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Abstract\_Title:  
Reading Skepticism into Troilus and Cressida

Abstract:

Stanley Cavell's original and insightful readings of Shakespeare have both renewed our thinking about the relation of philosophy and literature and our approach to the works of the Bard, namely for showing an important (and till the publication of his first texts on the subject altogether unexpected and unexplored) philosophical dimension of Shakespearean tragedies and comedies, the one related to skepticism. Troilus and Cressida, one of the traditionally considered "problem plays", with its particular overlapping of dramatic genres (tragedy, satire, comedy), its decrying of heroic values, its mocking depiction of men's folly and its unique somber Weltanschauung displays in common with Cartesian skepticism, in contrast to earlier Renaissance skepticism, a nihilistic form of skepticism that was so well characterized by Cavell, when he wrote that "the issue posed is no longer ... how to conduct oneself best in an uncertain world; the issue suggested is how to live at all in a groundless world". Unlike other previous interpretations of Troilus and Cressida under the light of skepticism, such as Graham Bradshaw's and William Hamlin's, the one this paper proposes, dialoguing with Cavell's epistemological readings of Shakespeare, centers on the skeptical ways of arguing and reasoning and with the relation of skepticism to the theme of self-destruction.