

THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE EPILOGUE TO *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*

Fredric M. Litto

The authenticity of Pandarus' epilogue has frequently been doubted by some critics because, they affirm: other Shakespearian epilogues are not usually given to secondary characteres; it is merely a rehash of motifs from preceding scenes; and Shakespeare would not have written an epilogue so loosely tied to the play—it is, doubtless, the work of some actor or director (1)

If we examine the text of the epilogue closely we may find some real reasons for a contrary belief, and perhaps a possible new light by which to view this segment of the play. I believe that (1) the continued reliance on Chaucer evident in the speech, (2) the specific references to earlier parts of the play, and (3) the continued references to legal terminology and legal slang, are all evidence of the unity and hence the Shakespearean authorship of Pandarus' speech.

When Troilus leaves Pandarus with the contemptuous curse:

Hence, broker lackey! Ignomy and shame
Pursue thy life, and live aye with thy name
(V, ix, 33-34)

the latter stands alone upon the stage to conclude the play. "A goodly medicine for my aching bones!" responds Pandarus, echoing his earlier admissions of suffering from rheumatism or gout.

"O world, world! thus is the poor agent despised" he cries, and his obvious meaning is: What kind of world is it, indeed, in which a fellow is cursed for helping his comrade? In Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare's accredited inspirational source for much of his play, the poet likewise comments on the state of affairs which left Troilus "naught but comfort cold!"

(1) — Harold N. Hillebrand, *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida*. Philadelphia and London, 1953; p. 315, f.n. 39.

Such is the world! Wherever you behold,
The common state of man is one of woe,
And in the end we all must take it so!

(Book V, v. 250)

To be sure, Pandarus in Chaucer's work is not the "gay, gross, shrewd, and worldly courtier-type" that is Shakespeare's 2. Nor is he cursed and rebuffed by Troilus. But the world being described in both instances is still the same. In Chaucer, the corruption causing woe is Cressida's fickleness; in Shakespeare, the corruption spreads like a pale over the action throughout the play. Paris, for the Trojans, began it; the Greeks continue it; Pandarus oversteps the fine line between encouraging his niece's social life and pimping for his friend; Cressida is a "born—not—made—wanton" 3; and Achilles, the cowardly murderer of Hector, also is an "agent" despised, even though his expeditious deed is actually justifiable in a state of war in the sense that it is a minor irrationality in the throes of a major irrationality. Thus, it is not just here, on the two sides of the Trojan walls, that we find "mankind on the verge of racial suicide because of its sins of violence and lust" 4, it is everywhere. "Such is the world!" echoes Shakespeare.

Pandarus' next lines, directed to "traitors and bawds" (lines 36-37), warrant some clarification. W. J. Craig has made a good case for the word "traitors" to be a misprint for the more likely "traders." (5) The *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals that none of the many meanings of the word "traitor" could logically be linked with "bawds"; "trader", on the other hand, in examples given from 1682 to 1760, also referred to a prostitute. (6) "Bawd" means "one employed in *pandering* (italics mine) to sexual debauchery", and before 1700 it applied to men as well as to women. (7) These meanings seem to be substantiated on line 45 of the passage when Pandarus again speaks directly to his audience: "Good traders in the flesh..." And what claptrap it must have been, if, as I suspect, the secondary meaning of the term "traders" held good in 1602.

No less interesting is Pandarus' admission of his own guilt when he attracts the attention of the "traders and bawds", and then asks

(2) — Hyder E. Rollins, quoted in the *Variorum*, p. 560.

(3) — John Palmer, quoted in the *Variorum*, p. 555.

(4) — Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. 2 vols. Chicago, 1951; p. 4.

(5) — W.J. Craig, quoted in the *Variorum*, p. 315, f.n. 40.

(6) — *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 12 vols. Oxford, England, 1933; XI, 224 (examples from 1682-1760).

(7) — *OED*, I, p. 710.

them “Why should *our* (italics mine) endeavor be so loved, and the performance so loathed?” And how well this speaks for much of the play: Troilus loves Pandarus when the scheme works well, but unfairly blames him for Cressida’s betrayal; Achilles is loved for having killed Hector, though the dastardly manner of accomplishment is of small concern to the Greeks; and even Paris’ kidnapping of Helen from Sparta is looked on as a daringly romantic feat, though it is essentially a foul case of wife-stealing. Pandarus speaks for these characters, Paris, Achilles, himself, and the “traders and bawds”, when he asks why outwardly- “good” people support skullduggery and dirty-work only as long as it proves beneficial to them. and afterward “loathe” the deed or those who performed it.

In his own case, Pandarus thinks he has an answer to his own question. He relates it in the four line ballad that he recites beginning on line 41. The ballad’s meaning is not hard to discern, and it surely one of its function’s is to characterize Pandarus as a dramatic figure — for he tells us how he looks upon himself. The humble-bee (8) lives a merry life until he loses his virile powers; and once they go, all manner of sweet words and manly efforts won’t get back for him his youthful allure or prowess. So it is with men, he means: and there were days past when he was much, much more than he now is.

From the enjoyments and exertions of his active youth nothing remains except prurient memories of agreeable sins and the quaint affectations of an elderly fop. He is the walking chronicle of court and city, in his own estimation the arbiter of social elegance, a Polonius of the boudoir and the salon. (9)

Some of the added pleasures of the ballad, besides the rhyme, are the connotative meanings of the puns. The word “sting” may very well fit a bee in a single sense, but used in connection with man it can simultaneously refer to the emotional poignancy have upon one another and to the physical and sensory characteristics or the male sexual organ. This is corroborated in the following line referring to the poor fellow’s being “subdued in armed tail” — rather an inglorious picture of impotency. Finally, the words “honey” and “sweet” have their more subtle meanings. Honey may refer not only to “the sweet fluid, the nectar of flowers, collected and worked up for food by certain insects, especially the honey-bee”, (10) but also, among

(8) — “A large wild bee, of the genus *Bombus*, which makes a loud humming sound; a bumble bee.” *OED*, V, p. 447. The humblebee is also used by Shakespeare in *MND*, III, i, 171 — “The honie-bags steale from the humble Bees.”

(9) — Fr. Kreyssig, quoted in the *Variorum*, p. 559.

(10) — *OED*, V, p. 363.

English-speaking people, it has been a term of endearment from the fourteenth century to the present day; (11) and, even more characteristic of the old, tired voluptuary, as a verb it means to “talk fondly or sweetly” (12) It may also suggest the idea of semen. “Notes” refers not only to the parts of music, and hence to alluring powers, but also it meant “use, usefulness, profit, advantage”; (13) and even more interestingly, “work, as occupying one for or at a particular time; temporary occupation or employment” (14) So, then, when a bee’s (or man’s) sexual powers fail, neither his wealth (honey), sweet-talk, non-sexual powers of allurements, usefulness, advantages, or diligent work, will prevent him from failing with members of the opposite sex and as well in other worldly matters. Such a rhymed story is not unusual for Pandarus. In Act IV, Scene iv, lines 14-19, he recites a rhymed ballad, though its source is yet a mystery, and its interpretation an even greater one.

The American critic, Harold Goddard, among others, attempts to demonstrate that *Troilus and Cressida* was probably written for an audience of barristers at one of the Inns of Court. (15) He cites as evidence the numerous Latinisms, the overall cynicism, the long formal debates, and the “extended aphoristic and philosophical disquisitions” in the play — exactly the things “to please a group of lawyers or legal students” There is good reason for believing that this may have been the case and that the passage is indeed Shakespeare’s when we examine the epilogue closely

Before reciting his little rhymed ballad, and in seeking to find an answer to his question of why they are despised who do the dirty-work for “good” people, Pandarus asks: “What verse for it? What instance for it?” (lines 39-40) To take the second item first, just what does “instance” mean here? Its obvious meaning, of course, is “for instance” — for example, as an instance of what has been said. (16)

But the word has more illuminating meanings: in Scholastic Logic, and its derived senses, it means “a case adduced in objection to or disproof of a universal assertion” (17) Could not this mean that universal assertion here was that those who do good for their fellows are well-liked, but that Troilus’ upbraiding of Pandarus is a

(11) — *OED*, V, p. 363 (examples from 1350-1832).

(12) — *Ibid.*

(13) — *OED*, VII, p. 224 (examples from 893-1450).

(14) — *OED*, VII, p. 225 (examples from 1325-1480).

(15) — Goddard, II, p. 2.

(16) — *OED*, V, p. 348 (examples from 1657-1885).

(17) — *OED*, V, p. 348 (examples from 1573-1696).

case adduced in objection to his assertion? Similarly, are there not universal assertions which can be made about the merits of the deeds of Achilles and Paris discussed above, and yet cases which can be adduced in disproof of the assertions? The dictionary provides us with still other kinds of usage of the word "instance" In legal use, it formerly meant "a process in a court of justice; a suit" (18) May not it have been a perfectly ludicrous sight when the actor playing Pandarus stepped to the edge of the stage before his audience of lawyers and law-students, drew himself up in mock-anger at having been wronged by his friend and debtor, Troilus, and asked himself what kind of lawsuit he could bring against his friend for this offence. (19) It must have brought the house down — that is, when combined with these other meanings and the temporary mock-anger.

The word "verse" likewise has interesting meanings, all of which would have special meaning for an audience of lawyers. The obvious meaning is one of poetic form. A second but unlikely one is a passage from the Bible. But used as a verb, it meant "to revolve or turn over (something) in the mind", (20) a process which Pandarus was carrying out as he stood alone on the stage, bringing the play to a close. In its most effective meaning for its audience, however, it meant "to practice fraud or imposition", or "to cozen, cheat, defraud"; a "verser" is "one of a gang of cozeners or swindlers" (21) These are terms that surely were commonly on the lips of lawyers (and perhaps on their heels as well) and the hall probably rocked as the audience thought of this comment and the preceding action of the play: of the cozening of his niece by Pandarus; of the impositions of the Greek "heroes" Achilles and Ajax; of the cowardly, fraudulent murder of Hector; of the cheating of the apparently whole-souled Diomedes, and so forth.

Despite the unusual form, in general, of *Troilus and Cressida*, I think we can give this seemingly disparate epilogue an authentic place in the drama, and perhaps a name more meaningful than just bland, inspecific "epilogue" (22) I suggest that we look upon Pandarus' whole closing speech as a "jig" attached to the play, or incorporated within it, if you will — it makes little difference as long as we can be relatively sure of its authenticity In Elizabethan drama, the "jig" was

(18) — *OED*, V, p. 349 (examples from 1661-1888).

(19) — I am reminded here of the delightful performance of the role of Pistol in the Olivier film of *Henry V*; The same actor, or another with the same comic technique, would make this scene come alive.

(20) — *OED*, XII, p. 142 (one example 1614).

(21) — *OED*, XII, p. 143 (examples from 1550-1606).

(22) — Goddard calls the scene "Pandarus' last flick of the tail," II, p.

...the dance by way of afterpiece... a regular and enduring custom. At first, perhaps, nothing more than such dancing, with the help of a variety of foreign costumes, as was also an element in the early masks, it developed into a farcical dialogue, with a musical and Terpsichorean accompaniment, for which popular tunes... were utilized... In the last decade of the 16th century the jig may be inferred from the Stationer's Register to have become almost a literary type... Unfortunately few jigs have survived except from a later date or in German adaptation.
(23)

The *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* (24) gives us the added information that the jig (1) was given in the public theatres only; (2) was sung and danced by three or four characters of whom the clown was usually one; (3) and had subject-matter that was often libellous or lewd. Each of these determinants gives us further evidence, I think, for the likelihood of such a conjecture. That the passage can be distinguished from the rest of the play in tone, especially an over-use of salacious imagery, cannot be denied. Since it was a custom at the public theatres to perform such dance-farces, later made more literary, as afterpieces, it would not be surprising to find Shakespeare effecting a compromise between his own lusty, free-wheeling public theatre, and the customarily more refined, but still all-male law school, where, it seems likely, the play was first performed. The tradition of using three or four actors in the jig, of whom the clown was no doubt the leader, can be modified in this compromise with the "rules" of the private theatres — the clown alone, Pandarus, will carry the performance to its end. The bawdy in Pandarus' speech is certainly characteristic of the jig as we know it to have been; in fact, only 10 years later, in 1612, the court in London sent out an order suppressing all "Jigges att the ende of Playes" because of their lewdness. (25) The commentary the passage makes on the major actions of the play proper is an obvious capping of the piece, and it makes the cynical tone, sometimes only hinted at in the play, ring home finally and truly. It is a fillip — in a sense saying as Shakespeare said elsewhere: "What fools these mortals be" — Though perhaps less politely, it is also very possible that he was saying: "A fig for you, 'dear' audience!!!"

(23) — E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*. 4 vols. Oxford, 1951. Quotation is from II, p. 551-2.

(24) — Phyllis Hartnoll, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. London, 1957, p. 427.

(25) — Chambers, IV. p. 340.