate as a false woman by once again giving in to the power of sexuality.

Otto Rank analyzes the psychology of the double and also how sexuality and immortality are intertwined throughout literary history. In the chapter "The Sexual Era" from his book *Psychology and the Soul* Rank discusses how the role of sex and sexuality has changed across time and has been influenced by social organization and religion. He states that, "Belief in individual immortality is so much a part of the self that, although religious, sexual, and social organizations provide collective substitutes for individual immortality, the individual constantly seeks to perpetuate his ego and his self in individual works." (Rank 37) I would also add that the self looks for immortality through its actions, and thus we can take the female's power for reproduction as an example of such a quest for immortality. The matter of the doubling between Helen and Cressida is no exception. As the Helen tradition outlined in my introduction calls for two Helens: one who submits the other who rebels. This latter Helen also rebels against the maternal role of reaching immortality through sexual reproduction. We have a chaste Helen, one

who respects her marriage and household, one who is expected to follow the established social order and be socially correct, thus providing her husband with the means for reproductive immortality via the birth of his sons. On the other hand, to create the disruption, we have a double, one that runs after her younger lover Paris and decides to be a sexual entity instead of a reproductive one, and who leaves her children behind when she leaves for Troy. It is this double that becomes completely unrecognizable to her social order but still achieves another, more enduring kind of immortality. Helen's immortality is achieved by making men chase after her and die for her, a form of "sexuation" that brings her *both* ever-lasting fame and undying infamy[12]. After all, the man who possessed the most beautiful woman in the world would reach a higher social status. And, as we know, the word "possess" also has sexual connotations. It was not only about owning the woman but about having her sexually as well.

In order to serve as the mirror image of these two Helens, the doubling of Cressida is necessary, not only to continue the tradition but so Cressida can lay claim to the immortality that Helen has achieved. Therefore, Cressida's own degraded and degrading double allows her to imitate the same actions that brought infamous immortality to the emulated model, Helen. It is through this estranging of the character from itself, through this debasing double that Cressida becomes an infamous and *unheimlich* creature, just like the woman she is doubling for. The uncanniness of Cressida is suggested throughout the whole play, but it is not until Troilus, who is supposed to be the legitimate master of her affections, declares her strangeness that we are assured that a double has taken over the action. The passage reads as follows:

Troilus- Let it not be believed, for womanhood!

Think we had mothers. Do not give advantage

[12] See Bruce Fink's *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Ecrits Closely*. "It should recalled that sexuation is not biological sex: What Lacan calls masculine structure and feminine structure have to do not with ones biological organs but with the jouissance one is able to obtain"(158)

To stubborn critics, apt, without a theme

For depravation, to square the general sex

By Cressid's rule. Rather think this not Cressid.

Ulysses- What hath she done, Prince, that can soil our mothers?

Troilus- Nothing at all, unless that this were she.

Thersites-[*aside*] Will'a swagger himself out on's own

eyes?

Troilus- This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida. (5.2 135-144)

Troilus' recognition of Cressida's change confirms for the audience that though she may appear unchanged, this Cressida is no longer the woman he loved; rather, she has turned into the woman that at least in Chaucer's text she was always afraid of becoming. However, for Shakespeare's Cressida the change comes naturally, and the division between simplistic notions of a good and bad Cressida is imperceptible. Nonetheless these polarized personality swings maintain the character in an ever changing gradient of power and powerlessness-- not only over Troilus but also over her personal situation. Cressida appears to be willing to sacrifice herself in order to obtain power and control, but what she obtains in turn is the recognition by the male characters that she has turned into something that they do not recognize and cannot love. If we look at this from the perspective of Otto Rank's *Soul and Psychology*, Cressida's sexuation entitles her to a certain amount of power that changes the way the story, the characters, and she herself will develop. Once she is in charge of her own sexuation, she becomes uncanny, unrecognizable. To portray women as a disrupting element is nothing new; it has been used as a plot device for a long time. Women like Guinevere in the Arthurian myth, Helen in Greek literature and Aphrodite in Greek mythology (just to name a few) have been held responsible for the fall of

great men. But, technically, it is not these women who cause the fall of men, but the disruptive force of change that comes along with their presence or absence. When women became patriarchal property, there was no space for two great men in their lives-- the ideal demonstration of this being the father giving the daughter away to the husband. When an element of this situation changes and the males have to confront each other to demonstrate supremacy, the woman becomes the trigger of change, the element of chaos that will disrupt the smooth functioning of the patriarchy. The two perfectly shaped specimens of what manhood should represent will have to face each other and one of the two will have to yield in order for the other to obtain a victory. This in turn will turn the disputed woman into an agent of violence and death, an estranged element that will never fit again in the world of either man.

In many myths, such as that of Theseus and Ariadne to which Shakespeare's play refers, the struggle is between the father and the suitor. For the father she becomes a traitor if she favors the suitor and for the suitor she will be a traitor if she favors the father. How is this reflected in Shakespeare's Cressida? In the absence of Cressida's father, it is Pandarus and his protégée Troilus who step in as her protectors, and, in a twisted sense, they fill the void left by Calchas' treasonous escape. Given the fact that Troilus assumes the role of the father but is not the father, he holds the position of Cressida's quasi husband. The troth-plighting scene in Act 3 imitates a pseudo-marriage, but at no moment their relationship is actually sanctified as that of a husband and a wife. Therefore Troilus is fulfilling both roles; he is the father and the suitor. For a while, things move smoothly for Cressida, because she does not have to choose one side or the other, she has them both in one person. It is when the moment of the exchange comes that Troilus is forced to choose one role, father or suitor. By giving Cressida away he makes clear that he chooses the role of father, he steps down and unknowingly gives the woman away to the man

who will become the next best suitor, Diomede. After he has given her away, Troilus then reclaims the role of suitor and loathes Diomede for he (Diomede) has what belongs to him (Troilus). Cressida thus becomes the disruptive element between males, showing once more her mimicry of Helen. If the Cressida element was removed from the Troilus/Diomede equation, the two perfectly capable warriors would have met on the battlefield as equals and would have only competed in the field as warriors. Thanks to Cressida, not only does the conflict between the two men become personal, but it sets the stage for these two males to compete as both lovers and as fighters.

This is represented in Act 5 scene 2 of the play when Diomede claims the sleeve that Troilus gave Cressida as a love token and vows that he will wear it to lure its previous owner into battle, just to prove himself the better man.

Diomedes- I will have this. Whose was it?

Cressida- It is no matter.

Diomedes- Come, tell me whose it was.

Cressida- 'Twas one that loved me better than you will.

But now you have it, take it.

Diomedes- Whose was it?

Cressida- By all Diana's waiting-women yond,

And by herself, I will not tell you whose.

Diomedes- Tomorrow will I wear it on my helm

And grieve his spirit that dares not challenge it.

Troilus- [*aside*]

Wert thou the devil, and wor'st it on thy horn,

It should be challenged. (5.2 93-102)

The men are now fully engaged in a mimetic rivalry. Given the huge importance this play gives to the mimetic rivalry and doubles, it becomes an unavoidable to stress that the rivals have become versions of one another. Just as the debased Cressida doubles both Helen as well as the more innocent version of herself, so does Diomedes doubles Troilus and their shared rivalry double that between Menelaus and Paris. But none of this would have occurred were Cressida not present to pull the two men into this conjunction. The same dynamic happens with Helen. In an ideal situation, Menelaus and Paris would have never been compared to one another, for in their individual environments they were both perfect specimens of what a great man should be, there was no need for competition. When Helen disrupts everything and makes their worlds collide, these two men are forced to measure themselves against one another, trying to prove not only who the better warrior is but who deserves the woman. This shows that Cressida's transformation from socially integrated to uncanny not only disrupts the stability of her environment, but it also creates a major ripple through the identities of others, putting in play the identities of Diomede and Troilus as well. We must not forget that Cressida has already been exiled from Troy once when she is exchanged. From this point on she turns into something unfamiliar, an outlaw, she is no longer a part of the Trojan society and, since she comes from the walled city, she is not one of the Greeks either. If Troilus had died in the duel with Diomede, the Trojans would have held her responsible. Had Diomede died, the Greeks would surely have blamed the foreign girl who provoked the battle. As the daughter of the traitor, Calchas, she is a conflictive element from the beginning, but it is not until she finds herself between the two sides, that her disruption and uncanniness becomes real for the audience and for herself. It is then that the full extent of her chaotic capabilities takes center stage. When Cressida decides to give

herself to Diomede, in spite of all the promises she made to Troilus, her identity markers change. She is no longer a treasured lady but now she has opened the pathway to be labeled as a woman of the trade. She fully knows both the extent and the weight of her actions and yet she does it anyway. Once again we must clarify that at this point we are no longer dealing with the socially accepted and recognized Cressida but with an unfamiliar one, who now represents not only a danger to her fellow countrymen, but also shame to her lover Troilus.

It can be argued, then, that Cressida is the *specter* of Helen's uncanny behavior. A specter must be recognized "as that which menaces hegemonies [and] structures of power…" (Alfar 33). Both Cressida and Helen comply with the characteristics necessary to be judged a specter in this sense. With her rapture Helen did not only threaten the structures of power of two of the most powerful societies known to mankind, but she destroys them. Her escape from the familiar order did not only destroy her husband's reputation, it also causes the many deaths that follow. Because all the Greek lords have to go after her and the Trojans vow to protect her, the lives of all of those involved are forever changed. Some of those affected on the Greek side are Achilles, who lives a short life and dies in battle, Penelope, who finds herself chasing away suitors, Telemachus, who grows up without a father, Agamemnon, who sacrifices Iphigenia, etc. On the Trojan side , the losses are even more catastrophic:, Cassandra is labeled as crazy and separated from the family, Hector dies leaving his family unprotected, Paris is shamed in battle and Priam loses the last of his sons as the city goes up in flames. It is as if the specter of Helen poisoned everything she touched. Cressida is not so far behind in terms of being a specter either. Her deceptive behavior disrupts gender role expectations and with it threatens to render powerless two of the most important men in both sides of the conflict. As it happens with Helen, Cressida's

behaviors do not only affect the way she is perceived but the way Troilus is perceived by other warriors also.

Does that mean that with the sacrifice of both Helen and Cressida the specter would be exorcized and forever vanquished? Hardly, for the physical suppression of a character does not mean its essence is forever destroyed. With the end of the *Iliad* came the end of Helen as a character in that text, but that did not mean the end of Helen-like characters expressing and reinforcing the same behaviors that compose the specter. The recycling of characters is a recurrent practice among traditions and our research subjects are no exception. To think that Helen has transcended her condition as a woman and turned into a specter would mean immortalizing her to a point where she has ceased to exist as a physical entity and continues to exist as an essence, a static set of characteristics that can be transferred to any other female character to signify the consequences of forsaking virtue, an embodiment or the essence of the gendered operation of what Girard calls mimetic rivalry. Maybe this is the reason why Shakespeare's Cressida, unlike Chaucer's, needs to be a virgin. By the time *Troilus and Cressida* was written, a woman's value was measured by her virtue, therefore portraying Cressida as a widow would have made her devaluation less shocking to an audience. If as a widow she moved on to a consort after her husband's death (Troilus), it would not come as a surprise that she did it a third time with Diomede. On the other hand if the character is pure (sexually untouched), her value is higher and her loss of virtue more shameful to her sex and more disruptive for the society around her. However, that would seem to leave the question of Cressida's lack of loyalty unanswered, but if we look deeper, we find that it does not.

Cristina Leon Alfar in her book *Fantasies of Female Evil* says that

> "Virginity for maids and chastity for wives are imbued with a literal economic value making women commodities on a marriage market. As a result to the value attributed to the pure female body, anxieties about its opposite— the nightmare figure of the adulterous rebellious woman— proliferate and give rise to a need for control over that which defies order" (31).

This is why characters like Cressida and Helen rebel against their commodity status by their loss of virtue. They turn into the adulterous, rebellious woman in order to break from the conventionalities and control their lives. If we review older narratives and look at women as alliance makers and peace weavers we will notice that the marker did not only gave power to her male owner but wealth as well. Like territory or treasure, women like Helen and Cressida are portrayed as commodities, objects that can be taken at will, just like any other property that is acquired in the exchange of material possessions. When Helen is abducted by Paris she becomes a commodity for the Trojans and as so, she must aim to please her new lord to give him a reason to defend her and not surrender her back to her previous owner. Within this context, Cressida's easy acceptance of a new lover makes sense. For her, once she is given away by the Trojans (and by Troilus himself), she recognizes her status as a commodity. Just like any other spoils of war, she, as Troilus says of Helen "is naught but as 'tis valued." Interestingly enough, Shakespeare seems to address no direct punishment for the rebellious heroine, but indirectly, he condemns her to an eternity as the specter of falsehood, "Yea, let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood, 'As false as Cressid'" (3. 2. 190-92). Contrary to Henryson's *Testament* which physically punishes Cressid for rebelling, Shakespeare's punishment takes matters outside of time, branding not a woman, but women in general. Henryson exorcises the specter by killing Cresseid's body and

her death brings the end of chaos. Shakespeare immortalizes the specter she represents, and by doing that consequently immortalizes Helen as well.

Would it then be correct to assume that Cressida is a kind of sacrificial lamb? I would dare to say yes. According to Rene Girard, when some malady strikes, society will find a way to restrict it to one individual, because that gives them a material, concrete totem to blame, therefore justifying and controlling the violence caused by mimesis as a means to restore order (70). This way the demonized malady becomes flesh, and flesh can be punished and exiled. From her creation in Homer as something traded between men to quell a rampant plague, Cressida was predestined to be a sacrificial lamb. The importance of Shakespeare's Cressida is not restricted to a single individual, but rather with the dangers she is made to represent and embody. She literally embodies everything that Helen before her embodied too, the dangers and disasters that come with uncontrolled female sexuality and how dangerous these women are to virtuous men. Their sacrifice and exile becomes an imminent attempt to restore social order and make a moral point. That said, feminine duality becomes a necessary evil. The change from idol to specter justifies the need for sacrifice so the uncanny can be removed and mankind can return to its original established order.

Chapter III:
From Apollo's Temple to Achilles' Bed: Petersen's Briseis

"For your glory walks hand in hand with your doom"

-Thetis, *Troy*

In the earlier two chapters we looked at Criseyde and her variations as mirror images-- or better yet, as "avatars" of Helen (Meagher 21). In the Briseis of Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy*, however, we are not only faced with direct imitation and doubling but also with displacement and othering. [13]Even though in the Greek histories such as Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, Helen of Troy's relationship with the mighty Achilles is portrayed as factual, it was not commonly so portrayed in popular culture until Wolfgang Petersen brought his vision of the Trojan conflict to the big screen in 2004. In book three of his *Description of Greece*, Pausanias narrates how Leonymus of Crotona saw Helen married to Achilles during his visit to the White Island.

> In time he was healed and returned from White Island, where, he used to declare, he saw Achilles, as well as Ajax the son of Oileus and Ajax the son of Telamon. With them, he said, were Patroclus and Antilochus; Helen was wedded to Achilles, and had bidden him sail to Stesichorus at Himera, and announce that the loss of his sight was caused by her wrath. (*Description of Greece* 3.19.13)

[13]"The 'big Other', the Other written with an upper case 'O' refers either to the Symbolic Order as it is experienced by individual subjects, or to another subject in so far as that subject represents the Symbolic." (Myers, 23) "'The implication is that the 'reflecting specular image' in imaginary relations, 'always contains within itself an element of difference': what is supposed to be 'ours' is itself a source of 'alienation'. In that sense, 'every purely imaginary equilibrium or balance with the other is always marked by a fundamental instability'"(Stavrakakis 18)

Markedly different from Pausanias' investment in this relationship (the one between Achilles and Helen) Petersen's movie can be considered the perfect combination of *eros* and *eris,*[14] elements that are never absent from the Helen story. For those who are familiar with filmed versions of the story of Helen or the war of Troy, the Menelaus/Helen/ Paris love triangle reproduced in the 1956 film *Helen of Troy* will sound more familiar than any other "forbidden love" story set in Troy. In 2003 another adaptation bearing the same title, *Helen of Troy,* differs from its predecessor only in being made for TV, not for the big screen. Told from Menelaus' point of view, this version focuses on how Helen affected the lives of all around her, casting the larger Trojan conflict and its heroes in the background. Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy*, however, tries to adapt both public and private conflicts, the Trojan war and Trojan romances, including one in which Briseis becomes a major character, whose situation doubles, like the Criseyde of Chaucer and Shakespeare, the specter of Helen. This sets the stage for a completely new approach to creating variations of the Helen and Troy stories. Joachim Latacz comments:

> As a result, [of the long tradition of re-writing the Troy story] today we possess an enormously complex web of interrelated texts and visual narratives that deal with the matter of Troy. But all of them have certain features in common. They all fit or can be embedded into a system of narratives that has become canonical. It allows of numerous variations and deviations from one version to another, but it demands that its basic structure remain fundamentally unchanged.
>
> (Latacz 38)

The spark behind the creative mind of the one who's creating something new(*Troy*) out of something old (*The Iliad*) is that he can play with places and moments in which actions happen, and he can transfer actions to characters originally unrelated to those actions. A good example is

[14] Erotic love and deadly conflict. (Meagher 42)

Briseis' killing of Agamemnon, an action that, as we are told by mythology was committed by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover upon his return to Mycenae. Even though the location and characters committing the action are changed, the "basic structure remains fundamentally unchanged" (Latacz 38), to punish Agamemnon for his cruelty and strip him of his power. Therefore, it does not matter how much time passes between each variation, the basics behind the story and the characters remain unchanged, for it is this fundamental bits and pieces what keeps the fluidity of the plot and acts as the glue that keeps the story's main theme together.

On the other hand Meagher argues that the Helen/ Achilles relationship is actually a logical one if we root the argument in the figure of the double. Helen serves as a double for Aphrodite and Achilles for Ares. Taking this typological surrogacy to the extreme of allegory, the human couple would then be the mortal representation of the union of *Eros* and *Thanatos.*[15] I would like to add to Meagher's analysis, then, Briseis as a double for Helen. In his *Troy*, Wolfgang Petersen retains the essence of the Achilles/Helen love affair without physically including Helen in it. The Spartan queen is emulated by Briseis, who for the purpose of coherence in this version takes the place that would otherwise be occupied by either Polyxena or Helen. But Polyxena is completely omitted from the film and Helen cannot take this place for in this narrative her place is beside Paris, not Achilles. Nonetheless, Briseis becomes the perfect mirror image, for she incarnates everything that Helen stands for. She is a fallen woman who by becoming *unheimlich*, betrays her family and country in order to save herself and the love she holds for her victimizer, the killer of her family and invader of her homeland. Like Helen she gives in to the temptation of betrayal, making it possible for Helen's "shameless phantom" (Austin) to take over the spotlight every once in a while. Even though she can be easily pointed

[15] "Desire and Death." See Meagher, chapter two, *The Many Helens* (30).

out as a replacement for Polyxena, her behaviors mirror for Helen, giving the character a higher level of complexity.

If we are, in fact, to see Helen as an "avatar" for Aphrodite and Briseis as an avatar for Helen, the relationship created by Petersen between Briseis and Achilles for the movie is plausible. Just as Aphrodite represents the supernatural force that makes possible the meeting between Paris and Helen, in Petersen's version of the story, it is Helen who plays the role of Aphrodite, becoming the force that brings Achilles and Briseis together. Briseis, like Shakespeare's Cressida, begins her journey as a chaste creature, for she is being initiated as an acolyte in the temple of Apollo when the Greeks storm the beaches of Troy. At that moment her story starts to get re-written; for it is as a consequence of this event that she goes from royalty to slavery in the blink of an eye—an event evident in Homer but which occurs before the beginning of his poem.

When we are first presented with Briseis, two very important details are told to us by the men who are the pillars of her life. First, that she is beautiful (as with Crisyede and Helen the specter of beauty must be established before any deeper understanding of the character):
Paris: "Beloved cousin, your beauty grows with each new moon." Second, that she has chosen to remain a virgin and serve Apollo: Priam: "The young men of Troy were devastated when Briseis chose the virgin robes." The importance of making this decision known, however, could be interpreted in two very different ways. The first one could be that her choice is in fact an unconscious rejection of her countrymen, for she preferred to serve a god before serving a Trojan husband. The second would be that these words are nothing more than a foreshadowing of what is to come, for Briseis will not remain untouched and she will not serve Apollo but rather Achilles. What does seem remarkably clear, however, is that even a vestal version of Helen can

be forced into playing her role by a patriarchal war machine that transforms women into items of exchange that serve both to signal male status and to put that status at risk.

Achilles' god-like presence and power is always highlighted in Petersen's adaptation. Just like Briseis' beauty, Achilles' supremacy is established from the beginning, maybe as a foreshadowing for the spectator, to prepare us for the clash of power and attitudes the encounter between Briseis and Achilles will provoke. Later on, in scene fourteen, "No Need to Fear,"[16] Ajax intercepts Achilles and tells him the amount of pride he feels in fighting next to such a superior soldier:

> Ajax: *(He walks clumsily in the sand as he approaches Achilles)* Achilles!
>
> Achilles: Ajax
>
> Ajax: *(Walking next to Achilles)* You are as fearless as the gods, I'm honored to go to war with you. (*Troy*)

This exchange serves to remind the spectator that Achilles is always above all the other men, no matter how great they think themselves to be. Achilles will always be closer to the gods than any of the others can dream of being; therefore Achilles is the only man that could compete with Apollo for the possession of Briseis.

As is revealed later in the movie, Briseis falls into the hands of Achilles as a spoil of war, or in the words of Meagher, because "shining deeds require shining objects. The latter are fitting tokens of the former." (38) She was in Apollo's temple when the Myrmidons pillaged it, instead of killing her, the invaders take her as "a prize of honor" (Meagher 38), for Achilles to do with her as he pleases. However, there is important symbolism behind such exchanges, and the giving of Briseis is no exception. The placement of women in different social categorical roles than

[16] In this scene the Greeks have just taken the Trojan shore and the Myrmidons have taken the temple of Apollo. Briseis has just become Achilles' captive.

those of men in society and women as *gifts* can be traced back to Hesiod and his *Theogony* where Pandora (who can be considered another of Helen's precursors) was given as a *gift* to Prometheus, a *dolon*[17] from Zeus that brings about the eternal doom of Prometheus' fellow men.[18] Once again we see the tricky nature of the relationship between gifts and deception in action. In the same way that the Greeks create a horse as a *dolon* to give to the Trojans in order to destroy them, Briseis becomes the *dolon*, the deceptive gift given to Achilles that ultimately brings his doom. Therefore, like Pandora and Helen, Briseis becomes a *kalon kakon*, a beautiful evil that is responsible for the fall of a great man. Nonetheless, Achilles is not able to perceive this until it is too late and death has taken him**.**

From the beginning of their interactions, the spectator can see that Achilles treats Briseis differently than expected; he is not abusive, or exceedingly dominant as he is with men, but on the contrary, he appears friendly and tolerant-- behaviors that he otherwise reserves for Patroclus. In the scene "No Need to Fear" Achilles exchanges the following words with Briseis:

> Achilles: You are royalty aren't you? Spent years talking down to men, (*kneels down and smells her hair*) you must be royalty. What's your name? (*As he unties her hands*) Even the servants of Apollo have names.
>
> Briseis (*As she turns her head and looks him in the eye*): Briseis.
>
> Achilles: Are you afraid, Briseis?
>
> Briseis: Should I be?

[…]

> Briseis: (*making eye contact with Achilles*) What do you want here in Troy? You didn't come for the Spartan queen.

[17] Trick, deception, see Meagher, pages 52 and 53.
[18] See Meagher, Chapter 3, *The Duality of Helen*, pages 51 and 53.

Achilles: I want what all men want, I just want it more. You don’t need to fear me girl, you’re the only Trojan who can say that. (*Achilles exits the scene*) (*Troy*)

Just as in the earlier representations of Chaucer and Shakespeare, we are presented with a paternalistic, protective attitude from the male lead, an attitude that later on will shift to a lover/ master relationship. This attitude encourages a level of sympathy towards the captor in the eyes of both the captive (Briseis) and the spectator. It gives the male lead (here Brad Pitt) a level of depth and dimensionality that allows the spectator and the captive to see him as something more than just a killer and to love him as a human being despite his savage, violent outbursts and killing sprees.

Briseis, however, is not as willing as Criseyde and Cressida when it comes to the exchange of loyalties, even Helen appears more willing in this movie than Briseis will ever be. She is genuinely resistant, rebellious, strong-willed, and refuses to give in to the realities around her. She does not cope well with the fact that she is no longer royalty but a slave and now must do as she is told.

Briseis: (*To Achilles*) You killed Apollo’s priests.

Achilles: (*avoiding eye contact with Briseis*) I’ve killed men in five countries, never a priest.

Briseis: Well, then, your men did! The sun god will have his vengeance.

Achilles: (*With complete indifference*) What’s he waiting for?

Briseis: (*Angrily*) The right time to strike! (*Troy*)

Achilles: His priests are dead and his acolyte’s a captive. I think your god is afraid of me.

As the plot develops, like so many other women in classical stories, she is broken and turned into the submissive woman her captor wants her to be. After she accepts her fate as a slave (to

both her enemy and to her passions) she becomes *unheimlich*, for in order to survive she must act against everything she believed and had so far been taught by her Trojan family. The former chaste acolyte of Apollo and now the lover of Achilles, Briseis doubles the two Helens. She goes from royalty to slavery, and from a god's bride to her enemy's lover. What was originally seen in the light of black or white gradually begins turning into shades of grey to which she must adapt in order to survive. Nonetheless, I believe this gradual change in behavior is necessary for the process of doubling in this movie not only to be believable, but to take its full effect on the character's psychology. Through these changes in status and mind, Briseis will come to understand that war is not only about who is good and who is bad, as she originally thought it was, but that the multidimensionality of the human relationships and psyches makes things a lot more complex. A good example of this point is when Achilles decides to leave the conflict behind, take his men, his woman and leave Troy, a complex decision that changes the instant he discovers that Patroclus has been killed by Hector.

In the scene "Spoils of War" Agamemnon takes Briseis from Achilles thinking that this will humble him and force him to recognize Agamemnon's leadership. In the *Iliad* Athena intervenes:

> "I came down from heaven to curb your passion,
> if you obey. White-armed Hera sent me.
> She loves you both alike, cares equally.
> Give up this quarrel. Don't draw your sword.
> Fight him with words, so he becomes disgraced.
> For I say to you, and this will happen,
> because of Agamemnon's arrogance

> some day gifts three times greater than this girl
>
> will be set down before you. Control yourself.
>
> Obey." (Iliad, 1.225-232)

However, in Petersen's *Troy* it is Briseis who exhibits a bond of affection with Achilles powerful enough to stop him in his tracks:

> Briseis: "Stop! Too many men have died today. (*To Achilles*) If killing is your only talent, that's your curse! I don't want anyone dying for me." (*Troy*)

From a very early point in the movie we can appreciate that Briseis is a willing sacrificial victim, she is willing to be sacrificed in order to stop the objective violence being caused by the whirlpool of death that is Achilles' superhuman strength. She perceives less harm in her sacrifice to save the lives of others than to let *men* lose their lives for her. She is okay with dying as long as it is to serve a higher purpose; after all she was getting ready to become a priestess of Apollo when Achilles arrived. Based on Meagher's take on the Helen/ Achilles relationship and how they serve as avatars for the gods (Ares and Aphrodite), the following argument can be formulated. Achilles, being an avatar for Ares, the god of war, allows the world around him to perceive him as a divine figure. This fact, of course, vests him with superiority over his fellow men. As a consequence of this divine perception, anything of his property must be respected, no matter how controversial its possession might be. That's where Briseis fits in this situation. Being a Trojan, Briseis is despised by the Greeks in the camp. However, she is not to be touched, and even though her presence disgusts many, her blood cannot be spilled, for doing so would mean provoking Achilles' wrath. This is why Briseis in this film can be perceived as a *homo sacer*. She is abhorred by the men but loved by the demi-god, Achilles. Therefore slaying her would mean incurring the wrath of the divinity that protects her. As a consequence, this situation

also places her closer to the *unheimlich* and expands the chasm that separates her from the values and worldviews learned in Troy. It adds new shades of grey to Briseis' expanding and conflicting moral views on the world and war. She understands that the only reason she is still alive in the Greek camp is because of Achilles, and yet Achilles is the biggest threat to her family and the Trojan way of life. It is this type of turmoil that comes to define Briseis' status as an alien, sacred figure, godlike in her own way. She understands the weight of her choices, yet she decides to stay by the enemy's side; resembling the *unheimlich* status of Chaucer's Criseyde among the Greeks. By assuming this *sacer* status Briseis' mimicry of Helen becomes more notorious. In the film, Helen is accepted by the Trojan people because she is Paris' property and Priam certifies her as such by declaring her Helen of Troy. However, that does not eliminate the discomfort Helen's presence causes to the Trojan people. Nonetheless the people have no other choice; she is not to be touched, for doing so could mean provoking the wrath of the Trojan royalty.

By the time Briseis reemerges in the film, her earlier intervention between Agamemnon and Achilles has sealed her fate, for Agamemnon has thrown her to the soldiers like a helpless lamb to a pack of hungry wolves. She wanders around the Greek camp like a ghost, fighting with her last breath to defend both her honor and her life. Achilles enters the scene as if out of thin air, a god-like apparition who preserves Briseis' life and her virginity.[19] Again we are able to see the similitude of Achilles with a divine figure, deciding to punish the guilty and spare the *homo sacer*, the both cursed and divine individual from the wrath of men. It is also at this moment that Briseis becomes also an *azazel*, she wanders the Greek camp carrying the sins of both Greeks and Trojans; for she is held responsible for Achilles' disrespectful and prideful nature and is a

[19] In fact, this debased exile, who is finally and pathetically reunited with her prince, recalls neither Homer, Chaucer nor Shakespeare but rather Robert Henryson's stark continuation of the tale in *The Testament of Cresseid*.

living breathing ambassador of the enemy just for being Trojan. The following shot shows a ghastly, tortured soul, while she feebly tries to defend herself from the soldiers.

Figure 1- A ghastly Briseis wanders through the Greek camp

Even though Briseis' internal conflict is short-lived compared to the other female characters studied here, we could argue that hers is stronger and less equivocal. Not only does she face internal doubts and challenges to her beliefs about war, life and death, but she also has to confront the collapse of her worldview while facing her captor. That is why for a brief but significant sequence in the movie she attempts to play the role of savior. After all, to rid the world of war's embodiment on Earth would save the lives of all of those Achilles is yet to kill, her cousin Hector included. Once again we see how she is willing to sacrifice herself for the survival and well being of others. She is willing to stain her hands with Achilles' blood in exchange for the lives of those who Achilles will brutally slay. The scene goes as follows:

(Briseis enters with a knife and puts it to a sleeping Achilles' throat)

Achilles: Do it. Nothing is easier.

Briseis: Aren't you afraid?

> Achilles: Everyone dies. Today or fifty years from now; what does it matter? *(He grabs Briseis by both her arms and moves her into a better position for striking a fatal blow)* Do it.
>
> Briseis: You'll kill more men if I don't kill you.
>
> Achilles: Many. *(Briseis looks straight into his eyes holding the knife to his throat, her hand trembling with doubt. Achilles holds her again and turns her over underneath him, knife still to his throat, and starts kissing and caressing her, Briseis lets go of the knife and gives in to the advances of Achilles.)* (*Troy*)

At this moment she also mimics Helen, for in the *Iliad* Helen also has this momentary lapse of judgment where she wants to be the savior of both Trojans and Greeks instead of the bringer of their doom. In the *Iliad*, Helen tries to escape from Troy, and Aphrodite stops her by threatening her with the disdain and hatred of men who used to covet her beauty and venerate her. However, just as Helen goes back to Paris' bed after the incident, Briseis returns to Achilles' tent. Briseis' passions also add nuances of ethical complexity to her moral spectrum. Things are no longer as black and white as she thought. She has started noticing the shades of grey in between. There is also an unmistakable game being played between Briseis and Achilles in this scene ("Everyone Dies" 1:31:32) that reflects their roles as the avatars of the gods. Achilles, the representation of war and violence among mortals at this moment embraces *eros* and *thanatos* as one and the same, much as the later Freud of *Civilization and Its Discontents* had done. Briseis, being *eros* incarnated, the mirror image of Helen, shows an undeniable attraction for Achilles' destructive desire and embraces his *thanatos* as her own desire when she gives in to her new master's wishes instead of killing him. Therefore we can see how Petersen, once again, intertwines the concepts of violence and sex to almost a point of fusion (the first time being with Paris and Helen) and by

doing this acknowledges the presence of the Greek gods without making them a concrete element of the story. "The gods *are* present in *Troy*. They are *inside the humans*" (Latacz 42). After all, in this film all divine interventions from the *Iliad* are replaced by the intervention of key characters. It is Briseis who stops Achilles, not Athena; it is Hector who stops Helen from leaving Paris; and Hector who saves Paris from certain death when fighting Menelaus, not Aphrodite. Therefore, key characters in the movie take divine roles and consequentially disrupt the rule of fate and reassert the role of free will. However, the scene also reveals psychological changes in Briseis. It says a lot about her level of submission to her captor that she accepts and prefers the attentions of a violent and unpredictable warrior, who one minute loves her and the next tries to strangle her, over her devotion to Apollo, a god who represents reason and order. With Briseis it is not only a matter of her sexuation but also a matter of her re-education in sexual power and gender dynamics.

Her sexual surrender to Achilles comes to define her as nothing more than an unfortunate avatar for Helen, a double; for Briseis starts her journey in the film as a virgin dedicated to Apollo and ends it as Achilles' concubine. She willingly gave herself carnally and spiritually to the man who abducted her from her "marriage bed" the same way Helen, as Menelaus' wife, gave herself willingly to Paris when he "abducted" her from her home. By the time we meet Achilles and Briseis again, she is most certainly not Achilles' captive but a captive of *eros* just like Helen, Criseyde, and Cressida before her.

(Achilles and Briseis lying naked together in bed inside Achilles' tent)

Briseis: Am I still your captive?

Achilles: You're my guest.

Briseis: In Troy, guests can leave whenever they want.

Achilles: You should leave then.

(Briseis looks at him tenderly, while Achilles approaches her lips slowly as if to kiss her)

Briseis: Would you leave this all behind?

Achilles: *(looks back at her with doubt reflecting in his eyes).*Would you leave Troy?

(Briseis answers his question by giving him a worried look while continuing to lie beside him, speechless.) (*Troy*)

Once Briseis has surrendered to the pleasures of the flesh we start dealing with an *unheimlich* Briseis, one that has been fully possessed by the specter of Helen. By surrendering willingly, Briseis has betrayed her loyalties and turned her back on the honor she owes to her male Trojan protectors by choosing the man who will be responsible for the death of her cousin Hector and the fall of her home, Troy. The dilemma is clearly set in front of her and by not answering Achilles' question of whether or not she would leave Troy, she is choosing to stay in an idyllic morally gray area that will not last. As Achilles foretells in the scene "Everyone Dies," they will never be lovelier than they are now, they will never be in that same moment ever again, everything will come to an end. However, it is while in this *sacer* status that we are lead to believe that Briseis' change serves a higher purpose; her sacrifice of honor and country are worth it, for she has numbed the killer within Achilles. And if she really has become a sacred object to this demi-god of war, a voice of conscience, perhaps, that has brought momentary peace to a turbulent force of destruction, Briseis' sacrifice is justified melodramatically if not morally. But this respite is also brief. In the scene "Bitter Tragedy" after Achilles learns of his cousin Patroclus' death, the violence within him is newly awakened and Briseis loses control over his fury. This is made more than clear later in the same scene when Achilles tries to strangle her

because she attempts to intervene while in his blind rage at Patroclus' death, Achilles is strangling Eudorus, his first in command.

Figure 2- A furious Achilles tries to strangle Briseis for intervening after receiving notice of Patroclus' death

In that moment Briseis goes back to being just a fallen woman, a traitor to the Trojans and an odious abject to Achilles, not because of who she is but because of what she represents, for now Achilles has a concrete reason to despise Hector and the royal family, and Briseis represents an extension of Hector's lineage. This abjection of Briseis is confirmed in the scene "Summoned to Fight" when she pleads with him not to fight Hector and he refuses even to look at her, he just leaves for the battleground with the intention of avenging Patroclus' death.

> *(Achilles is on his chariot, armored and about to leave for Troy's walls. Briseis enters the scene running desperately towards Achilles)*
>
> Briseis: Don't go! Hector's my cousin. He is a good man. Don't fight him. Please don't fight him. Please.
>
> *(Achilles doesn't even bother to acknowledge her with a glance, he whips his horse and leaves)* (*Troy*)

After these events occur, Briseis reverts from sacrificial lamb to *azazel*. She goes back to being the one who wanders, carrying the sins of both sides, plus her own. She is once again turned into an outsider by the man who once deemed her sacred. This status is chiseled in stone when in the

scene "Desecrating the Dead" Achilles comes back to the Greek camp dragging Hector's dead body, a sign to Briseis that neither she nor her bloodline could ever tame the killer instinct within Greece's best soldier. She is a Trojan who has betrayed her people by surrendering to the Greeks, the same way Criseyde betrayed Troilus by accepting Diomede, and she is paying a high price for her treason with the lives of those she loves.

The psychology of our heroine becomes more and more interesting as the film progresses. Even after Achilles rejects her and she is no longer deemed worthy of his affections, Briseis does not leave his side, showing signs that her emotional bond with Achilles has become a strong one. Again, we are presented with a female character that after being physically abused, rejected and marked as an outsider remains faithful to her captor. Petersen gives the spectator a woman who over and over again makes decisions that result in violence and chaos, not the peace and morality she claims repeatedly that she supports and represents. When the exchange scene occurs and she is sent back to the Trojans, she does not go back of her own will, it is Achilles' decision to send her back. This decision, devalues Briseis' status as a woman even more, for not only is she a traitor to Troy, now even her enemy lover has rejected her and sent her back.[20] Briseis has no other choice but to hide her irrational affections for Achilles and go back home to Troy, shamed and knowing what she has done.

Unlike Troilus or Paris, Petersen's Achilles needs no intermediaries to get what he wants, for that he has his god-like strength and his Myrmidon army. In the opening scenes of the movie we get a taste of Achilles' personality and strength of character. We are presented with the epitome of manhood and soldier-hood. He is not only strong and aggressive in combat, but tender and wise in his private life, embodying the bipartite heroic ideal of fortitude and wisdom. This duality will greatly affect the decisions taken by our heroine and will also be a key

[20] Just as, in a similar fashion, Diomede abandons Cresseid in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*.

influence on both their fates. A clear example is provided in the scene titled “Awaiting Achilles” just a few minutes into the movie when a young boy is sent to call Achilles to fight a duel. The boy and Achilles have the following conversation:

> Boy: The Thessalonian you’re fighting, he’s the biggest man I’ve ever seen. I wouldn’t want to fight him.
>
> Achilles: That’s why no one will remember your name. (*Troy*)

The exchange demonstrates the warrior’s selfish concern for glory and the form of immortality it confers. For Achilles, a life without glory is no life at all. But later on, when he is in Larísa training his cousin Patroclus, he is a caring and a father-like figure to the young man. Later, in the scene “Immortality at Troy’s Shore” he withholds his cousin from battle when the Myrmidons arrive on the beaches of Troy. Their conversation goes as follows:

> Achilles: Patroclus! (*Patroclus moves among the soldiers from the back of the ship to the front, where Achilles is standing and making himself ready for battle)* Put down your spear.
>
> Patroclus: *(looking at Achilles full of surprise)* But I’m fighting the Trojans, cousin.
>
> Achilles: *(with a paternal tone)* Not today.
>
> Patroclus: But I’m ready, you taught me how to fight.
>
> Achilles: (*while patting him on the arm*) And you are a good student. But you are not a Myrmidon yet. Look at these men. They are the fiercest soldiers in all of Greece. Each of them has bled for me. You’ll guard the ship.
>
> Patroclus: (*In an annoyed tone*) But this is a war.

> Achilles: *(takes Patroclus by the back of his neck, draws him near and locates Patroclus cheek close to his chest while he whispers in his ear in a concerned tone)* Cousin, I can't fight the Trojans if I'm concerned for you. Guard the ship. (*Troy*)

These scenes are important because they give audiences a glimpse into Achilles' human side. What keeps Achilles from completely releasing his god-like rage is not his love for Briseis, but his love for Patroclus. As it is said, blood is thicker than water: Patroclus is the one who has the legitimate bond with Achilles, for he is family; Briseis is neither family nor a brother-in-arms, though for awhile she manages like Patroclus to control the god-like rage within Achilles' heart. However, to imagine that Briseis could replace Patroclus as Achilles' buffer between his humanity and his *menis* is wishful thinking. As a consequence, Briseis' fate was also sealed when Patroclus was killed. With those few lines also, a clear profile of the type of man Petersen wants to present is made clear: straightforward, heroic, unafraid of death, but with a human side-- a side that remains unseen in Homer until Book 22, when Priam and Achilles find common ground in shared grief. The presentation of a love-stricken Achilles that rises above the complexities of war to fall in the nets of erotic love is a post-Homeric conception. Scholars like Georg Danek think that:

> One of the most fascinating developments of the Achilles myth through the centuries is that of the love motif. There is none yet in the *Iliad*: Achilles' wrath caused by the abduction of Briseis does not mean that he is in love with her, and his pain caused by the loss of Patroclus concerns friendship, not a sexual relationship. It is only in the post-Homeric tradition that we can observe an

> additional love element, one that involves Achilles with Priam's daughter Polyxena. (Danek 80)

This is the Achilles Petersen gives to his audience, with the slight twist that he falls in love before Hector's death and Polyxena is replaced with his fatherly love for Patroclus and his passionate love for Briseis. Consequently, as discussed earlier, we get a character that has been remolded to fit the purpose of the story even though his basic structure remains fundamentally unchanged, as is also the case with Briseis and Helen.

Like Chaucer and Shakespeare, Petersen provides us with an exchange scene in which Briseis goes back to the Trojans and her uncle Priam. Even though her uncle takes her back to Troy, in her heart she knows she will no longer fit in, for she has betrayed her people in becoming the lover of the killer of Troy's protector. As a consequence, she is also held responsible for Hector's death, much as Helen is. But back to the exchange: in the scene "A Father's Plea," Achilles, severely strained by Patroclus' death and Priam's courageous infiltration into the Greek camp to recover Hector's body, concludes that there is no longer a place for Briseis among the Greeks or by his side, so he sends her back to Troy, with a promise to respect the mourning period appointed for the burial of Hector's desecrated corpse. Again, Briseis serves an offering, an object of exchange between men through which a deal is sealed. This first occurred in the temple at the beginning of the film, when she was Achilles' prize for taking the beaches of Troy. Now she becomes Priam's consolation prize for his loss of Hector. And, just as Troilus sends Criseyde over to the Greeks with a token of his love, so too does Achilles, who gives Briseis the seashell necklace his mother gave to him when he was a young boy, the same one Patroclus used to wear around his neck. The necklace is important because it is a symbol of the only kind of unconditional love that Achilles has ever known, and now that

love goes with her, with the necklace. Close to the end of the movie, Briseis returns to her original "husband" Apollo, (just as Helen went back home with Menelaus and lived a long unhappy life). She prays for the god to save Troy from the rampant siege led by the Greeks on her city. Yet it is not Apollo who comes to her rescue, but Achilles, stealing the glory of the sun god for one last time and paying dearly for it when, as Briseis puts it in an earlier scene when she is judging Achilles for his attack on the god's temple, Apollo's arrow finds "the right time to strike" through Paris' bow.

However, we could argue that Petersen's Briseis has two moments of vindication, something that neither Helen nor Criseyde has. Those two moments are when she kills Agamemnon by stabbing him in the throat, and when she becomes responsible for Achilles being such an easy target for Paris to slay with his bow and arrow. In Petersen's version, it is she and not Clytemnestra who gets the honor of killing the power-hungry Agamemnon. And it is she, not Polyxena, who is responsible for the death of Achilles. Unlike in the *Iliad*, Briseis' suffering has consequences: just as is the case with Helen, men are made to pay for possessing her. Briseis is given a fleeting chance at heroism by escaping victimhood and confronting her captors, but this can only happen in the chaos of the siege, only the spectators of the film can see that it was she who brought to his knees the most powerful king in Greece. I guess that brings into play the proverbial tree falling in the empty forest. Does the blood of Agamemnon and Achilles redeem her sins if there is no one to witness it? I don't think it does. In the modern revision of the Trojan War, modern audiences are eye-witnesses to a truth which no participant in the events lived to relate. For those involved in the conflict (those within the world of the film) she is still the helpless acolyte who was captured by the Myrmidons, served as a slave for Achilles, was brought back to Troy by Priam, and saved from a certain death by Paris. Yes, the spectator gets

to see her save herself from Agamemnon but the spectator is not a valid witness within Briseis' world. Therefore history will never know Briseis as the woman who broke the Helen's curse by taking her fate into her own hands; instead she is destined to perpetuate Helen of Troy's shameless ghost just like Criseyde and Cressida and many other classical "heroines."

Conclusion:
One Woman, Every Woman

After analyzing the texts and characters in the last three chapters, one important conclusion can be reached: exceptional beauty, doubling, and deception are the main ingredients in the creation of Helen and her avatars. Given that these characters serve to send a message and fit a purpose, they are remolded at will, without taking into account the damage that these deceptive recreations do to the character's literary legacy. The specter of beauty becomes an important part of the character's presentation, because the reader is invited to fall in love with a beautiful *dolon*, only to have those desires and expectations frustrated when she shows her true colors and proves rotten to the core. Because these feminine simulacra are physically beautiful, they are manipulated into a life of deception that is later on blamed on the weakness of their sex, as both Criseyde and Cressida mention in Chaucer and Shakespeare, respectively. We can also conclude that women are the scapegoat of choice in imaginary recreations of the Trojan War from Homer to Wolfgang Petersen. The women of the texts are sacrificed for a cause they don't believe in. However, they cannot escape from a fate already written; or rather they cannot escape a misogynist literary tradition that re-inscribes its bias as fate. Nonetheless, as if to soften the blow, their sacrifice is not physical but social, they are not killed, but exiled and reviled. All the afore mentioned women had a comfortable [accommodated] social status yet, as their stories develop, they lose it, and lose along with it their family values, their life styles and their moral principles as well. As they are degraded from their lofty social status, their family and their homes, they are also forced to strip themselves of modesty, chastity and loyalty.

As readers, it is important for us to be able to identify all these mimicked characteristics and gender stereotypes so we can pass fair judgment on these women. In order to make an

objective analysis of the feminine characters discussed, an awareness of purpose and context is necessary. Once we understand that these characters are vessels designed to contain women and to present the transgression of rigid moral boundaries as tragic and catastrophic, we can see them objectively and pass more reflective judgments. In the case of the legacy of Helen of Troy, what we are left with is a negative view of women and their intentions. No longer simple victims of the patriarchy's trade of women, such figures wander from the familiar and spawn an unrecognizable double, a split personality, or a doppelgänger. Sadly, from a socio-cultural perspective, the predominant idea that these texts teach is that women are "fickle and changeable". However, I find it unfair for the women in these narratives to be the target of this type of forgery-- especially considering that Helen and her avatars are pushed into situations that corrupt them by the male characters sworn to protect them. It is clear that the doubling of these women becomes a convenient fabrication, a way to gender duplicity by rendering the objects of masculine desires culpable for the horrors of war. The double thus becomes indispensable, because it assures an opportunity for adaptation and justifies the spiral of morally doubtful decisions. Once the double makes its appearance, confrontation only becomes a matter of time, leaving the female character with a trail of evidence of her *unheimlichkeit* that both male characters and authors manipulate to obscure the real motivations behind imperial conquests. However, the said confrontation comes at a high price, paid of course by the heroines in the texts. Also very noticeable is the pattern of using women as currency, objects of exchange. Criseyde, Cressida, and Briseis become the coin with which debts are paid and exchanges established. However, their value is relative, for it depends on who is in possession of the lady. As a consequence their status enters a marketplace in which at some points they are considered as extremely valuable (i.e. Criseyde when is exchanged for Antenor), while at others their value

declines sharply (i.e. once Criseyde becomes Diomedes' property). "Nothing is aught but as 'tis valued," as Troilus remarks in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and that value decreases as woman pass from man to man. We can also see this tendency show its ugly face when the reader is introduced to characters, at first the women are presented as almost divine creatures, worthy of the great men they will later destroy, priceless and peerless companions; soon, however, their market value declines precipitously because changing sides and changing lovers makes them objects of scorn. Interestingly, as their value declines all these women are made to despise themselves—or at least that corrupt version of themselves they have become. Once devalued, none of them can regain their original worth but their stock can and does continue to fall in particular texts as well as in the literary tradition more generally.

The study of this type of traditional character becomes important because they have a deep impact on our perceptions of feminine change and the dangerous mutability of women unsupervised by the vigilant, masculine gaze. Also, these characters have been and continue to be inspirations for new female characters that are molded in their image, immortalizing an anti-feminine message and promoting the suspicion that all women are double. They represent how the double is always present, how the feminine has two sides, (one *heimlich,* the other *unheimlich*), for, as shown throughout this thesis, it is not until the woman is released and left to make her own decisions that her selfish, destructive nature is awakened. Once alone, the woman becomes unstable, allowing the emergence of a double that endangers not just her lovers and herself but also the entire civilization for which she becomes a scapegoat. The legacy of Helen and her avatars is enduring evidence, should we need it, of how and why the matter of Troy still matters.

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