Although Shakespeare seems to have written *Troilus and Cressida* very soon after *Hamlet*, the play does not at first sight appear to concern itself greatly with questions of identity and self-knowledge. The hero does not torture himself with the relationship of his self to others and the universe as does Hamlet. Yet he does ask the identity question once, in the first scene of the play, when he enters, sighing with love for Cressida. The ungracious clamors of the war emphasize the disharmony in his heart:

Peace, rude sounds!  
Fools on both sides! Helen must needs be fair,  
When with your blood you daily paint her thus.  
I cannot fight upon this argument;  
It is too starv'd a subject for my sword.  
But Pandarus—O gods, how do you plague me!  
I cannot come to Cressid but by Pandar;  
And he's as tetchy to be woo'd to woo  
As she is stubborn-chaste against all suit.  
Tell me, Apollo, for thy Daphne's love,  
What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we?  

(1.i.88–98)

Troilus addresses himself here to the god who was reputed to have demanded that man know himself, but obviously he does so with very special pleading when he asks the question in the manner of a courtly lover, "for thy Daphne's love." There is a curious mixture of skepticism and self-deception in these lines. Troilus cannot fight for Helen, or so he says, because she has no absolute value for him; he finds her fairness gored with blood. But at the same time, he elevates the value of the unpleasant and bawdy Pandarus
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and even more, in the subsequent lines, that of Cressida, who becomes a pearl, whose bed is India. From this hyperbole, Troilus descends to absurdity when he calls the space between her and his domicile "the wild and wand'ring flood," Pandar the sailing bark, and himself the merchant. We know about Pandar by now, we wonder about Cressida, whom Pandar's pleasantries have compared to Helen, and certainly most of all, we question Troilus's assessment of the world and of those around him. We distrust his taste when he says to Pandarus in an atrocious metaphor "Thou . . . / Pourest in the open ulcer of my heart— / Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice . . ." (I.iii.52-53).

Not only are his judgments strange and false; they also are inconsistent as when, later in the debate of the Trojans, he bestows on Helen, whom he devalued earlier, the title of pearl he deemed appropriate for Cressida. For Troilus, values fluctuate; they are dependent on time and on subjective needs: "What's ought but as 'tis valued." Troilus is a shallower man than Hamlet, but his skepticism is more apparent, and so is the skeptic strain that runs through the play. Hamlet has no brothers in spirit in his play; Troilus does. He is, of course, not as dominant a figure; we are not asked to view the action through his eyes and mind. The statement the play makes about self-knowledge depends almost as much on Ulysses, on Cressida, and on other characters as it does on him; and it depends more on the plot and on the discussion of ideas than it does in Hamlet.

The one character who appears to know himself and others clearly is Ulysses. And it is he who uses the most explicit pattern of self-knowledge in the play when he excites the vanity and jealousy of Achilles in an attempt to get him back to battle. Ulysses does so by reminding Achilles of the familiar comparison of the eye to the soul, by which the Renaissance liked to demonstrate the need and the difficulty of the soul's knowledge of itself. In Julius Caesar, Cassius transforms this comparison into a bait for Brutus; in Troilus and Cressida, Ulysses gives it an even more ironic and deceptive twist. That his purpose is not to enlighten Achilles about his true identity would be clear to anybody but that conceited and obtuse athlete. Ulysses enters, reading a book, in which, he says in answer to Achilles' question, a "strange fellow" claims that, no matter what man's qualities, he "cannot make boast to have that which he hath, / Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection" (III.iii.98-99). The
The beauty that is borne here in the face
The bearer knows not, but commends itself
To others’ eyes; nor doth the eye itself—
That most pure spirit of sense—behold itself,
Not going from itself; but eye to eye opposed
Salutes each other with each other’s form;
For speculation turns not to itself
Till it hath travell’d, and is mirror’d there
Where it may see itself.

(III.iii.103–11)

But Ulysses’ author gives this familiar position an unusual drift, one that appeals to Achilles because it explains why he is slighted by his former admirers. This author proves

That no man is the lord of anything,
Though in and of him there be much consisting,
Till he communicate his parts to others;
Nor doth he of himself know them for aught
Till he behold them formed in th’ applause
Where th’are extended; who, like an arch, reverb’rate
The voice again; or, like a gate of steel
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
His figure and his heat.

(115–23)

In Ulysses’ Circean words, the mirror of self-knowledge becomes the glass of self-love into which Achilles gazes amorously. Ulysses’s unexpected revelation that he actually refers to “the unknown Ajax” comes thus as a shock to him.

The “author” in whom Ulysses alleges to have read his reflection simile is a minor puzzle. I know of no ancient writer who used the image similarly, certainly not Plato, who has been claimed to be the source. Ulysses gives a distinctly skeptical turn to the commonplace: man is only what he is valued, subject to the vagaries of public whim. No Renaissance skeptic is likely to have gone so far; this author is indeed a “strange fellow,” apparently invented by Ulysses to stir Achilles into seeking the approval of his peers by rejoining the
battle. The pattern of self-knowledge thus turns into a *persuasio* of a narcissistic egotist; the alleged mirror of self-knowledge is merely a deceptive trick.

However, it is noteworthy that one English *nosce teipsum* book, Thomas Wright’s *The Passions of the Mind in General* (1601), used the eye-mirror analogy in order to illustrate man’s tendency to mistake self-love for self-knowledge and that it did so together with other images that play a role in the stultification of Achilles. Says Wright:

> The reason we judge more quickly other men’s faults than our own partly proceeds from self-love, which blindeth us in our actions, partly because we see other men’s defects directly and our own by a certain reflection; for as no man knoweth exactly his own face because he never sees it but by reflection from a glass, and other men’s countenances he conceiveth most perfectly because he vieweth them directly and in themselves, even so by a certain circle we wind about ourselves whereas by a right line we pass into the corners of men’s souls, at least by rash judgments and sinister suspicions.¹

If this argument does not completely parallel that of Ulysses’ author, it does explain why for men like Achilles the mirror of self-knowledge is the mirror of self-love. Interestingly, the supposition that Shakespeare derived Ulysses’ argument from *The Passions of the Mind* is made more attractive by Wright’s marginal note to the passage: “Non videmus id manticae quod in tergo est.” This is exactly the *sententia* by which Ulysses explains why Achilles is being passed by and neglected:

> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,  
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,  
> A great-siz’d monster of ingratiations.  
> Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devour’d  
> As fast as they are made, forgot as soon  
> As done.

(145-50)

Shakespeare gave the *sententia*, which Wright used in an abridged form, a meaning closer to its original source, Persius: “Ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo / Sed praecedenti spectatur mantica tergo.”² But Shakespeare put the wallet on the back of time rather than on that of a person; what in Persius and Wright is a figure that illustrates man’s delusions about himself, his unwillingness to descend
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into his own soul, becomes in the words of Ulysses an illustration of the subjection of all worth and honor to "envious and calumniating Time" (174). Here again is a skeptical twist; the changes wrought by time have always been one of the skeptics' favorite proofs for the relativity of judgments and for the instability of man. As Charron put it,

the greatest part of our actions are nothing else but eruptions and impulsions enforced by the occasions. . . . Our spirits also and our humors are changed with the change of time. Life is an unequal motion, irregular, and of many fashions.3

The touch of nature that, as Ulysses says, makes all men kin in their forgetfulness is also a touch that makes some men very obtuse, as he shows by his treatment of Achilles. The possibility that this touch came from Wright's palette is enhanced by Shakespeare's using at the end of the scene another figure associated with self-knowledge that occurs in The Passions of the Mind. Achilles, thoroughly shaken by Ulysses' clever commonplaces, laments finally, "My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirr'd; / And I myself see not the bottom of it." But Thersites has sounded the depth of this fountain: "Would the fountain of your mind were clear again, that I might water an ass at it. I had rather be a tick in a sheep than such a valiant ignorance" (III.i.303–8). Wright depicted the fountains of men's minds, deeper fountains than that of Achilles, as waters of ignorance: "Only I will infer our extreme ignorance that few or none of these difficulties which concern us so near as our souls and bodies are thoroughly as yet in my judgment declared even of the profoundest wits; for I know not how their best resolutions leave still our understandings dry, thirsting for a clearer and fresher fountain." 4

Thus a case can be made that Ulysses' "strange author" is Thomas Wright, the only English nosce teipsum author I know of that was much affected by skepticism. One must then assume that Shakespeare gave Wright's arguments a few still stranger twists. But regardless of whether Shakespeare followed Wright when he made Achilles' glass of self-recognition one of self-love and his fountain of the mind one of ignorance, the images he used are indicative both of his continuing interest in the patterns of self-knowledge and his skeptical look at humanistic "truths" about human nature in Troilus and Cressida.
If Ulysses is one character in the play who knows himself and others, he is also one of the least amiable. His knowledge of the souls of others is a realization of their lies, pretenses and self-deceptions. And that goes even for what he calls "the soul of state." As he says grandiloquently to Achilles:

There is a mystery—with whom relation
Durst never meddle—in the soul of state,
Which hath an operation more divine
Than breath or pen can give expressure to.

(III.iii.201-4)

As it turns out, this mystery comes from a good spy system, which Ulysses calls the "providence" of a watchful state. Thus, not so mysteriously, Ulysses knows about the motivation that keeps Achilles away from battle: his love of Priam's daughter Polyxena. In Ulysses, a skeptic attitude toward values is combined with an eminently practical, Machiavellian view of furthering the aims of the state. There is perhaps a contradiction between his theoretical skepticism and his practical espousal of the state as an absolute value, but that was an inconsistency common to Renaissance skeptics.

The contradictions, disjunctions, and paradoxes with which the skeptics illustrated the ignorance and instability of man are ingrained in the texture of the play. From the chorus's words to the audience, "Like or find fault; do as your pleasures are; / Now good or bad, 'tis but the chance of war," the play takes a problematic attitude toward values. Good or bad, success or loss, truth or falseness, buying and selling are some of the oppositions that become relative. What is good may depend on the viewer, what is true, on the speaker. The validity of a statement is negated by its opposite. "Bifid authority," the phrase in which Troilus expresses his utter disbelief that Diomed's Cressida is the same woman who, a few hours before, swore to be eternally faithful, could well be the motto of this play with its peculiar dualism in plot, character, thoughts, and themes that leads to division and finally to dubiety and impotence.

It is, of course, natural that the plot should be divided into two parts, the love intrigue and the war story; but Shakespeare went beyond necessity in creating a structural bipartition by making them nearly equal in length and, presumably, significance—or perhaps we should say insignificance. Each of the war parties is inter-
nally divided, although the Greeks are more deeply so. By and large, the Trojans are more sympathetically portrayed than the Greeks, but they too have flaws that soil their virtues. They espouse and partly embody the aesthetically pleasing ideals of chivalry, but they vitiate them by turning the pursuit of honor into an obsession. The Greeks, who are much coarser, have a more realistic view of war, but they tend to brutality and stupidity. Not even the best of heroes are totally sympathetic. It is as if Shakespeare endeavored to show them occasionally at their worst. What we first learn about Hector, as much a character of heroic stature as there is in the play, is that he has struck his armorer and scolded his wife although he is said to be generally a man "whose patience / Is as a virtue fix'd" (I.ii.4-5). Ulysses is certainly the shrewdest of the Greeks, yet his major actions are the perpetration of a hoax on Achilles and a rather unkind exposure of Troilus to the truth about Cressida.

Shakespeare's method of playing out favorable against unfavorable traits is most schematic in the characterization of Ajax, who, early in the play, is described as a bundle of contrarieties:

This man . . . hath robb'd many beasts of their particular additions: he is as valiant as the lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant—a man into whom nature hath so crowded humours that his valour is crush'd into folly, his folly sauced with discretion. There is no man hath a virtue that he hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attain but he carries some stain of it; he is melancholy without cause and merry against the hair; he hath the joints of everything; but everything so out of joint that he is a gouty Briareus, many hands and no use, or purblind Argus, all eyes and no sight.

(I.ii.19-29)

One would be hard put to find any of the few glimpses of virtue here attributed to Ajax borne out by his actions in the play. Evidently, Shakespeare's mannerist view of men as composites of shreds and patches worked in favor of Ajax, providing him with a somewhat better reputation than he deserves. The man we get to know is mere joints and no brain, but it could be said that the joints have their duality; he is half-made of Hector's blood, a compositional fact to which he owes his survival—Hector would kill some of his single parts if he could identify any that are clearly and distinctly Greek.

The war plot proper begins with the debate in the Greek camp (I.iii), which leads to Ulysses' scheme against Achilles. This debate
is paralleled by another one among the Trojan leaders (II.ii), in which Hector's challenge of a Greek hero to single combat is ratified. These debates and their consequences form, except for the inconclusive battle in the fifth act, all there is to the war plot. It is a story of frustrations and missed opportunities. The decisions taken in the debates prove utterly pointless. It is not Ulysses' ruse that brings Achilles back to the field, but the death of his friend Patroclus, dubbed by Thersites his "masculine whore." Nor does Hector's heroism and chivalry help the Greek cause, for, in what Troilus calls his "vice of mercy," he refuses to fight Ajax. Purpose is but slave to memory, of violent birth, but poor validity.

Yet the debates and their consequences are of significance for the thought of the play; they highlight the conflict between orthodox theory and refractory reality, as important a theme here as it is in Hamlet; they give us a feel for the intellectual and the moral qualities of the combatants; and they provide an important perspective on the hero, Troilus. In the Greek debate, Agamemnon's opening speech clearly strikes the theme of the incongruity of theory and practice: "The ample proposition that hope makes / In all designs begun on earth below / Fails in the promis'd largeness" (I.iii.3-5). The subsequent speeches of the Greek leaders breathe a similar frustration and disillusionment. But Ulysses succeeds in restoring the faith of his comrades in the high road of theory when he diagnoses the troubles as due to the neglect of "the specialty of rule."

This much-analyzed speech need not detain us long. Ulysses, as we have noted in examining his patterns of self-knowledge, is not addicted to humanistic principles. He is philosophically a skeptic, politically an absolutist. His clever manipulation of others has its equivalent in the specious way in which he makes ideas, even old humanistic commonplaces, subservient to his purposes. As Professor Elton has shown in detail, his degree speech is not a straightforward defense of hierarchical order but reflects the multiple ironies, ambivalent attitudes, and the skeptic tone of the play. For Ulysses, values have no purpose per se; they are subject to their daily quotation by the opinion brokers: "No man is the lord of anything . . . / Till he communicate his parts to others" (III.iii.115-17). In the degree speech, he does not defend the intrinsic values of an aristocratic hierarchical order—he would be no skeptic if he did. The external signs of this order, as he says in an ironic theatrical simile, must be maintained: "Degree being vizarded, / Th' unworthiest shows as
fairly in the mask” (I.iii.83–84). The paraphernalia of degree must be maintained, or the system will collapse. The negative aspects of this defense of external values is highlighted by the unimpressiveness of Agamemnon, the “med’cinable” sun, on whose display of “priority and place” the maintenance of Ulysses’ order depends. When Aeneas enters immediately after the Greek debate, he fails notably to recognize that the “god in office, guiding men,” Agamemnon, for whom he asks, is actually the person to whom he addresses his question (I.iii.224 ff.). Subsequently, Thersites, not unjustly, demonstrates how foolish it is when one fool obeys another higher up the hierarchical ladder (II.iii.40 ff.). Ulysses’ theories are proved to be shoddy most signally by his own action. His rhetorical effort is merely an introduction to his attempt to get Achilles back to the battlefield by stirring “the envious fever / Of pale and bloodless emulation” between Achilles and Ajax. Here and elsewhere, the actuality of men’s behavior belies their references to idealistic principles that in themselves are shown to be flawed. The ironies of Troilus and Cressida, as Professor Elton has shown, go deep.

As a diagnosis of the reasons for the stagnation of the war and the flaws of Greek society, Ulysses’ speech is inadequate and one-sided, and it does not agree with any philosophy of order Shakespeare expressed in the history plays or elsewhere. Ulysses attributes the dragging out of the war to “oppugnancy,” the conflict and tension in the Greek camp. But, as we noted in discussing the structural principles of the Renaissance macrocosm, Shakespeare seems to have thought of the tension of opposing forces as creative, at least up to a point. Of course, these forces were those of well-organized layers of society, not selfish cliques. Achilles’ private grudge is as sterile as is Ulysses’ skeptic authoritarianism, and the conflict between the two can bring no organic order. Neither does the mainspring of the philosophical and political dislocation lie in what Ulysses calls “appetite, an universal wolf” (I.iii.121)—this may be one of Achilles’ problems, but it is certainly not one of Ulysses’. The stagnation of the Greeks is not oppugnancy but intellectual and moral inadequacy.

It looks at first sight as if the debate of the Trojans presented an alternative to the Greeks’ sterility. The Trojans do discuss a more fundamental question, and they do so apparently in a spirit of greater seriousness, the question whether to continue a war that appears to some of them pointless. The opposing positions are clearly drawn up: Hector, seconded by Helenus, argues that reason decrees that
Helen should be returned to the Greeks and the war be ended; Troilus, supported by Paris, attacks this argument with the claim that such action would violate the national honor.

As we have noted earlier, Hector begins the debate with an announcement of his philosophical position as a moderate skeptic who uses reason cautiously in determining the all-important issue of war and peace; all calculations suggest that Helen must leave (II.ii.8–25). He is passionately interrupted by Troilus, whose arguments are enthusiastic, novel, and seemingly idealistic. We shall examine them first.

Troilus's main point is that the king of the country and a foreign queen who has become a national symbol (no matter how obtained) cannot be evaluated rationalistically. Priam's honor and worth cannot be put on a "scale of common ounces" with reasons and fears about war and peace (22–32), and Helen's value has been established as "inestimable" by the national effort of abducting and keeping her (69–96). Troilus, we say, is romantic and idealistic about kingship and women. He does, of course, quite clearly flout the humanistic position of reasonable action when, like Tarquin in Lucrece, he wafts away "reason and respect" as fit only for cowards (49–50). If one defines "idealism" in its popular meaning (not to speak about the philosophical one) as the desire to see the world as it should be or as the attempt to create such a world, Troilus is merely an illustration of the inadequacies and fallacies that often lurk behind this vision or endeavor. Idealism demands a belief in intrinsic values, in absolutes, and Troilus is even less capable of such belief than Ulysses. His ingrained skepticism shows itself best in his pivotal argument on the value of Helen. For him, it is not, as in Marlowe, her "face"—which he had earlier declared to be gory—but her "price"—that of a "pearl!"—which launched the thousand ships. The commercial simile, one of the many in the play, here demonstrates his need of values but also his habit of affixing variable prices to them. His odd example of the man who "distastes" later the wife he has chosen (61–68) is characteristic of him. Troilus, of course, argues that honor demands that one must keep such a wife, just as the Trojans must keep Helen—we shall not comment on the aptness of the analogue—but this example and his figure of the pricing of Helen show that Troilus's value system is a shifting and changing one in which pearls can be marked up and down according to the dictates of the will, an instrument very much subject to envious and calumniating
time; the strongest love can become boredom and aversion. Troilus espouses absolutes because of what Hector calls "the hot passion of distemp'red blood" (169). As Derek Traversi has said, his "disembodied idealism covers a sensual impulse which he refuses to recognize."  

But the pseudo-idealism of Troilus is even more disintellectualized than disembodied. His need to have ideals, contradicted as it is by his skepticism about absolute values, leads him to embrace fervidly those that his will elects. One could speak here of a pseudo-fideism. Troilus, rejecting all measurements of his ideals, acclaims them as intuitively apprehended by his faith in an analogous way to that which the fideist said was the only method to know God. One might compare Troilus's ridicule of the idea that Priam's worth and honor can be measured and his acclaim of the "past-proportion" of the king's "infinite" (26-29) with Montaigne's rejection of the idea that God is measurable (from the strongly fideistic ending of "An Apology of Raymond Sebond"):

It were a sin to say of God, who is the only that is, that he was or shall be; for these words are declinations, passages, or vicissitudes of that which cannot last nor continue in being. Wherefore we must conclude that only God is, not according to any measure of time, but according to an immovable and immutable eternity.

Montaigne's call to "vile, abject man" to "raise himself above humanity" not by his reason but by faith in an infinite God has its secular analogue in Troilus's rejection of reason and adoption of faith in honor, king, and national symbol. Troilus's chivalry, patriotism, and glorification of the divinity of kings are articles of a pseudo-religion. Ironically, he, whose hot blood no "discourse of reason" can reach, mocks the "high strains of divination" of his sister Cassandra (101 ff.).

But even Hector, who analyzes his brother well, turns out to be less consistently reasonable than his initial position indicates. It is true that he does defend humanistic rules of social and political action that Shakespeare had elsewhere shown to be basic to civilized life; he evokes the traditional moral virtues and asks that they be applied to the law of nations. His argument is so technical as to seem fashioned on Cicero's De Officiis, the most authoritative source. When he says that the law of nature and of nations demands that Helen be returned, he espouses the same moral-psychological prin-
ciple of temperance as did Cicero, who noted the inadmissibility of theft on a private as well as an international scale (III.21–74). Like Ulysses, Hector is an apologist of reason and order, and like Ulysses he loses his credibility for us by his actions. In a surprising switch during the debate, Hector abandons his theoretical principles and adopts Troilus’s hawkishness. On the intellectual issue, he does not retract; what he has said is “in way of truth.” But in practice, he will side with Troilus and advocate keeping Helen because she represents a cause “that hath no mean dependence / Upon our joint and several dignities” (192–93). The cleavage between what men know to be right and true and what they actually do, which opens up in Hamlet, here becomes even wider. Shakespeare gave it dramatic emphasis by the entrance, in the middle of the debate, of Cassandra, that symbol of truth for which men have no ears. Her prophecies and tears are not enough to keep Hector on the course of rational action; to Troilus, they are merely brainsick raptures. But the raptures really dangerous to Troy are those of Troilus, and even the more prudent Hector is infected by the irrationality that is in the air. The Trojan debate manifests not only an external division, that between hawks and doves, but also more subtle and serious internal fissures between one part of a disputant’s nature and the other, between Hector’s rationality and obsessive sense of honor, and between Troilus’s skepticism and his fideistic pseudo-idealism.

The scenes of battle (V.iv–x) that conclude the war plot and the play (except for Pandarus’s epilogue) are fragmentary, but they are right for this play. The camera shifts, as it were, from one brief individual action to the other. The glorious war dissolves into a number of private feuds that give vent to personal jealousies and grievances, but do not end them. Where human character might be strong enough to execute intentions, the shadow of fate falls between the conception and the execution. Those who have reasons for deadly hatred of their opponents are denied the satisfaction of killing them. Menelaus cannot slay Paris; Troilus cannot take his revenge on Diomedes. Hector is indeed killed, but not in fair battle. When he and Achilles confront each other, the cowardly Greek withdraws because his arms are “out of use.” When Hector falls into his enemy’s hands, it is ironically just after he has succumbed to greed, an emotion that little suits his chivalry, by hunting and killing a Greek because of his sumptuous armor. Achilles, who does not have any
sense of chivalry, has him murdered by the cruel Myrmidons just when, unarmed, he takes a rest from the battle.

Hector's murder and the subsequent indignity inflicted on his body is a commentary on the ironic brutality of war. A warrior with the reputation of nobility becomes, just at the moment when his hands are stained, the victim of a gang led by a cowardly, conceited, and brutal half-wit. The episode is an illustration of the humanists' belief that war was the product of man's ignorance of himself, a belief shared by some skeptics. In his chapter "Of the military Profession," Charron neatly balanced the stereotype of war as the breeding place of nobility, ardor, glory, vigor, manliness, and courage with its horrible effects—hatred, fury, madness, destruction, and death. "And all this," Charron concluded, "to serve the passion of another, for a cause which a man knows not to be just, and which is commonly unjust." 10

The battle scenes and much else in Troilus and Cressida lead one to a conclusion like Charron's about war; they use the skeptics' favorite method of negating man's illusionary ideals by pragmatic and brutal realities. And as if glimpses we get of the war action were not disillusioning enough by themselves, we see Thersites scouting the battlefield like an ubiquitous war correspondent, giving us sordid inside information not intended for the homefront. Those that have thought that these final scenes were written by Shakespeare in a hurry or added by somebody else are surely wrong; they are a powerful, if satiric and bitter, commentary on men at war. They pulverize the lie of war.

The war story is intertwined with the love plot, and the juxtaposition makes some ironic points about the congruity of the two most absorbing occupations of man.11 In the one scene in which Helen appears—a scene difficult to assign to either the war plot or the love plot—she, the inadequate issue of the war, is also debunked as the queen of romance. She proves to be merely a sex-obsessed girl, entertained by Pandarus with what must be the most inane love songs in Shakespeare. Helen, it is true, had lost much of her romantic glamor for the Elizabethans; in Lucrece, Shakespeare called her "the strumpet that began this stir" (1471). But just before her appearance in Troilus and Cressida, he conjured up her old romantic value, ironically by the Clown, who introduces her as "the mortal Venus, the heart-blood of beauty, love's invisible soul" (III.i.31).
The Clown’s pun on “stew” adds an obscene touch that contributes to the absurdity of Pandarus’s seven-times repeated “fair” in his greeting of Helen. In the Platonizing language of the courtesy books, the “First Fair” was the highest kind of beauty, spiritual and invisible, the permanent and divine Idea. Pandarus’s play on “fair” accentuates the obtrusive visibility and earthiness of Helen, the “Nell” of the Trojans. The scene is thus a sardonic introduction to the love tryst of Troilus and Cressida, which follows immediately.

There would obviously be no place in this disintegrating moral climate for a hero like Romeo; youthful purity here would be merely incredible naïveté. There would also be no place for a tortured seeker of values like Hamlet; no such man could fall in love with Cressida. The Troilus that Shakespeare actually created is different from either and undoubtedly of smaller stature. But he is not a totally simple man, and one could argue that he is as modern, perhaps more modern but uncomfortably so, as these two tragic favorites have proved to be. His characterization of himself and those of him spoken by others contrast oddly with his actual character. Even the two seemingly conventional laudes of his person, the one by Pandar (I.i.244 ff.) and the other by Ulysses (IV.v.96 ff.), are puzzling and unsatisfactory. Ulysses’ appraisal comes via Aeneas and thus has a distancing quality that, by itself, is vexing; but even taken at face value, Ulysses’ balanced antitheses leave one with some doubts about the young man. He is a “true knight,” but “not yet mature”; he is “not soon provok’d,” but, if provoked, not “soon calm’d.” Other features given by Ulysses are untrue; his remark that Troilus does not dignify “an impair thought with breath” denies his voluptuous remarks to both Pandar and Cressida and can be understood only from the perspective of Aeneas, his fellow Trojan. Most disturbing is the statement that Troilus is as manly as Hector, but “more dangerous.” The relative absence of “danger,” of vindictiveness, is, after all, Hector’s most amiable feature.

The other portrait, that drawn by Pandar, is a playful build-up intended to endear Troilus to Cressida; but it may contain some hidden truth. “Do you know what a man is?” Pandarus asks his niece—and we wonder how he should know. In Pandarus’s culinary analogy, a man’s “spice and salt” are birth, beauty, good shape, discourse, manhood, learning, gentleness, virtue (a term Pandarus can understand only imperfectly), youth, liberality, and so forth. A man with these spices, as Cressida wittily rejoins, is a “minc’d man.”
And Troilus is divided and fragmented, even more deeply so than the other characters. His seasoning leaves much to be desired, and, by the end of the play, he has lost most of the moral qualities in Pandarus's recipe of manhood and become what one might call a minced man, a very imperfect man indeed, hitting blindly right and left, wildly attempting to take revenge for a slight he thinks the world has given him.

Shakespeare kept Troilus from becoming sympathetic even in moments when we could identify most clearly with him. His sensuous anticipation of the love tryst makes him a junior voluptuary. Pandarus becomes for him, in one of his juvenile lapses of taste, a Charon that wafts him to the Elysian fields where he will "wallow in the lily beds" (III.ii.12 ff.). He shows himself almost as much a devotee to sensations as Cressida when he fears that "th' imaginary relish" might prove so sweet as to make him "lose distinction" in his joys. Troilus's anticipation is not only slightly soiled by an earthy ingredient but is also made subtly ironic by a skeptic awareness of the cleavage between desire and fulfillment, between the infinity of the will and the limitations of the act. He knows that "we taste nothing purely," as Montaigne said in the title of one of his essays. He lacks the spontaneity of youth and love that radiates from Romeo. He cannot really lose himself totally in love before he loses Cressida by fate.

It is by an exercise of the will he acclaimed as the supreme arbiter of values that he makes Cressida a symbol of ideal love. We have seen the real Cressida in bawdy pleasantries with Pandarus, and we have heard the latter mistaking the Clown's effusions about Helen as applying to Cressida—the two are sisters in spirit, and their value is out of proportion to the price men pay for them. Yet in the tryst, Cressida attempts to rise to Troilus's ideal conception of her. It is a superb touch of Shakespeare's artistry when he makes her effort conspicuous as she tries to put her amorous technique aside in order to enter into the spirit of the moment. It is a violation of her strategic principles to admit that she only seemed hard to win (III.ii.114) and that, perchance, she may be using more "craft" than she feels "love" (149)—there is a double irony here, for she wishes Troilus to reject these absolutely true statements. But the most ironic of her remarks is when she divides herself into two selves, thus parodying Troilus's split personality: "I have a kind of self resides with you; / But an unkind self, that itself will leave / To be another's fool"
(144-46). She is not really so deeply split; her ideal self is very largely that of Troilus's imagination, which she feebly tries to recreate. Her actual self is the unkind self that acts deceptively as if she were reluctant to embrace Troilus, the self that will later act similarly toward Diomedes.

Here and elsewhere, much of what Cressida says forms a satiric commentary on the ironies of Troilus's exertions. If his protests of truth and faithfulness are immature and hyperbolical, hers are hysterical and theatrical: she enjoys “tasting” the grief of her separation from Troilus as much as she did their union. And if Troilus can be a skeptic and find man's will directed by his deceptive senses (II.ii.61 ff.), by the same token she can excuse her fickleness:

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.

(V.ii.105-10)

This climactic scene, in which she reveals flagrantly her true nature, that of a “daughter of the game,” is one of Shakespeare's most complex dramatic exposes. The flirtatious Cressida, the direct Diomede, the wily Ulysses, the deflating Thersites, all contribute to showing that not only has Troilus been deceived by Cressida but that he also has deceived himself and will continue to do so. It is the moment when Troilus most nearly rises to the stature of a tragic hero; it is his greatest passion as well as his closest approach to self-discovery. Yet it also shows him incapable of the full dignity and the passion that characterize Shakespeare's great tragic heroes. In some ways, the scene foreshadows the later over-hearing scene in Othello, when the Moor watches Iago and Cassio and then Cassio and Bianca in the belief that they ridicule his cuckoldry. Troilus, of course, has an ocular demonstration of Cressida's unfaithfulness, which Othello does not; yet he is much less passionate. One may compare, for instance, Othello's wild protestation of patience, “I will be found most cunning in my patience; / But—dost thou hear?—most bloody” with Troilus's feeble “I will be patient; outwardly I will” (V.ii.68). If Troilus does not have the temperament to rise to the passion of an
Othello, neither has he the intellectual strength of a Hamlet to hide pain by wit and sarcasm.

It is symptomatic of his self-deception that his immediate reaction is to try to cling, in spite of all appearances, to the romantic image of Cressida. He would like to listen to

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a credence in my heart,} \\
\text{An esperance so obstinately strong,} \\
\text{That doth invert th' attest of eyes and ears;} \\
\text{As if those organs had deceptious functions} \\
\text{Created only to calumniate.}
\end{align*}
\]

(118-22)

Troilus displays here the same inconsistent idealism as when he sought to revalue Helen on the basis of the price the Trojans paid for her. As he was then inflamed by the subjective need of having absolute ideals (although his skepticism should have denied such possibility), so now again his desperate need for them rings in his cry: “Let it not be believ’d for womanhood. / Think, we had moth­ers” (127-28). He even tries to refute the idea that the Cressida he has just observed is the real Cressida.

His pathetic attempt to reject the attest of eyes and ears parallels Cressida’s excuse of being led by the error of the eye, according to her a congenital one with women. And in both cases the claim is deflated by Thersites, who calls Cressida’s argument a proof of strength she could outdo only by claiming that her mind has turned whore and who wonders whether Troilus will swagger himself out of his own eyes. Troilus is here no closer to real self-knowledge than he was at the beginning of the play when he asked Apollo who he, Pandar, and Cressida were. He deceives himself with picturesque and unilluminating metaphors.

But even if Troilus’s reaction to the great disillusionment of his life lacks in self-awareness, it leads to a supreme rhetorical exercise that draws on humanistic patterns of self-knowledge. The confused and pathetic speech in which he explains his state and feeling is, together with Ulysses’ eye-soul analogy, symptomatic of the twist Shakespeare gave to these patterns in this deeply disturbing play. Troilus characteristically begins with another attempt to deny that the actual Cressida is the true one:
If beauty have a soul, this is not she;  
If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,  
If sanctimony be the gods' delight,  
If there be rule in unity itself,  
This was not she.

(136-40)

Troilus expresses the impossibility that his Cressida is disloyal by making her into a "soul," a familiar enough identification for a lover. As a soul, she is, in Renaissance terms, the most cohesive and unalterable of unities; Cicero called it a *semper idem*, and the Renaissance commentators insisted that its unity was self-evident—"plain to anybody who knows anything about physics," as Camerarius put it. Troilus reaffirms this unity by logical demonstration; but he finds himself unable to deny what reality presents, and his own soul suffers a "madness of discourse, / That cause sets up with and against itself! / Bifold authority!" He thus tortures himself with a logical contradiction that a skeptic should be able to accept; as Charron put it, there is no reason, but has a contrary reason. But Troilus's projection of the ideal unity, the "soul," into Cressida makes this position untenable for him. The split in this supposed soul becomes now a deepening split in his own:

Within my soul there doth conduce a fight  
Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate  
Divides more wider than the sky and earth;  
And yet the spacious breadth of this division  
Admits no orifex for a point as subtle  
As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.

(145-50)

The seeming division of Cressida into two beings opens for him a macrocosmic cleavage:

Instance, O instance! strong as Pluto's gates:  
Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven.  
Instance, O instance! strong as heaven itself:  
The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolv'd, and loos'd.

(151-54)

This cosmic extension of disintegration still arises from the soul concept with which Troilus identifies his ideal Cressida. The Renais-
sance commentators on the *semper idem* anchored its unity in that of the macrocosmic spirit; Troilus quite appropriately sees Cressida's "disunity" as well as his own reflected in the heavens. Yet with all this rhetorical effort, in the end he has to resign himself to the undeniable reality:

> And with another knot, five-finger-tied,  
The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,  
The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy relics  
Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed.

(155-58)

Troilus has thus fragmented his supreme value, Cressida, and, in the process, his inner fragmentation finds its outward expression. He is now truly Cressida's "minc'd man." What comes from now on is of no real consequence to him. And what happens to him is of little consequence to us; it is dramatically significant only by showing that his subsequent life is inconsequential. He continues to live, seeking with "careless force and forceless care" some kind of revenge (V.v.40). But the action does not give him this satisfaction; it would be much too absolute an ending for this play of impotence and sterility. Death would restore Troilus from fragmentation to some kind of wholeness; therefore, it would be inconsistent with the relentless disintegration of men and values.

The general finale of futility is thus appropriate both thematically and dramatically. Inconclusive and seemingly irrelevant as the actions in the disrupted battle scenes are, they emphasize the theme of the fragmentation of the self in a twilight world. And the concluding episode, in which Pandarus enters in the throes of the Neapolitan bone-ache he wishes to bequeath to the audience, is just the right touch. Everything, like the bee in the pathetic little song of that former troubadour of love, has lost its honey and its sting. Pandarus's insult is a final, futile, and unpleasant gesture, but it is dramatically right.

The patterns of self-knowledge in *Troilus and Cressida* turn out to be patterns of ignorance, deception, and self-deception. They are imbued with a skeptical and satirical look at humanity. But I think that for this very reason they are not as deeply disturbing as those of *Hamlet*. They have a kind of built-in *reductio ad absurdum*. When all men and values are shown to be defective, we sense the
author's satirical intention and are apt to attribute some of the implied social and philosophical criticism to the formal requirements of a satire. Also, the low intellectual and moral stature of the Greeks and Trojans lessens the significance of their ideas. Hamlet's skepticism has the ring of search and suffering; it is not the congenital inconsistency of a fragmented Troilus.

This lessening of the sting seems to me to have a considerable effect on the role skepticism plays as a philosophical theme. It is difficult to say which of the expressed skeptic attitudes are to be taken seriously; and Troilus's use of skeptic ideas is satirized, Cressida’s is burlesqued. The humanistic position, theoretically taken by Hector, although in practice denied by him, comes off a little better. It is not deflated as such and has a somewhat better spokesman. Troilus and Cressida seems to indicate that Shakespeare was becoming more skeptic of skepticism and somewhat more tolerant of the humanistic absolutes he had questioned, ironically and sometimes bitterly, in Hamlet.

That this may have been so is made more likely by the way the play’s greatest skeptic, Thersites, is portrayed. His skepticism about values and human nature has none of the inconsistencies of Troilus’s. But Thersites is also one of the most unsympathetic characters. We cannot help accepting his comments on the degeneracy of the other characters and the rottenness of Greece and Troy as true even if they are unpleasant. It is Thersites who puts into words the overwhelming impression created by the play: “Lechery, lechery! Still wars and lechery! Nothing else holds fashion” (V.ii.194–95). Yet he, the deadly accurate fragmenter of men, is also a parasite and as such less than a full man; Achilles fittingly calls him a “fragment” (V.i.8). The character of Thersites shows that a presumed self-knowledge that questions all values, and does so in a spirit that reveals a lack of sympathy with humanity, is barren and odious; and it is also false because it denies the truth of the human condition that makes men dependent on one another.