

THE "UNTASTED NECTOR" OF MUTED ECOLOGY: AN ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

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Abstract

The great master Shakespeare remains an over-researched fellow in the postmodern discursive revolution. He is revisited for Marxism, structuralism, feminism, postmodernism. The great classic Shakespeare offers endless capacity for discursive underpinning. But the present research focuses on exploring the character traits of Cressida that peep into the dark recesses of her consciousness, and I take this epistemological depth as a "deep ecology" that comes to life with the collaboration of a very inclusive framework of ecological criticism. The excessive critical works on female characters of Shakespeare start in the 20th century, with the Modern lady Macbeth as Hedda Gabler, Anne Shirley as Anne of Green Gables (1908) appears analogous to Desdemona of Othello and of Romeo and Juliet in defying their fathers and going against the sanctity of popular mores of society. Since Ecocriticism is a relational point that absorbs in its theoretical framework countless diversions, it is much more than a theory by employing this critical ecofeminism framework by Susan Buckingham. (Gender and Environment 2000) as a stance of exploring the unexplored areas of the female character of Cressida, I have named it "muted ecology" (Buckingham). The research is conducted by employing the textual details contributory to developing the Character of Cressida, the plot, and the sub-plot. The term "untasted Nector" is borrowed from the speech of Troilus.

Keywords: *Marxism, structuralism, feminism, postmodernism, Susan Buckingham.*

Introduction

Dianne Chisholm, in her composition *The Art of Ecological Thinking: Literary Ecology*, defined ecological thinking in all its inclusiveness that encompasses traits of humans, animals, ecologies, and coherence among all these entities. It involves history in a new historicist way. According to him, "Ecological thinking points towards ways of developing a conceptual framework for a theory of knowledge an epistemology sensitive to human and historical and geographical diversity" (21). Thus drawing upon history, ecology, and human sciences, ecocriticism involves a discussion that encircles diversity into unity. Some other aspects highlighted by Chisholm widen the aura of epistemological sensitivity as "ecological thinking." She points out, "Ecological Thinking unsettles the instrumental rationality, abstract individualism, reductionism, and exploitation of people and places that the epistemologies of mastery have helped to legitimate." (21).

The present research will aim to dismantle the "epistemology of mastery," precisely the classical patriarchal canons constantly perpetuating forms of institutional oppression. It is popularly known that in the Elizabethan period, the intuition of patriarchy was culminating at the heights of heroism. A man could be heroic, he could wage war, initiate a love story, could rule and could be a magnificent slave. All the ideals of bravery, valor, and heroism were revolving around him. If we look at the fiber of Shakespearian society, we will get into the reason for it.

In his research article, *To Be A W o be A Woman: Shakespeare's Patriarchal Viewpoint*, Conley Greer mentioned the difficulty a woman was experiencing, and the burden of being a man was equally gruesome. The theoretical constraints were equally considered as the practical restrictions being experienced by the woman to relish an existence in emancipation. Greer opined

that "Notions of male-domination greatly constrained Shakespeare's female characters" (p.11). It was still very significant if we analyze the women portrayed by Shakespeare that he wanted to portray them with all the intricacies of being a woman, but the limitation of being a man stops him. Lady Macbeth, the glaring heroin of Macbeth, poses a pungent question in her dialogue, asks "Art thou afeard to be the same in thine own act and valor As thou are in desire?"– Lady Macbeth (Macbeth, 1606). Shakespeare was vocal about the desirous self of a woman living an abstract and unrealized life through her. Greer has also rightly pointed out that "Shakespeare simply operated within the guidelines afforded him by English society" (P.11).

The present research moves one step ahead of feminism. Here I want to expose the compromised intricacy, the ecological width with the feminist depth in the character of Cressida, for whom Troilus says that he wants to "taste her nectar." I want to realize the unignorable intricacy of her character that can be explored by substantiating her in the theoretical framework of ecofeminism. According to Greer, "Shakespeare goes to great lengths to present his views on the problematic nature of womanhood and offers his vision of the ideal status for women in his patriarchal society" (p.13).

This research is locating the eco feminist streak into the renaissance color of excessively idealistic romantic character sketch of Cressida.

Shakespeare assigned a different mold to each of his woman characters. Each of them has tried to break the mold, but one thing remained a constant factor, the dilemma of each one is in their blocked efforts to transcend, to transcend the rigidity of mold offered to them, by dint of the period, the social and psychological molds of acceptance. Each Shakespeare's ladies expressed discontentment; some were skeptical and alienated like Cleopatra, who utters in sheer dejection, "We have no friend But resolution And the briefest end"– Cleopatra (Anthony and Cleopatra, 1607)

Some turned venomous like Katherine, and she sighs, "If I am waspish, best beware of my sting."

– Katherine (As You Like It, 1603), some deprived of any accomplishment like Ophelia, says, "We know what we are but know not what we may be"– Ophelia (Hamlet, 1603). Here the collective is referring to all the women of her age. Cressida stands for forcibly imparted inactivity, not taking decisions, not arriving at the aspired end, she recalls, "Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing"– Cressida (Troilus and Cressida, 1607). Viola of Twelfth Night (1623) is trapped in a net of her unsolved psychological intricacies, and she addresses unaddressed constant 'times' she thus states, "Oh time thou must untangle this not I, It is too hard a knot for me t'untie!"– Viola (Twelfth Night, 1623).

The stoic resignation is almost present in all of them.

The present research presupposes that the relationship between gender or environment and ecofeminism will try to locate the historical discontentment of the fictional construct of the Shakespearian lady. By theoretically substantiating Susan Bakhtingum, who weaves "the contemporary theorization of this relationship," the relationship of gender and nature, I intended to let Cressida come in the light of previously unrealized theorization.

Theory effeminates nature in the Woolfian sense, and she insists that a complete mind and intellectuality are incorporated in both genders' traits. The assimilation of genders compensates for the historical and contemporary discrimination in genders. In this context, Cultural ecofeminism is the most relevant theoretical framework that appropriates the analysis of the muted ecology of Cressida, who was 'untasted nectar,' that Troilus self deceptively suspects he wants to taste without the historical understanding as a mind more than her body.

Cultural ecofeminism makes essentialist, ahistorical, universalist claims universalist, and both women and nature against the claims that suspend yet another possible reading of Shakespeare's ladies. The tenets of ecofeminism oppose well spelled by Padini Nirmal In Nature and Gneder (1999):

"There is no essential (biological, natural, innate) nature of 'women' (contra cultural ecofeminism's essentialism), no homogenous 'women's experience' or 'women's way of knowing' (contra cultural ecofeminism's universalism), and no ahistorical concept of 'women' (contra cultural ecofeminism's historicism)" (P.114).

Literature Review

MATTHEW A. GREENFIELD, a literary theorist and researcher, states the very philosophy of assertion of entitlement to any collective identity in these words, "Self-narration always requires at least the fantasy of a 'common space' within which we can be understood" (p.23). If we take it this way, we may say that if someone claims to be a Marxist or conservative, or feminist, he needs to have solidarity with the foundational claims to sustain that identity's fantasy.

The same happens when we maintain that any fictional character from the past writings of any great classic can be rewritten, as mentioned by Greenfield, says, "Because recreation of a collective identity requires reinvention of past." He goes on to establish some more ideas related to it "Self-narration always requires at least the fantasy of a "common space within which we can be understood" (P.11) The above mentioned common space is ecofeminism as a reference point, from where I am going to interpolate the collective identity to the muted heroines of Shakespeare, who are ecologies untapped in their actual potentials when we reinvent by visiting past.

In the light of the tropes as mentioned earlier of collective identity and space, VIRGINIA MASON VAUGHAN is most relevant because she, in her research work, has zoomed out her to its maximum lens while she was doing a critical analysis of narrowly gendered Cressida. She establishes that the analysis of the character of Cressida "reveals a deeply problematic relation between desire and representation in which the play itself is entangled, a relation which is revealed particularly in the problematic position of women as objects of desire" (p.11). Sharing the similar research problematization it could be said that Cressida could be the "daughter of the game (p.11), but not the game and gambler herself, it was she around which the plot revolves, but she is the entire course of action had not moved a single piece of chess—having for an excessive sexual desire Troilus wanted to "taste her nectar" not knowing that she within Elizabethan social and political background will always remain untasted nectar and mute ecology.

As a reference point for defining woman, the man-ology remained an irresistible paradox throughout the drama Troilus and Cressida development. The remarks of Cressida when she says, "Men prize the thing gained more than it is. That she was never yet that ever knew Love got so sweet as when desire did sue". (II. ii. 286-291). The ambivalence of Cressida is the perplexity that she has been experiencing as an object of desire. VIRGINIA MASON VAUGHAN, a researcher from the Dept. of English, Clark University, Worcester, opinionated Cressida while perspectivizing her as gendered, he says,

"Shakespeare's Cressida understands the paradox of chastity as a provoker of desire...She explains: Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing: Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing" (p.35).

"Joy's soul lies in the doing. "The maxim of desire thus encapsulated all the unheard melodies being aspired by Cressida. Cressida being in a trap is merely an object of desire, which is

manifold; she was injected with a single idea that she is the goddess of a sole desire as "sexual allure" (p.36).

She has always been associated with gendered metaphors, as Ulysses calls her after Helen, but she tries to redefine herself at every possible opportunity. Still, her sensuality was the only lasting mark that stays in the mind of Ulysses; he recalls, "There is language in her eyes, her cheek, her lip, Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out At every joint and motive of her body. (IV. v. 55-57). What dominates the discourse of drama is "the myth of female frailty" (P. 35), sustains only a remarkable aspect of Cressida's character, and smoothly overlooks the unsaid, undesired, and even unknowing unrealized by Cressida herself.

Lorraine Helms, a feminist film theorist, quoted Elaine Showalter in her article *Playing The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism And Shakespearean Performance*. She opens the door to yet another interpretive possibility in reinventing characters from the historical plays of Shakespeare, according to Elaine Showalter: "When Shakespeare's heroines start to be played by women instead of boys, the presence of the female body and female voice, quite apart from features of interpretation, created new definitions and subversive tensions in certain roles." (p.191).

This shows the female within the females of Shakespearean tragedies cannot be separated from their gender; the womanish psyche was painted so strongly in these character molds that they had become specimens forever. Here the irony of locating subversive femininity in the female body and even voices creates a gap between two radical positions. One is a romantic concept of a faithful mistress. The other is the concept of a rebellious, venomous, and stoic woman. The gap from the confined female traits overwhelmingly and singularly in female voices and females' bodies to the inclusive treatment of them as minds and souls is aptly filled by the theoretical assumption of ecofeminism that treats women ahistorically, universally, and inclusively.

The present research has made me discover what remained mute and deep ecology concerning ecofeminism's theoretical framework.

How systematically Cressida was muted by turning her into a merely magnificent spectator whose presence is inevitable but whose voice is not mandatory. JAMES O'ROURKE has traced the interesting co-relation of opposing genders in his research article *Gender in the Theater of War: Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida*. He says that "wars between men . . . would be impossible without an audience of women". This observation about the dependence of masculine conflict on feminine spectatorship is highly significant because it reflects the degree of independence and a "prescribed sense of being" for a woman in Elizabethan society.

Valeria Biondo, in her thesis *THAT WE WOMEN, HAD MEN'S PRIVILEGE OF SPEAKING FIRST": SHAKESPEARE'S AMBIVALENT VIEW OF WOMEN TROILUS AND CRESSIDA* talked about Shakespeare's ambivalent treatment of women and the right to speak as placed second to men. In this research, he has tried to capture the significance of Shakespeare's duality of treatment toward Cressida. He adopted a twine perspective with two opposite aspects. According to him, "Shakespeare seems at first to challenge the assumptions that women are naturally Chaste, Silent, and obedient" (p.2). Then he unfolds Cressida layer after layer, but she has had many colors, each betraying and subsiding the integrity of the previous one. Through this, Biondo deduced that "Shakespeare betrays the same anxieties about women's potential shift of roles revealed by many of his male peers" (p.2).

Thus the desire to transcend the socially defined roles seems strong in Cressida. Her development in the drama seems unexpected at the points, specifically when she was suspected of betrayal. It seems Shakespeare has tried to picture the authentic side of his era. Though he has tried to free Cressida, he has tried to let Cressida be, but his meaningful reluctance persists. In

her research, Biondo says, "This liberation from stereotypes, in turn, came to confirm the complexity of Shakespeare's attitudes toward women, a complexity reflected in the often contradictory critical views of her works" (P.07).

One more factor is of equal importance; apart from his ambivalence, Shakespeare was very much clear about the central importance of Cressida's cautious and guarded characterization. Johann Gregory and Alice Leonard in *Assuming Gender in Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida*: 'Are we to assume that women in the audience have critically examined the intricacies woven in her character sketch by Shakespeare. She became an amalgamation of several different entitlements by the critics. She was the audience. She is the panoptic gaze; she is the lady in the chamber, and since she is placed in a "potentially dangerous position" (p.07) hence she is "at times openly vocal, unafraid to offer comment and participate in the comedy of Troilus and Cressida through verbal dexterity." This shows her centrality as the audience but not the drama itself. She is able only to earn the integrity of merely an onlooker through a distinctively recognized one. But still not more than that. As Gregory and Leonard have examined that she is that, "One woman is positioned as the audience of another, where female testimony and experience is valued, this looks forward to Troilus and Cressida where Cressida becomes the audience gazing on male performance" (p.11). Here the fact is sensitive that how much a mute gaze can impart and contribute in securing the status of character placed in direct opposite of hero as "heroine."

The self-reflexivity of Shakespeare's plays – their awareness of their theatrical artifice and the instability of their role as "practice of subjectively embodied (re)presentation" (Martin 4) makes them well-suited not just to ecocritical approaches in general but also to ecofeminist criticism in particular.

Postmodern research and approaches have successfully created a gap for reinventing history or revisiting history through the lens of postmodern discursive explosion. The most inclusive treatment of theory and its very progressive engagement is offered by ecocriticism and ecofeminism. The striking analogy between nature and woman is the central assumption of ecofeminism. In this regard

Ashlee Joyce has posed a very valid question in his research titled *Female Sexuality and the Land in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Tragicomedies*, which is necessary to answer before moving ahead in discussing assimilating Cressida into this theoretical framework.

According to Ashlee Joyce, "Questions of whether the category 'woman' or 'women' has any clear natural referent or is not, in fact, an unstable product of social conditions" (p.13) He has further elaborated on this concept and reiterated this relationship principles of this analogy. He holds that ecofeminism is "a movement and a current of analysis that attempts to link feminist struggles with ecological struggles; the range of possibilities within this general mandate is, therefore, considerable" (P.17).

In the ambivalence of Shakespeare in drawing Cressida the way she appeared in the drama, the gappiness can be filled with the notion of ecofeminism that is undoubtedly a:

"Broad range of representation achieves the effect, like ecofeminism, of rejecting "that tradition of thought and writing that would project [humanity's] illusion of being a detached spectator or observer, either as a kind of consumer of experiences or in the fantasy of an unimplicated objectivity" (Clark 112).

Ecofeminism rejected all the illusions and fantasies and dismantled the idea of detachment from the subjectivity of human existence that Cressida was experiencing. For this research, ecofeminism is the currency of legitimacy that validates the subjectivity, expressivity, and vocalicity of Cressida against the metaphor of muted and silenced ecology.

Analysis

Cressida, who has met the swiftest of development in Shakespearian plot and became "an archetype of faithless love" from the ideal of chastity and fidelity, has undergone many opposing progressions. The factors that have caused this development are many, the most significant of her "exchange as part of hostage," thus disrupting the coherence and harmony of being a faithful woman. She concluded in a mourning tone of what she has deduced after being subjected to be that part of apparatus of statecraft and to the part of a Fairless deal in love. She says, "I am a bastard, too. I love bastards! I am bastard begot, bastard instructed, bastard in mind, bastard in valor, in everything illegitimate." The slow violence (Nixon) imparted on her was previously unknown to her because of its normalization into a discourse of fidelity, but it caused a considerable change in her reaction towards society towards others when she realized it. The appetite of Troilus towards her was purely sensual, as he just wanted to "taste" her nectar. Her analogy to ecology starts from that first level of comparison where it is just taken as an object to be assessed and as a site to be amused by. David Attenborough precisely penned the idea in his research on Environment, Gender, and Ecologies, he says:

"It seems that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living." (p.114).

The sensuality of earth as a relishable property is stressed here; Susan Bakhingum has penned the ideas of ecological violence quite similar to engendered violence, she says in Gender and Environment:

"Ecofeminism adds that patriarchy devalues women, and therefore devalues nature because nature is seen as mother. Women and nature get trashed together." (p.112). Cressida was equally devalued by being named unfaithful; her dialogues in drama have gauged her pathos on it. She says, "Achievement is a command; ungained, beseech, That though my heart's contents firm love doth bear, Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear. — Troilus and Cressida, Act 1 Scene 2, lines 225–234.

Her 'trashed' sentiments were polluting her purity, the undeserved exploitation of her pure emotions caused not less than earthquakes, and her tears erupted like volcanoes that were sieving in the inside only priority when her exchange as a part of the hostage was made. Bakhingum relates while she says, "Anything patriarchy associates with women is also trashed: caring, compassion, mothering, emotions, looking after nature, valuing life over money." (p.112)

The consumerist, capitalist, and exploitative nature of patriarchy as an institution has always been persistent in legitimizing and normalizing violence, unjust treatment into an unquestionable sanctity. Susan Bakhingum has precisely mentioned that "we need to know we are part of Mother Nature. To value nature, we must honor women too, and vice versa." (p.112).

It was the 21st century that summons much of the criticism of the character of Cressida and all the other historical classics. The distinctive framing of the character of Cressida has alienated her from the rest of the story, and she is presenting a plot within a plot, a tragicomedy with the dark comedy of Troilus Cressida. Thus she remained a historical fantasy, not only for the feminists but also for the institution of patriarchy. She has riddled all the new historicists. Carol Rutter has plunged directly into the dark recesses of her psyche when she writes, She writes, "[...] the challenge Shakespeare fabricates for this play is to set before us a Cressida, who, like that fair (but dark) lady of his sonnets is, in Eve Sedgwick's unparalleled term, 'oxymoron militant,' a genuine contradiction".(P.145). A very intriguing remark by Rutter helps to get yet another key to the closed doors of her psyche. Rutter remarks, "Cressida is delicate, that she "is something

entirely, radically new, the woman who reacts like a man, who betrays the man," moreover, that, "two voices seem to be speaking" (p.123)

The comment carries within it an inclusive denial of essentialism and radicalism of genders. The two voices in the Woolfian sense constitute Cressida as an intellect beyond the hard shells of gender. Postmodern critics have also posed questions on her distinctive socialization, which is more an intuition than society itself. Juliet Stevenson has remarked in his research that Troilus and Cressida have little performance history before the 20th century. The character of Cressida is as isolated as the plot of the evening never knows how her death happens, there is no "ever after" it, and even the commencement is mysterious to us. She appears as a humorous young girl just in the moment of introspection to become a serious, intelligent, and thought-provoking grownup. Carol Rutter discusses why Cressida is so exciting. She wrote, "[...] Shakespeare's challenge is to present a Cressida who, in the memorable Eve Sedgwick term, as the pretty (but black) lady of the sonnets, is an oxymoron militant, a genuine contradiction."

Rutter has a lot to say about their self-confidence of Cressida. First, Cressida is unique, "something new, a woman who acts like a man who transgresses the man," second, "two voices seem to speak[...] Where did Cressida learn this 'training?' ... Discussion is anxious, analytical, anti-romantic — its shape, nevertheless, is a sonnet... It reveals strategic schizophrenia with this goal. A lady must play fake, act double, to win in love. She must distinguish instinct from sexual activity. (p.146).

Thus till the 21st century, without the apparatus of postmodern deconstruction and frameworks like ecofeminism, Cressida was an 'untasted nectar,' a "muted ecology." The main question regarding Shakespeare's Cressida is centralized around whether she is simply a "whore" or if she is more detailed and worth further observation due to her apparent intelligence and duality. Cressida speaks bravely through her dialogues; she speaks volumes of the transcendentalism she has claimed at every moment of tragedy. She reacts out of pure anguish of being betrayed and dealt into a statecraft business. Her dialogue is an epilogue serving as the key to the new layers of her psyche deliberately closed by the Great master Shakespeare. As she proclaimed

"My thoughts were like unbridled children grown

Too headstrong for their mother. See, we fool!

Why have I blabbed? Who shall be true to us, When
we are so unsecret to ourselves?

But, though I loved you well, I wooed you not,

And yet, good faith, I wished myself a man,

Or that we women had men's privilege

Of speaking first.

— Troilus and Cressida, Act 3 Scene 2, lines 92–101

The story of Cressida as The story of ecology serves as a modern fable to locate first establish her stature as nature, secondly proving the reference point of her interpreter and her torchbearer who has also blindfolded her. The sustained analogy keeps on establishing itself as described by Susan Bakhtingum, she asserts: "What is happening in the female body reflects the larger practices of dominance, fragmentation, and conquering the earth body which is polluted, striped, deforested and cut into private parcels. Likewise, this pattern refers to the disintegration of the psyche that ultimately underlies and enables all these damages." (p.123)

Conclusion

The present research aimed at revisiting Cressida as an incompletely interpreted specimen of womanhood until she meets her theoretical interlocutor in the form of ecofeminism. She was an

"untasted nectar" placed in the dark spaces of the past as muted ecology. The research has tried to reinvent her through her utterances substantiated by foundational principles of ecofeminism by Susan Bakhingum in her Gender and Environment.

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