

# Troilus and Cressida

## 2.3

*Enter Thersites*

**THERSITES** How now, Thersites? What, lost in the labyrinth of thy fury? Shall the elephant Ajax carry it thus? He beats me and I rail at him. O worthy satisfaction! Would it were otherwise: that I could beat him whilst he railed at me. 'Sfoot, I'll learn to conjure 5 and raise devils but I'll see some issue of my spiteful execrations. Then there's Achilles: a rare engineer. If Troy be not taken till these two undermine it, the walls will stand till they fall of themselves. O thou great thunder-darter of Olympus, forget that thou art Jove, 10 the king of gods; and Mercury, lose all the serpentine craft of thy caduceus, if ye take not that little, little, less than little wit from them that they have±±which short-armed ignorance itself knows is so abundant-scarce it will not in circumvention deliver a fly from a 15 spider without drawing their massy irons and cutting the web. After this, the vengeance on the whole camp±± or rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache, for that methinks is the curse dependent on those that war for a placket. I have said my prayers, and devil Envy say `Amen'.±± 20 What ho! My lord Achilles!

*Enter Patroclus [at the door to the tent]*

**PATROCLUS** Who's there? Thersites? Good Thersites, come in and rail.

*[Exit]*

**THERSITES** If I could ha' remembered a gilt counterfeit, thou wouldst not have slipped out of my contemplation; 25 but it is no matter. Thyself upon thyself! The common curse of mankind, folly and ignorance, be thine in great revenue! Heaven bless thee from a tutor, and discipline come not near thee! Let thy blood be thy direction till thy death! Then if she that lays thee out says thou art 30 a fair corpse, I'll be sworn and sworn upon't she never shrouded any but lazars.

*[Enter Patroclus]*

Amen.±±Where's Achilles?

**PATROCLUS** What, art thou devout? Wast thou in prayer?

**THERSITES** Ay. The heavens hear me! 35

**PATROCLUS** Amen.

*Enter Achilles*

**ACHILLES** Who's there?

**PATROCLUS** Thersites, my lord.

**ACHILLES** Where? Where? O where?±±Art thou come?

Why, my cheese, my digestion, why hast thou not 40  
served thyself into my table so many meals? Come:  
what's Agamemnon?

**THERSITES** Thy commander, Achilles.±±Then tell me,  
Patroclus, what's Achilles?

**PATROCLUS** Thy lord, Thersites. Then tell me, I pray thee, 45  
what's Thersites?

**THERSITES** Thy knower, Patroclus. Then tell me, Patroclus,  
what art thou?

**PATROCLUS** Thou mayst tell, that knowest.

**ACHILLES** O tell, tell. 50

**THERSITES** I'll decline the whole question. Agamemnon  
commands Achilles, Achilles is my lord, I am Patroclus'  
knower, and Patroclus is a fool.

**PATROCLUS** You rascal.

**THERSITES** Peace, fool, I have not done. 55

**ACHILLES** (to Patroclus) He is a privileged man.±±Proceed,  
Thersites.

**THERSITES** Agamemnon is a fool, Achilles is a fool,  
Thersites is a fool, and as aforesaid Patroclus is a fool.

**ACHILLES** Derive this. Come. 60

**THERSITES** Agamemnon is a fool to offer to command  
Achilles; Achilles is a fool to be commanded of  
Agamemnon; Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool;  
and Patroclus is a fool positive.

**PATROCLUS** Why am I a fool? 65

**THERSITES** Make that demand to the Creator. It suffices  
me thou art. Look you, who comes here?

*Enter Agamemnon, Ulysses, Nestor, Diomedes,  
Ajax, and Calchas*

**ACHILLES** Patroclus, I'll speak with nobody.±±Come in  
with me, Thersites.

*Exit*

**THERSITES** Here is such patchery, such juggling and such 70  
knavery. All the argument is a whore and a cuckold.  
A good quarrel to draw emulous factions and bleed to  
death upon. Now the dry serpigo on the subject, and  
war and lechery confound all.

*Exit*

**AGAMEMNON** (to Patroclus) Where is Achilles? 75

**PATROCLUS**

Within his tent; but ill-disposed, my lord.

**AGAMEMNON**

Let it be known to him that we are here.

He faced our messengers, and we lay by

Our appertainments, visiting of him.

Let him be told so, lest perchance he think 80

We dare not move the question of our place,

Or know not what we are.

**PATROCLUS** I shall so say to him.

*[Exit]*

**ULYSSES**

We saw him at the opening of his tent.

He is not sick.

**AJAX** Yes, lion-sick: sick of proud heart. You may call it 85

`melancholy' if you will favour the man, but by my

head 'tis pride. But why? Why? Let him show us the

cause. *[To Agamemnon]* A word, my lord.

*[Ajax and Agamemnon talk apart]*

**NESTOR** What moves Ajax thus to bay at him?

**ULYSSES** Achilles hath inveigled his fool from him. 90

**NESTOR** Who? Thersites?

**ULYSSES** He.

**NESTOR** Then will Ajax lack matter, if he have lost his  
argument.

**ULYSSES** No, you see, he *is* his argument that *has* his 95  
argument: Achilles.

**NESTOR** All the better±±their fraction is more our wish  
than their faction. But it was a strong council that a  
fool could disunite.

**ULYSSES** The amity that wisdom knits not, folly may easily 100  
untie.

*Enter Patroclus*

Here comes Patroclus.

**NESTOR** No Achilles with him.

**ULYSSES** The elephant hath joints, but none for courtesy:  
his legs are legs for necessity, not for flexure. 105

**PATROCLUS** (to Agamemnon)

Achilles bids me say he is much sorry  
If anything more than your sport and pleasure  
Did move your greatness and this noble state  
To call upon him. He hopes it is no other  
But for your health and your digestion's sake: 110  
An after-dinner's breath.

**AGAMEMNON** Hear you, Patroclus.

We are too well acquainted with these answers.  
But his evasion, winged thus swift with scorn,  
Cannot outfly our apprehensions.  
Much attribute he hath, and much the reason 115  
Why we ascribe it to him. Yet all his virtues,  
Not virtuously on his own part beheld,  
Do in our eyes begin to lose their gloss,  
Yea, and like fair fruit in an unwholesome dish  
Are like to rot untasted. Go and tell him 120  
We come to speak with him±±and you shall not sin  
If you do say we think him over-proud  
And under-honest, in self-assumption greater  
Than in the note of judgement. And worthier than  
himself

Here tend the savage strangeness he puts on, 125  
Disguise the holy strength of their command,  
And underwrite in an observing kind  
His humorous predominance±±yea, watch  
His pettish lunes, his ebbs, his flows, as if  
The passage and whole carriage of this action 130  
Rode on his tide. Go tell him this, and add  
That if he overhold his price so much  
We'll none of him, but let him, like an engine  
Not portable, lie under this report:

`Bring action hither, this cannot go to war.' 135  
A stirring dwarf we do allowance give  
Before a sleeping giant. Tell him so.

**PATROCLUS**

I shall, and bring his answer presently.

**AGAMEMNON**

In second voice we'll not be satisfied;

We come to speak with him.±±Ulysses, enter you. 140

*Exit Ulysses [with Patroclus]*

**AJAX** What is he more than another?

**AGAMEMNON** No more than what he thinks he is.

**AJAX** Is he so much? Do you not think he thinks himself  
a better man than I am?

**AGAMEMNON** No question. 145

**AJAX** Will you subscribe his thought, and say he is?

**AGAMEMNON** No, noble Ajax. You are as strong, as  
valiant, as wise, no less noble, much more gentle, and  
altogether more tractable.

**AJAX** Why should a man be proud? How doth pride 150  
grow? I know not what it is.

**AGAMEMNON** Your mind is the clearer, Ajax, and your  
virtues the fairer. He that is proud eats up himself.  
Pride is his own glass, his own trumpet, his own  
chronicle±±and whatever praises itself but in the deed 155  
devours the deed in the praise.

*Enter Ulysses*

**AJAX** I do hate a proud man as I hate the engendering  
of toads.

**NESTOR** (*aside*) Yet he loves himself. Is't not strange?

**ULYSSES**

Achilles will not to the field tomorrow. 160

**AGAMEMNON**

What's his excuse?

**ULYSSES** He doth rely on none,  
But carries on the stream of his dispose  
Without observance or respect of any,  
In will peculiar and in self-admission.

**AGAMEMNON**

Why, will he not, upon our fair request, 165  
Untent his person and share the air with us?

**ULYSSES**

Things small as nothing, for request's sake only,  
He makes important. Possessed he is with greatness,  
And speaks not to himself but with a pride

That quarrels at self-breath. Imagined worth 170  
Holds in his blood such swoll'n and hot discourse  
That 'twixt his mental and his active parts  
Kingdomed Achilles in commotion rages  
And batters 'gainst himself. What should I say?  
He is so plaguy proud that the death tokens of it 175  
Cry 'No recovery'.

**AGAMEMNON** Let Ajax go to him.  
(*To Ajax*) Dear lord, go you and greet him in his tent.  
'Tis said he holds you well and will be led,  
At your request, a little from himself.

**ULYSSES**  
O Agamemnon, let it not be so. 180  
We'll consecrate the steps that Ajax makes  
When they go from Achilles. Shall the proud lord  
That bastes his arrogance with his own seam  
And never suffers matter of the world  
Enter his thoughts, save such as do revolve 185  
And ruminate himself±±shall he be worshipped  
Of that we hold an idol more than he?  
No, this thrice-worthy and right valiant lord  
Must not so stale his palm, nobly acquired,  
Nor by my will assubjugate his merit, 190  
As amply titled as Achilles' is,  
By going to Achilles±±  
That were to enlard his fat-already pride  
And add more coals to Cancer when he burns  
With entertaining great Hyperion. 195  
This lord go to him? Jupiter forbid,  
And say in thunder 'Achilles, go to him'.

**NESTOR** (*aside to Diomedes*)  
O this is well. He rubs the vein of him.

**DIOMEDES** (*aside to Nestor*)  
And how his silence drinks up this applause.

**AJAX**  
If I go to him, with my armeÁd fist 200  
I'll pash him o'er the face.

**AGAMEMNON** O no, you shall not go.

**AJAX**  
An a be proud with me, I'll feeze his pride.

Let me go to him.

**ULYSSES**  
Not for the worth that hangs upon our quarrel.

**AJAX** A paltry insolent fellow. 205

**NESTOR** (*aside*) How he describes himself!

**AJAX** Can he not be sociable?

**ULYSSES** (*aside*) The raven chides blackness.

**AJAX** I'll let his humour's blood.

**AGAMEMNON** (*aside*) He will be the physician that should 210  
be the patient.

**AJAX** An all men were o' my mind±±

**ULYSSES** (*aside*) Wit would be out of fashion.

**AJAX** A should not bear it so. A should eat swords first.  
Shall pride carry it? 215

**NESTOR** (*aside*) An't would, you'd carry half.

**[AJAX]** A would have ten shares.

**[ULYSSES]** (*aside*) I will knead him; I'll make him supple.  
He's not yet through warm.

**NESTOR** (*aside*) Farce him with praises. Pour in, pour in! 220  
His ambition is dry.

**ULYSSES** (*to Agamemnon*)  
My lord, you feed too much on this dislike.

**NESTOR** (*to Agamemnon*)  
Our noble general, do not do so.

**DIOMEDES** (*to Agamemnon*)  
You must prepare to fight without Achilles.

**ULYSSES**  
Why, 'tis this naming of him does him harm. 225  
Here is a man±±but 'tis before his face.  
I will be silent.

**NESTOR** Wherefore should you so?  
He is not emulous, as Achilles is.

**ULYSSES**  
Know the whole world he is as valiant±±

**AJAX** A whoreson dog, that shall palter thus with us±± 230  
would he were a Trojan!

**NESTOR**  
What a vice were it in Ajax now±±

**ULYSSES**  
If he were proud±±

**DIOMEDES** Or covetous of praise±±

**ULYSSES**

Ay, or surly borne±±

**DIOMEDES** Or strange, or self-affected.

**ULYSSES** (*to Ajax*)

Thank the heavens, lord, thou art of sweet composure. 235

Praise him that got thee, she that gave thee suck.

Famed be thy tutor, and thy parts of nature

Thrice famed beyond, beyond all erudition.

But he that disciplined thine arms to fight±±

Let Mars divide eternity in twain, 240

And give him half. And for thy vigour,

Bull-bearing Milo his addition yield

To sinewy Ajax. I will not praise thy wisdom,

Which like a bourn, a pale, a shore confines

Thy spacious and dilated parts. Here's Nestor, 245

Instructed by the antiquary times:

He must, he is, he cannot but be, wise.

But pardon, father Nestor: were your days

As green as Ajax', and your brain so tempered,

You should not have the eminence of him, 250

But be as Ajax.

**AJAX** Shall I call you father?

**ULYSSES**

Ay, my good son.

**DIOMEDES** Be ruled by him, Lord Ajax.

**ULYSSES** (*to Agamemnon*)

There is no tarrying here: the hart Achilles

Keeps thicket. Please it our great general

To call together all his state of war. 255

Fresh kings are come today to Troy; tomorrow

We must with all our main of power stand fast.

And here's a lord, come knights from east to west

And cull their flower, Ajax shall cope the best.

**AGAMEMNON**

Go we to counsel. Let Achilles sleep. 260

Light boats sail swift, though greater hulks draw  
deep.

*Exeunt*