

## ORDER AND DISORDER IN TWO VERSIONS OF *TROILUS* AND *CRESSIDA*: THE CASE OF ULYSSES<sup>1</sup>

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The character of Ulysses in Shakespeare's version of *Troilus and Cressida* (published 1603), though not often commented on in detail by the critics, is usually treated as the closest thing to a chorus, voice of reason or wisdom in the play otherwise marked by irrationality, lack of closure and inconsistency. His "Degree" speech in 1.3, in which Ulysses describes his theory of the orderly and disorderly society, is the prime reference point for such statements, backed up by other instances of his interventions to correct a ills previously diagnosed and by the background of mayhem against which the speech is uttered. In Dryden's 1679 rewrite of Shakespeare, confirmation of his role as chief counsellor seems to be vindicated by the instalment of a specific moral objective by Agamemnon, Ulysses' reiteration of the lesson to be drawn by the audience in the closing scene, and the constant interventions of the latter at several points in between to ensure that the objective is reached. This positive opinion of Shakespeare's Ulysses, which seems a sensible one because he espouses the ideologically comfortable notion of social order, is not, however, shared by everybody, perhaps because he also affords glimpses of the malevolent spymaster, in control of his environment yet giving nothing of himself away. In this paper, I start from a couple of notions about the concept of "chaos", a concept raised by Ulysses himself in his "Degree" speech, to explore this apparently counterintuitive representation of Shakespeare's Ulysses. My hypothesis is that such a view does not stem from any incompatibility with "common sense" but from Ulysses' confusion between a certain "scientific" image of order (the capacity for control over nature via predictive calculations) and that of ease of manipulation. This confusion in Ulysses is picked up by Dryden who brings the relationship between deterministic science and political theology of the Absolute state closer together.

This paper forms part of a larger study looking at the interplay of order and disorder in the Troy story through the Renaissance and which is exemplified here in two versions of *Troilus and Cressida*,<sup>2</sup> one by Shakespeare (registered in 1603) and Dryden's rewrite of the same play (registered and performed in 1679), with

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2. Shakespeare's version will be referred to using the abbreviation *Tro.* and Dryden's version using the abbreviation *Troilus*. It is also pointed out here that the printed version of Dryden's play does not contain line numbers.

Ulysses as the main focus of interest. The underlying problematic of both plays is social order, what it is and how it can be maintained. Ulysses, Agamemnon's counsellor, is the mouthpiece for ideals of order which are cosmic and idealistic in Shakespeare and social and pragmatic in Dryden. Both playwrights conceive of Ulysses in a totalitarian mould but, because of their different world views, Shakespeare's Ulysses ends up seeming an impotent and contradictory schemer in the midst of chaos, whilst Dryden's is instrumental in defending the King and ensuring the unity of the army and the victory of the Greeks. The different conceptions of Ulysses contribute partly to a general feeling about the two plays, which is that, although Shakespeare's play is Dryden's acknowledged source, this fact does not help to explain the qualitative difference between the two plays.

Ulysses' first intervention in both cases is the policy meeting of the King and his chief advisers to discuss the failure to make progress in the war, and during which he diagnoses divisions in the Greek camp as being one of the basic problems. A few brief comparative comments may be made. Firstly, in Shakespeare, Ulysses' contribution to the debate is long (136 lines in all) and rhetorical, whereas Dryden strips Ulysses' speech of most of the metaphor and amplification and takes just 39 lines to cover similar ground. Secondly, in Shakespeare, Ulysses is one of only three Greek chiefs, Agamemnon, Nestor and Ulysses, who meet to try and decide what to do. This gives their deliberations a conspiratorial air and contrasts with Dryden's broader-based, more 'parliamentary' version which includes Menelaus and Diomedes. Thirdly, according to Shakespeare's Ulysses, "specialty of rule has been neglected" (*Tro.*1.3.78), a statement which briefly but overtly, puts some of the blame for the problem onto Agamemnon. Dryden nowhere includes a criticism of the King; he uses the phrase "observance due to rule has been neglected" to emphasise that the king's subjects have not paid enough respect to their ruler (*Troilus* 1.1). Fourthly, the main problem, the responsibility of the subject, is based on different conceptions of order.

To begin with Shakespeare's version, Ulysses' universe is idealised and hierarchical, even patriarchal in nature. It is a relatively modern universe with the sun at the centre (a Copernican rather than Ptolemaic universe) and the functions of the sun are to watch and control for deviation. As Ulysses says, the sun's "...medicinal eye / Corrects the influence of evil planets" (*Tro.*1.3.91-92). The sun might be a metaphor for God, although God's name is not alluded to, only his traditional functions and his supposed location, at the centre of things. This is the root of one of the ambiguities in Shakespeare's version: determining who the king is. In 3.3, for example, when Ulysses advises the Greek chiefs to ignore Achilles, he comments parenthetically: "'Tis like he'll question me, / Why such unplausible eyes are bent on him" (3.3.42-45), making himself the central source of authority. Following this he claims, sneeringly: "If so, I have derision medicinal/ To use between your strangeness and his pride". The repetition of "medicinal" draws attention to Ulysses' possible aspirations as a usurper.

The hierarchy sketched out by Ulysses begins with the king and moves down through organised social groups of schools, trade, marriage and family, which are all male in character. References to the sun, the king, brotherhoods,

primogeniture, fathers and sons are made. The driving principle of the ideal universe is “degree” in which obedience to the duties dictated by one’s allotted position in the hierarchy is observed to take place. In the Greek camp, degree has been ignored, principally by Achilles. Ulysses tells Agamemnon and Nestor that when degree is “masked”, “shaked”, “suffocated” or is “out of tune”, the result is chaos and social failure. Symptoms of the lack of observance of degree are the inability to differentiate what has worth from that which has none (one of the themes of the Trojan Council speech in 2.2), or to separate right from wrong. Power, will and appetite are the hidden means of disorder, expressed as discord, collapse of community and a return to elemental disorder. Finally, civilisation collapses in on itself. The scenario of chaos (1.3.94-101) with its imagery of floods and the fecundity of physical nature beyond human control is similar to that expressed by King Lear in his madness, except that King Lear invokes the storm, whilst Ulysses tries to contain it. Ulysses, therefore, expresses a kind of male angst at being unable to order and control what, as a male, he is theoretically the centre of. Ulysses is seen to be impotent to control the mounting disorder and it is finally only anger caused by the death of Patroclus which brings Achilles out of his tent.

Ulysses’ role as adviser is undermined by doubts about his effectiveness, his loyalty to the king, and whether the information he gleans is put to the service of self rather than the collective good. Shakespeare uses the fractal device (localised patterned behaviour which is found to repeat its own shape but with subtle variations at different levels)<sup>3</sup>, to draw attention, in this case, to similarities between Ulysses’ criticisms of others and his own behaviour. So, Ulysses criticises those like Achilles who fail to observe degree or support the king, but nonetheless performs the aspects of the parodies which criticise the king. Achilles and Patroclus withdraw into their tents to criticise Agamemnon, Nestor, and probably Ulysses, but Nestor, Ulysses and Agamemnon are privately doing something similar. Another example of the fractal is the metaphor of the disorderly ‘universal wolf’ with which Ulysses apocalyptically ends the degree speech, gobbling everything and itself up in an orgy of unrestrained appetite. Ulysses’ image of appetite imitates the flow of his rhetoric, a couple of ideas are swallowed up in a hundred lines of speech. Dryden, in the Preface to his own version of the play, was perhaps thinking of these interventions of Ulysses when he commented on Shakespeare’s language as being “obsolete”, concealing “nuggets of gold” beneath. If we are to believe what Dryden said, he saw Shakespeare’s language as an obstacle to understanding the play, although one would like to know which ‘nuggets’ he thought worth salvaging.

Another relevant example of the fractal involving Ulysses concerns the theme of watching or spectating. Ulysses is constantly watching people. He accompanies Troilus to Calchas’ tent and watches the scene between Diomedes and Cressida-a

3. The *Mousetrap* performances in *Hamlet* are a good example of the fractal device, with events recounted by the ghost of old Hamlet reappearing, with slight variations in the dumbshow, the prologue, the ‘play’ proper and the supposed source cited by Hamlet.

mirror image of the spectators watching the play. Ulysses, seen as a voyeur, might remind the audience of the Puritan censors in the City 'keeping an eye' on the theatres located outside the city walls, perhaps more than strictly necessary, in order to find (and maybe surreptitiously enjoy) those scenes of moral turpitude they disapproved of so much. Ulysses says cynically of Cressida, before he and Troilus take up their positions in Calchas' tent, "She will sing any man at first sight" (5.ii.10), thus delivering a low blow to Troilus, but lingering anyway to see his comment justified. On the theme of "watching people", he also fits the profile of the spy. Bloom comments that: "The authentic chill that emanates from Ulysses comes when he speaks as the Elizabethan spymaster, Walsingham or Cecil, whom Shakespeare must have suspected of terminating Christopher Marlowe" (340). Both were advisers to Queen Elizabeth and both Protestant, and Walsingham a particularly staunch one.

Ulysses certainly has his sights set firmly on Achilles. When Achilles withdraws into his tent to avoid the King, Ulysses is the first to contest his claim that he is ill because he has just seen him. His predilection for watching others and collecting information in the name of the state is part of his role as adviser. He justifies spying on Achilles' affair with the Trojan princess, Polyxena, as the right of the state to know: "All the commerce (with Polyxena) that you have had with Troy / As perfectly is ours as yours, my lord" he says to Achilles (3.3.205-06). He uses information, particularly that involving sexual impurity as the basis of his power over others, although neither spectator nor reader can determine how well-founded are his interpretations. Achilles is trafficking with the enemy by carrying on a love affair with Polyxena (one of Priam's daughters) whilst simultaneously engaging in a homosexual relationship with Patroclus. When Cressida, in the so-called 'gang-bang scene', humiliates Ulysses, whom she spurns after he follows his fellow Greek princes in begging a kiss, he labels her 'wanton' and later (in 5.2) informs Troilus that "she will sing any man at first sight".

It is not obvious quite how useful his information is in keeping the social order intact. He uses transgression as a means of intimidation for disciplinary purposes and maybe derives sadistic pleasure from extracting information from the unwilling. Having labelled Cressida a "wanton", he then criticises the "glib of tongue" like his companions in the tent who "...wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts / To every tickling reader" (4.5.58, 60-61), although his profession involves precisely that, finding out what people know. Apart from that, his information does not seem to amount to much.

It is not surprising, then, that in Ulysses we find a figure who is not struck by the subjectivity of inner experience, or if he is, he does tell anyone about it. Ulysses reveals nothing of himself, except indirectly, through projected fears of social annihilation and loss of masculinity. He is emblematised perfectly in one of Henry Peacham's emblems (1612) entitled "Nulli Penetrabilis" ("Penetrable to No-one"), whose logo shows a thick wood at night with four or five stars above. The motto runs as follows:

A shadie Wood, pourtraicted to the sight  
With uncouth paths, and hidden waies unknowne:

Resembling CHAOS, or the hideous night,  
 Or those sad groves, by banke of ACHERON  
 With banefull Ewe, and Ebon overgrowne:  
 Whose thickest boughes, and inmost entries are  
 Not peirceable, to power of any starre.  
 Thy imprese SILVIUS, late did I devise,  
 To warne the what (if not) thou oughtst to be,  
 Thus inward close, unsearch'd with outward ies,  
 With thousand angles, light should never see:  
 For fooles that most are open-hearted free,  
 Unto the world, their weaknes doe bewray,  
 And to the net they first themselves betray. (183)

The conventionally negative Renaissance conception of social chaos is here inverted to justify the *individual's* need to remain close. This may be an offshoot of Machiavellian policy or a reference to the neo-platonic group, The School of Night. Whatever the case, Ulysses embodies two different aspects of a totalitarian position, the oppressive 'Big Brother is Watching You', and an absolute individualism emptied of content. Since Ulysses' interventions with his social environment serve only to watch and intimidate, he excludes the concept of community he has applauded in the degree speech, shrinking human self to nothing. The problems of the Greeks exist at all levels, and certainly are dispersed beyond the single person of Achilles, whose pride and ambition suddenly seem as debatable as Ulysses' fabled wisdom.

What kind of an adviser is Ulysses? Chapter XXII in Machiavelli's *The Prince* provides some advice for the Prince in the matter of selection of advisers: "When you see that the adviser thinks more about himself than about you, and that in all his deeds he seeks his own interests, such a man as this will never be a good adviser and you will never be able to trust him" (77). A weak adviser, however, also implies a weak king. Since Ulysses covertly identified himself with the "medicinal eye" of the sun, he may also be thinking of himself as occupying the place of the sun at the centre of the universe, although, in the event, he is conspicuously too small to correct those erring planets.

To return to the theme of order and disorder in the title, Shakespeare's play is a performance of random actions which fall well short of grand ideals. This general falling short of dimly apprehended absolutes is one of the unifying features of the play and all the characters, including Ulysses, share this dual aspect: one part which aspires to wholeness, fullness, truth, harmony (classical signs of order) and one which finds itself caught in the trap of illusion. Ulysses believes in a masculine universe where 'degree' should be practised, but does not follow his own strictures and can only communicate fears and uncertainties, individual and social, to the watching audience. The gaps in his presentation make him a postmodern creation, a character capable of development in a number of directions. Our reception is governed largely by that first 'degree' speech. If he had left his musings about the ideal universe until the end, the entire play and his character would have been constructed differently. It may be worth

pointing out in the same vein, although there is no space to develop the theme, that historically-based criticism of the play often ascribes the person of Achilles to the earl of Essex. The earl of Essex fell from his position as a favourite of Elizabeth I and a brave soldier to an ambitious rebel who abandoned his post in Ireland and, when stripped of office, gathered some 200-300 supporters and tried to instigate a popular rebellion. The signal for his revolt was a specially-commissioned performance of *Richard II* at the Globe on Feb. 7th 1601<sup>4</sup> (possibly the model for Ulysses' "performance of a performance" in 1.3). The general point to be made is that, for the informed spectator who was loyal to the monarch, Ulysses' counter-intelligence service would be regarded approvingly with little sympathy given to Achilles. In general, Shakespeare's treatment of characters and events which look as if they are historical excludes the use of any technique enabling them to be identified unmistakably as such. On a larger scale, and possibly the hallmark of the play's disorder, *Troilus and Cressida* prevents any single unifying criterion of evaluation from being adopted.

Dryden's Ulysses follows the single arrow of time. He is designed by Dryden according to a model of social order based on the notion of progress towards a determined objective. Unlike Shakespeare's Ulysses, he functions only in the linear order in which Dryden presents him. There is no looking back for him or shifting of position.

The ideological centre of Dryden's version of the degree speech in the opening scene of the play is Thomas Hobbes and it is stripped of any astronomical or metaphysical assumptions. Core elements of the Hobbesian ideal pertinent here are the abhorrence of war and rebellion, both of which endanger collective security, and an insistence on the obedience of the subject to an absolute sovereign. The powers have been conferred on him by virtue of the contract established in consensus between subject and sovereign, which is why there are no allusions by Ulysses to the sovereign failing to fulfil his responsibilities; indeed, King Agamemnon takes control of the situation in the very first scene, as he should, by imposing a mission on Ulysses and Nestor which becomes the play's specific goal: "to Vindicate the Dignity of Kings". The 'dignity of the king' marks the beginning and end of the play, with Ulysses' strategy the driving force drawing a fairly straight line between the two points.

Achilles' withdrawal from the war is a public problem. His "neglect of observance due to rule" affects others and so is an overt threat to the dignity of the King. Ulysses performs the same satires as he did in Shakespeare, including himself this time amongst its objects. He labels the acting style of Achilles and Patroclus as 'rant', dismissing them as show offs and not worthy of emulation. If Charles II had been in the theatre he could have found nothing offensive in the performance (quite the reverse!) since the play sets itself the task of consolidating the dignity of the personage of the King.<sup>5</sup>

Only in the second act does any practical possibility for achieving the ob-

4. Exactly two years before the play *Troilus and Cressida* was entered into the Stationers' Register (7th Feb. 1603).

jective present itself. Achilles' pride must be cured to avoid exacerbating the war, and the recently announced challenge from Hector provides a suitable opportunity. From this point on, Ulysses' interventions all mark points on a clear, linear strategy directed towards the moral. He offers the following pieces of advice. He suggests Ajax be sent to the rigged combat with Hector instead of the expected Achilles (which is in Shakespeare) but this is reinforced with a strategy of divide and rule (which is not). Achilles and Ajax are friends and the friendship must be severed in order to prevent the pair from attracting popular support among the soldiers. He uses the resentment of Ajax's slave, Thersites, to drive a wedge between the two. The plan works because we see the fruits of it in the following scene, whereas a similar report by Shakespeare's Thersites that Ulysses had employed the same trick is revealed as having failed.

Ulysses advises Agamemnon not to send Ajax to Achilles' tent to try and treat with him, and, in a heavily edited version of Shakespeare's "Time" speech, advises ignoring Achilles in another attempt to cure his pride. Ulysses passes over the stage with the rest of the Greek chiefs but makes no intimidating comments about 'the watchful state'.

Following this, his interventions follow those of Shakespeare, but Dryden provides Ulysses with psychological motivations. He is concerned less with puncturing Achilles' pride than testing out the calibre of the Trojan opponents in a kind of war of nerves. After the combat between Hector and Ajax, Ulysses wonders aloud how Troy manages to survive, since "we have here, her base and pillar by us", thus informing those nearby of the weakness of the Trojan body politic, whose head, Priam, is severed from the body, Hector. He watches Troilus in Calchas' tent and learns that Troilus is rash, not self-controlled, and guesses that Troilus was probably Cressida's lover in Troy. These hints are given in Shakespeare but are not connected to any obvious line or end point in the action. Dryden's Ulysses uses the information to lay a final psychological trap, to bring Hector out of Troy and onto the battlefield. Thersites has apparently brought news of a letter from Polyxena to Achilles which, says Ulysses, has "disarm'd our great Achilles of his rage". The contents of the letter are not revealed, although the suggestion is made that she has begged Achilles to spare Hector's life. Ulysses guesses (rightly) that Hector's self-esteem is on trial and that Troilus' choleric temperament will fuel his desire for revenge. The last thing Troilus wants is peace and he will not fail to mention the letter to Hector. Which is what happens.

Ulysses' control of logistical operations resumes in the final act. The battle commences and he advises a strategy of containment, in which a small party of Greeks, headed by the young and inexperienced Patroclus, is sent to meet

5. As an aside, it may be conjectured from phrases such as "the monkey author" and "Rehearsals" in Ulysses' demonstration of Achilles' rebellion, that Dryden uses Achilles to allude indirectly but wittily to the critical treatment he himself had received in 1671 at the hands of George Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham whose play, *The Rehearsal*, lampooned Dryden in the character of Mr Bayes.

the expected Trojan rage which blows up following the report of the insulting welcome given to Cressida. This small party will allow the Trojan anger to wear itself out and make the remainder easy to restrain using earthworks. At one point in the battle, Ulysses gives the order for the men to open ranks around the Trojans and encircle them. After a series of rather choreographed skirmishes, all the Trojans are killed by this means. Ulysses is responsible for none of this in Shakespeare.

How do we know that Dryden intends Ulysses to be taken seriously as a character? Firstly, Ulysses, like Hobbes, defends absolute monarchy and national unity. After the final battle, Ulysses salutes the King and claims that "Peacefull order has resum'd the reynes". He lists the Greek faults of envy, pride, factiousness, confusion between public good and private ends and false patriotism, all now successfully reversed. In the final couplet, recalling Hobbes, he states: "Then, since from homebred Factions ruine springs,/ Let Subjects learn obedience to their Kings". The army is implicitly reunited and Achilles, having killed Hector and Troilus, suddenly identifies with the Greeks, proclaiming "*Our* toyls are done". Ulysses passes over the manner of the Trojan defeat ("base" according to Ajax) and brings the play to a close. Ulysses' part in the play is to set up a sequence of actions, directed at an objective, in which logic and explicit reasoning provide the major dynamic of order. Agamemnon is vindicated. The task is completed.

Secondly, all evidence of 'pragmatism' in Ulysses (the sacrifice of Patroclus, his insincere flattery of Ajax, the wedge he drives between Ajax and Achilles) which might be self-interest or just obscure in Shakespeare, are here condoned because they are a means to an end: obedience to the King's interests and the restoration of peace among the Greeks. It is the achievement of these two ideals which means that however much we dislike the means used, we have to assume that the job is 'complete' and 'finished'. Niggling questions like: what happened to Aeneas who is supposed to have survived the war to rebuild Troy in Rome? Did Achilles and Ajax become friends again? Has the regime changed so radically that disobedience and factiousness could never happen again? are simply not entertained because not pressing.

The play shows the Greeks systematically and successfully pursuing order. Disorder and uncertainty are shifted onto the frailties of Trojan family and social relationships, particularly their lack of "strong" leadership. There is a kind of Cartesian split in the way Dryden shapes his play. The Greeks exist to reorganise out of their internal disorder as disciplined and rational, looking forward to a peaceful future, almost as a new nation. The disorder of unbalanced relationships, of inappropriate religion and superstition and the tension between private and public interests, lies with the Trojans. The question of why Dryden used the prologue to lead the audience to expect a glorification of "Trojan valour" only to contradict this by making the Greeks the obvious victors is a question too complex to enter into here. Dryden's Ulysses and model of the absolutist regime seem to end up, by default, as normative models of masculinity and good government. Interestingly, Dryden's Ajax addresses Ulysses at one point and asks "may I call you father?" possible evidence that Ulysses is intended as a kind of



surrogate father figure to the nation. In Shakespeare, this question is asked of Nestor. Dryden's line is to emphasise male friendship over and above family relationships, which may be why it is imperative for Ulysses to divide Achilles and Ajax when they threaten collective security, which is more important.

Dryden, perhaps, identified an urgent need for 'modernity' and 'nationhood' to calm a superstitious and disunited populace during the Popish plot from 1678 on and to assuage the endless religious controversies and conspiracies dating from before the Civil War. Perhaps he recognised philosophical inconsistencies and was little concerned with the language of poetry, but with no other curative social paradigms to hand, Hobbes' prescriptions could serve as a theoretical and empirical model of progress, without worrying too much about future problems. To put the hypothesis another way, he tries to dissociate his as yet unformulated aspirations for England from the old medieval associations of Britain with Troy, and channel myth in new directions.

The two plays are made of the same material but are concerned with quite different kinds of order. Dryden is optimistic, and sees modernity as a necessity, one which can be engineered and imposed. Ulysses is his lynch-pin. His version of the play is the one that reigned on the stage for another fifty years or so, but he has little to say to us nowadays because of his uncomfortable absolutist assumptions, his glorification of nationalism and because it originally catered to a narrow audience segment which shared the same elitist assumptions. Shakespeare performs "the chance of war" (Prologue) and is pessimistic about the ability of the past to provide any models for today, but is unable to offer a viable alternative. Everyone assumes meaning may be found and everyone is deceived. Nobody wins. Its pessimism and the unheroic nature of the characters are unpalatable but timeless and, maybe for this reason, became the preferred version of twentieth century directors looking for a play which takes up the theme of enmities and disagreements which get out of hand.

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