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A Measure for Menippean Discourse: The Example of Shakespeare

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Abstract A vigorous classical tradition was adopted and adapted in the English Renaissance, a way of satirical writing that we call Menippean discourse. This tradition was well known to Shakespeare; indeed, it challenged his deepest creative instincts, and he deployed it extensively in his *Troilus and Cressida*. While delineating Menippean elements in *Troilus*, we also confront certain problems involved in defining—even in discussing—genre and character. Whether or not a distinct genre, traditionally called Menippean satire, can be arrived at or agreed upon remains problematic, as does the concept of genre itself. Instead, we attempt to establish a taxonomy that isolates and identifies what we call the major colligatory motifs, numerous yet distinct, that constitute Menippean discourse, recognizing and applying where profitable the generic analysis of Garry Sherbert (influenced by Northrup Frye), Mikhail Bakhtin's cultural-historical view of Menippean texts, and the taxonomic work of Eugene Kirk, Joel C. Relihan, and W. Scott Blanchard. The result of our study is a strong indication that Shakespeare's apprehension of the classical tradition was wide and deep, with an abiding concern for traditional forms and a bold, even daring tendency to experiment radically with those forms but especially with structure and characterization.

The only literary type more difficult to define than the novel is one of its presumptive ancestors, Menippean satire (Milowicki 1996: 1215–17). Indeed, it either is, or is among, "the most elusive of genres" (Blanchard 1995: 11).

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No model of Menippean textual coherence and organization, such as plot in the case of epic or character and situation in the case of romance, actually stands up. If defined at all, its definition might best proceed not by a structural model of some kind but by the collocation of numerous and often disparate elements—a skeptical, bitter, or even caustic tone, a "blend of invective and irony," an erudite content, a cluster of clearly identifiable motifs and images that can be cataloged, a recurrence of certain plot patterns, and always the aim to deflate (Robinson 1979: 140). Such a collocation under one title may create the illusion of a genre, though not one that inspires scholarly confidence, for the diverse elements can operate independently of each other or in radically dissimilar assemblages. No single Menippean element seems quite to emerge as a necessary condition. Like a will-o'-the-wisp, the definition of Menippean satire seems always just beyond grasp.

To problematize the issue further, Menippean satire operates on all discursive levels: diction, style, theme, structure, (generic) form. It therefore may be more profitable to "measure" Menippean satire on the basis of what it does and does not do rather than trying to determine what it is and is not. Nonetheless, the strongest current argument about Menippean satire holds that it *is* a genre (of sorts) defined by a single invariant characteristic: the object of its scathing attack. It is, Garry Sherbert (1996) writes, a "kind of intellectual prose satire [that] parodies prevailing forms of learned discourse." It is both highly intellectual, using learned wit to combat learned wit, and extremely self-conscious (Sherbert 1996: 1, 4). Menippean self-consciousness follows from the need to adjust to each object of satire and from the vast intellectuality of the enterprise. Intelligence seems always to breed self-consciousness. In this respect, Menippean runs to form.[1]

Sherbert's efforts to formalize Menippean satire, though attractive, encounter several difficulties. First, it is always hard to define a way of writing, much less something as full-blown as a genre, by its purpose or by the thing outside itself—the object of representation, the satiric objective, the butt of

1. It may seem odd to define the genre of a discourse by its purpose. Nonetheless satire always includes the object (the target or butt) of its ridicule as a part of its definition. The Menippean arsenal, including all manner of mockery and travesty (from lampoons and pasquinades to mock eulogies and paradoxical encomia), especially foregrounds its purposes. More generally, moralists in the study of literature have often evaluated (praised or dispraised) texts in terms of their moral consequences. The English tradition of moral investigation, perhaps best exemplified by the work of F. R. Leavis and his followers, has normally seen literary texts in terms of their capacity to evoke the moral imagination or to reenact actual-world moral situations. In this tradition complex textual phenomena, such as character, are reduced (or perhaps elevated) to moral instruments. Characters should be read as if they were alive and thrust, as all conscious human persons are, deeply within the moral thickets of life. For a discussion of the moral view of character, in particular the Leavesian, see Wilson 1979: 734–38.

the joke—which seems to have set its task. To take an example that we develop at length later in this essay: Thersites in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* speaks and acts like a Menippean figure, but the objects of his attack, Agamemnon in the first instance, display neither learning nor wit, nor any characteristic that might remind an audience of Thersites himself. The relation between Thersites and other characters is intransitive. He learnedly mocks unlearned characters. Second, it seems impossible to define a genre by the numerous parts it contains when these parts are neither invariant nor exclusive to the presumed whole. The empirical content of Menippean satire is diverse and nomadic. Any single Menippean element can show up (nearly) anywhere. (On the empirical enumeration of Menippean elements, see Appendix A.) Third, although a self-conscious rhetoric is evidently a Menippean element, many kinds of literary texts are self-conscious. What is true of all (or most) cannot be the defining mark of one.

In this essay, we will explore the significance of the epithet *Menippean*. We are interested in the problem of giving generic shape to an indeterminate term, if that were possible, but even more concerned with the way that Menippean elements follow different paths, nomadic and elusive, to become integral parts of very diverse ways of writing. In particular, we will examine how Shakespeare uses different Menippean motifs to develop both ideas and characters. Although there are various Menippean elements in several plays, most obviously *Hamlet*, only *Troilus and Cressida* seems to possess enough such elements to stand out as a distinctly Menippean text. Indeed, we intend to show that Shakespeare's notoriously problematic *Troilus and Cressida* is a richly Menippean text. We shall also argue that, on the basis of our analysis of Shakespeare's *Troilus*, *Menippean* accurately refers to more than a type of satire. It names a way of writing that can best be considered as transgeneric.

Undermining traditional literary structures, Menippean satire (which we shall refer to henceforth, for various reasons to be explained later, as *Menippean discourse*), inevitably explores, then expands conventional generic boundaries, sometimes even approaching subversion. In this essay, we will examine Menippean discourse as a self-conscious, encyclopedic array of discursive techniques, both motifs and conventions, any subset of which can be employed for exploratory or subversive purposes in virtually any text. Even if it were the case that certain texts exclude Menippean elements—scientific laboratory reports, say, or legal documents—it would not change the vast capacity of any Menippean text to incorporate any other kind of discourse, including the scientific and the legal. Menippean discourse constitutes a supple, if abrasive, literary method with excessive parts but only exiguous structures and with an almost baffling range of uses. Concentrat-

ing upon the single Shakespearean text *Troilus and Cressida* but drawing upon many other examples of Menippean writing, we intend to clarify, though not to define, the term. (On the possibilities of a Menippean canon, see Appendix B.)

1.

Our essay confronts a triple elusiveness.[2] First, we shall explore the significance of Menippean discourse as a way of writing, a means of placing a fictional world. (Since Menippean fictional worlds are typically fragmentary, and characterized by rhetorical distortions, they are never easy to describe precisely; they make mapping problematic.) Second, we shall try to cast a new light upon Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, a play that has always exceeded the category "problem" and that continues, even in a time when it frequently finds a place on the stage, to mock criticism. Third, in the course of our argument, we shall see Menippean as a textual mode, a transgeneric discourse, that underscores a problem both in the recurring motifs and in their colligatory relationship to one another. While this may fall short of a definition of the ghostly Menippean "genre," it will help to clarify what has been a contested area of scholarship.

The solution to the third problem may help demonstrate Shakespeare's understanding of contemporary literary traditions and his capacity to enter into a "way of writing" in order to appropriate its (often narrative) conventions for dramatic storytelling. We will conclude that *Troilus and Cressida* is a Menippean text from two distinct perspectives: (1) that it is constituted similarly to what has often been called Menippean satire and (2) that it captures in particular detail, especially in the words given to Thersites, many of the

2. Although it seems reasonable to account for Menippean discourse in terms of its formal features, stylistic and mixed (or hybrid) generic markers, for example, such an approach proves to be problematic. Across a spectrum of "manifold shapes," Menippean discourse may be thought to have "sufficiently unique formal and thematic features to deserve independent generic status" (Blanchard 1995: 11). However, it is just as possible, following Mikhail Bakhtin, to consider Menippean discourse as having had a specific historical origin as well or as being a vehicle for certain definite thematic contents. Menippean discourse displays both a particular origin (classical fora) and typical expressive contexts (urban, metropolitan). Susan Stewart (1993 [1984]: 79) crisply captures the Bakhtinian emphasis upon the urban-centered, whether as occurring in a forum or during a banquet (often engaging in "experimental fantasticality" in order to discover new perspectives upon the object of mockery) in her discussion of Menippean: "But once we engage in the mode of consciousness offered by existence *within* the city, distance is collapsed into partiality, perception becomes fragmentary and above all temporal." Our argument does not dispute the postulate of urban origins for Menippean discourse (in fact, we assume it), but it does look mainly in a different direction—toward the formal aspects of Menippean that a writer such as Shakespeare might learn, synthesize, and then refigure.

traditional Menippean elements. Finally, our argument will insist that attempts to understand *Troilus* without examining it in the distorting mirror play of Menippean discourse miss much of both its complex thematic burden and its immense formal richness. No single rubric actually accounts for the complexity and internal diversity of *Troilus*. Still less does a jejune category such as "problem" or a shallow enthusiasm for its potential as a "stage vehicle" (for contemporary satire) achieve much to promote an understanding of the play. (On the inadequacies of the term *problem* see Elton 2000: 1–3, 9–10, 167.) The epithet *Menippean* places Shakespeare's disturbing play in a fuller light.

Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* throngs with heroes, all of whom are less than they would wish to seem. The ironized hero, undercut and undermined, is a common phenomenon in Shakespeare's plays, but *Troilus* exceeds even *Antony and Cleopatra* in its reduction of heroic pretensions and in the immensity of the moral devastation it surveys. Although mockery of heroic pretensions runs through the whole play, the character of Thersites most underscores the weakness of the heroes and the hollowness of their rhetoric. Known for his bodily ugliness in Homer, Shakespeare's Thersites, still lacking in "handsomeness," speaks an ugly discourse that ferrets out, highlights, and exaggerates, as a fun-house mirror might, the ugliness in others. When he first appears, exchanging verbal abuse with Ajax, Thersites draws attention to the king's body, that physical correlation to spiritual authority so much discussed in Renaissance political theory under the rubric of the "King's two bodies" (Hart 1992: 55–88).

> Agamemnon—how if he had boils, full, all over, generally? . . . .
> And those boils did run—say so—did not the general run then? . . . .
> Were not that a botchy core? . . . .
> Then would come some matter from him . . . .
> (2.1.2–9)

Imagining Agamemnon's body covered with pustular boils, the pus oozing and suppurating, rather takes the mind away from the heroic conception of the noble body. It also reminds the audience that, if Agamemnon's body did actually parallel his spirit and his works (an ill-managed war running to disaster), it *should* ooze and splatter with pus. Agamemnon would have an ill-fashioned, "botchy" body, a discolored hodgepodge, to match his ill-fashioned, flawed, and certainly botched war. It would be as if a plague had struck him just as he attempted to strike the Trojans. Thersites's first lines anticipate his discourse as a whole: biting, harsh, supposititious, and charged with analogies that turn toward the rotting, oozing, and stench-enshrouded human body. When he observes what passes between Achilles

and Agamemnon, his comment that "the argument is a whore and a cuckold" (2.3.74–75) illustrates the extreme physicality, ideas translated into corporeal images, of his manner of speaking. It is an unusual though not unknown discourse in Shakespeare, more savage than Touchstone, Feste, Lear's Fool, or even Lucio, and perhaps only equaled in Hamlet's blackest moments. Indeed, Thersites's mockery is so intense, so strongly phrased that it requires a precise name. Although (as we have already noted) the term is difficult, historically elusive, and conceptually multifarious, Thersites seems an unmistakable Menippean character. He is a brilliant manifestation of a character type from classical literature that was, if not always recreated with enthusiasm, known to every Renaissance writer. Menippean discourse was an important part of the classical tradition that the Renaissance inherited and reshaped (Blanchard 1995: 40–45; Wilson 1995: 22–26, 38–41).

Troilus has always posed difficult problems with regard to genre, original audience, and authorial intention. The differences between Quarto and Folio editions, numerous but "seldom large" (Palmer 1991: 5), point toward a single, consistent dramatic imagination. However, the discrepancy between history (Quarto) and tragedy (Folio) anticipates later scholarly argument in which a third possibility, comedy, emerges.[3] Its unconventional form, Ann Barton (n.d. [1974]: 443) writes, "neither comedy, tragedy, history nor satire," its vision of a world in pieces, and its "intellectualism, savagery, and disillusion" all speak to skeptical contemporary audiences who may doubt traditional values of honor, nobility, and glory. These quali-

3. *Troilus* might be a "comedy" only because it is so evidently a satire, so relentlessly wintry. However, Anne Barton provides a more forceful argument upon which to ground this proposition. It is, she argues, despite (or perhaps because of) its profound skepticism and its "intensely verbal, almost self-consciously intellectual" dramatic action, "finally exhilarating." "Despite the bleakness of its ending," the play leaves its audience, in the manner of all great comedy, "fundamentally reassured" (Barton n.d. [1974]: 447). In the introduction to his Arden edition, Kenneth Palmer discusses in adequate detail the problem of genre as posed by the three early editions. He also discusses Peter Alexander's thesis, also argued by W. W. Greg, that *Troilus* must have been written for a private performance before lawyers (Palmer 1991 [1982]: 21). In this essay we are not primarily concerned with textual problems of that order. But here again the Menippean tradition resonates: Christopher Robinson (1979: 61, 44) makes "two reasonable assumptions" about Lucian's writings, that they "were designed for live performances" before an audience with "a high level of literary knowledge," an audience he calls elsewhere "cognoscenti." Is the Letter, with its emphasis on Wit, a call to such cognoscenti at the Inns of Court? In a recent study, W. R. Elton (2000: 4) supports the thesis of Alexander and Greg, arguing methodically and persuasively that the play was written for an audience of "law students . . . , teachers, . . . benchers, resident and visiting aristocrats, and members of the legal hierarchy," specifically for an Inns of Court revel, and that the play contains many elements of such a revel, in which "the mock-ruler parodied government as mis-government, order as disorder, with law, rhetoric and logic, along with rule itself, made to stand on their heads" (ibid.). We have come full circle, apparently, to Bakhtin's carnival.

ties may also speak to audiences suspicious of traditional literary notions of form and genre. The problems are several, both textual and linguistic, and all contribute to the uncertainties that surround the play's identity (its conventions, form, class, and, in a word, discourse). Above all, *Troilus* is a play charged "with several kinds of stylistic dissonance" (McAlindon 1969: 30) and deeply characterized by its "heightened language consciousness" (Freund 1985: 21).[4] Much of this dissonance has been ignored in criticism or else much flattened out in an effort to derive (some) thematic unity from the play's diversity. However, it is not merely a task of reviving Thersites's voice or of acknowledging the doubleness in the voices of other characters to locate a "new pluralism," if such were possible, with which to undermine the "mystifying rhetoric of authority," both within the play and in its criticism (Hyland 1993: 1, 10). *Troilus* is a "complex intellectual undertaking," creating in every word and at each level a questioning dialectic that examines multiple uses of language and several dissimilar rhetorics (Milowicki and Wilson 1996: 133). One such "rhetoric" is that of form.[5]

The problem of literary form is only a part of the larger debate about essential qualities and defining features, but it clings tenaciously to all analyses of Shakespeare. For example, did Shakespeare possess an idea of tragic form, or does such an idea emerge only from the reading of certain plays, practice having preceded form? With its corrosive diction, shifting perceptions, and unstable characterization, *Troilus* proclaims the difficulties of determining, even of speaking reasonably about, form in Shakespeare's plays. (No doubt *Troilus* poses exceptional difficulties with regard to form; however, all the plays, even the comedies, contain boundary problems and also

4. Thomas McAlindon is primarily concerned with levels of speech and the uses of Latinate English. In that sense, the diverse speech acts of *Troilus* can be assimilated to the neoclassical model of decorum. Our objective in this essay is to develop a Bakhtinian model that analyzes distinct language types in the terms of the worlds (axioms, values, affects) they presuppose and indicate. Thus we find support for our argument in Elizabeth Freund's (1985: 26, 32) brilliant analysis of intertextuality in *Troilus*, its extravagant texture of "self-alienated iterable citation" as well as its overall "citationality, rhetoricity and anachronicity" that "braids and rends its own texture." However, we also argue that the text's linguistic plurality extends far beyond its intertextuality, its tentacular citationality, or even its self-consciousness about language, to problematize all traditional literary concepts of form, including both character and genre.

5. A rich philosophical tradition exists with regard to problems of form. The fundamental elements of the tradition are classical, but the key steps in analysis (all of which can be easily recognized in contemporary discussions) were taken within the context of medieval philosophy: form exists, and obtains in the world, because (1) it antecedes all its exemplifications (the Platonic, or "realist," *ante rem* position), (2) it inheres in things that express it (the Aristotelian view), or (3) it comes into existence only *post rem*, as a mere word, an empty (if useful) breath. The third, nominalist position corresponds to much modern skeptical thinking, including deconstructive play texts.

raise, in their own contexts, formal difficulties. They contain so much and follow so many surprising ways that interpretive conclusiveness remains always beyond grasp.) Although only a few scholars would maintain the Platonist *ante rem* position on form in Shakespeare's plays (all tragic or comic form is, essentially, the same and precedes everyone's literary practice), quite a few might argue that Shakespeare had his own singular idea of form that he embodied in his plays. Against this historical conviction are set the nominalist, skeptic, and poststructuralist dispositions to see all notions of literary form as articulations of, and as determined by, the critic's own mind-set and conceptual baggage.[6] In this last sense, a genre is something invented, an artifact produced by routine reading habits. There might still be "genre expectations," since readers will have been educated in similar ways and with analogous, if not identical, prejudices and may even belong to "interpretive communities." Tzetvan Todorov (1977 [1971]: 47) has given one of the clearest expressions to this view: "Prospection takes the place of retrospection." Genre expectation is a consequence of having read and constitutes a demand upon the text that it behave itself and conform to prior reading experience. In this view, genre does exist, but only as a construct of readers—a perplexing view, in particular for self-confident formalists, but not a silly one. It would have nothing to do with things in the world either as they are or as they must have been.[7]

Menippean discourse possesses sufficient outstanding features, displayed in European literature over more than two millennia, to justify our initial hypothesis that it is a distinctive way of writing, though not precisely a "genre" in any normal sense of the term. Usually erudite, and often an "encyclopedic farrago" (Frye 1957: 311), Menippean discourse reveals a consistent pattern of mixture and mélange throughout its shifting history. All instances of Menippean texts reveal an exiguous structure of opposition and

6. This point has been made by many deconstructionists. In his *Beyond Deconstruction* (1985), Howard Felperin identifies deconstruction with a long genealogy that begins with the pre-Socratics and includes the Sophists. (Gorgias and Sextus Empiricus are the titular spirits of his argument.) He also identifies this tradition with another, that of rhetoric. It is possible to associate many Renaissance writers, including Shakespeare, with the skeptical, and nominalist, tradition.

7. Thus in Todorov's example, a detective fiction must meet certain requirements of plot (the murderer must be among the characters introduced early in the story, the detective cannot be the murderer, a new character cannot abruptly appear on the final page to confess guilt, and so forth) even if these have little or nothing to do with actual crimes or police procedures. Todorov's position exemplifies one of our recurring points, a leitmotif in this essay: *genre*, like other literary terms (*character*, say), is important to literary discussion and not easily eradicable, but it is difficult to pin down, difficult to be conclusive about. A text such as *Troilus and Cressida* highlights the complex problem that "genre" always is and makes it into a problem of immense difficulty, but it does not altogether destroy the usefulness of the term (as a pointer to or as index of difficulties).

combination in which different kinds of writing have been juxtaposed to make a tenuous whole. This waspish skeleton is hardly enough to constitute a genre, but it is a fact from which scholarly analysis may begin. Shakespeare certainly would have encountered this pattern, since it was incorporated into the humanist educational program and was found everywhere in the Renaissance revivification of classical literature. (The chief Menippean writer for humanistic education was Lucian, but he belonged to a constellation with numerous suns.[8])

The case for Shakespeare's classicism becomes more persuasive if we can establish ties to the powerful satiric tradition of ancient Greece and Rome that survived in the English Renaissance.[9] A striking conjunction of facts points in this direction. Satire was outlawed by the bishops' edict on 1 June 1599. Two of the foremost Elizabethan satirists, John Marston and Ben Jonson, sought to circumvent the edict, as Oscar James Campbell argues, by developing a new genre, satiric comedy. They moved satire, as it were, from the page to the stage (Campbell 1938: vii, 1). The irrepressible satiric style and spirit of Marston and Jonson can be traced back to the Greek and Roman satirists. Indeed, Jonson's *Volpone* (1605) has its roots in the works of

8. Marcus Varro's reputation was eminent in the Renaissance, but only a few hundred fragments of his *Saturae Menippeae* had survived. In his *A Discourse Concerning the Origin and Progress of Satire*, Dryden consolidates what was known of Varro's writing, attributing to him both Menippean playfulness and delight in creating stylistic mixtures (Sherbert 1996: 32–33). The works of Lucian, a later but Greek-language author, survived more or less intact and constituted canonical readings for the humanist curriculum. (Importantly, Lucian's writings included his satirical dialogue *Menippus* and the fantastic *Icaromenippus*, with its catascopic, or *theatrum mundi*, overview of human folly. Menippus is also a character in other Lucianian dialogues.) Northrop Frye (1957: 308) observes confidently that "no one will challenge the statement that the literary ancestry of *Gulliver's Travels* and *Candide* runs through Rabelais and Erasmus to Lucian." Not surprisingly, this same line of descent can be found in Frye's own writing: he treats anatomy, and his own *Anatomy of Criticism*, as Menippean satire, and his early published fiction is Menippean in thematic content as well as form (Hart 1994: 84, 280–83). In discussing the influence of Menippean on a subsequent age, eighteenth-century English satire, Sherbert (1996: 61) notes that Lucian's *True History* and his *Icaromenippus* stand "as prototypes for imaginary voyages." Probably no Renaissance imaginary voyage, and most emphatically including Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, was written without the navigational chart Lucian provides. Joel C. Relihan (1996) discusses in depth the influence of Lucian (though primarily in neo-Latin texts) during the Renaissance. Nonetheless, Lucian's influence having been established, it is good policy to bear in mind Bakhtin's (1968 [1965]: 386) caveat that, with respect to Rabelais (a Menippean to the very marrow) at least, "Lucian's influence is usually much exaggerated."

9. A dramatic innovator, Shakespeare early on experimented with a new type of drama, the history play, dealing with relatively recent English history. *Henry V*, for example, is a hybrid drama packed with borrowings from, and allusions to, several genres. We intend to indicate that Shakespeare's heuristic playfulness with genres extended into the classical tradition, that he did indeed develop a (relatively) recognizable conception of Menippean discourse, and while deploying it in *Troilus and Cressida*, he followed a model that derived from the classical tradition.

Lucian. Shakespeare apparently had close relations with both Marston and Jonson, but the connections to Marston are the most striking: Only one of Shakespeare's plays, *Twelfth Night*, has a subtitle, *What You Will*, which is the title of one of Marston's satiric comedies, written around the same time as *Twelfth Night*, generally dated 1600 or 1601. According to Campbell, Jonson wrote three and Marston two satiric comedies from 1599 to 1600 or 1601, including Marston's *What You Will* (ibid.: 1–3). To argue for coincidence would be to argue in defiance of any statistical system ever devised. Furthermore, the quarrels among the dramatists are well recorded, yet there appears to have been no row over the fact that one of the playwrights took another's title.[10] The second use of *What You Will* was undoubtedly an acknowledgment, perhaps a compliment.

Even more striking is the fact that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* are apparent first cousins, if not siblings. The dating of *Antonio's Revenge* and *Hamlet* is "inextricably involved," and it is probably impossible to determine which play comes first, which play influences the other (Gair 1978: 12). There are thus two distinct, but interconnected, lines of influence that link Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* to the tradition of Menippean discourse. First, a great deal of evidence suggests that he would have known Lucian and other classical Menippean writers at least, as in the case of Varro, by reputation and allusion. Second, considerable evidence, not all of it speculative, ties Shakespeare to other contemporary writers, especially Jonson and Marston, working in the "comical satire" tradition, that is, the narrowly Elizabethan version of Menippean discourse. Clearly aware of the literary uses of Menippean discourse, Shakespeare incorporates, to an astonishing degree, key elements of this tradition in the compo-

10. The rivalries and antagonisms among Elizabethan dramatists are well recorded, if uncertain in origin and purpose. These (apparently) personal disputes were crystallized in the War of the Theatres—the "Poetomachia"—which occurred between 1599 and 1601. The chief antagonists in the war, Jonson and Marston, were satirists. They fought each other with dueling satirical plays. The reasons behind this combat are still in dispute. "It has been viewed as a personal feud between Ben Jonson, John Marston, and Thomas Dekker; as a conflict between the popular public theatres and the private coterie theatres; as a commercial rivalry between two leading theatrical companies, the Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men; as a mock feud trumped up for its box-office appeal; and, finally, as an abortive encounter between the contrasting artistic principles of Shakespeare and Jonson" (Campbell 1966: 936–37). In his recent study of "personation" (that is, the characterization on the stage of actual people) in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, Matthew Steggle extends the scope of combat to the 1630s and writes of "war*s*." He observes that the satirical comedies of the period are "generally organized around depicting the reformation, or in a few cases, the destruction, of those they personate" (Steggle 1998: 125). Campbell (1938: 111) generally takes a softer approach, noting, for instance, that in the *Poetaster*, Jonson writes "to mock some pestilent fellows whom he scorns to name." Personal mockery, or lampoons, whether to reform or to destroy, clearly are within the Menippean arsenal.

sition of *Troilus*.[11] What are these elements? The most commonly claimed, and sometimes it would seem the only, identifying feature of Menippean discourse has been a mixture of prose and verse. Often indiscriminately used by critics and scholars, and hardly definitive, this criterion nevertheless suggests a salient characteristic: Menippean discourse is above all else a mixture, a farrago of genres (though classically merely the intercalation of verse into a mainly prose text), styles, and tones. "From the time of Varro and Lucian," Sherbert (1996: 32) writes, "Menippean satire has been known as a predominately prose genre with only internal verse." However, citing Dryden, he further observes that the most distinctive feature of Menippean is "its mixture of satire and philosophy" (ibid.: 33).[12] The range of mixture

11. Leon Guilhamet (1987: 5) views Menippean satire as having "nearly no form at all," as "too vague a concept to offer . . . guidance." He does confess that in spite of "the vagueness of the term 'Menippean Satire' a substantial amount of scholarly effort has been exerted to prove that various prose satires are 'Menippean'" (ibid.: 170). Guilhamet's position does not appear absurd or without some justification, since Menippean satire, by all definitions, manifests extraordinary variation and diversity. It would be tempting to retreat to a second line of argument, that the Menippean tradition is identifiable by a certain corpus and "attitude." However, we are going to join "a substantial amount of scholarly effort" to argue that Shakespeare was conscious of more than a tradition when he wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, that he saw Menippean satire as intimately bound up with the idea of character types and as one possible solution to the problem of literary form. Part of the difficulty in talking about Menippean discourse stems from the scholarly predisposition to think in terms of more or less rigid genres, or literary forms, that preexist, *ante rem*, their particular expressions. Guilhamet finds the experiential diversity of Menippean to undercut the possibilities of genre, and like Alastair Fowler (1982: 119) commenting upon Frye, he finds the sheer range of features associated with Menippean to defeat the "unitary force" that genre requires. On the other hand, Sherbert locates genre in Menippean's irreducible diversity. We prefer to emphasize what Menippean discourse accomplishes.

12. Sherbert places a strong emphasis upon the philosophical content of Menippean texts. His own understanding of Menippean discourse, underscoring "learned wit" and including Jacques Derrida as a principal Menippean writer, leads him in this direction. Is the Menippean aim to mock philosophy out of existence or to mock it into a more commendable version of itself? Both paths are open. One translator and commentator of Varro provides the following sagacious observation: "Ces modèles helléniques [Lucian, Menippus, Timon] n'étaient pas plus tendre avec les victimes que leur postérité latine, bien au contraire: en particular, la censure varronienne, ici comme ailleurs, est beaucoup moins radicale et virulente que celle de Cyniques: les Cyniques raillent la philosophie pour l'abattre; Varron la raile, mais ne met pas en cause sa légitimité; il veut qu'elle s'ait connue de plus grand nombre; il travaille à la défendre et à l'illustrer; c'est uniquement les outrances des philosophes de métier, inferieurs à leur noble mission, qu'il critique" (Cèbe 1972: 116). [These Hellenic percursors (Lucian, Menippus, Timon) were not any easier on their victims than were their Latin followers; the contrary was rather the case. In particular, Varronian mockery, here as elsewhere, is much less radical and virulent than that of the Cynics. The Cynics made fun of philosophy in order to destroy it. Varro makes fun of philosophy but does not question its legitimacy. He wants it to be known by the largest number. He struggles to defend and to exemplify it. It is only the excesses of professional philosophers, less than their high mission, that he criticizes (authors' translation).] As with every other element in Menippean discourse, philosophy (or the mock-

and the possibilities for creating a textual mélange are vast. Menippean discourse can include both a high and a low style. It can discordantly combine the humorous with the serious. It can even incorporate the parodic and macaronic or descend to outrageous lampoons, mixing all these disparate elements on both high and low levels:

> Menippean satire is of crucial importance precisely because it is formally disruptive and intrusive, a satiric solvent that acts as a catalyst for generic mixture and mutation. . . . The Menippean mode of writing permits movement up and down the literary scales (high and low, oral and literary, verse and prose) and between genres and forms of speech. (Branham and Kinney 1996: xix)

One aspect of that mixture in Menippean writing, as we will show with respect to *Troilus and Cressida*, lies in the competing and often discordant allusions from previous literature.

This wide-ranging inclusiveness on all levels—style, structure, content—suggests a vision indifferent to boundaries and always edging toward the anarchic. The universal attribute of Menippean discourse, Gay Sibley (1995: 60) writes, has always been abuse; it is a mode of discourse inimical to all and any borders. No two things, whether comic or philosophic, the living or the dead, gods or mortals, preserve their boundaries in Menippean discourse. These two Menippean elements, mélange and abuse, have some bearing upon each other. Discordance, it could be claimed, arises when boundaries are abused; abuse flows from radical discordance. The dissolution of all boundaries is at once a powerful feature of all Menippean discourse and also a primary conceptual challenge. The philosophical import of this systematic dissolution of all boundaries is so great that it seems unnecessarily delimiting to refer only to Menippean *satire*. For this reason, we generally refer to Menippean *discourse*, some key part of which is satiric. Taken only as a conceptual problem, Menippean discourse constitutes something "so paradoxical and strange as to be suspect—like 'cold fusion'" (Branham and Kinney 1996: xviii).

A further major characteristic of Menippean discourse, a powerfully reductive tendency, is implicit in the first, the "mixing." Menippean playfulness asserts and then denies; holds up high, then tears down. This is nowhere more apparent than in the characteristic treatment of the philosopher, the *philosophus gloriosus* who undercuts, in reflexive second thoughts and metacommentary, his own intellectual achievements (Sherbert 1996: 198). The reductive objectives of Menippean discourse extend, strikingly, to

ing critique thereof) constitutes a variable, at once a nomad and a shape-shifter. For a recent Menippean treatment of a well-known philosopher and his philosophy department–oriented book, see Robertson 1999.

the treatment of the gods and myths as the cherished principles of human civilization are ironized and mocked. As satire, classical Menippean discourse was "virulent in its criticism of the gods and of traditional religion" (Goulet-Cazé 1996: 76). Other contributory elements in this deflation include everyday or colloquial speech, proverbial lore suggesting a popular or common sense wisdom (always opposed to the vain pretensions of the mighty), and the use of the grotesque. Menippean comparisons, emerging through an array of deflationary methods, are characteristically reductive.[13]

Menippean discourse evolved throughout the classical period. Later satires used the symposium, or banquet, and also turned to historical situations for more matter.[14] (These are the considerations that led Bakhtin to locate Menippean discourse precursively in the early history of the novel.[15])

13. Menippean techniques deflate and undermine pretense. They undercut all claims to social, moral, and intellectual superiority. *Standing*, at whatever level, constitutes the primary objective of Menippean deflation. Irony, and its militant mode, sarcasm, achieve this end. However, there are many specific techniques, including travesty, imitative mockery, and personal lampoon, that work toward the same ends. Language itself, invective and Billingsgate (say), can undercut, by injecting an unexpected linguistic polyglossia into a previously controlled dialogue, all standing and its public trappings. Bakhtin (1968 [1965]: 15) notes the use, in "medieval humorous literature," of the "various genres of mock rhetoric: carnivalesque debates, comic dialogues, and *euloges*." We think that the most eye-catching (and we include the mind's eye in that term) aspect of Menippean discourse is the externalization of moral or intellectual traits in public theatrical performance. When a character, such as Thersites, *acts out* another person's distinctive traits, those that seem to lie behind his or her claims to moral or intellectual superiority, he or she creates a small deflationary theater in which the person's self-inflation is reduced to a few grotesque or otherwise deformed traits. These traits, made visible and unmistakable, now represent the pretentious, self-important person who had, so to speak, called out for deflation. We refer to all Menippean methods of deflation as *reduction*. (For a discussion of Pandarus's "reductivism" see Palmer 1991 [1982]: 50).

14. There can be no doubt that Shakespeare was aware of the banquet in the evolution of Menippean satire. The banquet may get into *Troilus* only by indirection, so to speak, but it is omnipresent. First, perhaps the single most dominant running image in the play has to do with food—preparation, serving, ingestion. In a play about various appetites, feeding metaphors dominate the imagery. Second, such figurative language is "realized," made literal, toward the close of the play with feasting in the quarters of the various Greek leaders. Third, in the final act the word "banquet" is actually used, though somewhat out of place in a camp of war (5.1.45). Agamemnon's use of the apparently quite rare "convive" (4.5.271) suggests the Latin word for feasting, banqueting, *convivium*. The banquet is not deployed as it was in classical Menippean satire, but instead there are repeated allusions to it. Shakespeare's grasp of the inclusiveness and the encyclopedic in traditional Menippean satire allows him to allude directly to the banquet twice and to suggest it throughout the play.

15. Bakhtin traces the history of the novel to its precursors, the polyglot writers of the Roman Empire, who created, within the urban spaces in which diverse peoples gathered, a hybrid discourse. One major dimension of this linguistic diversity was Menippean satire, the "heteroglossia of the clown" (Bakhtin 1981: 273). The use of "bodily grotesque" and other modes of extreme physical distortion and caricature played a central role in Menippean satire and flowed directly from that discourse into the novel. Like Menippean satire, the novel is "saturated with marketplace elements" (Bakhtin 1968 [1965]: 186–87). Not all historians of the

In whatever age, Menippean discourse seems always to have possessed a similar intellectual thrust: to test unexamined cultural assumptions and philosophical "truths." It promotes a radical demystification, from which nothing is exempt: it breaks up, in Frye's (1957: 233) words, "the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions," and everything else that promotes social repression.

There are three different theoretical accounts of Menippean discourse available: formal and period-specific taxonomic analyses (by Eugene Kirk, Joel C. Relihan, and W. Scott Blanchard); the delineation of a genre, or supergenre, based upon one (or more) necessary conditions (Garry Sherbert and Northrop Frye); and the consideration of Menippean discourse as an evolving phenomenon (Mikhail Bakhtin, whom Sherbert, to some extent, also follows). Kirk, Relihan, and Blanchard each present Menippean discourse as a taxonomy of traits, a number of stylistic features that recur in several texts from the classical period to (in Blanchard's view) the Renaissance. The vast number of motifs and stylistic variations available to Menippean discourse create the form's "polymorphic formal possibilities" while at the same time lending it sufficient camouflage to keep it hidden from, or at least uncertain in, the eyes of a repressive state apparatus (Blanchard 1995: 168). If a genre could be adequately defined by "a body of conventions, in structure and in style, to which certain themes are more appropriate than others" (Relihan 1993: 10), then a taxonomy of motifs might lead, eventually, to an acceptable generic formulation of Menippean discourse. We doubt this, since we think that such a "genre" would have porous and unstable boundaries.

A *taxonomy*, as we are using the term, is the result of an empirical investigation and may stop far short of making claims for a definition, or for the delineation, of a genre.[16] Sherbert suggests a "super-genre" (Frye's system,

novel accept Bakhtin's model of a precursive hybridity located in Menippean discourse, but it should be clear to all but the most rigid genre-formalist that whatever the first novelists had read, it could not have been other novels. One may suppose, at the minimum, that the role of linguistic polyglossia "in the slow death of the myth and the birth of novelistic matter-of-factness" must have been very great (Bakhtin 1981: 65). Bakhtin's main point concerning the novel, in any case, is not diachronic at all. The diverse languages of the novel cannot be laid out on a single plane or stretched along a single line; rather, the novel is a "system of intersecting planes" (ibid.: 48). Menippean discourse, or different elements of it in different novels, constitutes one such plane.

16. We are using *taxonomy* to indicate an enumeration, or even a compilation, of empirical traits but not a structure. A taxonomy arises when a number, more or less large, of recurring traits can be noticed in a number of texts. In the study of literature, an *anatomy* collates a wide diversity of subject matter and places these empirically observed traits within a framework of ideas. An anatomy creates a larger structure out of the empirical materials that it considers.

too, with its encyclopedic seasonal mythoi—say, Winter—can be said to rely on comprehensive "super-genres") based upon the presence of comic erudition or learned wit normally accompanied by marked, even extravagant, self-consciousness. Any literary text that displays self-conscious wit, often in the mockery of other wit, particularly if it embodies this mockery in the figure of a philosophus gloriosus, will be Menippean.[17] On the other hand, Bakhtin presents Menippean discourse historically as evolving, with clear relationships to society, from definite historical moments to definite modern literary forms. It represents, he observes in his study of Dostoevsky, the "adventures of an idea" (Bakhtin 1984: 94). In Bakhtin's scheme, the modern novel develops out of Menippean discourse. For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky assimilates and perfects Menippean polyvocalism: classical heteroglossia and the raucous cacophony of polyglot discourse becomes the harmonious polyphony of Dostoevsky's great novels. In the course of our discussion we will rely upon and refer to all three theoretical models for a profile of Menippean discourse: specifically to Kirk (but also to Relihan and Blanchard) for distinct motifs and stylistic features; to Bakhtin for Menippean discourse as a body of evolving social phenomena; to Sherbert for those distinguishing features that *might* support a generic model.

2.

Several of Shakespeare's plays, such as *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Timon of Athens*, contain Menippean elements, "intersecting planes" of dissimilar language levels and speech acts. *Timon of Athens* seems even to owe something to Lucian's *Timon the Misanthrope*. However, *Troilus and Cressida*, exemplifying most of the Menippean characteristics listed in both Kirk and Relihan (see Appendix A), stands out as our primary example. Shakespeare's use of Thersites as the countervoice in *Troilus* could have been influenced by the meeting of Thersites and Menippus in one of Lucian's

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Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* examines literature as a whole, seeking to discover recurring patterns and archetypal motifs. On that basis, it argues for a particular structure to the study of literature or criticism (as Frye uses the term). Frye (1957: 311) takes his own use of *anatomy* from Robert Burton's 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which he considers the "greatest Menippean satire in English before Swift." It constitutes, for Frye, an intellectualized approach to the conduct of dissection and analysis. As a kind of fiction, the anatomy is seen to merge with the novel more or less as Bakhtin argues that Menippean discourse generally does (ibid.: 312).

17. Sherbert places more emphasis upon wit than do the other commentators on Menippean discourse (there are 130 page references to "wit" in his index, 32 of them to the *philosophus gloriosus*). This indicates that, like Frye before him, he places a preeminent stress upon intelligence and intellectual acrobatics. His sense of a genre arises from his perception that there is at least one invariable necessary condition: the mockery of learning by learning or of wit through enactments of wit.

Dialogues.[18] Thus the character of Thersites possesses an ancient association with Menippean discourse as well as a Homeric birth. One commonly accepted Menippean element, the mixture of prose and verse, pervades *Troilus* with a fairly careful deployment of the styles. For example, Thersites almost always uses prose, as does Pandarus, except when he sings (3.1.110–21; 4.4.15–19; 5.10.42–45) and when he delivers what appears to be an epilogue (5.10.48–57). The other aristocrats generally speak in verse.[19] Shakespeare obviously sets off Pandarus for comic and thematic purposes. His idiom, like that of Thersites, is low to the point of scurrility and brutally contrasts with the high style of Ulysses's great speech on degree (1.3.75–137), the intellectually intricate discussion of Ulysses and Achilles (3.3.95–189), and the normal orotundity of the Greek kings. The most obvious Menippean mixture, however, takes place on the generic level, for *Troilus* is a remarkable mélange of literary kinds—epic and romance, tragedy and comedy, philosophical dialogue and vituperative diatribe, encomium, lyric, character sketch, and others. Not all of these elements are equally strong in *Troilus*, but they are all present (in another text, the balance might be quite different). It might seem that the vituperative diatribe was the key element, since it is so striking in the play, but we think the paradoxical encomium is actually the central element even though there is only one in the play (2.3.240–

18. The encounter between Menippus and Thersites occurs in the *Dialogues of the Dead*. Menippus interrupts a dispute between Thersites and Nireus as to which of them is the most distinguished by good looks to point out that no one can have pretensions to beauty in Hades. It would be possible to read *Troilus* in such a way as to take Ulysses's voice as authoritative and to see Thersites's ugliness as a comment upon, or exteriorization of, the fallacious distortions of his discourse. However, his presence in the play is more complex than that: he also *locates* ugliness. But the character's rhetorical history as a misanthrope and railer would, in itself, suggest that it is Thersites's voice, or the function of voice that he represents, that Shakespeare most cared about. His traditional ugliness would have only subordinate purposes (among which, perhaps, would be to mock Ulysses, who was, in literary tradition, no beauty himself). There is an allusion to Thersites in Lucian's *True History*, in which Ulysses is said to have acted against Thersites, as counsel for the defense in a libel action that Thersites had brought, and to have won his case. Thersites's presence and prominence in the play demands an alternative account. The hybrid composition of Ajax, in Alexander's description (1.2.19–31), might also have been influenced by Lucian. Relihan (1993: ix) indicates that the personified Dialogue of Lucian's *Bis Accusatus* [The author twice on trial] states "a fundamental truth about Menippean satire: the author has so compounded him of contrasting elements, of which the mixture of prose and verse is the strangest, that he appears to the audience as a paradoxical hybrid and a centaur." Of course, Ajax and Agamemnon also appear in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, with the emphasis on the story of Ajax.

19. Palmer (1991 [1982]: 50, 85–86) feels that the use of verse and prose to distinguish "noble speakers" from "characters of the middle sort or below" breaks down in *Troilus*. If he is correct, this would constitute another instance of Menippean discourse undercutting (neo)classical decorum. We are inclined to believe that some distinction is maintained for thematic considerations.

56); in it, Ulysses mockingly praises Ajax to Agamemnon (". . . and, for thy vigour, / bull-bearing Milo his addition yield / To sinewy Ajax"). The play as a whole, invoking both Homeric and medieval views of classical heroism, and hinting at a normally "high" form (history or tragedy), charged with the diverse rhetoric of heroic praise and self-praise, mocks everything and undercuts all. In combining the serious with the comic, the play distantly echoes an ancient ancestor. In their introduction, R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé (1996: 11) tell us that Menippus was "the only cynic expressly called *spoudogeloios* ('seriocomic') in antiquity."

Menippean inclusiveness, its encyclopedic nature, promotes extremely intellectual texts. The mere act of including one text within another (since such an act presumes the intelligence to see fictional boundaries) constitutes an intellectual exercise; Menippean discourse, since it permits the inclusion of radically disparate texts within an antagonistic matrix, makes the act even more intellectual and a matter of playfulness and wit. Sherbert (1996: xiii) suggests that Menippean discourse almost goes too far, risking "revealing the emptiness of signification, but not before the satirists display the full intensity of their intellectual and verbal exuberance." Similarly, Kenneth Palmer (1991 [1982]: 43) feels that one of Ulysses's chief laments in his speech on degree (1.3.75–137) "is the loss of logical distinctions, categories and relationships." As a literary mode, nonetheless, it offers advantages to writers who wish to cover many disparate themes and whose vision of the world sees many levels of existence crossing and variously affecting each other. In its specifically satiric mode, Menippean discourse suggests the possibilities of mockery by showing, often in physical and bodily terms, the translation of one level of action or thought into another. It mocks and anatomizes the structure of an idea by playing its conceptual content through a very physical kaleidoscope. In the case of *Troilus*, it is easy to see how the play's inclusiveness, a vast range of ideas and possible positions, lays the foundation for satiric mockery. An idea—honor, glory, valor, or love, say—receives an idealistic statement that is in contrast to the actions or other thoughts of the character who makes it. Often another character then mocks this idea in theatrical antiphony. Even when a character is not directly mocked, such as Diomedes in the final act, the play as a whole comments and places "rogue Diomed" (5.2.189) into perspective. When Thersites, observing the dalliance between Diomedes and Cressida, comments, "How the devil Luxury, with his fat rump and potato finger, tickles these together!" (5.2.55–6) he has both characters in his sight.

A significant part of Thersites's mockery involves highly physical diction ("fat rump and potato finger," for instance). It also employs physical mimicry, though he is not the only character who moves physically, both

in the delimited space of the stage and in the more commodious space of a fictional world, to "the music, wit, and oracle" of an idea. Pantomimic travesty works by recontextualizing the structure of an idea: the most significant features of glory might become a strut, a turkey-cock bearing, a large hat with plumes, or a precisely focused parodic language (full, for example, of orotundity and "fire-new words"). Ulysses notes as evidence for the suffocation of degree in the Greek camp that Patroclus breaks "scurril jests" and with "ridiculous and awkward action, / Which, slanderer, he imitation calls, / He pageants us" (1.3.148–51). Throughout Shakespeare's plays, characters lampoon and parody other characters with physical gestures and other forms of bodily mockery.[20] In this respect, *Troilus* is particularly vivid.

Inclusiveness collapses boundaries. Since one of the recurring critical problems in the scholarly commentary upon *Troilus* has been to identify its kind or genre, the internal dissolution of boundaries constitutes an important consideration. Clearly, *Troilus* does not belong to a "genre" in the sense of a group of texts, each possessing a number of agreed upon, and easily recognizable, traits that, taken together, seem to constitute the boundary of a definite category. Menippean elements, we argue, slip across boundaries and can reappear within any category. In any case, Shakespeare often combines elements of genres, mixing disparate generic motifs. This practice radically subverts conceptual boundaries. *Troilus* is exceptional in this matter, as in others, but it is not altogether dissimilar from the other plays. The dissolution of generic boundaries in *Troilus* is evident as early as Prologue's statement that the play begins *in medias res* (28), like an epic, and is captured in Ulysses's speech on degree, which also alludes to dissolving boundaries:

20. Some characters—Lucrece and Cleopatra are instances—actually fear physical mockery to such an extent that it influences their decisions. Cleopatra looks ahead to the moment in captivity when "quick comedians extemporally will stage us" and squeaking child actors will "boy my greatness / I' the posture of a whore" (5.2.216–21). After having been raped, Lucrece meditates that the nurse "to still her child will tell my story" and that story will be inscribed in her brow, where even the illiterate, who are ignorant how to "cipher what is writ in learned books," will be able to read "my loathsome trespass in my looks" (806–14). In effect, Lucrece will become her own Menippean travesty, her own acid-tongued fool who will unwillingly but self-consciously "pageant" herself. Shakespeare recognizes that the human face is a blazon, a compendium, of signs. Every sign is open to parody. As Hamlet understands so well, a human face can be a key prop in games of role-playing and transgressive make-believe. *Troilus* differs from the other plays in the extent of its physicality and in incorporating, through the character of Thersites, a superior aloofness and self-possessed intelligence. Thersites exhibits an authentic Menippean stance, at once distantly aloof and physically passionate, self-conscious, and only apparently spontaneous. In this deployment of the physical Shakespeare is well within the tradition: describing Lucian's procedure, Christopher Robinson (1979: 71) notes the prominence of stock physical traits.

> . . . Each thing melts
> In mere oppugnancy; the bounded waters
> Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
> (1.3.110–12)

The dissolution of boundaries emerges as a problem in the internal arrangement of episodes, characters, and themes.

Like *Hamlet*, *Troilus* is a play "pre-eminently in the interrogative mood" (Mack 1955: 33). Questions tend to create new boundaries, to point toward edges, and to ask after the unseen or hidden behind the borders of the visible.[21] However, a great deal of dissolution, of permeable and collapsing boundaries, came to Shakespeare already contained in the literary history of the Trojan War. The matter of Troy that Shakespeare inherited implied a vast, interconnected mythical matrix in which episodes and characters cross paths and edge through each other's boundaries in uncountable implicit ways. Even so, many patterns run through these mythic materials. For example, there is a recurring tension between objective and subjective. The hero understands himself as an individual but also as a leader or representative of a community or state. The epic writer deals with the tensions between subjective and objective worlds but only in heroic terms. The heroic warrior's debate between "flight or fight," for example, is a collision between social (objective) and individual (subjective) needs, but any overriding assertion of subjective needs like, say, self-preservation is precluded by the demands of Honor, inevitably dictated by the social code. The advent of (romantic) love in the romance enhanced the inescapable tension between the two worlds. Love is essentially an interior experience, an experience of the self, with a powerful biological basis that the culture can "construct," but only in limited kinds of ways. Honor, on the other hand, seems largely to have originated, and to have been shaped, within a basically social context.

All of these factors appear in *Troilus* and contribute to the overall dissolution of boundaries as well as to the byplay between the affirmation of ideals

21. Vivian Thomas (1987: 102) claims there are 400 or more questions in *Troilus*. Actually, there are 397 distinct questions in the play (Arden edition). There are many more than 400 grammatical questions in *Hamlet* and several series of questions integrated by a single punctuation mark, such as Polonius's three-part question to Claudius, which he repeats three times (2.2.131–39), or Marcellus's five queries (1.1.73–82). This may seem a piddling distinction. Nonetheless, it does three important things: it establishes *Troilus* as a play "in the interrogative mood"; it links *Troilus* to the intellectual intensity of *Hamlet*; and it shows that *Troilus* exploits, as fully as does *Hamlet*, the function of questions to shift discourse, to break up a narrative or an argument, and to create ruptures of many kinds. As a discursive strategy, questions contribute to an overall sense of dissolution and uncertainty, but they also enforce the intellectual ambience that Menippean discourse often creates. For a discussion of questions and boundaries in Shakespeare see Wilson 1995: 192–216.

and the cynical (or Menippean) deflation of these ideals. *Troilus and Cressida*, then, shows Shakespeare's fascination with the relationships between epic and romance (evident in *Henry V* and, as a minor chord, in many of the tragedies). The matter of Troy also gives Shakespeare a ready mix of heroic materials adapted to the romance genre: the distinctly medieval versions of the Troy matrix in which Hector had become a paragon of chivalry, Troilus a Courtly Lover, and Cressida a lecherous whore. (Epic anger and honor are retained, even foregrounded, in the midst of the medieval encrustations.) But there are many other literary types. One of the minor forms, the philosophical dialogue, lies near the meaning of the play. Other minor forms include the lyrics or ballads sung by Pandarus; the (paradoxical) encomium delivered by Ulysses in ironic praise of Ajax (2.3.240–56) and therefore also a *deprecatio*; brief character sketches "on the Theophrastan model" (Palmer 1991 [1982]: 41); and an anatomy of Ajax by Alexander (1.2.19–31).[22] There are also references to pageants (1.3.151; 3.3.270), a possible aubade (4.2.8–11), and the suggestion of a play within a play (3.3.279–97). The elements of history and tragedy, both of which are abundant (the former suggested by the Quarto's classification, the latter by the Folio's), are central to the critical history of the play. Hence, in multiple respects, *Troilus* transgresses boundaries and recreates a mélange of literary kinds, motifs, and themes. No doubt all of Shakespeare's plays, and for that matter most Renaissance texts, draw upon multiple literary kinds, but *Troilus* mixes kinds in a particularly wide-reaching and exuberant manner. Furthermore, it does this without turning to the resources of one particular kind for either an overall view or for a conclusion. The play's ending belongs neither to tragedy nor to comedy, still less is it at all like the ending of a history play, momentarily conclusive and forward looking, but rather it is entirely reductive (the actual last word is Pandarus's "diseases"). In *Troilus*, Shakespeare seeks to capture as much of Menippean discourse as a letter, a prologue, five acts, and a kind of epilogue will allow. And even though the play's seams may appear to bulge, even edging on rupture, Shakespeare achieves an unusual amount of inclusiveness through hybridity.

The corrosive treatment of the gods and the ancient myths, a frequent Menippean element, appears only indirectly in the deflationary treatment of the Trojan War itself and in the love affair between the idealistic Troilus

22. We take the letter from "A never writer to an ever reader," printed before the play in the second state of the Quarto, to be genuine. It adds two additional genres to the play (epistle and preface) and the "dimension" of a reader as well as of a theatrical audience. In other words, it indicates that Shakespeare expected his work to be at least as much read as performed ("not having been sullied with the smoaky breath of the multitude") (Palmer 1991 [1982]: 95).

and the randy Cressida, already resonant with ironies when it came into Shakespeare's hands by way of Chaucer. The gods are absent from the immediate world of *Troilus*. Shakespeare's ironies are seldom directed upward; normally only the inhabitants of middle earth are subjected to his irony. The use of everyday speech and proverbial lore are also evident as an integral part of the reductive spirit of Menippean discourse. Like his Chaucerian ancestor, Shakespeare's Pandarus overflows with a barrage of proverbs and colloquial forms that, as Palmer (1991 [1982]: 114) indicates, are "characteristic of Pandarus" (see, for example, 1.2.210, 245–48). Colloquial forms of speech, such as oaths, curses, and proverbs, are among what Bakhtin (1968 [1965]: 187), in his account of medieval carnival, calls "the unofficial elements of speech," striking aspects of marketplace language (cf. 16–17). They are one aspect of that sociocultural phenomenon that directly associates it with Menippean discourse. Pandarus can be said to continue this tradition, particularly in his closing address to the audience.

There is also the long association of Menippean discourse with the grotesque, that is, with physical distortions and deformations—what Bakhtin calls "grotesque realism," the portrayal of the body in states of exaggerated deformation (Bakhtin 1968 [1965]: 19), and, in his study of Dostoevsky, "slum naturalism" (Bakhtin 1984: 115). We cannot know how Thersites might have appeared on stage when, or if, the play was staged. He is a grotesque (i.e., physically deformed) in the *Iliad* (2.217–21). He is opposed to the handsome paragon Nireus in Lucian's *Dialogues* (25). In his rankness he seems to continue the tradition of exemplary ugliness in *Troilus*. Edmond Malone's dramatis personae (1790) describes him as "a deformed and scurrilous Greek" (Palmer 1991 [1982]: 96). In the play, Ajax says to Thersites, "I will beat thee into handsomeness!" (2.1.15) and calls him a "stool for a witch!" (2.1.44). In modern performances, Thersites seems to be played along a spectrum from bodily grotesque to degeneracy.

Troilus manifests a significant dimension of playfulness, another Menippean element. There are several kinds of play in Menippean discourse, including all forms of mockery, travesty, and parody. However, the most important manifestations of play seem to us to be transgression and heuristic exploration. Literary texts from many distinct periods and "movements," from old comedy to postmodernism, have often shown "playful transgression"; that is, the "multidisciplinary struggle against received forms" and the "dismantling of binary operations" (Edwards 1998: 82). Playful transgression undercuts received perceptions and textual orthodoxies. Carnival, at once expressive and transgressive, is playful in this sense. Such transgression also is a very Menippean activity. However, Menippean discourse is also playful in the sense of testing and exploring (not only deflating or

reducing) orthodoxies. It is, Bakhtin (1984: 115) comments, a "genre of 'ultimate questions'" in which conceptual positions are "put to the test." Menippean texts are often, beneath their mocking and grotesque play, deeply heuristic. We might say, agreeing with Sherbert, though reaching further, that Menippean texts, because wit plays in them such a dominant role, are characteristically heuristic. Furthermore, both Pandarus and Cressida exhibit considerable play, both mockery and bantering, which sets them off when they are together and distinguishes them from the young idealist Troilus, who has only a limited sense of play. (Troilus is a self-centered, unplayful character. After his night of love with Cressida, he does not seem in the least exploratory.) The grotesque, transgression, and heuristic play can all be said to constitute violations of physical norms or boundaries, particularly those of social hierarchy, decorum, and (conventional) beauty. Like madness, play dissolves social boundaries.

3.

Shakespeare appears to have had a highly self-conscious knowledge of the long tradition he encompasses in his drama: *Troilus* not only incorporates the quest for truth through dialectic and a pitiless deflation of intellectual pretense and arrogance, it also makes these intellectual actions a constant problematic that characters observe and comment upon. He includes two major dialogues in *Troilus* in which the quest for truth is undermined by a systematic deflation. Both dialogues, elaborately worked out and carefully staged, arrive nowhere, accomplish nothing. That between Achilles and Ulysses (3.3.95–189), which the latter has deliberately staged, deals with the ethical responsibilities an individual has to his or her society; but Ulysses is no Socrates and Achilles remains unenlightened. The other major dialogue among the Trojan leaders in council, which also has something staged about it,[23] deals with the ethical responsibilities of one nation to another (2.2). (The dialogues thus treat two sides of the important distinction between private and public morality that the Renaissance took from Aristotle and strenuously debated and re-debated.) Also implicit in the Trojan dialogue is the ethical responsibility each of the leaders has to Troy. Only Hector makes any sense, but he soon enough abandons rational discourse for the emotional appeal of individual honor that Troilus advocates (2.2.191–94).[24] The upshot is that the Trojans unanimously decide to fight

23. Perhaps the high degree of self-conscious role-playing in *Troilus* generates this sense of staging. Palmer (1991 [1982]: 25) notes how Pandarus "constantly 'produces' the scene in which he appears, suggesting . . . , commenting; . . . full of promptings and nudgings."
24. Bakhtin (1984: 115–16) argues that Menippean discourse focuses on the dialectic of rela-

for a bad cause, while the individualistic Achilles places his interests before those of the Greeks. Thus the Trojans have the unity the Greeks cannot achieve but for all the wrong reasons. When the Greeks do manage some unity, it is, *per accidens*, for individual revenge. A recognition of this appears to be behind Nestor's ironic comment after Achilles and Ajax return to battle: "So, so, we draw together" (5.5.44). There is a pun on "draw." Far from drawing together, the Greeks simply draw their swords at the same time, though from different motivations.

Shakespeare's playfulness with staged dialogues and discussions culminates in the remarkable scene in which Ulysses and Troilus listen to and comment upon Diomedes's slick wooing of the coquettish Cressida, while Thersites eavesdrops on both pairs (5.2). Each dialogue operates on its own level of relativistic truth, while the single-minded Thersites, paradoxically godlike in his catascopic view of the two "stages" before him, comments reductively upon the barely disguised lechery of Diomedes and Cressida (5.2.55–57) and the idealistic Troilus's difficulty in believing in Cressida's flagrant betrayal (5.2.135). Throughout *Troilus*, characters use language to bring their subjective views of the world closer to their hearts' desires. Ultimately, these attempts fail. Troilus's own idealizations are undone (in effect, he finally sees that the "goods" he has purchased are shoddy) when a mentally divided Cressida, attempting to justify her individual betrayal in Ovidian fashion, generalizes about what she perceives as women's foibles:

> Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee,
> But with my heart the other eye doth see.
> Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us I find:
> The error of our eye directs our mind.
> What error leads must err; O, then conclude,
> Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude.
> (5.2.106–11)

The scurrilously blunt idiom of Menippean discourse demolishes the elaborate Ovidian rationalizing when Thersites concludes, "A proof of strength she could not publish more, / Unless she said 'My mind is now turn'd whore'" (112–13).

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tivity and analogy, making *syncrisis*, or the juxtaposition of multiple viewpoints, its fundamental rhetorical trope. Formal logic finds a place in Menippean discourse only in travesty, as the butt of the joke or as the structure of a mock or paradoxical encomium. Interestingly, Hector's formal logic is not refuted by the relativistic arguments of Troilus or Paris but is simply abandoned (2.2). Palmer (1991 [1982]: 84) notes, "The whole play seems designed at once to invite and to frustrate judgement: to insist upon the relative at the expense of the absolute" (see also 49).

Thersites dominates a definitively dramatic scene upon which much care has been spent. The scene itself is a compact variation on a structural pattern Shakespeare deploys effectively in certain of the comedies. For example, in *Love's Labors Lost* and *As You Like It* there is a "hierarchy of knowledge," with those near the top of the hierarchy more aware of what is happening than those near the bottom. The paradigm has been called "discrepant awareness" (Evans 1960). Placing the grotesque Thersites, so unlike the courtly Berowne or the sprightly Rosalind, in command of a hierarchy of knowledge underscores the Menippean cynicism that rules a world in which any other disposition—trusting, confident, or idealistic—could only be doomed.

A definite view of society emerges from the play in tandem with, and supported by, a comparably definite concept of discourse. The social exchanges within the fictional world of *Troilus* occur on a spectrum between self-delusion and enlightenment. The magniloquent orotundity, the pompous fullness of rhetorical display, all end up deflated and reduced to caricature. With Menippean discourse, Shakespeare creates a vehicle for playing off delusions against contrary evidence. Enlightenment, if it is found, comes with considerable pain—the recognition of foolishness, error, and misjudgment. The world of *Troilus* is not a world in which the elimination of self-delusion leads to happiness or even, as in the tragedies, to new social forms. In the final scene, there is no character, no Edgar, Cassio, Octavius, or Fortinbras, to point the dawn. In foregrounding Ulysses and Nestor as individuals who are supposedly objective, and in opposing to them characters of profound subjectivity, such as Ajax, Troilus, Cressida, and above all Achilles, Shakespeare seems to establish a defining opposition of character types. That opposition (of normal contrasts) soon reveals itself to be unstable. (For a similar view of Chaucer's *Troilus* see Payne 1981: 157.) For example, Ulysses is unable to maintain convincingly the role of dispassionate objectivity. He is particularly subjective in his appraisal of Cressida[25] and in his cynicism (3.3.165–84). On the other hand, Thersites, a vastly more complex character than Ulysses, provides a corrosive analysis of the play's heroic society that functions as objective but arises from attitudes and

25. E. Talbot Donaldson (1985: 111) cautions "against mistaking [Ulysses] for a very accurate judge of people's characters." He notes how "Ulysses' pluralization of Cressida, his multiplying her from an individual to a species, enables him to pin all the hypothetical sins of the species on her, the individual. . . . Sour are the grapes of his wrath" (ibid.: 113). See also Palmer 1991 [1982]: 46 on Ulysses. Ulysses's view of Cressida's character seems to be borne out in the play's conclusion, when she appears to prostitute herself (though she may also simply fall beneath the weight of circumstances) but does not arise from empirical ("objective" in some sense) observations. Rather, Ulysses appears prejudiced against Cressida's gender. His view is species-ism of a quite subjective kind.

values that are wholly subjective, unshared with and uninfluenced by that society. Thersites erupts from his subjectivity to comment incisively upon the other characters' values and their claims to objectivity. He injects what Peter Sloterdijk (1987 [1983]: 361) calls the "acidic element" that suffuses all "kynicism," including its Menippean manifestations.[26] Thersites's radical subjectivity (in the sense of being alienated from the society he inhabits, of being an "outsider") expresses itself so extremely that it denies all community and communal values and projects. His exquisite ugliness further alienates him.

Thus *Troilus* is elusive in its core: a play about social tensions in which different characters variously occupy both sides of each opposition; an anatomy of various classical virtues that are asserted, then undermined by the test of action; an ensemble of distinctive characters, solid and unmistakable, in which each character ultimately reveals his or her inner emptiness. Many of the play's images are derived from the clash of subjective and objective worlds: the running image of eating and food reminds one that ingestion is the animal process by which the exterior is interiorized; the consistent reappearance of blood, whether literal or figurative, points to subjective appetites and emotions; allusions to reflections and mirrorings recall the intense subjectivity of Ovid's Narcissus (in important respects the distant literary type for the unplayful Troilus); and in the references to reason and reasoning is suggested the means (not attained in *Troilus*) of mediation between subjective and objective worlds. Each character in the play is trapped in this dichotomy. The radical method of characterization employed by Shakespeare in all his plays, which we have called "split awareness," is an Ovidian technique, common in both the late Middle Ages and in the Renaissance: a character then experiences a division of values or a conflict between "worlds" that cannot be resolved rationally.[27]

26. In his foreword to Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Andreas Huyssen gives an excellent summary of the former's distinction between the "kynical" and the "cynical." It is a "struggle between opposing consciousnesses: the cynicism of power and its institutions (in the realms of politics, the military, religion, knowledge, sexuality, and medicine) vs. the kynical revolt from below, which responds to the cynicism of domination with satirical laughter, defiant body action, or strategic silence" (Sloterdijk 1987 [1983]: xvi, xvii). "Sticking the tongue out," Sloterdijk remarks, "says no with many undertones" (ibid.: 142). Compare that statement with William H. Gass's (1985: 135) observation that the "primal and still ultimate rejection is the retch." The power of very physical images to satirize, or otherwise comment upon, ideas lies at the heart of Menippean satire. In a Menippean world, the proper response to an overinflated (whether pompous or hypocritical) idea is to make, or act out, a harsh physical gesture. To succeed, the gesture must display, as does Thersites's description of Agamemnon's war, a homology with the idea. There must be a recognizable correspondence between the physicospatial gesture, or a more elaborate pantomime, and the idea being mocked.

27. For further discussion of split awareness as a radical Ovidian strategy for characterization that Shakespeare, along with many other Renaissance writers, inherited and developed

The encounter of subjective and objective worlds, at least within the Ovidian paradigm, comes as a collision because the result is always some damage or alteration, usually to the subjective world. Female characters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, such as Medea, Myrrha, and Byblis, stand on the edge of madness, driven by their passions to some form of moral betrayal. The encounter usually begins a *psychomachia*, an internal dialogue, a rational attempt at compromise in which the subject seeks some middle ground with the system he or she confronts. In *Troilus*, the dialogues do occur but fruitlessly, even parodically so. Achilles represents one extreme of those who collide with the status quo, thinking to adjust everything to his vision, that of "Kingdom'd Achilles" (2.3.176). Uncompromising, Thersites is at the other extreme, rejecting a society he sees as incapable of regeneration. In the interaction of objective and subjective worlds, the play generates a good deal of reflexivity (Freund 1985: 21–22, 25). The characters turn back upon themselves, insisting upon and arguing for their respective self-delusions but largely (one does not know about Nestor) cognizant of the circumstances that resist their rhetoric (Payne 1981: 157).

4.

So entirely does *Troilus* seem predicated upon a deconstructive antisystem that both rational compromise and humane considerations are beyond reach. Hector, for example, appears to attempt a redefinition of certain martial ideals. Unfortunately, he is not in a joust or a tournament but a war, and Troilus calls his attention to this fact (5.3.37–38, 43, 49). Hector refuses a battle *à outrance* with Ajax, pleading kinship (4.5.118–37). He apparently seeks to limit war's mortal leveling, to contract the boundaries of war by redefining mercy's dominions and by excluding kinfolk as deadly enemies. He also spares Thersites (5.5.30). If he is trying to write new rules, he fails. Indeed, Hector dies because Achilles will not abide even by the old rules of warfare and chivalry.

Like the other characters in the play, Hector is flawed. When Cassandra and Andromache foresee his end and plead for him to avoid battle on the morn of death, they appeal not only personally, as a sister who will lose a brother and as a wife who will lose her husband and her son's father, but also as citizens of Troy. The "mad" Cassandra appeals for Troy because Hector is literally the city's sole prop (5.3.59–61). Though heavily subjective, her appeal also has a strong objective component. Yet Hector will not

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experimentally, see Milowicki and Wilson 1995a and 1995b; see also Wilson 1995: 148–82. Cressida's intricate appraisal of her divided mind (3.2.113–24, 144–48) has evolved from the monologues of Ovid's passion-obsessive women in the *Metamorphoses*.

consider such a point of view because of his need to answer to the demands of individual honor. However chivalric, Hector is still an epic hero unwilling or unable to compromise on honor (5.3.26–28). Hence he goes not to an honorable but to an ignominious death, slaughtered like a beast: Achilles, echoing the warrior of the *Iliad*, refers to Hector's corpse as "this dainty bait" (5.8.20).[28] Here, in one of Shakespeare's most bitter formal syntheses, a commonplace observation about human life is given fresh expression: a person can play by one set of rules while an opponent may well be playing by another or by none at all. Menippean discourse will always be available to remind both readers and characters that no "rule" has much, if any, moral scope and that no type or genre has more absolute definition than a dog's (or cynic's) bark.

Other characters who attempt redefinitions of the relationships between objective and subjective worlds include Ulysses, Troilus, and Cressida. Ulysses's attempt to direct self-love in a social direction fails with Achilles; Troilus tries to avoid an unfair redefinition of all women in the light of Cressida's betrayal (5.2.128–32, 136–59); Cressida may be the most self-perceptive of all the characters (after Thersites) in this examination of subjective-objective tensions. According to Freund (1985: 23), "she has little confidence in the stable identity of selfhood or in the ability of discourse to represent it." That is, she shares, though it seems unlikely at first glance (as everything in Shakespeare usually does), some qualities of mind with Thersites.

Both the system of Courtly Love, idealized, purified, even spiritualized, and the heroic and, later, the chivalric codes, formalizing martial endeavors, were attempts to direct the "blood," anger in the latter case, passionate love in the former. In *Troilus*, Shakespeare shows both systems to be inadequate in the face of individual narcissism, whether manifested in appetite, emotion, or ambition. However, Shakespeare does something original and provoking with narcissism. Down through the centuries the great paradigm for love's awakening of self-consciousness had been Ovid's Narcissus, and Shakespeare uses this in *Troilus*. Oddly enough, he uses it essentially in the heroic, epic sphere, only suggesting it in the sphere of romance. Here again occurs the Menippean dissolution of boundaries. His great narcissists are first Achilles, then Ajax, and the dour, unplayful Troilus a distant third.

In Troilus's high idealization of Cressida, Shakespeare points up the essentially fatal flaw in Courtly Love. Cressida, of course, is just one of several characters in the play used to indicate the inadequacies of one or

28. In the *Iliad*, Achilles tells Hector he would like to devour his flesh (22.345ff.), since killing him is an inadequate revenge. Shakespeare may have had that passage in mind. With Achilles's remark, the running imagery on food and feeding culminates.

another human system. Shakespeare suggests that Courtly Love, idealized and therefore exaggerated to such an extent that at times it flirted with parody and indeed became in a text like that of Andreas Capellanus a kind of self-parody, could nonetheless be taken quite seriously by a young idealist like Troilus, whose youth both Ulysses and Hector stress (4.5.97 and 5.3.10–12). In such a case there would be a close congruence between the vision of the lover and the paradigm that the system presented. This is the tragedy of both Chaucer's and Shakespeare's Troilus. A cynic like Chaucer's Diomedes can use the system's idealizing rhetoric to claim advantage, but an idealist like Chaucer's or Shakespeare's Troilus can be seduced by the system, taking rhetoric for truth. Chaucer's Troilus laments, "O lady myne, Criseyde,/ Where is youre feithe, . . . ? / . . . Where is youre trouthe?" (5.1674–76). Echoing his predecessor, Shakespeare's Troilus asks, "O beauty, where is thy faith?" (5.2.67).[29] In all this, Sloterdijk's distinction between "cynic" and "kynic" provides a key to Shakespeare's characterization of Thersites. Diomedes can be a "cynic" because, like certain politicians or multinational CEOs, he knows but does not care. Thersites is a (classic) "kynic" because he knows much has gone terribly awry and does care, which drives him to a rejection of the human level of endeavor and thence groundward to a dog's growling.

Other ideals promulgated by epic and romance are also deflated or reduced in *Troilus*: the wellsprings of martial motivation in the epic, honor and anger, produce only dissension in the Greek camp. Nor does the source of martial motivation in the romance, love, produce heroic action. Instead, Achilles leaves the field because of his love for Polyxena. Similarly, love operates only by indirection in the Trojan camp, driving an angry Troilus to seek revenge on Diomedes. This pervasive affirmation and reduction of ideals, exemplified though not exhausted by Thersites, energizes the play's overwhelming dissolution of boundaries.[30]

29. F. Anne Payne, for whom Menippean satire is an elegantly intellectual structure, maintains that the tragic vision of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, deeply influenced by Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, is essentially Menippean. Significantly, she sees the provenience of Chaucer's *Troilus* as relativistic (Payne 1981: 120, 157).

30. There is something more to say. In his study of an evolved Menippean tradition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Sherbert (1996: 2–5, 17–30) indicates the central roles of wit and of the (Ovidian) myth of Narcissus. According to Sherbert, wit manifests itself on both the linguistic and narrative levels (ibid.: 17–21), while the story of Narcissus was used to anatomize self-knowledge (ibid.: 76) and its obverse, self-deception (ibid.: 120). In the only voice outside the play proper that may be authorial, that of the Letter, wit is given a prominent role, while narcissism is a singularly powerful motif throughout, as are the related quest for self-knowledge and the curse of self-deception. Palmer indicates, for example, that neither Achilles nor Ajax knows himself (1991: 81; see also 74). Although we agree with Sherbert on the question of wit and the intellectualism of Menippean discourse generally, we think one

Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* reveals many things. It demonstrates that Shakespeare was adventurous and, in the modern sense, experimental. He knew how to test every possibility of literary creation. It further shows that the problem of form, of literary type and genre, was of central interest to him. In turning to Menippean discourse, Shakespeare invokes a way of talking about the world most capable of challenging all assumptions about heroism and love, about both public and private virtues. *Troilus* examines both historical and moral truths, putting them to a most exacting test. It also examines assumptions about literature, particularly in its sustained experiment with genre. Different genres flow together in the play, struggling in opposition to each other (rather as the characters in the play behave), affirm their presence, are mocked and reduced, finally dissolving into constituent elements like numerous colligatory motifs capable of crossing any and all generic boundaries. Finally, *Troilus* displays the multiplex qualities of Menippean discourse, a conceptual diversity that seems to stake out a strong claim for status as a distinct genre while entirely undercutting that claim. Many scholars, such as Sherbert, have thought that Menippean discourse, whether satiric, playful, or simply erudite, constitutes a distinct genre, even a supergenre. The careful consideration of *Troilus* makes the generic claims of Menippean discourse more problematic. If it is a genre, then it is one that, by its very diversity and flexibility, runs against all prescriptive theories of genre, all those that base their classifications upon either a set of rules or the idea of a single form that (like Frye's *mythos* of Winter) determines the relationship of parts to the whole, and may also run against the very concept of genre.

Troilus and Cressida opens a path to the consideration of Menippean discourse as transgeneric. It displays a way of writing (a *discourse*) that embodies at once both a nomad's and a collector's versatility. It comprises a number of colligatory motifs that have slipped easily across global boundaries. These motifs have a disposition to link together and yet can be combined and recombined in any number of fresh literary texts. It is a discourse, a kind of transgenre (or even antigenre), as "flexible and changeable as Proteus" (Bakhtin 1984: 113). If *Troilus* is a Menippean text, it is not because of the presence of any single character—Cassandra, Pandarus, Patroclus, even Thersites—or any single characteristic but because of an obsessive drive to deconstruct. *Troilus* builds out of the elements of different human systems an active, highly reflexive antisystem. And writing, as modern Menippeans such as James Joyce and Jacques Derrida consistently show, can scarcely be

should not ignore the extreme physicalness of Menippean discourse, its wealth of gesture and pantomime, the other end, as it were, of the spectrum of human communication.

more experimental than when it strives to express total openness, to shatter all boundaries, and to rebuild continuously (new texts) from the old fragments. Menippean discourse constitutes a textual mode, at once versatile, fluid, and transgeneric, that persistently demonstrates both the openness and the instability of form.

Appendix A

The inventory of Menippean features in *Troilus* is both immense and varied. Even the parody of courtly speech by Troilus and Cressida (3.2.63–97) and of Pandarus's idiom by Aeneas (4.2.56–59) are quite Menippean. Thersites's burlesque language (3.3.246–48; 5.3.176) could hardly be taken as anything else. Feast images, which are common in *Troilus*, are a recurring epic convention, but they are also associated, as Bakhtin insists, with Menippean discourse. During a feast or a banquet (*cena* or *symposium*), diverse ways of talking can appear and the usual boundaries between sociolects can be shown as dissolving. Bakhtin (1984: 116–17) sees madness as an important ingredient of Menippean satire. Troilus describes Cassandra as "our mad sister" (2.2.99), while Thersites, as official fool, if inappropriately so, stands himself on the edge of madness. Another component of Menippean satire is its tripartite structure (Bakhtin 1984: 116) of Heaven, Earth, and Hell, doubtless deployed to achieve its "miraculous universal vision" (Relihan 1996: 269) and evidently inherited from the epic. To suggest this vertical, universal inclusiveness, Shakespeare has many of the Greek gods mentioned in one way or another, while Troilus's favorite image is one of a descent into the Underworld (3.2.12; 5.4.19–20). But one could argue that the references to a tripartite universe in the play derive as much from the epic tradition as from the Menippean. Perhaps the most important Menippean characteristic is what we have called the "thrust" of Menippean discourse: that is, absorbing elements of other genres in order to test a (certain philosophical) truth. Shakespeare tests several generally accepted "truths," not all of them strictly philosophical, in all of his plays, but in *Troilus* (and only *Hamlet* equals it in both intellectual exploration and aggression) the testing exchanges are especially violent because of the translation of conceptual into bodily terms. Indeed, the play is a kind of ongoing experiment, testing virtually all the basic ideas of a civilized culture. The sheer number of Menippean elements in the play seems to confirm our view that Shakespeare understood Menippean as a way of writing, a discourse that could be recreated in many diverse ways or borrowed from to contribute to, or indeed to create, another kind of discourse. In Shakespeare, perhaps more than anywhere else, Menippean turns out to be a testing, experimental discourse.

Kirk (1980) notes some recurring characteristics of Menippean satire that are obviously not found in *Troilus*: speaking beasts (unless one nominates "elephant" Ajax for this role), fantastic voyages (which surround, at its beginning and end, the "Matter of Troy" and which might be, as well, discerned in Troilus's voyage of fantastic delights into Cressida's body), mock apotheoses, mock trials, utopias (other than in Troilus's utopian fantasy of true love), and interviews with the dead. Other elements on Kirk's list can be found in the play, including the banquet and dialogue, metamorphoses (if one is willing to see a radical change in Cressida's behavior; Ajax's metamorphosis is noted at 3.3.250–65, and Thersites contemplates his metamorphoses at 5.1.60–66), allegorical personages (which do not appear except in the figure of the Prologue but which are alluded to) [for Palmer (1991), metamorphosis is a major motif in the play (64–5), and he also discerns a tendency toward allegory, in that a character "subject to a vice moves halfway to becoming the vice" (77)]), cynics (several, but especially Diomedes; Thersites, following Sloterdijk's valuable distinction, is a kynic), dream visions (of Cassandra and Andromache are alluded to at 5.3.10–12), a paradoxical encomium (of Ajax), nocturnal exchanges (a good deal of the play occurs at night), ridicule of learnedness (which Ulysses displays in his speech on degree), and interest in language and its possibilities. Frye (1957: 311) notes a number of "scholarly distillations of Menippean form" in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, such as the "digression of air, the marvelous journey," and the "digression of the miseries of scholars." These "distillations" cannot be found in *Troilus* (other than the "marvelous journey," which, as we noted above with respect to the "fantastic voyage," surrounds the action of the play and does, at least metaphorically, describe Troilus' lovemaking with Cressida), but they do show that no empirical taxonomy of Menippean discourse will ever be complete. It is a discourse that reinvents itself and continuously discovers new possibilities within itself.

The self-reflexive intricacy of language in *Troilus*, which seems extensive even for Shakespeare, has always been counted among the play's difficulties and has a large role in its putative status as a "problem" play. Above all *Troilus* is overwhelmingly self-conscious in the way it highlights language, theatrical technique, and literary allusiveness. Self-consciousness, as Sherbert (1996: 1, 4) correctly argues, constitutes a key, even a foundational, element in Menippean discourse.

Appendix B

Is there a Menippean canon? Writers on Menippean discourse have normally cited a large number of literary texts that recur through all discussions

and have indicated an even larger body of discourse that includes many, if never all, of the Menippean motifs that we discuss in this essay. Kirk's (1980) vast catalog of Menippean writers, both major and distinctly minor, might be said to establish an empirical canon. Relihan (1993: xiii–xv) offers a concise bibliography of canonical classical texts. However large or small this canon, uncertainties attend the project because, if for no other reason, a literary text may be Menippean in part or may incorporate Menippean elements within an otherwise straightforward discourse. Still, certain writers do stand out as more important than others, either because of their influence upon subsequent Menippean writers or because their texts have remained well known and read for other reasons (Apuleius, for example, is a master of narrative fiction; Seneca, of drama).

Although no writings by Menippus himself have survived, classical texts, such as the writings of Lucian and Varro (the writings of whom survive only in fragments) are the prime candidates for a Menippean canon because they exerted an immense influence upon later writers (and upon humanist educational programs during the Renaissance). They are also extreme in their mockery and are highly self-conscious. They are, as Sherbert (1996: 4) suggests for Menippean discourse in general, "narcissistic and nonsensical." Lucian might even be said to head up the canon, since his influence, in both classical times and in the Renaissance, was so significant. Classical Menippean also shows significant interconnections and degrees of overlap with other classical writing, such as old comedy and Euripidean drama. Petronius, Seneca, Apuleius, and Macrobius seem to belong to the Menippean canon. Boethius, at least as a master of mixed or hybrid discourse, is usually considered to be an important Menippean writer. Indeed, Kirk (1980: 47–52) cites sixty-one editions of *De consolatione philosphiae*, including translations, from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Renaissance writers, in particular Erasmus, François Rabelais, Sebastian Brandt, Jakob Grimmelshausen, and Miguel Cervantes, as well as Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Nashe, often are (in Rabelais's case, usually is) Menippean. Nashe, one scholar of Menippean discourse observes, was "an upstart author challenging the classicizing trends of Renaissance aesthetics and the institutionalizing constraint of authorship in the Elizabethan state": the Menippean arsenal allowed writers to suggest political meanings while at the same time "mocking the notion that his intentions as an author were anything of the sort" (Blanchard 1995: 109–10). That is, Nashe wrote within the shadow of Menippean models while also constituting himself as one for subsequent writers.

Some of the best examples from English literature are located in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century writing. (Kirk concludes his

catalog with the end of the seventeenth century.) Sherbert focuses upon John Dunton, Thomas D'Urfey, and Laurence Sterne. Jonathan Swift, particularly in his *A Tale of a Tub*, seems to be a deeply Menippean writer. Voltaire is often, if not always, a Menippean writer. Menippean elements pervade Henry Fielding's novels, and Robinson (1979: 104) puts him with Jonson as showing in his dramas a "significant influence of Lucianic material" (see also 198–235). Kirk (1980: xxxi), writing from his deeply empirical approach, warns against asserting Menippean connections solely on the basis of "psychic similarity." Our own approach, though paying heed to the inventory of motifs, finds considerable weight in "psychic similarity."

Sherbert suggests Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* as a Menippean text. Frye (1957: 310), whom Sherbert follows in fundamental respects, claims that the "Alice books are perfect Menippean satires." Frye (ibid.: 313) also includes Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* as a Menippean "romance-anatomy," in which the novel's romantic theme of a "wild hunt" grows and expands into "an encyclopaedic anatomy of the whale." Kirk himself (writing as Korkowski) takes Melville's *The Confidence Man* to be a Menippean text (Kirk 1976: 257). Many twentieth-century novels, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* and, even more so, *Finnegans Wake*, are Menippean. A great deal of recent American writing strikes us as characteristically Menippean. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* stands out as an extended narrative of diverse and polyvocal Menippean writing. There is, then, at least a sufficient Menippean canon to permit scholars and critics recourse to many of the same texts.

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