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# **Hector: Tragedy**

by Antoine de Montchrestien

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Translated, with Introduction and Notes,  
by Richard Hillman

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## Référence électronique

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by Antoine de Montchrestien  
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## TRADUCTIONS INTROUVABLES

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# Introduction

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The reasons for proposing an English translation of this tragedy by Antoine de Montchrestien are less salient than for the same author's *The Scottish Queen* (1601, 1604), which presents particular politico-dramatic interest from the perspective of French-English connections.<sup>1</sup> *Hector* can lay claim to no such distinction. It is, however, the most accomplished French dramatic treatment, according to the conventions of the late-Humanist theatre, of material that was attracting dramatists on both sides of the Channel—the so-called “Matter of Troy”, which the Middle Ages had deployed in multiple narrative forms. On the English side, the ineluctable dramatic instance is Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1602), but there were many more, including Thomas Heywood's *The Iron Age* (1611-13) and others now lost, dating mainly from the 1590s.<sup>2</sup> On the French side, the dramatic tradition dates back to the mid-fifteenth century

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1 See Antoine de Montchrestien, *The Queen of Scotland (La reine d'Escoffe)*, introd. and trans. Richard Hillman, online publication, Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, Scène Européenne-Traductions Introuvables, Tours, 2018: <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/traductions/queen-scotland>> (accessed 28/01/2019).

2 For a summary, see Geoffrey Bullough, “Introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*”, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols, vol. 6: Other “Classical” Plays: *Titus Andronicus, Troilus and Cressida, Timon of Athens, Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 97-100. See also John S. P. Tatlock, “The Siege of Troy in Elizabethan Literature, Especially in Shakespeare and Heywood”, *PMLA* 30.4 (1915): 673-770 *passim*.

For the French plays, the present overview is indebted to Françoise Charpentier, *Les débuts de la tragédie héroïque: Antoine de Montchrestien (1575-1621)* (Lille: Service de Reproduction des Thèses, Université de Lille III, 1981), pp. 420-21, which is still the most extensive study of Montchrestien's work. For a thorough survey of relevant plays from the mid-sixteenth century through the Classical Age, see Tiphaine Karsenti, *Le mythe de Troie dans le théâtre français (1562-1715)*, Lumière Classique, 90 (Paris: H. Champion, 2012).

with *La destruction de Troie la grande*, by Jacques Milet (1425?-68), a sprawling dramatisation, in the free-wheeling style of the French mysteries (multiple scaffolds, spectacular action, octosyllabic quatrains), of a vital common source for numerous European authors: the twelfth-century verse *Roman de Troie* of Benoît de Sainte-Maure.<sup>3</sup> In the late sixteenth century, the influence of Euripides (*Hecuba*, *The Trojan Women*, *Andromache*) and Seneca (*The Trojan Women*) gave rise to several neo-classical adaptations, most notably *La Troade* (1579), by Robert Garnier, who was Montchrestien's chief dramaturgical model. A further sprinkling of French plays on Trojan themes appeared between 1563 and 1605. It would appear, however, that Montchrestien's was original in concentrating its action and emotion on the theme of the death of Hector.<sup>4</sup>

That concentration results in considerable dramatic power, which arguably remains accessible across the constraints of late-Humanist theatre (and I hope, to some extent, even in translation). The process begins with reduction of an essentially familiar plot-segment to its basic elements: the hero's failure to heed an ill-omen, despite the pleas of his family, especially his wife Andromache, followed by his death at the hands of Achilles and the mourning that ensues. Attached to the key moments are lengthy expressions of intense emotion, as well as debates about the nature of heroism and the relative roles of divinity and human action in mortal affairs.

Since little of this will self-evidently seem "dramatic" by early modern English theatrical standards—despite a parallel penchant for rhetorical elaboration in the early years of Senecan influence—it is worth insisting that contemporary French audiences, as well as readers, accepted such elements as the basic characteristics of neo-Humanist tragedy, which the play shares with *The Scottish Queen* and Montchrestien's other four tragedies. Invariably, the premise is a tragically charged situation, unrelieved (or otherwise varied) by comic elements, which in this case is heightened by especially heavy irony, with the universally known outcome reinforced by its classically mandated mechanism. Developing the emotional responses and the metaphysical framework in which to place them depends on rhetorical skill, deployed in extended monologues, stichomythia

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3 Behind Benoît's romance lay legends transmitted under the names of Dares the Phrygian and Dictys of Crete, but these subsequently had little independent influence. There were editions available in Montchrestien's time, including a faithful translation of Dares into French by Charles de Bourgueville (*L'histoire véritable de la guerre des Grecs et des Troyens, etc.* [Caen: B. Macé, 1572]), but to claim that Dares and Homer virtually account for Montchrestien's basic material appears exaggerated and askew (*pace* Christopher Norman Smith, Introduction, *Two Tragedies: Hector and La Reine d'Escoce*, by Antoine de Montchrestien, Athlone Renaissance Library [London: Athlone Press, 1972], pp. 1-24, 18-19). Smith does, however, provide a useful discussion of theatrical and intellectual backgrounds.

4 Charpentier, p. 421.

(adapted to presenting contrasting points of view), and moralising choric commentary. Alexandrine couplets constitute the basic verbal medium (subject to lyric variation for the choruses). Action on stage is largely limited to entrances and exits (whose staging is sometimes problematic, as will be seen)—although Hector’s affectionate interplay with his infant son as he arms himself (ll. 281–301 [Act I]) stands out as a supplementary interlude.<sup>5</sup> As for the potentially spectacular events—the panicked populace in the street (ll. 1605 ff. [Act IV], ll. 2041 ff. [Act V]), and especially the scenes of warfare—they are evoked, however vividly, through narrative reports.

Given the restrictive formal conditions, the disposition and manipulation of such elements in *Hector* may be seen as highly accomplished. Indeed, largely on these grounds, Charpentier unequivocally pronounces the play Montchrestien’s “*chef-d’œuvre* [masterpiece]”.<sup>6</sup> She does so, it is notable, on the widely shared assumption that *Hector* constitutes the author’s final work, since it is the only one of the tragedies not to have appeared in some form in the first collected edition of 1601, figuring for the first time in that of 1604. Reasonably, then, she dates composition between these dates.<sup>7</sup> More questionable, for reasons to be expounded below, is her confident proposal (of whose radical nature she appears oblivious) that *Hector* shows the influence of Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*.<sup>8</sup> In support of this idea, she recalls that Montchrestien’s self-imposed exile in England (reputedly the consequence of a fatal duel) might have begun prior to 1604.<sup>9</sup> I will return to the questions of chronology and influence, but it is also important to note that this placement of *Hector* within Montchrestien’s *œuvre* serves a highly teleological reading, whereby his presumably final play marks the culmination of an evolution from a “*tragédie*

<sup>5</sup> This is one of several details derived directly from the *Iliad*; see the translation, l. 281 (Act I), n. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Charpentier, p. 416.

<sup>7</sup> Charpentier, p. 700. The two editions in question are *Les tragédies de Ant. de Montchrestien, sieur de Vasteville, plus une Bergerie et un poème de Susanne* (Rouen: J. Petit, 1601), and *Les Tragédies d’Antoine de Montchrestien, sieur de Vasteville. ... Edition nouvelle augmentée par l’auteur* (Rouen: Jean Osmont, 1604); a second edition including *Hector* appeared two years later: *Les Tragédies d’Antoine de Montchrestien, sieur de Vasteville. ... Dernière édition revue et augmentée par l’auteur* (Nyort: J. Vaultrier, 1606). Exceptionally, and without explanation, *Hector* is dated prior to *La Reine d’Escosse* by Jeff Rufo, “*La Tragédie Politique: Antoine de Montchrestien’s La Reine d’Escosse, Reconsidered*”, *Modern Philology* 111.3 (2014): 437–56, 443.

<sup>8</sup> Charpentier, pp. 422–23, virtually takes Montchrestien’s use of *Troilus and Cressida* for granted (“sans doute [undoubtedly]” [p. 422]); acquaintance with Shakespeare’s work on the part of a French dramatist has never, to my knowledge, been claimed for such an early date. (Cf., however, Richard Hillman, “Setting Scottish History Straight: *La Stuartide* of Jean de Schélandre as Corrective of *Macbeth*”, *Modern Language Review* 113.2 [2018]: 289–306.)

<sup>9</sup> Charpentier, p. 423, n. 7. The dates of his sojourn in England remain uncertain. For discussion of Montchrestien’s life, see Charpentier, pp. 1–53, as well as my introduction to *The Queen of Scotland* in the present series, pp. 3–5.

*renaissance qui a surtout été celle du malheur* [Renaissance tragedy which was chiefly one of woe]” towards a new aesthetic of “courage”; Charpentier thus concludes: “*Cette pièce ouvre largement la voie à la tragédie héroïque* [This play opens wide the route to heroic tragedy]”.<sup>10</sup> It is essentially from the same literary-historical perspective that Montchrestien’s first (and still principal) editor, Louis Petit de Julleville, detects anticipations of Pierre Corneille in Montchrestien’s poetic expression.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly, the idea of *Hector* as a tragedy of “courage” exalting the prevailing neo-Stoic ethic matches a number of expressions within the text, such as the following, which is invested with choric authority:

O happy is the state of mind  
That hope eschews along with care,  
And likewise which avoids despair,  
Unable to be undermined  
When human chance seems to conspire  
From its hands to snatch its desire.

[*O bien-heureuse la pensée  
Qui n’espere rien en souci,  
Et qui ne desespere aussi;  
Ne pouvant estre trauersee  
De vois les accidens humain  
Luy voler ses desirs des mains.*]  
(ll. 1847-52 [Act IV]; pp. 54-55)

Still greater authority is lent by Montchrestien himself in the dedicatory Epistle addressed to his patron (also for the 1601 volume and in his political life): the powerful Henri II de Bourbon, Prince of Condé, first prince of the blood and possible heir to the throne. There Montchrestien explains his placement of *Hector* at the beginning of the collection—incidentally, he says nothing about its being a new play—on the grounds that its hero deserves to march first in the heroic line as a prime example of noble blood (indeed royal, like Condé’s), showing the qualities that distinguish it from the vulgar. The playwright elaborates as follows:

<sup>10</sup> Charpentier, p. 471.

<sup>11</sup> I retain as my edition of reference Antoine de Montchrestien, *Les tragédies*, ed. Louis Petit de Julleville, new ed. (Paris: E. Plot, Norrit et Cie., 1891), from which I have supplied page numbers for quotations from the original. The 1972 edition of Smith does not differ significantly from that of Petit de Julleville, which is still more widely available.

*Aussi remarquerez vous en luy cest air releué de courage et de gloire, non susceptible d'alteration, ains ferme et demeurant immuable en vn calme et serain perpetuel de constance.*

[Thus you will observe in him that elevated quality of courage and glory, not subject to alteration but firm and remaining unchangeable in a perpetual calm and serenity of constancy.]  
(Épistre [1604], unpaginated)

If such “glory” (decidedly one of the play’s keynotes) reaches a kind of paroxysm at the point of extinction, as with a torch, such, we are told, is the intrinsic quality of “*vertu* [virtue]”—another recurrent term, which, as its etymology warrants (from “*vir*”/“man”), comprises “manhood” in both the physical and moral senses (though it is often inflected by context towards one or the other).

Yet if it was Montchrestien’s intention to exalt Hector’s uncompromising thirst for personal “glory” as an exclusive ideal of manly behaviour and to offer Stoical courage as the only response to adversity, the text effectively opens up another perspective revealing the cost to others—most comprehensively (self-defeatingly, in a real sense) to all of Troy, but most immediately and intensely to the hero’s entourage. That Troy is doomed appears an irrevocable decree of destiny; the audience knows enough to trust Cassandra, the play’s first speaker, on this point. But mitigation and inflection of that destiny’s realisation through human actions, notably Hector’s own, may remain possible within the system: otherwise, it would simply not matter whether he went out to fight or not on the fatal day, whether or not he exercised “prudence”. And if his lapse of prudence, too, is inevitable, then one draws close to the principle of Heraclitus of Ephesus—blasphemous, surely, within this play-world—that “a person’s character is his fate (divinity)”.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, the terms “prudence” and “prudent” (identical in French), with variants of “wisdom” (“*sagesse*”, “*sage*”), resound through the play as moderators of reckless action for glory’s sake,<sup>13</sup> and the application to Hector in particular comes with contemporary resonance: this is the premise of Christine de Pizan’s widely disseminated *Epistre Othea*—a supposed letter of advice written to the young Trojan hero by “*Othea, deesse de prudence / Qui adrece les bons cuers en vaillance* [Othea, goddess of prudence, / Who edifies hearts stout in valour]”.<sup>14</sup> I will be suggesting that the *Epistre* marks Montchrestien’s work in fur-

**12** Heraclitus, *Fragments: A Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. T. M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Fragment 119 (pp. 68–69), in which the Greek term for “fate (divinity)” is δαίμων.

**13** Examples occur in ll. 311, 516, 709, 744, 756, 764, 775, 1031, 1130, 1638, 1648, 1859 and 1864.

**14** Christine de Pizan, *Epistre Othea*, ed. Gabriella Parussa (Geneva: Droz, 1999), section 1 (texte 1, ll. 14–15 [p. 107]). (The structure of this work is complex, with three distinct parts comprised within each of one hundred sections; I will normally refer only to sections and the page numbers in

ther ways. In any case, at least by way of the consequences of an act presented as imprudent, this “tragedy of courage” may surely lay claim to double credentials as a “tragedy of woe”.

Apart from Hector’s intuitions of his wife’s own dismal fate (ll. 324 ff. [Act I])—for “history”, as is also well known, will not grant her final wish to follow him in death—abundance of “woe” is amply displayed from the start by anticipation, and it is brought out most strongly, as the tradition warrants, through laments by Andromache and Hecuba, although the personal devastation of Priam legitimises the response as more than feminine weakness. As both king and father, Priam had initially aligned himself reflexively with the ideal of glory, before becoming an insistent advocate for prudence in the face of the ill omens.<sup>15</sup> Andromache’s feminine grief is allowed, within the constraints of Alexandrines, to veer into outbursts of convincingly poignant grievance—directed against Priam, against Hector himself—before she returns to more conventional objects of blame: destiny and its instrument, the treacherous Achilles, who strikes Hector down contrary to all dictates of chivalric honour.<sup>16</sup>

By this route, paradoxically, Achilles partially transcends his primary role as emblem of perfidy to become a *de facto* figure of death’s arbitrary and irresistible power.<sup>17</sup> The con-

Parussa, ed.). On the *Epistre*’s broad diffusion in manuscript and print, see Parussa, ed., p. 11 and n. 22. The titles of early printed editions highlighted the basic moral point—e.g., *Les cent hystoires de Troye. Lepistre de Othea deesse de prudence envoyee a lesperit chevalereux Hector de Troye avec cent hystoires* (Paris: Philippe Le Noir, 1522).

**15** See esp. ll. 881-82 (Act II); p. 28: “When the thirst for glory is excessively strong, / The soundest judgement becomes altered and goes wrong [*Quand le desir de gloire et trop immodéré, / Le plus sain iugement en deuiet alteré*].” The following Chorus, however (ll. 897 ff.), uncompromisingly affirms glory as the supreme value.

**16** See her dynamic peroration, ll. 2325-74 (Act V). Karsenti, p. 327, perceptively identifies the central importance of Andromache in transforming the story of Hector into tragedy “[p]arce qu’elle incarne le refus de la fatalité [because she incarnates the refusal of fatality]” and offers this persuasive summary:

*La résistance d’Andromaque [sic] ouvre un espace de mise en question de l’action dans le cadre tragique d’un monde soumis à la nécessité de la mort, et c’est dans cet espace que s’élabore et se formule d’éthique radicale d’Hector, qui dessine un mouvement inverse d’acceptation du destin.*

[The resistance of Andromache opens a space where action is called in question within the tragic framework of a world subject to the necessity of death, and it is in this space that the radical ethic of Hector, which traces a contrary movement of accepting destiny, is elaborated and formulated.]

**17** The certainty of death by uncertain means is indeed one (commonplace) lesson that Pizan in the *Epistre* draws from Hector’s killing; another is the need to obey one’s father, one’s sovereign and, more generally, to follow wise advice. She does not present the death-blow as such as treacherous but rather as proof that one should always be properly armed, both literally and spiritually. See sections 90-91 (pp. 327-29). On the death of Hector within a French tragic tradition of representing the assassination of an otherwise invincible hero, see Antoine Soare, “Les tragédies de l’assassinat et



cluding lucubrations of the Chorus on universal mortality (ll. 2382-84) thereby emerge as something more than the standard clichés. And even that Chorus, in adding a practical warning against allowing a state to depend on one man's strength ("The welfare of a state is feeble and unstable, / If it depends on one alone, though brave and able [*Que le bonheur publique est foible est vacillant, / S'il depend de la main d'un seul homme vaillant*]) (ll. 2379-80 [Act V]; p. 68), remains equivocal on the mechanisms of destiny with respect to human actions.

Finally, then, despite Montchrestien's claim to be presenting an unequivocal paean to heroic glory, a more sceptical (if not quite contrary) reading is also made available. Such ambiguous duality has a rough parallel in *The Scottish Queen*, which swings radically from condemnation to transcendent eulogy with regard to its heroine. But in *Hector*, where human politics give way to questions of human possibilities in the face of destiny (if there are any), the doubleness is built into the situation and developed throughout, producing destabilising shifts of ground that define debating positions impossible to resolve in the face of the secrets of the gods.

## I

It is the detail of Achilles' flagrantly ignoble killing of the hero, surprised when unable to defend himself, that leads Charpentier to deduce Shakespearean influence. This would be, then, a borrowing of a quite straightforward and limited nature. Certainly, Montchrestien's play does not deal at all with the love-story at the centre of Shakespeare's: Troilus appears only once (l. 823 [Act II]) as a non-speaking character, and when he is mentioned elsewhere, it is likewise simply as one valiant prince amongst others.

In comparing the two texts on the key point, it should also be stipulated that Achilles' stealthy killing of Hector while the latter has his guard down, busy with an opponent he has just overcome, usually one whose armour appeals to him, is a recurrent motif in one form or another across the sources and analogues;<sup>18</sup> it is sometimes moralised as a lesson against covetousness. Behind it, moreover, may lie an episode from a prominent work in the common heritage of European literature. Somewhat curiously, there is

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l'*Hector* d'Antoine de Montchrestien", *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* ns 7.3 (1983): 173-91.

**18** A rare exception is the account of Dares Phrygius, which Smith, ed., nevertheless claims as a major source for the French playwright. There, while he does surprise Hector engaged in despoiling the slain Polybete of his armour, Achilles engages him in a fair fight; see Bourgueville, trans., p. 46.

a fairly close parallel with the death in the heat of battle of the Volscian warrior-princess Camilla, according to Book XI of the *Aeneid* (ll. 768-804). Otherwise invincible, she is imprudently distracted by the resplendent armour and accoutrements of Chloreus—a weak moment that Virgil explicitly characterises as a lapse from her otherwise masculine character.<sup>19</sup> This enables Arruns, fearful of confronting her directly, to cast a spear surreptitiously, with fatal results.

Some details do especially tie together the versions in the two plays: in both Hector is surprised on foot, unarmed, when he is occupied with the slain warrior's armour, and killed by sword-stroke.<sup>20</sup> Most accounts have him thrust through with a spear on horse-back while attempting to carry off his dead prize from the press of battle.<sup>21</sup> In *Troilus and Cressida*, the hero's attraction to his opponent's armour, which carries an intertextual trace of the covetousness strenuously condemned in John Lydgate's *The Hystorye Sege and Dystruccyon of Troye*,<sup>22</sup> is mitigated by his ensuing remark on the contradiction between inward and outward value—a fitting insight to achieve, ironically, at the moment of death (*Tro.*, V.ix.1-2).<sup>23</sup> Montchrestien makes Hector's adversary more formidable physically—

**19** “[F]emineo praedae et spoliolum ardebat amore [she was burning with a woman's love of booty and spoils]” (Virgil, *Aeneid*, XI.782).

**20** Montchrestien's account has him first ordering a subordinate to remove the rest of the armour (ll. 2182-84 [Act V]), then turning his attention to the magnificent head-covering; in Shakespeare's version, he may well also be dealing with the helmet: he at least reveals enough to be struck by the “putrified core” (V.ix.1). References to *Troilus and Cressida* (as *Tro.*) are to David Bevington, ed., *The Arden Shakespeare*, 3rd ser. (London: Thomson Learning, 1998).

**21** The absence of the horse from a version destined for staging, such as *Tro.*, explains itself (although horses are apparently admitted in Milet's mystery play); in the successive narratives employed by Montchrestien, the medievalised horse-back encounters initially reported by Antenor (ll. 1747 ff. [Act IV]) shift to neo-Homeric foot combats with the account of the Messenger (ll. 2113 ff. [Act V]), and the hero's vulnerability is thereby accentuated, as in Shakespeare.

**22** For Lydgate, I cite the excerpts in Bullough, ed., pp. 157-86, and for Shakespeare's main “historical” source, Raoul Le Fèvre, *Recueil des histoires de Troye* (c. 1474), trans. and first pub. William Caxton, *The recuile of the histories of Troie, etc.* (London: William Copland, 1553; STC 15378). In Le Fèvre, trans. Caxton, Hector is said to have “coueyted” the arms of Patroclus after he had slain him, “for they were ryght queynte and ryche” (bk. III, fol. xxi<sup>r</sup>); there he is prevented by Ydumeus (Idonomeus) and “the king Menon” (not Homeric, not to be confused with Agamenmon or with the Trojan Menon, on whom see the translation, l. 228 [Act I], n. 37).

**23** Le Fèvre, trans. Caxton, speaks merely of a “moche noble baron of Grece moche queyntly and rychely armed” (bk III, fol. xxx<sup>r</sup>). Lydgate is far more prolix (Bullough, ed., pp. 177-78 [esp. ll. 5334-72]). On this point, he is evidently indebted to Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le roman de Troie*, ed. Léopold Constans, 4 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1904-12), vol. III, ll. 16155, who names the character, like Montchrestien (and Dares), “Polibetès”/“Polybete”. Benoît also, like Lydgate but not Montchrestien, specifies that Hector was “coveitos [covetous]” (l. 16178), though he does not moralise the point. Finally, it is notable that the dramatisation by Milet, despite its indebtedness to Benoît, omits the encounter with the richly armoured knight, substituting Hector's non-violent

indeed, vaguely larger-than-life<sup>24</sup>—rather than vacuously glittering, but there is agreement with Shakespeare’s Hector that glorious armour should betoken a glorious hero:

Hector with a ravished eye measured out his height,  
Brandished the feathered crest in the air clear and bright  
That belonged to the shining helmet on the ground,  
Which longed to have that star of war with it be  
crowned.

[*Hector d’un œil ravi mesure sa grandeur,  
Fait branler son pennache en la claire splendeur  
Du casque flamboyant qui gist dessus la terre  
Et veut s’orner le chef de cet astre de guerre.*]  
(ll. 2175-78 [Act V]; p. 63)

The conspicuous lack of such concordance in *Troilus* thus stands out more sharply as part of Shakespeare’s general subversion of pretensions in war as in love.

What most radically distinguishes the two texts, however, is more than a matter of detail: among the extant versions, only Shakespeare compounds Achilles’ violation of chivalry, and the concomitant imputation of cowardice to him, by having Hector surrounded and rendered helpless by the Myrmidons, then at least partly slaughtered by them, according to Achilles’ prior instructions.<sup>25</sup> It is a fact not always given due weight that this element is imported by the playwright from the subsequent death of Troilus, as narrated in Caxton’s translation of Le Fèvre and elsewhere. (The protagonist’s fate, laconically anticipated by Chaucer, is left indefinitely, and ironically, suspended at the conclusion of Shakespeare’s play.<sup>26</sup>)

Paradoxically, this difference may prove a point of convergence after all. For while Montchrestien restricts the factual account, as reported by Antenor, to the basics of Hector’s death, he charges it insistently with bitter condemnation of Achilles, such as, in the sources, is attached rather to the even more obviously treacherous death of Troilus. The process begins with Priam’s expostulation:

meeting with his kinsman, Telemonian Ajax (Jacques Milet, *La destruction de Troie la grande, etc.* [Lyons: Denys de Harsy, 1544], fol. 92<sup>r-v</sup>).

**24** See the translation, ll. 2155, n. 207, and 2172-75 (Act V).

**25** Achilles presumably makes it a “point of honour” to get in at least one blow (“[m]y half-supperd sword” [V.ix.19]).

**26** Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde, The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), V.1806: “Despitously hym slough the fierse Achille”. In Le Fèvre, trans. Caxton, the killing of Troilus is described in bk. III, fol. xxxv.

O treason of the Greeks! Breech of the law of arms!  
 Was it Hector's lot to incur his fatal harms,  
 Not in fair combat but by the stroke perfidious  
 Of a brutal butcher less strong than treacherous?

[*O Grecque trahison! ô desloyales armes!  
 Falloit-il donc qu'Hector tombast dans les alarmes  
 Non par vn combat iuste, ains par le lasche effort  
 D'un meurtrier inhumain plus perfide que fort?*]  
 (ll. 2193-96 [Act V]; p. 64)

And if the dragging of Hector's corpse around the walls is Homeric, the mutilation of his head is not, and this degradation too is given added impact intertextually by recalling descriptions of the treatment of Troilus, whom Achilles decapitated before dragging the body through the field at his horse's tail. (The latter detail is likewise adapted for Hector by Shakespeare [*Tro.*, V.xi.4-5].) Again, Priam's outrage is powerfully aroused by an element extraneous to the previous accounts of Hector's fate:

What sense has honour now? The Manes violate!  
 Without respect or shame, cadavers mutilate!  
 To slaughter him, crush him and disfigure him so  
 That his features no longer as human we know!  
 Now you may truly say, O coward cruelty,  
 That you surpass yourself in inhumanity.

[*Qu'est deuenu l'honneur? les Manes violer!  
 Sans honte, sans respect vn Cadavre fouler!  
 Le meurtir, le derompre et le gaster en sorte  
 Que plus d'un corps humain la figure il ne porte!  
 Maintenant peux-tu dire, ô lasche cruauté,  
 Que tu passes toy-mesme en inhumanité.*]  
 (ll. 2207-12 [Act V]; p. 64)

If this perspective implicitly refutes the heroism of Homer's Achilles in triumphing over Hector, it does so by echoing a number of the post-Homeric accounts of the treatment of Troilus—witness the exclamatory comment in Raoul Le Fèvre's *Receuil*, the original of Caxton's narrative:

*O quelle vilonnie de trayner ain si le filz de si noble roy qui estoit si preu  
 et si hardy[!] Certes se noblesse eust este en achilles Il neust point fait ceste  
 vilonnie.*

[O what vylonnye was hit to draw so the sonne of so noble a kynge, that was so worthy and so hardye[!] Certes yf anye noblesse had ben in achilles he wold not haue done this vylony.]<sup>27</sup>

But it is in the thirteenth-century prose narrative of Guido della Colonna, as a postscript to his description of Troilus' death, that one finds an extended indignant apostrophe to Homer linking Achilles' treachery to the fates of both Trojan heroes; the passage is worth citing at length because it tends to confirm that the violent condemnation of Achilles in Montcrestien's play stems from a collapsing of two notorious acts of villainy in the sources—perhaps the ultimate evidence of intensity through concentration:

*Sed O Homere, qui in libris tuis Achillem tot laudibus, tot preconiiis extulisti, que probabilis ratio te induxit ut Achillem tantis probitatis titulis exaltasses, ex eo precipue quod dixeris Achillem ipsum in suis uiribus duos Hectores peremisse, ipsum uidelicet et Troilum, fratrem eius fortissimum? Sane si te induxit Grecorum affeccio ... verum non motus diceris ratione sed potius ex furore. Nonne Achilles fortissimum Hectorem, cui nullus in strennuitate fuit similis neque erit, proditorie morti dedit, cum Hector tunc regem quem in bello ceperat ipsum a bello extrahere tota intencione vacabat, scuto suo tunc post terga reiecto ... ? ... Sic et fortissimum Troilum, quem non ipse in sua uirtute peremit sed ab aliis mille militibus expugnatum et victum interficere non erubuit, in quo resistentiam nullius defensionis inuenit et ideo non uiuum sed quasi mortuum hominem interfecit amplius. Nunquid Achilles dignus est laude, quem scripsisti multa nobilitate decorum, qui nobilissimi regis filium, uirum tanta nobilitate et strennuitate uigentem, non captum neque deuictum ab eo, ad caudam sui equi, dimisso pudore, detraxit? Sane si nobilitas eum mouisset, si strennuitas eum duxisset, compassione motus nunquam ad tam uilia crudeliter declinasset.*

[But O Homer, you who in your books extol Achilles with so many praises, so many commendations, what credible reason led you to exalt Achilles with such great titles of approbation, especially on the grounds that Achilles himself with his own strength killed two Hectors, namely himself and his most formidable brother Troilus? Indeed, if affection for the Greeks induced you ... truly you will be said to be moved not by reason but rather by furor. For did he not do the mighty Hector to death by treachery, whose vigour never was, nor ever will be, equalled, at a moment when Hector had all his mind on a king whom he was

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27 Raoul Le Fèvre, *Recueil des histoires de Troye* (Bruges: William Caxton, [c. 1474]), bk. III, unpaginated; trans. Caxton, bk. III, fol. xxxv<sup>v</sup>.

beginning to lead out of the combat, having slung his shield beyond his back ... ? ... And thus it was with the most mighty Troilus, whom he did not himself slay in exercising his manhood, but did not blush to kill by means of a thousand other soldiers once he was subdued and overcome, in whom he found no resistance in defence, and therefore, not a living man but a nearly dead one, he killed more thoroughly? Is Achilles really deserving of praise, whom you endow with great nobility, for having shamelessly dragged at his horse's tail a man of such great nobility and flourishing vigour, not captured or subdued by himself? Truly if nobility had moved him, if manly vigour had inspired him, moved by compassion he would never have cruelly stooped to such vile deeds.]<sup>28</sup>

From an intertextual perspective, it is as if Shakespeare, deploying the freedoms available in his theatre, recreates, in his staging of the death of Hector, Montchrestien's symbolic and imaginary conflation, itself amply authorised by Guido. A good part of the English audience might have been expected to have recognised at least the manipulation of Caxton—and found it to be ironic at the still-living Troilus's expense.

## II

All in all, Charpentier's supposition of a direct connection between the French and English plays is worth taking up, and taking seriously, with circumspect attention to context and circumstances—insofar as is possible. For the contexts and circumstances are not clear-cut for either play. What we do know without a doubt is that Montchrestien could not have read Shakespeare's prior to 1604, as Charpentier casually proposes,<sup>29</sup> since it did not appear in print prior to the (two-state) Quarto of 1609. As for seeing a performance, if the usual date of the English play's composition is accepted (1601-2), that is conceivable (though we have no documentation of performances)—provided, of course, that Montchrestien did indeed come to England in time to compose his work for 1604 publication. That could not have been prior to 1603, however, since his purpose was to seek the good-will of the royal father of the late Scottish Queen, as would make no sense

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**28** Guido de Colomnis [Guido delle Colonne], *Historia destructionis Troiae*, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin, Mediaeval Academy of America Publication 26 (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1936), bk. XXVI, fols 99<sup>v</sup>-100<sup>r</sup>; pp. 204-5. I cite the version online at <[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.medievalacademy.org/resource/resmgr/maa\\_books\\_online/griffin\\_0026.htm](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.medievalacademy.org/resource/resmgr/maa_books_online/griffin_0026.htm)> (accessed 6 September 2018) but also give the page numbers of the print edition as indicated there.

**29** Charpentier, p. 423.

prior to James's accession. The opportunity for influence by *Troilus and Cressida* appears narrow indeed.

A further possibility exists, which I present with due diffidence. It seems to have been almost universally accepted, given its first appearance in the 1604 collection, that *Hector* must have been composed shortly before that date. But might it have been in existence, perhaps even in print, closer to the 1601 *terminus a quo* posited by Charpentier and others? Again, it is worth recalling that Montchrestien's 1604 letter to Condé makes no claim for *Hector* as a new play, or even as one his patron does not know, but merely asserts its claim to priority of placement within the volume on the grounds of its exemplary content.<sup>30</sup>

A brief bibliographical digression may be in order here, if only to confirm that the full picture is not securely in place regarding even the play's contemporary accessibility in print. A provocative, if hardly decisive, document exists in the Arsenal library of the BnF (Ars. GD-11404) – namely, a stand-alone edition in 24° format carrying two title pages. The first bears the imprint of La Petite Bibliothèque des Théâtres, a series produced by the Parisian publisher Belin and Brunet in the late eighteenth century (although the precise date on the page is impossible to decipher); the second is written out in a late-nineteenth century hand<sup>31</sup> and reads as follows: *Hector, // Tragedie par A. Montchretien, représentée à Paris en 1603 // Rouen Jean Osmont 1604*. In fact, however, while the text, typographical layout and page numbering conform to the version included in Osmont's 1604 duodecimo collection, in which *Hector* is usually supposed to have first appeared, the catchwords, signature numbers (in Arabic, not Roman) and printer's devices confirm identity instead with the tragedy as printed in the successor collection produced in Niort by J. Vaultier in 1606. The mystery (and the interest) are enhanced by a number of manuscript modifications added in an early seventeenth-century hand, which has corrected the list of speakers at the opening of several acts and supplied a missing speech-heading ("Heleine" on p. 43, in turn miscorrected to "Hecube"). Finally, the same corrector has appended to the last page (though without specifying the play's title) the "*Personnages*" of *The Scottish Queen*, which indeed follows *Hector* in the collections of both 1604 and 1606. Yet against the obvious possibility that this text was being prepared for integration

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**30** Not only is there no claim that Condé will be discovering *Hector* for the first time, but Montchrestien does not exclude it from his claim to have revised all his plays for this occasion.

**31** This according to my colleague, Pierre Aquilon, on whose expert dating of the manuscript interventions I gratefully rely.

into the latter stands the stubborn fact that none of these corrections has made its way into any extant edition.<sup>32</sup>

One way or another, the apparent circulation of the individual edition, with its early seventeenth-century corrections, must be accommodated, as well as the claim for 1603 performance, which might well have taken place in the provinces as well as in Paris.<sup>33</sup> Thanks to the censorship question, we have evidence that *The Scottish Queen*, in its earlier version, was being acted in both Paris and Orléans (if not elsewhere as well) between 1601 and 1604; further, its “book” (in whatever form) was simultaneously in circulation—hence subject to suppression.<sup>34</sup> It was usual for French plays of the period (like English ones) to be published as a supplement to performance, if at all.

The further the date of Hector may be pushed back, the less plausible Shakespearean influence would be. On the other hand, it begins to become conceivable that the influence went the other way. The dates of *Toilus and Cressida* are not definite enough to confirm this as possible—or, again, to rule it out. But the hypothesis is consistent with what we are increasingly recognising as the responsiveness of English playwrights, including Shakespeare, to contemporary French material.<sup>35</sup> The currency of a contemporary Matter-of-Troy play from across the Channel might well have added impetus to the vogue in England. Moreover, to carry conjecture a step further, the ambivalence of *Hector* concerning personal glory and its destructive consequences, even in a work which by generic definition has no place for a Thersites, might have fed naturally into the mixture of idealism and cynicism that distinguishes *Troilus and Cressida*. But then the tragic human costs

**32** The 1627 Rouen volume published by P. de La Motte, *Les Tragédies d'Anthoine de Montchrestien, sieur de Vasteville. ... Édition nouvelle, augmentée par l'auteur*, is out of the running: while it prints the dedicatory epistle to Condé in its latest version, notably including the mention of *Hector*, the play itself is not included. (Despite this volume's claim to be a new edition, its texts, to judge from the presence of the earlier form of *The Scottish Queen*, including its first title, *L'Écossaise, ou le disastre*, are taken over from *Les Tragédies* of 1601.)

**33** For what it may be worth, representation in 1603 is also indicated by Antoine de Lérès, *Dictionnaire portatif historique et littéraire des théâtres, etc.*, 2nd ed. (1763; fac. rpt. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), s.v. “Hector” (p. 227).

**34** On the censorship, see Frances A. Yates, “Some New Light on *L'Écossaise* of Antoine de Montchrestien”, *Modern Language Review* 22.3 (1927): 285-97, 285-88. The BnF holds a copy entitled *L'écossaise (Marie Stuard Reyne d'Écosse): tragédie* issued in Rouen in 1603, the British Library what is described as the second edition, *Ecossoise, ou le Desastre ... Tragédie* (Rouen: Iean Petit, 1603).

**35** I have developed this subject elsewhere from various angles. See especially Richard Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002); “*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *La Diane* of Nicolas de Montreux”, *Review of English Studies* 61.248 (2010): 34-54; and “Mercy Unjustified: A Reformation Intertext for *The Merchant of Venice*”, *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 154 (2018): 91-105.



of the downfall of Troy were also a commonplace, as is highlighted by *Hamlet's* request to the Players for a Troy speech (albeit by way of Virgil's Aeneas) and his eagerness to have them "come to Hecuba" (*Hamlet*, II.ii.501)<sup>36</sup>—the latter a stock figure of desperate grieving. Montchrestien, without explicitly going as far as the ultimate catastrophe, concludes with a progression from Priam to Hecuba, then finally—most movingly, with a discourse that, in a convincingly distracted and conflicted way, goes to the heart of the central issue—to Andromache.

As the broader perspective confirms, the crowded discursive field of late medieval and early modern Troy material is notably polyglot and multi-cultural, with a recurrent French presence.<sup>37</sup> Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyda*, of course, came most immediately by way of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, but ultimately through precursors writing in Latin and French (Guido delle Colonna, Benoît de Sainte-Maure). Shakespeare may well have supplemented with various extant French translations a partial acquaintance with the *Iliad* obtained through George Chapman's 1598 version of seven books.<sup>38</sup> Guido's Latin prose (and to some extent Benoît's French verse) lay behind the English of Lydgate's poem, which Shakespeare may (or may not) have used.<sup>39</sup> And of course the ineluctable history commonly referred to as Caxton's was actually his translation of Le Fèvre. Somewhat surprisingly, even the mystery-play version of Milet was in print, with an edition as recent as 1544.

What reason might there finally be to admit Montchrestien's *Hector* within this discursive field as a potential fount of dramatic ideas, in accordance with Shakespeare's eclectic practice, rather than a supplementary intertext presenting a few more or less tangential points of contact with a play whose main business lies in the love-story, which has its own distinct tradition? A starting point might be the innovative choice and treatment of its subject, which effectively identifies the tragedy of the fall of Troy, both symbolically and practically, with that of its ultimate hero. So much can be inferred from the *Iliad* itself, which ends with the burial of Hector. The identification is also intuitively reflected in the title of the (anonymous) 1614 adaptation of Lydgate, *The Life and Death*

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**36** With the exception of *Troilus and Cressida*, I cite Shakespeare's plays from William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, gen. eds G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

**37** Among the many discussions of the Troy material lying behind Shakespeare's play, especially useful overviews are provided by Bullough, ed., pp. 82-111, and Bevington, "Instructed by the Antiquary Times': Shakespeare's Sources", *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Bevington, pp. 375-97.

**38** See Bullough, ed., p. 87, and Bevington, p. 376.

**39** Bevington, "Shakespeare's Sources", comes to a broadly sceptical conclusion (p. 392), but there is no critical consensus to deny some use of Lydgate, whose text, like Caxton's, was available in print.

of *Hector*,<sup>40</sup> which nevertheless, like its original and the other “historical” sources, begins well before and ends well after the Hector sequence isolated by Montchrestien.

The Trojan-war framework supplied by Shakespeare for his version of the love-story adopts this perspective, beginning with a telling remark introducing Ulysses’ famous speech on order. That speech is widely recognised as adapted from a hint in Homer by way of Chapman—“The rule of many is absurd”<sup>41</sup>—then enriched by Elizabethan homilies on order and obedience, but it is Shakespeare who makes Ulysses begin by evoking the preeminent Trojan hero:<sup>42</sup> “Troy, yet upon his basis, had been down, / And the great Hector’s sword had lacked a master... ” (*Tro.*, I.i.75-76). The defeat of Troy is thus from the outset made commensurate with Hector’s elimination.

For his part, Montchrestien, with an irony of which he could not have been unaware—and which might conceivably have struck Shakespeare—recognisably transfers the same Homeric affirmation of the need for discipline to Hector himself. At the point where the latter has reluctantly accepted his royal father’s formal injunction (rather than the women’s pleas) not to go forth to fight on the ominous day, he suddenly speaks (rather surprisingly), not as a seeker of personal glory, but as a *prudent* general, giving advice and encouragement to those who go in his place. The Chorus (at this point no doubt comprised of venerable counsellors<sup>43</sup>) has just asked heaven’s aid in renewing the Trojans’ will to fight after ten years. The situation thus mirrors that of the Greeks in Homer and Shakespeare, in need of an injunction to maintain order. Hector acknowledges the need for the gods’ favour, but then urges, like Ulysses in Shakespeare, collaborative effort subordinating individual to general interest. The passage is worth quoting at length for the parallel to Ulysses’ instance of the foraging bees who work together to bring honey to the hive (*Tro.*, I.iii.81-83):

But reflect, as well, on the perils we sustain  
When order is not kept and a strong arm is vain.  
Let him command who ought, and him who should obey:  
No little honour lies in serving in that way.  
Multiple commands are naturally confused;  
But as one sole spirit through the body diffused

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<sup>40</sup> *The life and death of Hector* (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1614); STC 5581.5.

<sup>41</sup> Homer, *The Seaven Bookes of Homers Iliads*, trans. George Chapman (1598), ed. Bullough, pp. 112-50, p. 120. The original is *Iliad*, II.204: “Lordship for many is no good thing. Let there be one ruler.” (References are to *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1951].)

<sup>42</sup> On the homiletic elaborations, see Bevington, ed., *Tro.*, Longer Note to I.iii.78-108.

<sup>43</sup> On the composition of the play’s choruses, see below, pp. 25-27.

Variouſly moves it, ſo your men, motivated  
 By a ſingle will, find their forces animated.  
 Great warriors, in paſſing I addreſs you thus,  
 For if deſtiny, which in all things governs us,  
 Conjoins its favour to your conduct in the fight,  
 Today the ſun will look down upon Greece in flight  
 And you ſafe-returned, honoured to your hearts' contents  
 By the populace and your worthy agèd parents.

[*Mais au reſte penſez gu'aux perilleux combats  
 Où l'ordre n'a point lieu, peu ſert l'effort du bras.  
 Commande qui le doit, qui le doit obeiſſe:  
 Ce n'eſt pas peu d'honneur de faire vn bon ſeruice.  
 L'Empire de pluſieurs eſt volontiers confuſ;  
 Mais comme vn ſeul eſprit eſt par le corps diffuſ,  
 Qui le meut en tous ſens, de meſme voſtre armée  
 D'vne volonté ſeule ait la force animée.  
 Grands Guerriers, ie vous tien ce diſcourſ en paſſant,  
 Car ſi le ſort fatal en nos faits tout puiffant  
 Adiouſte ſa faueur àuec voſtre conduite,  
 Auiourd'huy le Soleil verra la Grece en fuite,  
 Et vous reuenus ſains, honorez à l'enui  
 De vos bons vieux parens et du peuple rauï.]*  
 (ll. 861-74 [Act II]; p. 28)

Hector wiſhes that he could ſally out with his fellow-warrors ſo as to help bring back “of honour a great harveſt [*grande moisſon d'honneur*]” (l. 878; p. 28). The groſs irony, of courſe, is that he will finally bring home nothing but death and deſpair, having yielded to the temptation of individual initiative. More ſubtly, in preaching the leſſon, like Shakeſpeare’s Ulyſſes, of the value of “order” over “a ſtrong arm”, he implicitly declines the role of Troy’s only hope, of which his family and countrymen remain as convinced as does Ulyſſes in the English play: “my one and only hope [*mon vniſque eſperance*]” (l. 827 [Act II]; p. 27), as Priam puts it, juſt prior to the ſpeech. Hector’s rhetorical exerciſe, then, is in line with his earlier excuſe for riſk-taking when he enumerated the ſuppoſedly adequate ſubſtitutes for himſelf in ll. 227-30 (Act I)—ſubſtitutes including Troilus, who is preſent on ſtage for the ſpeech in Act II. On the one hand, then, his appropriation of the Homeric “order” ſpeech offers a rare moment when his obſeſſion with personal glory is eclipsed; on the other, this is clearly under dureſſ and has the effect of ſending a contrary ſignal.

In fact, the idea of a ſubſtitute-in-waiting is briefly attached to Troilus by Shakeſpeare’s Ulyſſes himſelf (*Tro.*, IV.v.97-113), when the latter, with an uncharacteriſtic ſuſpenſion of ſcepticiſm, repeats the eulogistic character reference he has received from Aeneas, which does not neceſſarily accord with our direct obſervation. In this conſpiciously idealised

portrait, it is as if the prudence and recklessness that Montchrestien's Hector cannot finally reconcile are blended into a perfect heroic harmony. Troilus' supposed self-mastery, measured by the modesty and judgement accompanying his valiant deeds, is made to coexist with a disposition to greater violent rage on the battlefield than Hector himself displays, and which makes him "more dangerous" (105). The upshot is that the Trojans "on him erect / A second hope, as fairly built as Hector" (109-10). The passage has been seen as drawing on Lydgate's encomium of Troilus as "[t]he seconde Ector for his worthynesse".<sup>44</sup> More dynamically pertinent may be the account found in Caxton of the Greek debate, following the death of Hector and a two months' truce, about pursuing the war. There Menelaus argues that with Hector (and Deiphobus) gone, "the troyans repute them as vainquished"; Ulysses and Nestor counter that

troye was not so disgarnished but that they had a newe Hector, that was Troyllus, that was a litle lasse stronge & worthy than Hector.<sup>45</sup>

Such intertexts help set the stage for the precarious assumption by Shakespeare's Troilus—in the ironic context of the catastrophes universally known to be looming both for himself and for Troy—of his role of "second hope", hope which is palpably inseparable from despair:

Frown on, you heavens, effect your rage with speed!  
Sit, gods, upon your thrones and smite at Troy!  
I say at once, let your brief plagues be mercy,  
And linger not our sure destructions on!  
(*Tro.*, V.xi.6-9).

This is the authentic note of Montchrestien's Hecuba, who explicitly affirms that no hope remains:

Hector, our champion, is dead: nothing defends us.  
Let us therefore be agreed that death-dealing Fate  
Ourselves with Hector the infernal boat should freight,

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<sup>44</sup> Bullough, ed., p. 160 (bk. II, chap. 15, l. 4871). Bullough, p. 93, suggests Shakespeare's general indebtedness to this passage.

<sup>45</sup> Le Fèvre, trans. Caxton, bk. III, fols xxxiii<sup>v</sup>-xxxv<sup>r</sup>. Behind this appears to lie Benoît's *Roman*, where Diomedes, in the same circumstances, presents Troilus as taking Hector's place ("*N'est pas meins forz d'Ector son frere* [He is no less strong than Hector his brother]") and lacking in no knightly quality (l. 19911). The general idea was widespread; hence Cassandra, in Milet's mystery play, laments the death of Troilus, "*le thresor / De Troye, le second Hector*" (fol. 120<sup>v</sup>).

And not wait for the swords of Greek malignity.  
For since he has been killed, what better hope have we?

*[Le preux Hector est mort, rien plus ne nous deffend.  
Faison donc d'vn accord que la fatale Parque  
Nous charge quand et luy dans l'infermale barque,  
Sans attendre les fers des Grec iniurieux;  
Car puis qu'il est occis qu'esperon nous de mieux?]*  
(ll. 2280-84 [Act V]; p. 66)

And if Troilus at once, rebuked by Aeneas (“My lord, you do discomfort all the host” [*Tro.*, V.xi.10]), ostentatiously rechannels despair into a fore-doomed “[h]ope of revenge” that “shall hide our inward woe” (31), he effectively traces the mental trajectory of the French playwright’s Andromache, who prays to the gods for vengeance, so she may quickly pass below and communicate the good news to her husband’s shade. (Here, too, the contrary fate of the “historical” Andromache is left ironically hanging in the dramatic air.<sup>46</sup>) The object of vengeance in both cases is, of course, Achilles—similarly apostrophised: “thou great-sized coward...” (*Tro.*, V.xi.26); “O cowardly foe of the bravest man of war / Who ever the proud laurel on his forehead wore [*O coüard ennemy du plus braue Guerrier, / Qui iamais sur la teste ait porté le Laurier*]” (Montchrestien, ll. 2351-52 [Act V]; p. 67).

All in all, Troilus’ concluding speeches intertextually pre-empt the Messenger’s report and sequence of laments that conclude *Hector*. So much is virtually signalled by a *praeteritio*, which closely corresponds to the Messenger’s initial words (ll. 2065-76 [Act V]):

Hector is gone.  
Who shall tell Priam so, or Hecuba?  
Let him that will a screech-owl aye be called  
Go into Troy, and say their Hector’s dead.  
There is a word will Priam turn to stone,  
Make wells and Niobes of the maids and wives,  
Cold statues of the youth, and, in a word,  
Scare Troy out of itself.  
(*Tro.*, V.xi.14-21)

In *Hector*, the Trojan population is indeed portrayed as transfixed with terror. Montchrestien’s Priam might as well, moreover, be turned to stone, speaking only two lines when the Messenger has told the worst: “The infinite suffering that lays my soul waste / So presses on my heart that words far off are chased [*Le torment infini qui mon*

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46 Cf. the translation, ll. 322 ff. (Act I), and l. 324, n. 51.

*ame désolé / M'estraint si fort le cœur qu'il m'oste la parole*"] (ll. 2253-54 [Act V]; p. 65). Hecuba supplies the gap with thirty-three lines of eloquent despair, in keeping with that character's traditional function. But it is Andromache whose nearly two hundred lines of lamentation comprehensively record twists and turns of feeling, conflicts and contradictions, a sense of what is inexorable and what might not be, in a way that delineates the tragic in profound, quasi-Shakespearean, terms. Such a response remains beyond the reach of a Troilus whose capacity to fathom the devastation of another, beginning with his beloved Cressida, is circumscribed within egocentric limits, and who rides roughshod over human complexities: "I with great truth catch mere simplicity" (*Tro.*, IV.iv.103). For someone who knows both plays—by whatever means such knowledge might have been acquired in the first years of the seventeenth century—Montchrestien's heroine hovers intertextually at the margins of Troilus' *praeteritio* in a way that might prompt the reader/spectator to intervene with "come to Andromache".

### III

Enough has been said to confirm that, despite its highly rhetorical and "actionless" quality—and even setting aside the claims for performance—*Hector*, like Montchrestien's other tragedies (and indeed French Humanist drama generally, as is now generally accepted), was written with representation in mind. The printed text is completely lacking in stage directions, however, as is the case with all Montchrestien's tragedies in both the 1601 and 1604 collections, and indeed with many early dramatic publications. Moreover, the acts, which are normally (if irregularly) prefaced by a list of the participants in each, are not divided into scenes, so that points of entrance and exit are occasionally hard to identify. Besides these, which sometimes seem to call for editorial intervention, as the translation records, there are a few moments when issues of staging may benefit from commentary.

I have already mentioned Hector's tender encounter with his infant son (ll. 281-301 [Act I]), who is not included among the "Speakers [*Entreparlevers*]" (trans., p. 5; Petit de Julleville, ed., p. 2). Apart from the obvious fact that he does not speak, this might also reflect the fact that he was represented, not by a person, but by a doll. That so much was part of theatrical convention is supported, for instance, by the representation of the title character's infant son in *Coriolan* (c. 1607), by Alexandre Hardy.<sup>47</sup> In that play, however,

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47 See Alexandre Hardy, *Coriolan*, ed. with introd. by Fabien Cavaillé, English trans. with introd. by Richard Hillman, 2nd ed., online publication, Scène Européenne–Traductions Introuvables,

the baby is merely displayed passively on two occasions (V.iii, iv), whereas the active interplay in Montchrestien's scene, closely modelled on its Homeric original, might be seen as stretching the convention to the limit, requiring especially adroit responses from the actor and increased "suspension of disbelief" from the audience. It can be argued, I think, that Montchrestien takes the risk as part of a sustained and ironic evocation, across the presentation of Hector's arming, of the equivocal symbolism widely associated in the Renaissance with women's arming of heroes. The archetypal pattern is reproduced in numerous illustrations of Venus helping to arm Mars, sometimes with the assistance of their child Cupid,<sup>48</sup> a figure suggested here by the infant, at once loving and fearful. We know from l. 585 (Act II) that it was Andromache's custom to help Hector put on his armour. Her refusal on this occasion is thus thrown visibly into relief; so are his ostentatious disarming at his father's command (ll. 836-37 [Act II]) and his hasty seizing of arms as described at ll. 1621-25 (Act IV). Montchrestien employs, then, the unusual onstage animation centred on an inanimate doll in active support of the play's central thematic duality—the glories of heroism versus its costs—and reinforces a differentiation between masculine and feminine perspectives.

The differentiation, it should be stipulated, is not absolute or stable. That might imply a more subversive treatment of heroic glory than would be consistent with the play's ideological premises, broadly endorsed by the Choruses—or, presumptively, those of its author. But female endorsement of those premises is conspicuously made contingent on circumstances. A striking instance comes in the highly ironic opening of Act V, as Priam and Hecuba, almost convinced that their son has escaped the threat hanging over him, engage in a joint paean to martial glory. Hecuba regrets that this ultimate masculine experience was not directly accessible to her but reports that she has experienced it vicariously, privileging it over what she presents as the ultimate feminine one:<sup>49</sup>

. . . when I perceive him to his house coming back,  
Soaked with sweat mingled with dust from the battlefield,  
I feel more pleasure than the wedding rites would yield

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Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, Tours, 2018: <<https://sceneuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/traductions/coriolan>> (accessed 12 September 2018), Cavaillé, ed., n. 134; translation, n. 56.

**48** On such symbolism, see Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 85-96. Shakespeare draws ironically on this symbolism in *Antony and Cleopatra*, IV.iv, when he shows Cleopatra awkwardly helping to arm Antony for his last deceptively successful combat.

**49** Here, as on other occasions in the play, the future weighs ironically, since an audience is bound to think of the grim fate of her daughter Polyxena, familiar from the Trojan tragedies of Euripides and Seneca.

Of my dearest daughter, were happy fate to grant  
Her marriage with a prince agreeable and valiant.

[... *quand je l'appercoy regagner sa maison  
Trempe d'une sueur meslée à la poussiere,  
Je sen plus de plaisir qu'à la pompe nopciere  
De ma plus chere fille, à qui le sort heureux  
Accoupleroit vn Prince aimable et valeureux.*]  
(ll. 1956-60 [Act V]; p. 57)

The element of blood is missing, but even so one can hardly keep from wondering whether Shakespeare recalled these lines in having Volumnia in *Coriolanus* employ this comparison to justify her own delight in her son's heroic exploits:

The breasts of Hecuba,  
When she did suckle Hector look'd not lovelier  
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood  
At Grecian sword, contemning. (*Coriolanus*, I.ii.40-43)

Hecuba's discursive mode shifts abruptly, of course, when the truth dawns concerning Hector's fate.

That discovery, invested with great poignancy, is made through disclosure of the true reason for the uproar in the public streets, which they have wished to assimilate to Hector's triumphant return, promising reunion with their heroic son: "Listen to that tumult of confusion in the street—/ It's the applause with which his arrival they greet [*Oyez le bruit confus qui tonne par la ruë: / C'est l'applaudissement qu'on fait à sa venü*]" (ll. 2041-42 [Act V]; p. 59). And prior to the Messenger's appearance, it is, fittingly, through the prescient Andromache that the discovery is made. Her role as harbinger, previously on the level of the imaginary, now takes concrete form on stage, although she still, at first, both poses and faces the challenge of interpretation. It is by noting her physical reaction at a distance that Priam and Hecuba first begin to interpret correctly. When she enters, she replies to questions by affirming ignorance of the details but certainty of some disaster. And at the Messenger's first announcement, she faints.

An internal stage-direction at this point (l. 2080) makes the action clear: she is carried offstage by the women of the Chorus (an easier feat to manage gracefully if they, too, were played by men). Yet it is not clear at what point she returns. Logic may not be the chief consideration, but she later shows herself fully conscious of Achilles' treachery, and this may imply her silent presence on stage through a part of the Messenger's narration. (I have tentatively made her re-enter at l. 2182, but this is nearly arbitrary.) In any case, she stays silent until Priam and Hecuba have both exhausted their capacities for lamentation, and it is only



when Hecuba remarks on that silence (ll. 2285-86) that she breaks it. The silence is thus revealed, partly through staging, as a register of all the delusive hopes and inexorable disillusiones that have culminated in Act III. As these now gush forth in distracted form, they carry with them a multi-vocal mixture of successive attitudes, from the seductive attraction of a hero's glory to the brutal realisation of his loss, to thirst for revenge, and ultimately to the vanity of all human experience in the face, or the shadow, of death. The rhetorical force with which these "natural" attitudes are presented implicitly imparts a legitimacy to them as constituting a tragic experience not simply invalidated by the Stoic ideal.

## IV

Finally, the problematic question of the play's choruses (listed merely as "Chorus" among the "Speakers", and sometimes omitted in the list at the beginning of an act) needs to be addressed. As in *The Scottish Queen*, Montchrestien uses choruses both to intervene in the dramatic situation and to provide the usual sort of philosophical and moral commentary—the latter at the end of each act and crafted in various verse forms. While in that play, however, it is fairly easy to distinguish three distinct choruses, and while one of them, consisting of the Queen of Scotland's waiting-women, is unequivocally female (even if intended for male actors), the situation is not so clear-cut in *Hector*. Charpentier, although she has reservations about the size of troupe required to stage both a masculine and a feminine chorus (assuming that the former modulates into the mode of lyric commentary when called for), must nevertheless allow that a chorus of women is required in Act V to tend Andromache, since they refer to themselves as "sisters [*sœurs*]" (l. 2080 [Act V]; p. 61). Similarly decisive, surely, is Priam's address to the chorus that has been trying to comfort and reassure Andromache in Act IV as a "chaste flock [*chaste troupeau*]" (l. 1597 [Act IV]; p. 47). Otherwise, there seems no reason to doubt that the Chorus which engages characters (including Cassandra) in dialogue is comprised of wise old counsellors, as might be expected.<sup>50</sup> But there remains one point of uncertainty, which is especially revealing about Montchrestien's adaptation of his material.

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50 Nevertheless, Charpentier (p. 438) is perhaps overhasty in assuming that Hector's reference to the "grave counsels old reverend men provide [*graves conseils des vieillards reuez*]" (l. 1051 [Act III]; p. 33)) refers to the chorus, which are not notable for urging restraint of the heroic impulse such as Hector complains of; more immediately evoked, I propose, is Antenor, who has just been presenting this point of view in conversation with him.

At the end of Act III, beginning at l. 1274, there is an unusual sequence involving shifts of choric mode at least, if nothing more. Left alone on stage, the Chorus that has been discussing events with the Messenger appears to modulate into a commentator-moraliser, delivering the commonplace lesson of mortal uncertainty in all things, except the fact of mortality itself. He then, however, announces the entrance of Helen, whom he identifies, in a neutral way, as the source of all their ills, then proposes, “Let us listen to these sighs: it brings some content / In one’s unhappiness to hear a sweet lament [*Entendons ces soupirs: c’est vn contentement / D’ouïr en son malheur lamenter doucement*]” (ll. 1294-96 [Act III]; p. 39). Indeed, Helen then launches into ninety or so lines of sorrowful self-blame, culminating in a desire for death, whereupon the Chorus—or *some* Chorus—responds to her with consoling sympathy in three octosyllabic quatrains (ll. 1365-76). Finally, a choric commentator concludes the act with the typical reaffirmation of reputation and glory as the ultimate masculine virtues.

A strong case can be made, I believe, given the feminine choruses elsewhere, that the one consoling Helen is also made up of women, in which case it would presumably accompany her entrance and exit. Charpentier (p. 438, n. 27) is sceptical about this possibility on the grounds of the episode’s derivation from a celebrated Homeric episode (*Iliad*, III.139 ff.), in which a sadly reflective Helen is observed by old men, including Priam, although she delivers no lament as such. That episode is indeed doubly recalled in Montchrestien’s scene—first by the Chorus introducing her, which echoes Homer’s elders (III.156-57) in admitting that “Such beauty of an age’s wars might be the ground [*On debatroit mille ans vne beauté pareille*]” (l. 1294 [Act III]; p. 39), then by the second Chorus’s reassurance that she is blameless, which echoes Priam’s own words to Helen in the *Iliad* (III.164-65). Conspicuously absent is the old men’s comment in Homer that she should be given up to the Greeks for the sake of peace (III.159-60). (That is itself milder, moreover, than the wish of Montchrestien’s first-act Chorus as expressed to Cassandra: “Great gods, to dampen the ardour of our long fight, / Extinguish, in the lasting night of death, her light! [*Grands Dieux, pour amortir l’ardeur de nos combats / Esteignez sa lumiere en la nuict du trespas*]” [ll. 145-46] (Act I); p. 7)).

Evidently, Montchrestien has rearranged his inherited material so as to set off Helen’s regrets and the consolation she receives, and it makes sense that the latter should be offered in a feminine voice, contrasting with a framework of masculine choruses. For this idea too, indeed, he may have taken his hint from Homer, who stipulates that when Helen walked out in her pensive sadness,

... wrapping herself about in shimmering garments,  
she went forth from the chamber, letting fall a light tear;

not by herself, since two handmaidens went to attend her.  
 (*Iliad*, III.141-43)

After reflection, then, I have taken the risk of specifying a “Chorus of Women” in this case, as in the two unambiguous instances, while designating simply as “Chorus” the other choric figures, evidently masculine, who appear to shift between engagement in the dialogue and external commentary.

As a final note to the pathetic solitary appearance of Helen in *Hector*, which comes, appropriately enough, virtually at the centre of the tragedy and serves as a highly concentrated illustration of the human costs of heroism, it is worth adding that the contrast is striking with Shakespeare’s Helen in the single scene where that character figures—again virtually at the play’s centre (*Tro.*, III.i). Far from alone or introspective, she is seamlessly integrated into bawdy dialogue with Pandarus and Paris, eager to keep “melancholy” (III.i.67) at bay with the song, “This love will undo us all” (104), and sighing, with mock complaint, “O Cupid, Cupid, Cupid!” (105). The scene ends with her gratefully accepting the honour, presented in sensuous terms by Paris, of disarming Hector (142-53)—a radical displacement of the motif invested with such tragic overtones by Montchrestien. Again, if one posits influence, as opposed to pure coincidence, it is inconceivable that the French playwright would have recast in high tragic terms such a radically contrary Shakespearean element. On the other hand, the latter might plausibly stand as a characteristic bitter-sweet parody of a precursor’s subtle dramatic development of the Homeric original. Thus the personage who, for Shakespeare’s idealising Troilus, as for Montchrestien, is “a theme of honour and renown” (*Tro.*, II.ii.199), effectively becomes grist to the relentlessly reductive mill of Thersites: “All the argument is a whore and a cuckold” (II.iii.69-70). Shakespeare’s sequence of scenes, in a sense, resolves these alternatives by suddenly, in a unique appearance, presenting Helen “herself”, or, at least, as she has been constructed by her society and circumstances. And in the light of the intertexts, including—perhaps most immediately—Montchrestien’s adaptation of Homer, she appears, beneath her ostentatious frivolity and lightness of heart, inexorably haunted by melancholy.

