

## THE GROWTH OF THE TROILUS AND CRESSIDA LEGEND AND BENOIT DE SAINTE MAURE.

It is in Homer that we meet for the first time the future protagonists in the Troilus and Cressida love story.

The *Iliad* opens with the quarrel of Agammemnon and Achilles over two captive girls, Chryseis and Briseis, who had been awarded them as prizes in the division of spoils following the battle of Thebe. Upon Agammemnon's refusal to restore his captive to her father Chryses, a priest of Apollo, the god himself decided to punish the Greeks and sent a pestilence upon their host. Agammemnon realized that in keeping the girl he was incurring the wrath of the Olympians and thereby imperilling the issue of the venture; he sent Chryseis back to her father, whereas Briseis whose father Homer does not mention, was yielded up by Achilles to Agammemnon as a kind of compensation for the loss of Chryseis. Of the two girls we only know that they were pretty and that Agammemnon preferred Chryseis to his own wife Clytemnestra. Chryseis and Briseis being patronymics, the real names of the two girls remain unknown in Homer. Later authorities established them as Hippodamia and Astynome. Benoit de Ste Maure ignorant of the Greek use of patronymics, attributes two different stories to the same girl, one under her real name, Hippodamia, the other under the name of Briseis, and gives the latter for father Calchas, the Trojan seer.

Pandarus in book IV of the *Iliad* is a Lydian archer from Zeleia, a shady character who allowed himself to be persuaded by Athene to shoot a treacherous arrow at Menelaus, thus violating a truce. In book V he is slain by Diomedes.

Troilus is mentioned but once in book XXIV by the old Priam as he is preparing to go into the Achaian camp to ransom the body of



Hector. We learn from him that among his dead sons, besides the «godlike Nestor» and «Hector who was a god among men» there was also Troilus, «the chariot fighter». <sup>1</sup>

Those who were to become secondary characters in the love story of Troilus and Cressida occupy a more prominent position and are frequently mentioned in the *Iliad*. Calchas, a Greek devine, is called upon to interpret omens and voice his opinion every time the Greek chiefs take a decision, and Diomedes is the bravest of the Greeks, Athene's favourite, attacking gods as well as men.

There is no personal relationship between these five characters, nothing that may foreshadow or suggest an intrigue and not a single post-homeric work on the same subject hints at any possible love story in which they may have played a part, though for some unknown reasons Troilus seems to have had a particular appeal to the imagination of Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Mediaeval writers.

The mystery which in the *Iliad* surrounds the circumstances of Troilus' death seems to have excite the curiosity and the imagination of the commentators of Homer. At what age did he die? where? and how? and for what reason? The Scholiast pretends that Troilus was slain as a child by Achilles and that this murder had served as a plot for one of the tragedies of Sophocles. The tragedy is lost but, from the manner in which later writers treat Troilus, it is quite conceivable that Sophocles had represented him as a young boy. Horace addresses him as «impubem Troilum» <sup>2</sup> and Virgil «infelix puer». <sup>3</sup> Seneca refers to him simply as Cassandra's younger brother <sup>4</sup> but we learn from Lycophron that Hecuba's youngest son was begotten by Apollo and that Achilles, smitten with love for the handsome youth who resised his advances, slew him on Apollo's altar. <sup>5</sup> In Lycophorn the youth has no name but there can be no doubt as to his identity: in describing him Lycophron is closely following Apollodorus of Alexandria who calls the boy Troilus. In the fourth century Ausonius writes an epithaph upon the

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad*, Bk. XXIV. 1. 1257.

<sup>2</sup> Horace, *Odes* II. IX. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Virgil, *The Aeneid* I. 474.

<sup>4</sup> Seneca, *Agammemnon* II. 747, 748.

<sup>5</sup> Lycophron, *Cassandra* I. 307.



death of a Troilus equal in valour to Hector<sup>6</sup>, as though the passing years had transformed the image of a boy into that of a hero, and Dares is echoing Ausonius when he reports that «Diomedes et Ulixes dicere coeperunt Troilum non minus quam Hectorem virum fortissimum esse.»<sup>7</sup> Yet for Dictys, a contemporary of Ausonius, Troilus remains above all the charming youth of the earlier writers whose untimely death he laments: «Trojani ..... deflent recordati aetatem eius admodum in maturam, qui in primis pueritiae annis cum verecundia ac probitate, tum praecipue forme corporis amabilis atque acceptus popularibus adolescebat.»<sup>8</sup> On the other hand Malalas in his *Chronographia* expands Dares' picture of Troilus' appearance while obviously relying on Dictys in his comment upon the hero's death: «Troilus et Lycaon Achilles manu ceciderunt: reliqui a nobis interfecti autem Trojanis Troyli ob casum luctus incessit ut qui juvenis admodum magnique animi fuit et formae eximiae.»<sup>9</sup> Tzetzes is even more interested in Troilus whom he mentions in his *Commentary*, defending him from the accusation of being the object of Achilles' love, (as alleged by Lycophron,) and drawing of him an extremely flattering portrait in his *Homerica* and *Posthomerica*: «Parca veri sustulit Troilum qui luctum sicut and pro morte Hectoris dedit Trojanis, fortitudine et pluchritudine atque etiam flore juventutis..... Troilus vere magnus, celer erat nigro colore et facie gratus, spessa barba, longa coma. Hunc vero Achilles occidit prope Scamandri fluentia. Post quam. vero martialem sustulit Parca Troilum prope erat mors Pelidae Acchilli.»<sup>10</sup>

Thus in time a vague son of Priam acquires a very definitely established personality: that of an exceptionally brave and handsome warrior whose premature death at the hands of Achilles deprived Troy of one of its strongest defenders.

Frédégaire, the French chronicler of the 7th century is apparently the first to assert that Troilus is the ancestor the Turks and the Franks by his sons Turcus and Francjo. This assertion, (based according to

<sup>6</sup> Ausonius, *Epitaphs*, «Troilo».

<sup>7</sup> Dares, *De Excidio Trojae Historia* XXX.

<sup>8</sup> Dictys, *Ephemeris Belli Trojani* IV. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Joannis Antiocheni Cognomenti Mallai, *Historia Chronica* (Chronographia) p. 132, translated and edited by E. Chilmeadi, 1692.

<sup>10</sup> Tzetzes, *Posthomerica* l. 858 and ff. trans. Pillon.



Frédégaire upon Eusebius) which was unreservedly received by such scholars as Hugo of St. Victor, and later by Vincent of Beauvais, formed the basis of the widely accepted mediaeval conception of Troilus as the progenitor of the Franks and the Turks. In the light of modern scholarship it appears however to be as unfounded as the attribution to Troilus of a love affair with either Cryseida or Briseida.

As far as this latter is concerned she remains in Ovide <sup>11</sup> and Seneca <sup>12</sup> the same slave girl she was in Homer. Dictys ignores her as Briseida but gives her real story as Hippodamia, while strangely enough Dares adds her portrait to the list of the Greeks. <sup>13</sup> Malalas identifies her with Hippodamia, daughter of Brises, but believes her to be the wife of king Menes.

The post-homeric Diomedes in Virgil <sup>14</sup>, in Seneca <sup>15</sup>, Ovide <sup>16</sup>, Ausonius <sup>17</sup>, Dares <sup>18</sup> and Dictys <sup>19</sup> is faithful to his prototype in the *Iliad*: next to Achilles he is the bravest of the Greeks. Calchas for no apparent reason is transformed by Dares into a Trojan seer who upon Apollo's order allied himself with the Greeks. <sup>20</sup> Dictys has a Pandarus who is but the replica of the one in Homer, and whose death he considers «a penalty for an accursed mode of fighting» <sup>21</sup>.

Neither the gradual growth of Troilus into a hero, nor Dares' unaccountable transference of Briseida to the Greek side and the change of her status from the one of a slave to that of a queen, suffice to explain why in the second half of the 12th century Benoit de Ste. Maure knit them both, together with Diomedes and Calchas, into a love episode of his *Roman de Troie*.

<sup>11</sup> Ovide, *Heroides* I. 469; *Ars Amatoria* I. 713. In the *Remedia Amoris* both Chryseida and Briseida are mentioned ll. 469 — 476.

<sup>12</sup> Seneca, *Troades*, I. 223. *Agammemnon* I. 185.

<sup>13</sup> Dares, *Historia* XIII.

<sup>14</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* I, ll. 95, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Seneca, *Troades* I. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Ovide, *Metamorphoses* XIII and XV.

<sup>17</sup> Ausonius, *Epitaphs* «Diomedi».

<sup>18</sup> Dares, *op. cit.* XIII.

<sup>19</sup> Dictys, *op. cit.* II.

<sup>20</sup> Dares, *op. cit.* XV.

<sup>21</sup> Dictys, *op. cit.* II. 41.



Although in his prologue Benoit praises Homer as a:

“..... clers merveillos  
sages e escientos.”<sup>22</sup>

he bases his own version of the Trojan saga upon Dares and Dictys whom he, together with his contemporaries, believes to have been eye witnesses of the events described much later in the Illiad, and therefore a more reliable source of information than Homer. Besides this latter had discredited himself in the eyes of mediaeval scholars :

“Porço qu’ot fait les damedeus  
combatre o les homes charneus.”<sup>23</sup>

while Dares and Dictys-which are now recognized as forgeries dating respectively from the 6th and 4th centuries - were considered more dependable because dealing with the subject on a purely human level. They also contained a great deal of incident and episodes of love attractive to a mediaeval author and his readers.

Among the numerous “portraits” found in Dares there are three which are of a special interest for the genesis of the Troilus - Cressida story. They are as follows :

“Troilum magnum, pulcherrimum, pro aetatem valentem,  
fortem, cupidum virtutis.”<sup>24</sup>

“Diomedem fortem, quadratum, corpore honesto, vultu  
austero, in bello acerrimum, clamosum, cerebro calido, in-  
patientem, audacem.”<sup>25</sup>

“Briseidam formosam, non alta statura, candidam, capillo  
flavo et molli, supercilis junctis, oculis venustis corpore  
aequali, blandam, affabilem, verecundam, animo simplici,  
piam.”<sup>26</sup>

These portraits are in themselves inconspicuous and lost among

<sup>22</sup> Benoit de St. Maure, *Le Roman de Troie* ed. Constans, I, ll. 45, 46.

<sup>23</sup> *op. cit.*, I, ll. 61, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Dares, *Op. cit.*, XII.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.



many similar ones, the only remarkable feature common to all three is that they belong to people who are neither married nor involved in a love affair. Singled out and juxtaposed they may have suggested to an inventive mind, such as Benoit's, the outline of an intrigue between the beautiful unattached girl and the two single men, the first of whom appeared to possess all the qualities of a «jeune premier», and the second those of a successful rival.

The question of Benoit's originality still remains unsolved.<sup>27</sup> One of the objections to it is that he neglects to describe the inception and the development of the love affair between Troilus and Briseida, dismissing the min «terms that seem to imply that they were common knowledge to his reader.»<sup>28</sup> But there is no reason why Benoit shouldn't begin his story with the separation of the lovers, since what mattered to him was the reaction of the couple and Briseida's subsequent defection and not the happy and uneventful course of their love which couldn't have provided the required element of interest. When therefore N. E. Griffin argues that «some preliminary account of Briseida's love for Troilus would have served to emphasize by contrast her faithlessness in abandoning him for another»<sup>29</sup> he seems to be assessing Benoit's work in terms hardly suitable to a 12th century romance. However modern Benoit's shaping of his characters may appear, he was not interested in Briseida's successive states of mind and in the motives

<sup>27</sup> Benoit's later editor L. Constans in Petit de Juleville's *Histoire de la Littérature Française*, Paris 1903, I, 204—209, and in his edition of the *Roman de Troie*, Paris 1912, VI, 224—263, also N.E. Griffin in N.E. Griffin and A.B. Myrick edition of the *Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio*, Philadelphia, 1929, Introduction, 26—27. n.2, hold the view that Benoit based his work upon an enlarged version of Dares. But Benoit's promise: «Le latin sivrai e la letre», 1.139 which Griffin uses as his main argument, may be nothing but an instance of a common mediaeval practice — even Chaucer promises to follow his Lollius. On the other hand Constans adduces a passage from *Ovide Moralisé* in which the author, after having blamed Benoit for contradicting Homer, adds:

Fors tant que plus prolixement  
Dist Daires le demenement - etc.

This interesting reference to a more detailed text of Dares is not convincing since it remains unsupported.

<sup>28</sup> N.E. Griffin. *op. cit.* p. 26 n. 2.

<sup>29</sup> N.E. Griffin. *op. cit.* pp. 26—27 n. 2.



which led her to forsake Troilus for a new lover. For him Briseida's betrayal was a consequence of the separation of the lovers, and her change of heart a manifestation of the well known instability of women, which would have gained no new significance from a preliminary exposition of the earlier love affair. What mattered to Benoit, as a mediaeval writer, was not the contrast between Briseida's love and betrayal but between her fickleness and Troilus' constancy, in fact between vice and virtue. Whether his reader was acquainted or not with the first part of the love affair was therefore irrelevant to his purpose. Had Benoit thought otherwise he would have started his story from the beginning, especially if, as Griffin and Constans allege, he was following Dares («*la letre*»). Consequently the words

Co saveient tuit li plosur<sup>30</sup>

quoted by Griffin in support of his thesis mean no more than the love affair between Troilus and Briseida was a matter of common knowledge to their contemporaries.

On the other hand Griffin again refuses to credit Benoit with the invention of the story on the grounds that his «representation of love as a destructive agency» derives from antiquity or from an early mediaeval conception incompatible with the age in which he lived.»<sup>31</sup> Yet it is quite apparent that in Benoit, love's destructiveness is due to an entirely different cause. Love in antiquity is destructive only when it takes the form of a blind fatal passion, unlawful and even criminal, a passion which seems to be sent by the gods as a kind of punishment. Otherwise it appears rather as an element of stability, continuity and order in the life of the individual and his society. Benoit on the other hand rejects all love that is uncontrolled by reason.

Contre reison e contre dreit,  
Ai ma fine amor otreice.<sup>32</sup>

says Briseida in one of her moments of lucidity. Whenever reason is obfuscated by instincts ruin and sorrow naturally ensue. This may be

<sup>30</sup> *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. cit. II. l. 13270.

<sup>31</sup> N. E. Griffin *op. cit.*, p. 26 - 27. n.

<sup>32</sup> *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. cit. III. ll. 20272 — 20273.



Plato, but it is also simple Christian doctrine propounded by the church of which Benoit was a member. As a clerk he set out to edify as much - if not more, - as to amuse, and in depicting love as «a malign influence» he merely conforms to the practice of the mediaeval clerical satire so often directed at women, as concludes N. E. Griffin, a few pages further, thus obviously contradicting himself.»

«Frailty, thy name is woman» is the key to the mood of the Troilus-Briseida story, which is inserted together with two other love episodes, Medea and Jason, Achilles and Polyxene, in the slow progressing narrative of the Trojan war. But lest the attention of his readers should be drawn away from what Benoit considered to be the primary topic of his poem, which was the fate of Troy, he cut up his love stories and filled them in piece-meal, a little at a time. Thus the Troilus-Briseida episode is made up of nine sections which put together give us the story essentially such as it was afterwards told by Boccaccio and Chaucer.

Briseida, the daughter of Calchas, a Trojan divine who had gone over to the Greeks, is being exchanged at her father's request for Antenor, one of the bravest defenders of Troy. Briseida and her lover Troilus grieve over their impending separation. Yet, once in the Greek camp, Briseida after a pretence at resisting, yields to the pressing suit of Diomède, and though at times is assailed by remorse, soon forgets her former lover. Briseida's desertion is a foregone conclusion since Benoit warns us, while minutely describing Briseida's preparations for her departure, that no woman is ever faithful:

Mont müent tost li lor corage

Assez est fole la plus sage

.....

Qui fort femme poireit trover

Le Criator devreit loér.<sup>34</sup>

This is only a few years after Jaufré Rudel died at the first sight of the woman whom he had never seen but to whom he had dedicated all his life, and a short time before Chrétien based his romances on the cult of woman.

<sup>33</sup> N. E. Griffin *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Le Roman de Troie*, II. ll. 13443, 13444.



Love in Benoit is an instinctive violent feeling, untouched by the sophistry of the Courtly Code. It ignores all idealization and sublimation of passion through «mesure» and «curtesie» and therefore doesn't exert the regenerating influence of «la joie d'amour». It is crudely equated with desire and happiness is synonymous with physical possession:

Crient sei que ja soz covertor  
 Ne gise o li ne nuit ne jor  
 .....  
 Toz sera mis jois acompliz,  
 Quant jo serai a vos saisiz.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently none of the Courtly conventions obtain here. To begin with Briseida's liaison with Troilus is not a clandestine affair, not only

Ço soveient tuit li plosur,<sup>36</sup>

but the lovers are not afraid of appearing together in public since it is Troilus who takes the reins of her horse to lead her into the Greek camp:

Troilus a sa regne prise,  
 Qui mout l'ama d'estrage guise.<sup>37</sup>

Neither is Briseida shy of discussing her past with Cariz de Pierre Lee,<sup>38</sup> nor with Diomède himself<sup>39</sup>. On the other hand Troilus fighting with Diomède publicly insults his former mistress.<sup>40</sup>

This action is not only a violation of secrecy which is one of the fundamental principles of the Courtly Code, but also a breach of manners entirely incompatible with the Courtly conception of the ideal lover. But then neither Diomède nor Troilus can be described as such. No more than Briseida possesses the qualities of a Courtly heroine. Benoit's characters are unrestrained by the Courtly convention and therefore move with greater ease and freedom than Chrétien's personages who conform to fixed and artificial patterns of behaviour. They are neither

<sup>35</sup> *Le Roman de Troie*, ed cit., III. ll. 15027, 15028 and 15153, 15154.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* II. l. 13270.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* II. l. 13425.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* II. ll. 14325 — 14340.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid* III. ll. 15095 — 15101 — and 15123 — 15124.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* III. ll. 20080 — 20102.



completely virtuous nor irrevocably evil, but are just human beings faced with situations created by their own instincts, desires and emotions, loving, fighting, sinning and repenting, in short individuals, not types.

Benoit wrote his Troilus-Briseida story in order to give a moral lesson to young people who put their trust in women. But his keen gift of observation, and his realistic treatment of his subject made him achieve real characters, not mere embodiments of good or evil. Though they are introduced by formal mediaeval portraits, they have none of the stiffness usually associated with mediaeval characterization and if not all of them are very complex, yet all are intensely alive.

Benoit tells us that Troilus was very handsome, a brave warrior, in valour second to Hector, kind and considerate. So far the portrait might do as well for all the Troiluses to come, but then Benoit adds:

Mais liez e gais e amaros. <sup>41</sup>

which makes Troilus quite different from his later namesakes. Boccaccio's Troilo, a young man about town has had some unhappy experiences with love and therefore keeps away from it. Chaucer's Troilus is afraid of love, while Benoit's hero always amorous, like Chaucer's Squire of whom he reminds us, considers love as a kind of «diversion from fighting». Though Benoit tells us that

Tot son cuer aveit en li mis <sup>42</sup>

though at the moment of their parting he begs Briseida to remain faithful to their love and solemnly vows:

Mon cuer avreiz toz jorz verai,  
Ja por autre nos changerai; <sup>43</sup>

yet her desertion surprises him no more than a «Kick from his horse» <sup>44</sup> since he is convinced that no woman can remain loyal:

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid* I. l. 5434.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* II l. 13265.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* II. ll. 13509 — 13510.

<sup>44</sup> Moland et d'Héricault, *op. cit.* Introduction p. LXXXIX.



Les dame clame trichereces;  
 E les puceles mentereces,  
 Dit mal fier se fait en eles,  
 Quar mout en i a poi de celes  
 Que leiaument seient amies  
 Senz fausté e senz boisdies. <sup>45</sup>

Faced with his lady's betrayal Boccaccio's Troilo persists in defending her virtue, Chaucer's Troylus tries to find oblivion in feats of arms; Shakespeare's hero feels the world crumbling under his feet, while Benoit's gallant, whose pride is more wounded than his heart, revenges himself not only by fighting Diomède but by poisoning his rival's mind against Briseida, who, he is certain, will betray her new lover just as she had betrayed his predecessor:

S'esté avez la ou jo fui,  
 Pro i avra des acoilliz  
 Ainz que li sieges seit feniz;  
 .....  
 Quar, se taut est qu'un poi li plaize,  
 Li ostelain i avront aise. <sup>47</sup>

In fact he is no Courtly lover, but just a rough warrior, rightly irritated by feminine fickleness, «Un chevalier des premiers temps du Moyen Age, à qui la femme n'a pas encore dit ses plus douces paroles et qui n'est pas encore enervé par la ruse de ses coquetteries et par la langueur de ses caresses». <sup>48</sup>

Benoit's Briseida is in her complexity one of the most astonishing characters of mediaeval literature, Though created in order to embody the unreliableness, the faithlessness and the heartlessness of women, she is both less and more than all that; she is no mere personification of vice but a human being, full of contradiction, driven by her instincts yet conscious of her failings, disconcerting and rather charming. In describing her, Benoit closely follows Dares but with two additions of

<sup>45</sup> Roman de Troie ed. cit. III. ll. 20669 — 20674.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. III. ll. 20092 — 20100.

<sup>48</sup> Moland et d'Héricault *op. cit.* Introduction, p. LXXXIX.



his own, one about her physical appearance, the other about her character, both obviously destined to mitigate the impression of perfect beauty and flawless virtue created by the «portrait». The first remark is about Briseida's joined eyebrows; a trait recorded by Dares, probably as a sign of beauty, but which, says Benoit «li mesaveneient»<sup>49</sup> thus implying, according to N. E. Griffin, that this outward blemish echoes a moral taint.<sup>50</sup> The second comment, cleverly inserted among the list of her virtues is meant to prepare and to explain her subsequent behaviour. She may be well brought up and modest and full of pity, and lovable and loving, but all these qualities are but of little worth since she is fickle, since «sis corages li chanjot».<sup>51</sup> And yet this woman is no ordinary jilt: she is capable of deep, sincere, if not very lasting, feelings: «mout amot» says Benoit, adding later on:

El li raveit de sei fait don  
E de son cors e de s'amor.<sup>52</sup>

If on the morning of her departure Briseida arrays herself in her best clothes, rich robes, furs and jewels minutely described by Benoit, this doesn't necessarily prove that she has already got over her sorrow and is ready for another lover, but rather shows that she belongs to that essentially coquettish type of women who even in the midst of affliction take great care of their appearance. She is vain, changeable, impulsive but not a scheming shrew or an experienced coquette. Her answer to Diomède's first amorous overtures is a very successful piece of Benoit's irony, since the woman who is about to betray her lover confesses her fear of being deceived by men:

Mainte pucele est escharnie  
Par ceus ou est la tricherie  
E qui sont mençoncier e faus.<sup>53</sup>

But one feels that this is no mere pretence, that away from Troilus and

<sup>49</sup> Le Roman de Troie. ed. cit. I. 1. 5280.

<sup>50</sup> N. E. Griffin in his «Chaucer's Portrait of Criseyde» J.E.G.P. XX, 1921, p. 39 believes that Benoit considered this blemish as an «echo of a moral taint». See also G.P. Krapp in M.L.N. 19.235 and G.L. Hamilton *ibid.* 20.80.

<sup>51</sup> Le Roman de Troie ed. cit. I. 1. 5286.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* II. 11. 13258 — 13269.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* II. 11. 13629 — 13631.



her old life she is apprehensive of what the future might hold in store for her, the only woman in the Greek camp:

Or serai en feire e en fole  
 Seuz antre dame serai sole.  
 Ne voudreie pas chose faire  
 Que l'orn poüst en mal retraire. <sup>54</sup>

Consequently her fears are allayed by Diomède's offer of devotion and service while her vanity is flattered by his assurance that she is «the woman of his life.» The reasons with which she rejects his suit are so lame, so unconvincingly expressed that Diomède easily understood «qu'el n'esteit mie trop sauvage» <sup>55</sup> but just weak. Once he discovered it her fate was sealed, for she could never resist his strong and unscrupulous personality.

Briseida herself has principles and apparently knows what duty and honour mean since she holds up to shame her father's behaviour — another piece of irony Benoit allowed himself <sup>56</sup> — and since she realizes the depth and the extent of her own fault:

Si set el bien certainement  
 Qu'el se mesfait trop laidement <sup>57</sup>.

Briseida knows that she has lost not only her reputation but also her right to happiness, and if her thought turns o Diomède it is more because she needs to be in peace with herself than because she is in love:

E que me vaut, se m'en repent?  
 En ço n'a mais recovrement.  
 Serai donc a cestui leiaus. <sup>58</sup>

This inner conflict of Briseida torn between two loves, or rather between the urgency of Diomède's suit and her loyalty to Troilus reveals a passionate and unstable woman, intelligent, clear sighted (Benoit repeatedly calls her «sage ») but pleasure-loving, a pathetic if not a tragic

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* II. II. 13659 — 13663.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* II. I. 13628.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* II. II. 13721 — 13775.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* III. II. 20229 — 20230.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* III. II. 20275 — 20277.



figure, almost the only psychologically realistic character of mediaeval literature before Chaucer. «Elle (Briseida) est dessinée de main de maître. Les grands poètes qui vont venir la mettre de nouveau en scène trouveront quelques nuances à jeter sur son portrait, mais ils ne toucheront point au fond de son caractère. <sup>59</sup>

If Briseida is more than a fickle wanton, Diomède is more than the common villain of mediaeval literature. He is as great a warrior as Troilus, comes from as good a family, but has what the latter entirely lacks: a certain practical insight into human nature. It doesn't take him long to discover that Briscida is not cruel but soft and leaning, that what she loves is not Troilus but love, that she is naive and vain enough to believe his bold faced assurance that he has never loved a woman before:

Onques d'amer ne m'entremis,  
N'amie n'oi ne fui amis. <sup>60</sup>

nor could love anyone after her:

Vos en estes la premeraine  
Si sereiz vos la dereraine. <sup>61</sup>

To the usual tactics of a Mediaeval seducer, which consist in the praise of the lady's beauty and virtue together with a certain amount of boasting mingled with humility, he adds the subler offer of help and disinterested service at a moment when Briseida needs them most:

Ne refusez le mien homage  
Tel cuer prenez e tel corage  
Que mei prengiez a chevalier, <sup>62</sup>

says Diomède to the girl who has just left her lover and is surrounded by strangers. She has bidden good-by to her past. Diomède will take care of her future. Yet he must explain and excuse his sudden outburst of passion:

<sup>59</sup> L. Moland et C. D'Hericault *op. cit.* p. LXXX.

<sup>60</sup> *Le Roman de Troie*, *ed. cit.* II. 11. 13557 — 13558.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* II. 11. 13595.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* II. 11. 13585 — 13587.



Mais j'ai oi assez parler  
 Que gent qu'onc ne s'erent veu  
 Ne acointie ne coneu  
 S'amoent mout, c'avient adés.

.....  
 Or sent qu'Amors vers vos me tire <sup>63</sup>

This reference to Love (with a capital) at first sight and the use of Courtly terminology (service, devotion, Knight, mercy etc.) by the coarsest and the most sensual character in the story looks like another of Benoit's thrusts at the Love religion. For Diomède's love for Briseida is nothing but a sensual desire he doesn't even trouble to disguise:

Ja ne quier mais grant joie avoir  
 Desci que j'aie seürance  
 D'aveir vostre amor senz dotance  
 E que j'aie vostre solaz  
 Si faitement qu'entre mes braz  
 Vos bais e ieuz e boche e face. <sup>64</sup>

He is sure that a weak woman like Briseida cannot resist a passion so bluntly and so suddenly directed at her, but as time passes and she defers her ultimate surrender he begins to lose his self-assurance:

Paor a grant: n'est mie fiz  
 Que il ja seit de li saisiz. <sup>65</sup>

and even grows tearful, pale and sleepless like a regular Courtly lover, with the difference that he finds this situation humiliating, «mout est vilains de li preier» <sup>66</sup>. Since his feeling for Briseida is entirely devoid of tenderness, or even mere affection his thwarted passion turns into a desire for revenge:

Bien le li cuidot metre en lieu  
 Ainz que departisseut li gieu <sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* II. ll. 13552 — 13559

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* II. ll. 13564 — 13569.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* III. ll. 15023, 15024.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* III. l. 15061.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* III. ll. 15085, 15086.



But what prayers, promises, deeds of valour couldn't do, pity achieved: having resisted the strong Diomède Briseida yields to the wounded one. We are not told anything about the subsequent course of their love but cannot help having misgivings as to Briseida's future.

Such are the characters around whom Benoit built his love story, which, short as it may seem compared with later works on the subject, contains in grem much of the material used by Boccaccio and especially by Chaucer. Thus Benoit supplied Western literature with one of its unexhaustible subjects; the lyrical, dramatical, comical and satirical potentialities of his love tale were destined to be used and stressed according to the cast of mind of each writer who tackled it. As told by Benoit it is certainly one of the most remarkable love stories of Mediaeval European literature.

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