

Trojan Horse or Troilus' Whore? Ulysses and the Rape of Troy

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Starting from Girard's insightful work on Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, my paper suggests that Ulysses does not merely manipulate Ajax and Achilles as adroitly as Pandarus used his eponymous art on Troilus and Cressida. While Girard shows how Troilus' waning love for Cressida was re-kindled by her removal to the company of the "merry Greeks", we must also observe how this second Hector is soon turned into a 'dead man walking' (who, like Achilles at the *Iliad's* end, seeks only death) by Ulysses. Only allowed to see Cressida from afar, through carefully framed -albeit deceptive- perspectives, Troilus is led to conclude that she has been monstrously unfaithful to him, and pursues vengeance regardless of personal risk and civic responsibility. This seduction of Troilus strikingly parallels the devious way by which Ulysses made Achilles spurn Polyxena's love and reenter the battle. While *Troilus and Cressida's* cynicism seems to differ sharply from Homeric heroism, closer reading suggests that the tragic wisdom of the *Iliad* is preserved and recast by Shakespeare in a less heroic key – better suited to an age of commodity. These insights into the co-mingled roots of mimetic love and nihilistic violence are very relevant to our own time.