Shakespeare’s French: Reading *Hamlet* at the Edge of English

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The work for this thesis was undertaken on the ancestral lands of the Gadigal and Darug people of the Eora nation, and largely at the University of Sydney, which was built on land neither bought nor ceded.

In sharing knowledge, teaching, learning and research practices within and beyond this university I will strive always to pay respects to the knowledge embedded forever within the Aboriginal Custodianship of Country. I acknowledge their elders past, present, and emerging.
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Abstract

*Shakespeare’s French: Reading Hamlet at the Edge of English* argues that Hamlet is not written in English. Instead, Shakespeare’s working knowledge of French produces what I call a French English dialect in the three Hamlet texts. My thesis argues that two French language sources influenced Hamlet: the Amleth myth as translated by François de Belleforest and Les Essais by Michel de Montaigne. I begin by establishing extant scholarship on the relationships between Belleforest’s tale, Montaigne’s essays, and the Hamlet texts. My first chapter considers the French text of the Amleth narrative alongside the Hamlet texts. The second chapter considers the history of Montaigne’s essays being mediated in Shakespeare studies by John Florio’s English translation in 1603. I address ways in which this mediating text is an inadequate source for the three Hamlet texts. Referring to the short essay “De l’Âge”, I show how source study can produce an alternative chronology for Hamlet. In the middle two chapters of my thesis I use ideas about diachronic and synchronic source study to inform my analysis of the shared philosophical concerns between Montaigne and Shakespeare’s respective texts. The third chapter focuses on each text’s interest in philosophy and repentance, exploring how Montaigne’s discussion of those ideas can be found in the different Hamlet texts. The fourth triangulates ideas about faith, fellowship, and doubt, comparing Shakespeare and Montaigne’s synchronic responses to early modern concerns about classical and Christian fellowship. My final two chapters argue that Montaigne’s ideas about textual and editorial fragmentation can also be located in the Hamlet texts and their critical history. In my fifth chapter I compare Montaigne and Shakespeare’s use of terms like “pieces”, “patches”, “shreds”, and “flaps”, and how they capture ideas about the fragmentary nature of theatre. My final chapter then develops from their shared terminology about fragmentation to the editorial practices that frame any reading of their texts. Using Montaigne’s own editorial theory, I suggest that the Hamlet texts can be
productively read as essays. Each of my comparative chapters draws attention to the borders between languages and texts. By redefining Shakespeare’s language in *Hamlet* as French English, I ask how readings of *Hamlet* might change if divorced, or at least estranged, from English and Englishness.
Statements of authorship attribution and originality

This thesis contains material due to be published as “Hamlet’s French philosophy à la borde d’anglais” in On the Edge in Early Modern English Drama, edited by Mark Houlahan and Aidan Norrie (Kalamazoo, MI: MIP University Press). Chapter 3 of this thesis largely corresponds with this forthcoming material, and some parts of the Introduction also touch on its ideas.

The introduction to this thesis contains material published as “To English, or not to English? Shakespeare as a translator” for a guest contribution on the Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies project website (http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk). The MULOSIGE project is based in the School of Oriental & African Studies at the University of London.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing it has been acknowledged. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

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Many other colleagues also provided feedback, asked questions, or suggested new directions, when I presented my work at seminars and conferences. These included attendees at ANZAMEMS, ANZSA, CHE, EMLAC, the Harvard Institute for World Literature, the 2018 Australian Literary Studies convention, NeMLA, the Department of English Poetry and Poetics Network, SAA, and the Shakespeare Reloaded conference. The staff of Fisher Library at the University of Sydney and at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C., gave invaluable advice. I have been fortunate to meet many who were generous with their time, feedback, advice, reference letters, mentoring, or friendship, both academic and otherwise. As well as those I have already mentioned, other individuals include Rafi Alam, Mark Byron, Ella Collins-White, Gabriella Edelstein, Marina Gerzić, Mark Houlahan, Laurie Johnson, Dashiell Moore, Oliver Moore, Aidan Norrie, Samantha Poulos, Blythe Worthy, and no doubt others who, by my own fault, I have overseen while writing this list. My thanks are particularly due to those who kept wassail in the Fisher dungeon, the Woolley attic, and everywhere in between.

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A note on editions and citations

All modern English quotations have been amended to UK/Australian spelling conventions as necessary. I have silently amended alternate spellings for “Shakespeare” throughout. I have often silently modernised French and English text for ease of reading.

Citations of the Amleth myth derive from Hervé-Thomas Campangne’s Libraire Droz edition of Les Histoires Tragiques. Citations of Montaigne’s original French text derive from the online version of Pierre Villey and Verdun-Louis Saulnier’s edition of Les Essais. All translations from French are my own unless otherwise specified.

Paginated citations for Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s essays are from scanned copies of original texts provided on Early English Books Online (EEBO). Unpaginated citations of Florio’s translations are from the online Renascence Edition.

Citations from the Second Quarto of Hamlet are generally taken from Philip Edwards’ Cambridge edition, while those from the First Quarto and Folio are taken from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor’s Arden edition. Other Shakespearean citations derive from the illustrated Chancellor press edition. Any alternative editions used are cited in footnotes.

Biblical citations are taken from the King James Version.

I differentiate “the King” in Q1 from “Claudius” in Q2/F, as well as maintaining alternate names for several other characters. However, I keep “Laertes”, rather than Q1’s “Leartes”, throughout.
Qui ne dirait que les gloses augmentent les doutes et l’ignorance, puisqu’il ne se voit aucun livre, soit humain, soit divin, auquel le monde s’embesogne, duquel l’interprétation fasse tarir la difficulté ? Le centième commentaire le renvoie à son suivant, plus épineux et plus scabreux que le premier ne l’avait trouvé. Quand est-il convenu entre nous: ce livre en a assez, il n’y a meshui plus que dire?

— “De l’Expérience”, Michel de Montaigne

There is another writer I know, who, like myself, is thought by a great deal of people to be dead. His name is William Shakespeare, and he has written four kinds of plays: comedies, romances, histories, and tragedies. Comedies, of course, are stories in which people tell jokes and trip over things, and romances are stories in which people fall in love and probably get married. Histories are retellings of things that actually happened… and tragedies are stories that usually begin fairly happily and then steadily go downhill, until all of the characters are dead, wounded, or otherwise inconvenienced. It is usually not much fun to watch a tragedy, whether you are in the audience or one of the characters … [and] people in Shakespeare’s audience often weep, or sigh, or remind themselves to see a comedy next time.

— The Carnivorous Carnival, Lemony Snicket
Introduction: French English

There is no literary history without translation.¹

*Hamlet* is not written in English. Instead, Shakespeare writes in a language that can be more helpfully called French English. This thesis traces the importance of this feature in Shakespeare’s writing via two French language sources for *Hamlet*: the Amleth myth as translated by François de Belleforest and *Les Essais* by Michel de Montaigne. These sources have been analysed alongside *Hamlet* before but without taking full account of their “Frenchness” in relation to how Shakespeare read them. His debt to these texts is dependent on the French language and its relationship to English. There are two reasons to consider Shakespeare’s writing at this edge of English. The first is to better understand how he writes. The second, if Shakespeare’s English is not “just” English, is to show how general conceptions of what constitutes English language and literature can and should be challenged.

Why choose *Hamlet* to think about Shakespeare’s French? Both *Hamlet* and *King Lear* often figure as exemplars of his achievement in English. If careful comparison can show that *Hamlet* is less English, then Shakespeare’s language can be questioned in a more expansive way. *King Lear* does not have an extant relationship to a French source, while my two sources already have an existing French connection with *Hamlet*. However, scholarly works concerning the sources’ relationships to Shakespeare’s play texts are not coterminous with my own claims about the significance of French English. Instead, existing comparisons largely document shared language from a translation, or otherwise shared philosophical content. Importantly, this thesis is not seeking out instances of actual French in Shakespeare’s

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work as an indication of his “francophonie”. The translation process Shakespeare undertakes is a complex one that produces a porous rather than impermeable border between English and French.

“French English” encompasses French terms that remained in use in early modern English after their migration over the Channel, and words that share a combination of pronunciation, spelling, and meaning, even if they are “false friends”. Put simply, a French English word is one that cannot be easily located on one side or the other of a French-English linguistic border. In early modern London, English was not yet a category with the same formal conventions as non-vernacular administrative languages like Latin. Likewise with early modern French. However, both vernaculars were widely spoken and in print in early modern London. As Ardis Butterfield argues in her work on Chaucer’s vernaculars, “languages do not function autonomously in multilingual environments, but rather form a shifting set of relationships in which meanings are produced through a constant process of contrast, discrimination, overlap, and rivalry”. Her argument provides a framework for understanding French acquisition in early modern London, as multilingual sources and texts jostled for space among the city’s printed material. English was a minority on the European linguistic stage, while Latin, French and Spanish were more widely read or spoken. Although Shakespeare’s grammar school education guaranteed a familiarity with at least Latin, his knowledge of other languages has been debated. Ben Jonson’s memorable description that the playwright “hadst small Latin and less Greek” is often cited as proof that Shakespeare knew little beyond English. However, the line could equally imply a difference between him and other poets, his lack of university education in those languages (rather than a lack of

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knowledge in those languages), or simply Jonson’s sarcasm in praise of his friend. The preface lauds Shakespeare as writer and playwright; it is not a defence of his language proficiency. Texts like Jonson’s already point towards Shakespeare’s knowledge of at least some vocabulary outside of English.

While history plays like Henry V feature entire scenes in French, and others of his comedies, including Twelfth Night, feature courtly exchanges seasoned with French, Hamlet boasts French English in its three texts. The multiplicity of these quarto and folio versions invites comparison with the sources at the level of words and phrases that reflect a sustained relationship between source and target languages. If Shakespeare’s own writings are an initial litmus test for his familiarity with French, Henry V is certainly a candidate to display and question his proficiency. However, this produces an overt focus on Shakespeare’s knowledge of French without considering its effects on his use of English itself. As Jean-Michel Déprats observes, while English editors have a tendency to “exonerate Shakespeare” of his incorrect French, the French in Henry V appears to be plausible for its time.5 Other critics have been more generous again. George Watson suggests that Shakespeare is a “conscious linguist”, aware of how English is “based on a system of double derivation…at once Germanic and Romance”.6 David Steinsaltz likewise suggests that Henry V displays Shakespeare’s “essentially correct French”, and that the etymological awareness evident in the playwright’s choice of words throughout the tetralogy indicates his sensitivity to features of the two languages.7 Marjorie Rubright similarly observes how Shakespeare’s facility with French is fluid enough to produce relationships in the Henry V text that are both conscious of and

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intentionally working against the borders of the two languages.\(^8\) These three observations reveal not only Shakespeare’s knowledge of French but his awareness of its close relationship to English. Early modern England, while patriotic, could not deny its Norman history; French was still spoken at court and in cities, and English today still retains significant etymological roots in French.

The fact that French as a language tethered early modern England to mainland Europe is also essential for thinking forwards into the current political climate in and beyond Europe. International borders are policed by language – English as a form of political currency, for example – as well as by the bureaucratic and physical limitations of passports and plane tickets. Considering Shakespeare’s access to and use of French forms is one way to access questions about the less porous borders of the twenty-first century. But movement from one language to another is a relatively simple form of translation. My conception of French English is more complex than this, as is Shakespeare’s approach to his sources. Walter Benjamin would suggest that the traditional aim of accuracy in translation is meaningless unless the translator “[incorporates] the original’s way of meaning” as well as reproducing its meaning, so as to make “both the original and the translation recognisable as fragments of [the] greater language [of truth]”\(^9\). However, rather than aiming to “regain…pure language”, Shakespeare works to generate complexity rather than simple clarity in his translations.\(^10\) Observing this process brings the complexity of his translation process to light, and its complexity is only exacerbated by the three Hamlets: the First Quarto (Q1), Second Quarto (Q2), and Folio (F).

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\(^10\) Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 261. Simon Palfrey, while not focused so much on the relationship between English and other languages, would also argue that Shakespeare’s writing is generative. See Palfrey, “Why all these metaphors?” in *Doing Shakespeare* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2005), 19-38.
Scholarship has always had to contend with multiple versions of *Hamlet*. Peter Groves notes for example that “[a] particular editorial problem posed by Elizabethan drama” is that “some of the most famous passages in *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet* are texts that no Elizabethan may ever have written: editorial conflations of F1, Q1 and Q2”.\(^\text{11}\) Q2 and F are quite similar. While the cover of Q2 boasts its text to be “Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie”, and thus is indicative that an earlier text existed, the arrival of Q1 in 1823 made discussions more complex than perhaps had been anticipated. Q1 became the “bad” quarto relatively quickly, not least because of George Ian Duthie’s critical study in 1941.\(^\text{12}\) In addition to this, the theory of memorial reconstruction as an explanation of its quality became popular and remains so. However, scholars including Margrethe Jolly have argued that this explanation can seem inadequate, even suggesting that sources like the Belleforest tale are integral to understanding the texts’ chronology.\(^\text{13}\) Writing on multiple *King Lear* editions as opposed to other multiple texts, R. A. Foakes suggests that “if displaying textual indeterminacy is so desirable, the other plays should be treated in the same way as *King Lear* in one-volume editions of Shakespeare”.\(^\text{14}\) *Hamlet* is one such text. Leah S. Marcus also establishes similar comments on the history of Q1 being labelled as “bad” and being the result of a memorial reconstruction. However, she rightly argues that the progression from the quartos – particularly Q1 – to the Folio text as “oral” to “literary” indicates that “Q1 *Hamlet* is indeed “bad” *Hamlet*, and will continue to be bad so long as we rank the early texts of the play on


the basis of their adherence to culturally predetermined standards of literary excellence”.  

Marcus suggests that the “To be or not to be speech” is “[traditionally] regarded as a touchstone for rarefied, discriminating taste” and “has served as a powerful cultural shibboleth” because of this. She consequently describes a proverbial Hamlet actor speaking the Q1 version of the speech as “[forfeiting] his opportunity to measure up to the long tradition of great Hamlets, since…deviation [from the established text] is likely to be greeted as parody”. Marcus also explains that thinking of Q1 as alternate to Q2 generates what could be a false opposition:

The two [quarto] title pages, with their double and conflicting guarantees of authenticity to performance (in the case of Q1) and to the written copy (in the case of Q2), have helped to generate a strict dualism in our understanding of the two texts: Q1 was a performance text of some kind, or a debased copy thereof, with all of the corruption that such a suspect origin suggests; Q2, on the other hand, was a literary text based on the author’s own manuscript “Coppie,” with the promise of genuineness that such a provenance implies.

This dualism is of course reductive. By thinking instead of all three Hamlet texts as Hamlet, I emphasise the need to think about texts as ongoing works that exist in pieces, versions, and editions. Questions about the nature of these three texts and their intertexts recur throughout this thesis, but my focus is on how this can be mediated through French English.

The first time I read Hamlet, aged seventeen, I can remember being struck by a French phrase used in Act I. Horatio tells Hamlet about the ghost of his father:

> For two nights together had these gentlemen Marcellus and Barnardo on their watch In the dead waste and middle of the night Been thus encountered: a figure like your father Armed at point, exactly, cap-à-pie…

(I.ii.387-391)

I understood this was a version of the English phrase “head to foot” or “head to toe”: “cap” being “head” or “top” and “pied” meaning “foot”. What I did not know was that “cap-à-pie”,

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16 Marcus, Unediting the Renaissance, 135.
17 Ibid., 133.
18 Ibid., 139.
also spelled several other ways – cap a pie, capapea, cap a pea, and capapé, to show only a few – is a variation on the French term which we find in use in other texts from the period: “pié en cap”. Without knowledge of the intertexts surrounding *Hamlet*, my line of inquiry ended prematurely. However, this “Englished” French term is in use in several other texts. It appears in the original French of Jean Froissart’s *Chroniques*:

…armez de pié en cap…et en la grosse bataille du roi avait bien xxx\(^M\). chevaux et tous hommes armez…

John Bourchier then translates it into the *Chronycles* in the 1520s. Comparing the two shows their relationship:

…and they were of harnessed man *cape a pe*, lyke men of armes, mo thã xxx. thousande, and as many with malles…\(^{19}\)

The grammatical structure across both French and English is similar: in contemporary French, for example, “d’ici à là-bas” is directly “from here to there”. The phrase is also being used across both the chronicles and *Hamlet* to describe the same thing: someone dressed in full armour. Shakespeare sometimes provides a kind of gloss to his own language: when Macbeth describes his hands making “the multitudinous seas incarnadine”, the line that follows is “making the green one red” (*Macbeth* II.ii.61-62).\(^{20}\) In the aforementioned scene of *Hamlet*, he does not. The phrase “head to foot” exists from Old English language sources onwards, but Shakespeare has here nevertheless chosen the French phrase instead.\(^{21}\) Moreover, the French recurs across all three version of the play, even though Hamlet’s recitation of the speech when he asks the players to continue includes the expression in

\(^{19}\) Travis D. Williams writes that John Bourchier uses the word “twice in close proximity”, using the similar spellings “bounds and bournes” and “bounds and bornes”. I was only able to locate the first of these two phrases in the copy available to me. See “The Bourn Identity: Hamlet and the French of Montaigne’s *Essais,*” *Notes and Queries* 58.2 (2011): 255; and the original: Jean Froissart, *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, Portugal, Scotland, Brittany, Flanders, and the Adjoining Countries, Volume I*, trans. John Bourchier (Rivington: University of Iowa, 1812), 257. Original: “armez de pié en cap…et en la grosse bataille du roy avoit bien xxxM. chevaux et tous hommes armez”.


\(^{21}\) See respective notes on “head to foot” and “head to toe” within OED “head, n.1” and “toe, n.”.
English: when Pyrrhus is covered “head to foot” in blood (Q1 vii.346; II.ii.414). Why, as I asked myself in high school, is Shakespeare – or indeed, anyone else in early modern London – in the business of using French phrases in English-language texts? One reason is found in the intertextual relationships of French and English across and within texts in early modern London. My French sources and English play are one such example.

This thesis can be divided into three parts, or six chapters, in accordance with my approach to French English overall and the different kinds of comparative work within each section. Part I (Sources) establishes the two sources that drive my project. The first is the French Amleth myth, itself a translation by François de Belleforest from the Amleth tale written down in Latin by Saxo Grammaticus in the thirteenth century. The second is the collection of essays, *Les Essais*, by Michel de Montaigne. While *Hamlet* has been studied widely in other languages, its Anglophone origins tend to be central to how we read it in English literary studies. However, *Hamlet* has French sources, and, in writing this play, Shakespeare is a translator of Belleforest and Montaigne. The multiple versions of the play indicate that he is perhaps a translator of his own work, too. I am interested in some of the etymological history of English in what Watson calls its “system of double derivation”.

However, I also want to construct a new way to view Shakespeare’s language, by changing the kinds of qualifiers used to describe it. “English” on its own carries too much colonial clout. Instead, I use “French English” as a way to qualify Shakespeare’s language. My first chapter establishes extant scholarship on the relationship between Belleforest’s tale and *Hamlet* and identifies ways in which it can be extended. Through close analysis of the French text and critical consideration of the Ur-*Hamlet* myth, I show how the connections from Amleth to *Hamlet* support Shakespeare’s knowledge of French and use of French English. In the second chapter I consider Montaigne’s *Essais* as an extended linguistic and philosophical

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source for *Hamlet*. I specifically address how John Florio’s translation of the essays is not an adequate source for *Hamlet*; I refer directly to Montaigne’s essay “De l’Âge” to illustrate how returning to source study with fresh eyes produces new results about the relationships between French and English, and an alternative chronology for the *Hamlet* texts.

In Part II (Synchronisation) I take Kent Cartwright’s definition of “synchronic” source study, rather than the diachronic parallelism of traditional source studies, as the foundation for my comparison. The third chapter focuses on texts as part of a web of cultural material that informs textual production. I consider how treating sources as synchronic and diachronic allows for fruitful comparative work of philosophy in the *Hamlet* texts alongside Montaigne’s “Que Philosopher C’est Apprendre à Mourir” and “Du Repentir”. My fourth chapter continues with synchronic work, triangulating ideas of faith, fellowship, and doubt in a series of excerpts from Montaigne’s work and in *Hamlet*, with a particular focus on the role of Horatio in the philosophy of Shakespeare’s texts. Both writers share an interest in classical friendship but also in the biblical Paul’s iteration of Christian fellowship. They also consider classical and Christian approaches to suicide. Their shared concerns and sources tie their groups of texts together, but are greatly enhanced by Shakespeare’s response to Montaigne’s development of those ideas. Together, these middle two chapters evaluate the rich series of connections between Shakespeare and Montaigne’s texts mediated not only at the level of language but also in shared philosophies surrounding belief, theatre, and writing.

The chapters in Part III (Stories) consider how Montaigne’s ideas of textual fragmentation and editing bleed into the language and structure of the *Hamlet* texts. My fifth chapter turns towards the cultural history of early modern theatre and its relationships to

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anatomy theatres. Montaigne and Shakespeare’s use of terms like “pieces”, “patches”, “shreds” and “flaps” prompt reflections on how this shared group of terms capture the concept of fragmentary bodies – whether of the dead, or of actors, or texts – and point towards *Hamlet* and *Les Essais* as fragmentary textual bodies. The sixth chapter develops the idea of fragmentation by locating both Montaigne and Shakespeare in their own editorial practices and those of scholarship. I argue that *Hamlet* thereby functions as if it is an essay. Each feature I identify Montaigne and Shakespeare (and Hamlet himself) to be cyclically (and sometimes cynically) rereading, rewriting, editing, and interrupting themselves, without necessarily having the intention of a wholly complete text. I suggest an approach to editorial practices for *Hamlet* in light of the *Essais* must include uncertainty.

The question of textual fragmentation implies textual margins, which in turn raises the question of edges once more. In early modern Europe, borders between regions existed, but the idea that those borders might demarcate the outline of a nation state was still in its early days. National literature is therefore a difficult one to identify in that context. As Richard Hillman observes, national literature is a process only “uneasily underway in the early modern period and far from fully realised”. The same is true of the edges of nations and regions’ various languages. English literary studies “has not been in the habit…[of redrawing] boundaries to include both sides of the Channel”, but these non-national borderlines are useful. Asking “what are the borderlines of a text?” in translation, as Derrida does, must include the scope of its language. If, as Lisa Hopkins argues, edges are “a place of power”, then the edge of English is a place of linguistic and political power both

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for early modern language and the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{27} \emph{Hamlet} in all its multiple forms is a particularly noteworthy text to consider in relation to its edges and its language because of the power it carries as a text and as a product of its author. Hopkins suggests that unlike \emph{Henry V}, which relishes its borders, \emph{Hamlet} is troubled by them:

While the \emph{Henriad} seems to take a certain pleasure in the notion that borders within Britain might be permeable, \emph{Hamlet} consistently registers far greater unease about the possibility of such fluidity…[hovering] obsessively around a number of literal and metaphorical edges; indeed its concerns could almost be thought of as being [summarised]…when Horatio observes ‘I knew you must be edified by the margin ere you had done’.\textsuperscript{28}

Shakespeare is troubled by borders in many of his texts, and scholarly inquiry is attuned to this concern. The fact that Hand D in \emph{Sir Thomas More}, pronouncing the “mountainish inhumanity” of early modern border control, is attributed to him points to more than handwriting and the knowledge of collaboration in that play text (\emph{Sir Thomas More} IIc.144).\textsuperscript{29} As Shakespeare’s central work within the field of English studies, \emph{Hamlet} is worth considering in relation to its margins, too.

This thesis challenges how English is divorced from its etymological roots or colonial history. Shakespeare’s language is not purely French or English, but a French English dialect. I use “dialect” to point to the adage that a language is a dialect with an army. Keeping this

\textsuperscript{27} Lisa Hopkins, \textit{Renaissance Drama on the Edge} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 8.

\textsuperscript{28} Lisa Hopkins, \textit{Shakespeare on the Edge: Border-crossing in the Tragedies and the Henriad} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 35. For more of Hopkins’ recent interest in edges and early modern texts, see \textit{Women on the Edge in Early Modern Europe}, eds. Lisa Hopkins and Aidan Norrie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

\textsuperscript{29} See: “Sir Thomas More,” in \textit{The New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition}, ed. Gary Taylor et al. (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2016). As Gabriella Edelstein has observed, these lines from \textit{Sir Thomas More} went viral online in 2016, allegedly proving Shakespeare’s humanitarian spirit in the wake of the refugee crisis still underway in Europe and elsewhere today. As Edelstein put it, the media hype suggested that “Shakespeare, with all his prescience, had the answer to Europe’s refugee crisis: empathy”. However, she wryly observes the reasoning for the popularity of these words being more to do with Shakespeare than empathy: “this play’s coming out of the woodwork of textual history, it seems, had less to do with the Refugee Crisis and more to do with the anniversary of Shakespeare’s death. The British Library curators’ canny idea to make Shakespeare relevant to the Refugee Crisis, whilst simultaneously advertising their exhibition celebrating the quartercentenary, is just one of the ways that Sir Thomas More has been framed to sell the idea of a singular Shakespeare.” See: Edelstein, “Censorship, Collaboration, and the Construction of Authorship in Early Modern Theatre” (PhD thesis, The University of Sydney, 2019), 166, 169, and James Purkis, \textit{Shakespeare and Manuscript Drama: Canon, Collaboration and Text} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
implication at the fore is an important reminder of the colonial backdrop of Shakespeare’s distribution and the historical force of England and English more broadly. By using the word “border” I am also thinking of a current political climate where questions of border patrols and visas are rife. Shakespeare moves between borders with surprising ease, but national borders are frequently made inaccessible to those of a particular language or origin. Redefining Shakespeare’s language in Hamlet as French English challenges English as a sole category and the linguistic and national borders that are often barred, but should remain fluid.

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Part I: Sources
1. The First Quarto and the Fool

The discussion of Hamlet’s first quarto has produced a complex, tangled history, in which the concepts of text and author engage in an ever-changing dance. Whether or not Q1 is considered to have a proper ‘author’ depends partly on judgments about the status of a text; however, judgments about whether Q1 is a ‘mangled’ text, a performable script, or an intentional response to a source tend not to disturb the concept of a unitary author.\(^{31}\)

One key French source for *Hamlet* is François de Belleforest’s translation of the Amleth myth. As translator of that text, Shakespeare makes use of Belleforest’s stylistic, linguistic, and narrative forms. By focusing on the francophone Amleth narrative I emphasise the presence of French in Shakespeare’s manipulation of English. He undertakes a translation that Roman Jakobson would describe as both interlingual (from one language to another) and intralingual (within the same language), rearranging French into English, and then English within multiple versions of *Hamlet*.\(^{32}\)

When translating *Hamlet* into *La Tragique Histoire d’Hamlet* at the turn of the twentieth century, Eugène Morand and Marcel Schwob attempted “to stay as close as possible to the linguistic and textual/narrative codes” of Shakespeare’s text.\(^{33}\) Unlike earlier French translations of the play such as that by Jean-François Ducis, Morand and Schwob’s version was in prose and used “language current at [the play’s] time of origin”.\(^{34}\) Their text included seventeenth-century vocabulary and “a number of expressions normally associated with the Renaissance and even with the Middle Ages”.\(^{35}\) Romy Heylen suggests that


\(^{34}\) Heylen, *Translation, Poetics, and the Stage*, 62-63; 66. See Heylen’s monograph in full for her extensive analysis of six versions of *Hamlet* in French, including those by Ducis and Morand and Schwob.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 68.
Schwob’s convictions about using quasi-Shakespearean language were a result of the fact that in his eyes, Shakespeare “must have read [the narrative]…in French”, because the English prose translation of Belleforest, *The Hystorie of Hamblet*, was published in 1608, well after *Hamlet.* Schwob and Morand’s perspective points to the idea of Shakespeare as a translator, an aspect of his process that is not always acknowledged. Their approach indicates one of many connections with *Hamlet* that are evident in texts outside of Anglophone-dominant culture: in this case, specifically via the French language. The Amleth myth is a known source for the narrative of *Hamlet*, but it was most likely the French version of the text that Shakespeare read, not the Latin text first written down by Danish scholar Saxo Grammaticus (which is in turn a translation of a Danish oral folk tale). The question of Shakespearean revision is frequently tied up in questions of authorial identity, print histories of quartos and folios, or the printing market. While these elements may be worthy of attention, the act of translation itself is frequently left to one side. Combining the history of the Amleth narrative and *Hamlet* texts with the early modern interest in translation shows how this French text influences both the narrative and the French English language of the three play texts. Shakespeare’s revisions are translations and retranslations.

Comparing Belleforest’s text to *Hamlet* establishes the groundwork for locating three kinds of French English. The first is mostly obvious: tracing words with identical or extremely similar orthography indicates one way the *Hamlet* texts display their indebtedness to Belleforest. The second is similar, expanding the categories from identical or similar words to related terms, groups of phrases, and Belleforest’s written style, each of which are

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36 Ibid., 64. Schwob also suggested the Gascon oral folk tale *La Reine Châtiée*, or *The Chastened Queen*, as a possible francophone source for *Hamlet*, “complete with a ghost, a prince who hesitates, then withdraws, before returning to fulfil the task required of him by the ghost, a Horatio figure, and a girl with whom Hamlet is in love and whom he sends to the convent”. See Jean-François Bladé, “La reine châtiée,” in *Contes Populaires de la Gascongne, Volume 1* (Opales: Toulouse, 1996), 57-64.

37 For an example of this kind of thinking, see Jolly’s tabulation of parallels between language of Belleforest’s tale, Q1, and Q2 in *The First Two Quartos of Hamlet*. 
also found in *Hamlet*. The third relationship is in their shared narrative. This last element shows itself in *Hamlet* through main narrative events, but is also evident in transposed or adapted parts of the story that contribute to its dramatic rather than prose form. These French connections span all three *Hamlet* texts. Furthermore, these French English networks also allow for a fresh approach to the origin stories of Shakespeare’s play. By showing how French is a key player in their connections, I suggest how the Saxo version of the narrative is less relevant to Shakespeare’s text, as well as how the speculative Ur-*Hamlet* text might be aligned with the First Quarto (Q1) of *Hamlet*.

I argue, alongside Terri Bourus, that the supposed Ur-*Hamlet* is in fact Shakespeare’s Q1 text, and that Belleforest’s tale is its direct precursor. The French English connection between Belleforest and Q1 is key to that relationship. The fact that “by 1589 there seems to have been a *Hamlet* on the London stage” has been explained in multiple ways, but an Ur-*Hamlet* text has generally been part of the chronology. “Ur-*Hamlet*” has generally served as a placeholder for explaining references to a *Hamlet* on stage prior to 1599, when Shakespeare is generally understood to have written his play. Critical studies of the play’s history have often relied upon this hypothetical text to explain any references to *Hamlet* significantly before that time. However, as Emma Smith explains, the Ur-*Hamlet* does not definitively exist:

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40 Several historical documents mention *Hamlet*, and sometimes Shakespeare with it, prior to the printing of Q1 in 1603. Thomas Nashe describes “whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls of Tragicall speeches” in 1589; Philip Henslowe records a performance of “hamlet” at Newington Butts in 1594; Thomas Lodge watches a ghost that he describes like an “oyster wife” crying “Hamlet, revenge” in 1596; Gabriel Harvey attributes the “tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke” to Shakespeare in the margins of his copy of Chaucer in 1598; Edward Pudsey misquotes *Hamlet* in or after 1600; Thomas Dekker’s Tucca in *Satiromastix* speaks the line “My name’s Hamlet reuenge; thou hast been at Parris Garden, hast not?” in 1601; and *Hamlet* is listed in the Stationers’ Register by 1602. However, any specific claims that an Ur-*Hamlet* was written by Thomas Kyd or another contemporary playwright cannot be historically verified. See: Jolly, *The First Two Quartos of Hamlet*, 13-14.
Hamlet’s prehistory exists both within the play, in old Hamlet’s (dis)embodiment of the past, and beyond and before it, in the persistent bibliographical evocation of a pre-Hamlet, a non-existent play known as the Ur-Hamlet.  

As she continues on to write, the fact that an earlier play might not have existed “[has] not deterred textual bibliography from speculating about the play which preceded Hamlet”. But the Ur-Hamlet as a definitively separate text from the play we now call Hamlet is only a product of speculation, an observation also noted by Margrethe Jolly. Instead of speculating about an interim text, I place Q1 Hamlet in its stead. Analysing the chronological possibility of Belleforest leading to Q1 and then Q2 and F is made possible by focusing on Shakespeare’s French.

Shakespeare engaged with a library, informal or otherwise, that spanned multiple languages. However, critical studies of these sources are frequently reluctant to consider Shakespeare’s facility with French. Neither William Baldwin’s William Shakspere’s Small Latine & Lesse Greeke nor more contemporary accounts like Robert Miola’s Shakespeare’s Reading pin down the exact text list from which Shakespeare wrote, but the range of sources

43 Jolly, The First Two Quartos of Hamlet, 11.
44 There are many accounts for Q1 and Shakespeare’s hand in its creation. However, here I will assume that recent critical accounts of Shakespeare’s revision of Q1 into the other two versions hold true. In the vein of Zachary Lesser’s work on Q1, I am reluctant to take traditional chronologies relegating it to 1599 at earliest at face value. In their chapter on Shakespearean chronology in The New Oxford Shakespeare, Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane tentatively date an early Hamlet from 1588 for which Shakespeare was responsible (542-548). Among others, Taylor and Loughnane refer to Bourus’ Young Shakespeare’s Young Hamlet in which she too discusses Q1 as an early text and its content in relation to its context and relationship with the Amleth myth. These ideas of a revisionist Shakespeare are also argued from different angles by Bourus and Richard Dutton. Paul Menzer also accounts for ways in which the Hamlet texts might have been adapted and updated in their various forms, focusing on London playhouses and cue texts as ways to imagine early modern theatre. See: Lesser’s Hamlet After Q1: An Uncanny History of the Shakespearean Text (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan’s The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion (Oxford, United Kingdom New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Dutton’s Shakespeare, Court Dramatist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Menzer’s. The Hamlets: Cues, Qs, and Remembered Texts (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008).
that they consider are largely in Latin, Greek (often through Latin translation), or English.\textsuperscript{45} Some critical work does show interest in Shakespeare’s French, including Stuart Gillespie’s \textit{Shakespeare’s Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare’s Sources}, which contains a range of francophone sources.\textsuperscript{46} However, most of these focus on broader questions about Shakespeare’s use of sources, without emphasising the extent or likelihood of Shakespeare’s various language skills. Jolly, Bourus, and Travis D. Williams are three scholars who address Shakespeare’s French.\textsuperscript{47} They show ways in which \textit{Hamlet} specifically reflects Shakespeare’s knowledge of French, and cite both the Belleforest myth and the \textit{Essais} of Michel de Montaigne as antecedents to the play.

Shakespeare’s connection to the Belleforest text is as a translator not only of language but also form and narrative. Jolly’s overall argument for a new chronology via Belleforest implies Shakespeare’s role as what she calls “a grafter”.\textsuperscript{48} This sense of fluidity between iterations of Shakespeare’s works suggests that Shakespeare and others’ processes of writing required \textit{rewriting}. Given that the source text is in French, it also requires translation. \textit{Hamlet} in all three forms represents this kind of drafting. Analysing the French text in comparison with Shakespeare’s has revealed that both transformation and translation have taken place between the Amleth myth and Q1, but also in the subsequent versions of the play. Shakespeare’s French English affects the chronology of the \textit{Hamlet} texts. It reveals his interest in the potential plurality of language, long known in scholarship but often framed within the false borders of a non-codified English.

\textsuperscript{48} Jolly, \textit{The First Two Quartos of Hamlet}, 193.
The Ur-Hamlet myth

The Ur-Hamlet serves as a placeholder for what would become Shakespeare’s play, regardless of its author or the version of Hamlet being discussed. However, its claim of proximity to Shakespearean originality muddies the Hamlet chronology. As Smith dryly argues, the Ur-Hamlet can be described as “a creature of fantasy dressed in the pseudo-science of late Victorian bibliographic invention and of Bardolatry”.49 The historical slant to the Ur-Hamlet text in criticism then becomes tangled with questions of authorship and the fable of an original text. When critics do address the question of Ur-Hamlet, they generally revisit the publication history of early modern London. William F. Hansen and Bourus are two such scholars who do so for different purposes in different decades. While they reach different conclusions, both acknowledge Belleforest’s text as integral to the play’s development. Hansen considers the progression from Saxo to Shakespeare, making mention of Belleforest. However, he suggests that the Ur-Hamlet is the most likely means by which Shakespeare would have encountered the tale.50 Bourus argues outright that the Ur-Hamlet is in fact the earliest text by Shakespeare, preserved in the form of Q1.51 Comparing these two critical perspectives makes room for Shakespeare’s French English. As an alternative to the Ur-Hamlet myth, my reading of these texts’ relationships is through an imagined multilingual chronology.

Hansen focuses on the textual connections between Hamlet and other variations on the Amleth narrative. His overall argument for Hamlet’s source material is that Shakespeare accessed the Amleth tale via an intermediary dramatic version of the tale:

Saxo’s book was familiar to Elizabethan and Jacobean England and so could have been consulted by Shakespeare or his predecessor, but there seems to be no evidence requiring us to believe that it was. Most likely, then,

51 Bourus, “Enter Shakespeare’s Young Hamlet, 1589,” 5.
Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a revision of a dramatic treatment (Ur-Hamlet) of a retelling (Belleforest) of a literary treatment (Saxo) of a Scandinavian legend.\textsuperscript{52}

Hansen’s summary of Saxo and Belleforest’s contributions to *Hamlet*, Ur- or otherwise, captures the multiple layers of translation between the tale’s Danish-Latin origins and its Anglophone iteration on London’s stages. Most interesting is his observation about the translation of *form* that also occurs when “Vita Amlethi” becomes *Hamlet*:

There is now no third person, no omniscient observer, no objective voice…we move from an objective narrative world to a subjective dramatic world, a world of appearance…[and] in giving up the narrator, the audience loses its privileged certainty and joins the characters in a world of uncertainty and limited knowledge. The playgoers are invited to participate in the same game as that which the characters are playing, which is to discover the objective truth about one another and about themselves.\textsuperscript{53}

This concern with knowledge, or its absence, is prominent throughout Shakespeare’s play. Furthermore, this shift in perspective is specific to its generic transformation from prose narrative to theatrical text. Hansen’s work emphasises how we might read Shakespeare as a participant in these revisions of the Amleth myth. If the Ur-Hamlet existed, perhaps it was one step closer to the source material, whether via Belleforest’s French or Saxo’s Danish Latin. However, Hansen assumes that a non-Shakespearean Ur-Hamlet is an interlocutor. His work is therefore missing a thorough commentary on early modern translation and the possibility of Shakespeare’s multilingual revision. There is no need for a “middle man” author for Ur-Hamlet, and no need for an Ur-Hamlet separate from Shakespeare’s own play text.

Bourus suggests that Shakespeare was “interested in sixteenth-century French literature, from the very beginning of his career” and therefore “did not need Thomas Kyd to pre-digest Belleforest’s *histoire* of Amleth and spoon-feed it to him”.\textsuperscript{54} She argues that Belleforest’s emphasis on the “jeune”, “adolescent”, and “enfant” prince translates into what

\textsuperscript{52} Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet*, 67.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{54} Bourus, “Enter Shakespeare’s Young Hamlet, 1589,” 2.
becomes Q1 *Hamlet*, with a younger protagonist than the other two versions of the play.\(^{55}\)

She proposes that the three *Hamlet* texts support the idea of the revisionist Shakespeare; each is reworked in accordance with context, the members of the acting company at the time, and Shakespeare’s own experiences and skills. Bourus’ analysis is attuned to the very name for the pre-Shakespearean Ur-*Hamlet*:

That Germanic idiom implicitly compares the 1589 play to the “*Urfaust,*” a version of Goethe’s masterpiece that he worked on between 1772 and 1775, when he was in his midtwenties…*Faust* is the central masterpiece of the most canonical of German writers, and *Hamlet* is the central masterpiece of the most canonical of English writers, and the first version of both works was lost for more than a century. Like *Faust*…*Hamlet* was repeatedly revised by its author. As *Faust* matured with Goethe, *Hamlet* matured with Shakespeare. It matters so much to us, in part, because it mattered so much to him.\(^{56}\)

“Masterpiece” implies an unfortunate nod to Bardolatry, but Bourus’ acknowledgement of a revisionary process is a useful one in re-defining the Ur-*Hamlet* from a placeholder to an earlier version, particularly in light of its French narrative source.

A French English reading of Hansen and Bourus’ work suggests that Shakespeare is responsible for the earliest iteration of the staged Danish prince. As Bourus argues, Q1 can be the earliest of the *Hamlet* texts, because it can be traced linguistically and narratively as closest to *Les Histoires Tragiques*. Jolly’s account of the connections between Belleforest and *Hamlet* also considers the textual similarities and differences between the French account and Shakespeare’s texts. She refers largely to Q1 and Q2. Acknowledging that “memorial reconstruction is the view most widely believed and disseminated”, her essay focuses on the unknown publication order of *Hamlet* quartos by analysing their language, with the Belleforest text as a point of reference.\(^{57}\) She also suggests that “[reconsidering] revisionism would be a major step” for *Hamlet* studies.\(^{58}\) Taking Jolly’s work on chronology into account

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\(^{55}\) Ibid., 5.

\(^{56}\) Bourus, *Young Shakespeare’s Young Hamlet*, 210.


\(^{58}\) Ibid., 105. Bourus also picks up on revisionism throughout *Young Shakespeare’s Young Hamlet*. 
alongside Bourus and Hason, I analyse Belleforest against Q1. This suggests how the Ur-
*Hamlet* can be Q1 and therefore an early Shakespearean *Hamlet*. My approach takes
revisionism into account not via questions of authorship but through translation and
untranslatability.

Dispelling the myth of an Ur-*Hamlet* also affects my reading of Hamlet as a character. The name “Hamlet” is homophonic, or at least an almost match, with the French “Amleth” [æmləθ] and is likewise similar to early modern English names Hamlet and Hamnet (the latter of which Shakespeare named his son). Jacques Derrida’s ideas about Babel’s untranslatability are not unlike the awkwardness of translating the plot and character of “Amleth” into the same for “Hamlet”. Derrida writes that “it is in translation that we most often read [the Babel narrative]”, and that “in this translation, the proper name retains a singular destiny, since it is not translated in its appearance as proper name”.59 Both Hamlet the character and *Hamlet* the text are translated and yet left untranslated in Shakespeare’s iteration of the hero-as-fool narrative. The different names or titles are in fact impossible translations of a name into different forms: they all mean “fool”. This idea of naming will inform the final section of this chapter. However, the French English translation process is worth considering in detail first, as it reveals Shakespeare’s role as a translator as well as a writer or playwright.60

**French Connections: Words and Style**

Shakespeare’s transformation of the tale first happens at the level of specific words and phrasing, exemplifying my concept of French English. Jolly’s work on the “French connection” between the two quartos of *Hamlet* is a useful starting point for analysing the

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60 The word “playwright” is essential for me in thinking about Shakespeare’s translation processes, too, because it emphasises the element of building within any writing task. The OED defines “wright” (n.1 a., 3) as “an artificer or handicraftsman; esp. a constructive workman” or “one who works in wood; a carpenter, a joiner”.

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francophone influence of Belleforest’s text. She establishes similarities between the Amleth text and the two quartos, identifying words and phrases that correlate and suggesting that “the verbal echoes are unmistakeable”. Old Hamlet is described as “valiant”, is “dared to the combat” by Norway, and has a brother who is described as a “villain”, while Horwendille is “vaillante”, “deffié au combat” by Norway, and has a brother also described as a “villain” (Q1 i.73, v.79; I.i.83, I.v.106-108). Amleth’s “melancholie” and the use of “lascive” (lewd) to describe Fengon are both mirrored in Shakespeare’s text, too: Hamlet is melancholy and describes Claudius’ “lewdness” (Q1 7.383, 5.41-42; II.ii.536, I.v.54-55). Belleforest’s image of lust as “les apetits des bestes” occurs in the text in Hamlet’s descriptions of his uncle and mother’s marriage (Q1 2.65-68; I.ii.144-150). It also appears in the Ghost’s description of his wife’s betrayal in Q1 (Q1 v.24). Amleth’s mother calls him her “doux ami” (literally “sweet friend”) and Hamlet’s calls him “sweet Hamlet” (Q1 11.45; III.iv.94). Jolly also considers further parallels in the form of “adapted borrowings and transpositions”.

Horwendille’s agreement with the King of Norway is that “celui qui serait vaincu perdrait toutes les richesses qui serait en leurs vaisseaux” (“the one who is vanquished would lose all the riches in his ships/vessels”), while Old Hamlet agrees that the victor of his fight would receive “all those his lands / Which he stood seized of” (Q1 1.7-8; I.i.87-88). Horwendille’s downfall is “la trahison de frère conte [sic] frère” and Old Hamlet is slain “by a brother’s hand” (Q1 5.58; I.v.74). The “gentilhomme” who warns Amleth of danger is Shakespeare’s Horatio, who we might describe as a gentleman. Jolly writes that Amleth’s “compaignons”

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63 Belleforest in ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
68 Belleforest in ibid., 88.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
are those “with whom Amleth discusses ‘les Philosophes’”, as opposed to Hamlet, who tells Horatio that “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in [his] philosophy” (Q1 5.142-46; I.v.166-167). Amleth pleads with his mother to look upon “la vive image” of his father, while Hamlet urges Gertrude to compare images of Claudius and Old Hamlet (Q1 11.25; III.iv.51). Amleth speaks “rigoureusement” to his mother, while Hamlet promises he “will speak daggers” (Q1 ix.236; III.ii.357). Lastly, Amleth/Hamlet’s revenge on his uncle relies on a sword: “[Fengon] tries to take Amleth’s sword, but it has been nailed into its scabbard, so Amleth takes the King’s own sword for the final act of vengeance, while Hamlet by chance swaps swords with Leartes or Laertes” (Q1 17.78; V.ii.285).

From a different critical perspective, John Casson’s observations of a 1576 annotated copy of Belleforest’s fifth volume also suggest direct influences stemming from Belleforest’s French terminology. Casson argues that because “the majority of the annotations are in the Amleth section the annotator seems to have had a special interest in this story”. He proposes that “we must consider the possibility that Shakespeare might have been the annotator”. While I am extremely wary of this assumption based only on an alleged motive for reading, particularly given the widespread popularity of Saxo’s texts, Casson has nevertheless identified at least one possible parallel that is noteworthy beyond questions of authorship. He quotes Belleforest’s “ce n’est sans cause et juste occasion que mes gestes, countenances & paroles ressentent le fol” (it is not without cause and just occasion that my gestures, countenance, and words are always foolish) as an example that indicates the annotator’s

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71 Ibid. The Folio text reads “our” instead of “your”.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid. Jolly refers to Jenkins’ introduction to his Arden edition of the play, and particularly page 94.
74 Ibid., 88-89.
“[interest] in the idea of dissembling and Amleth’s strategy of appearing to be mad”. 77 He argues that these words in particular indicate that “Shakespeare may have re-read Belleforest in preparing his major revision of the play circa 1601”. 78 Shakespeare’s text of course rehearses several of these related ideas on madness, speech, and gesture, from Hamlet’s descriptions of his grief and antic disposition to Claudius’ own descriptions of his nephew. Clear examples include Claudius’ description of Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Hamlet’s instructions to the players.

However, several other aspects of the French text suggest Shakespeare’s movement between French and English. Shakespeare translates two key words from Belleforest’s tale. Belleforest prefaces the myth itself with a description of Danish culture before they “embraced…Christian doctrine”. 79 He writes that they were “barbare et mal civilisé” (barbaric and uncivilised), and the use of “mal” here is interesting because one might expect “non” to qualify “civilisé”, or that the phrase would instead simply be “sauvage”; instead, Belleforest’s use of “mal” invokes the prevalence of “maladie”, “malady”, and “disease” in both the Q2 and F texts. Conversely, figures of disease and sickness do not appear directly in Q1. Shakespeare’s iterations of Hamlet’s “diseased” wit and the corrupt Danish court have

77 Belleforest in ibid., 5.
79 Belleforest, *Le Cinquième Tome des Histoires Tragiques*, 259. The religious element of Shakespeare’s approach to Belleforest runs in parallel to but not within my own argument. Julie Maxwell considers Shakespeare’s access to source material for the play, arguing that “in the absence of the Ur-Hamlet…scholars have always been obliged to consult the prose versions, conscious that we cannot know how directly they influenced *Hamlet*” (519). Observing the closeness of Shakespeare’s version to Belleforest’s “than to any other [version]”, Maxwell agrees that the Belleforest text may have been Shakespeare’s immediate source for the tale (519; 518). However, her work focuses on the “religio-political” aspects of the Amleth legend ((554-556). She does not argue for any linguistic connection between the historian and playwright, but rather suggests that “properly cautious proceedings of *Hamlet* source study have entirely obscured…a main reason why Saxo’s Amleth story was translated, cited, and retold in the sixteenth century…it was repeatedly made to carry ideological freight…reinterpreted by historians who used literary projects to pursue Counter-Reformation agendas” (520). Maxwell also suggests a linguistic link between Belleforest and Shakespeare in Q1’s title: “Tragicall Historie” is an exact translation of *histoire tragique*, which “had never been used for a play title before and is used nowhere else in the Shakespeare canon” (520). Maxwell’s argument is perhaps an interesting answer to the recurrent concerns about the *Hamlet* texts’ address of various Christian beliefs both aligned and at odds with the English church of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. See “Counter-Reformation Versions of Saxo: A New Source for “Hamlet”?”. *Renaissance Quarterly* 57.2 (2004): 518-560.
perhaps evolved from reading the French “mal”. 80 “Barbare et mal civilisé” is also an instance of hendiadys, which becomes only more significant below as one of many examples in Shakespeare’s response to Belleforest’s rhetoric.

Furthermore, when Fengon’s unnamed advisor hides in Geruthe’s room to eavesdrop on her conversation with Amleth, he “hides beneath a quilt a little earlier” than Hamlet arrives. 81 At first glance, this is accurately conveyed in Hamlet, too, but while the phrase “au paravant” (sometimes written as a compound word) generally means “before” or “earlier”, “paravent” spelled with an “e” is a noun meaning “screen”. 82 Non-codified spelling means that “paravant” spelled to mean “before” is sometimes also used to mean “screen”, and the homophone noun for the verb comes into use around the turn of the century. An example of this is found in the TLFi definition for the term, where the inventory of Gabrielle d’Estrées from 1599 uses what in contemporary French would be the “wrong” spelling for the word “screen”: “paravant” rather than “paravent”. 83 Belleforest is writing the word “before”, but is it possible that Shakespeare has thought of both definitions? Given the word’s proximity to the equivalent scene in Hamlet, does this “screen” evoke what would become the arras?

When waiting on Hamlet to visit Gertrude’s room in the Q2 and F texts, Polonius says to Gertrude:

> Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,  
> And that your grace hath screened and stood between  
> Much heat and him.

(III.iv.2-4)

This additional use of “screen” suggests another layer of transposition from Belleforest’s language, proximate to the conversation between the prince and the queen, and the

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80 See Chapter 3 for an extended reflection on French influences on Shakespeare’s use of “diseased” and related terms from Montaigne’s work.
81 Belleforest, Le Cinquiéme Tome des Histoires Tragiques, 270. Original: “secrètement et en la chambre de la reine, se cacha sous quelque loudier; un peu au paravant que le fils y fut enclose avec sa mère”. See TLFi “auparavent” and “paravent”.
82 See TLFi “auparavant”, “paravant” and “paravent”.
83 See TLFi “paravent”, etymological notes.
counsellor’s eavesdropping and subsequent death. These examples of “mal”, “malady”,
“paravent”, “paravant”, and “screen” indicate what could be not only Shakespeare’s reading
of the French source, but an ongoing relationship with it. The development of these terms
into English, and then their development in a given scene or speech, show how the Hamlet
texts exist as French English translations of Belleforest’s specific terminology.

Shakespeare’s text also responds to groups of words and ideas and the rhetorical style
of Belleforest’s narrative. Well before Fengon’s death or any place in Belleforest’s narrative
where Amleth suspects his uncle is an intriguing use of the word “conscience”. Belleforest
identifies not only several aspects of Fengon’s character, but uses “conscience” to
foreshadow the idea of guilt when describing his relationship with Geruthe:

…[which] caused Fengon to be emboldened for such impunity, still daring to
couple in marriage to the one he had already coupled during the life of good
Horwendille,soiling his name with double vice and charging his conscience
with double impiety, incestuous adultery, and felony and parricide. 84

This idea of the king’s conscience is of course also translated into Hamlet’s own questions of
guilt, not of vice or impiety but of delay and doubt. Shakespeare also responds to both
Belleforest’s use of the word “doubling”, twice no less, and the terminology used to describe
Fengon’s crimes: felony, incest, adultery, and parricide. Hamlet describes Gertrude’s
marriage to Claudius as an example of “most wicked speed, to post / With such dexterity to
incestuous sheets!” (I.ii.156-157). 85 Shakespeare gives the Ghost of Old Hamlet a barrage of
brachylogia and hendiadys in his description of Claudius, which reflects Belleforest’s own
language:

Yea, he,
That incestuous wretch, won to his will with gifts
– O, wicked will and gifts that have the power
So to seduce – my most seeming-virtuous Queen.

84 Belleforest, Le Cinquiesme Tome des Histories Tragiques, 263-264. Original: “…fut cause que Fengon
enhardi pour telle impunité, osa encore s’accoupler par mariage à celle qu’il entretenait exécrablement durant la
vie du bon Horwendille, souillant son nom de double vice et chargeant sa conscience de double impiété,
d’adultère incestueux, et de félonie et parricide”.
85 Q1 reads: “wicked, wicked speed, to make such / Dexterity to incestuous sheets” (Q1 ii.69-70).
But virtue, as it never will be moved
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Would sate itself from a celestial bed
And prey on garbage…
Thus was I sleeping by a brother’s hand
Of crown, of queen, of life, of dignity
At once deprived, no reckoning made of,
But sent unto my grave…

(Q1 v.35-43, 57-60)

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts –
Oh, wicked wit and gifts that have the power
So to seduce – won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming virtuous queen.

…But virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed,
And prey on garbage…
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand,
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched;
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhoused, disappointed, unaneled…
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.

(I.v.42-46, 53-57, 74-77, 82-83)

This compressed version of the Ghost’s exclamations nevertheless reveals the excessive and cumulative effect of Belleforest’s translated terms couched in doubling figures like hendiadys and brachylogia. Shakespeare’s choice of the verb “couch” evokes the French “coucher”, often used within “se coucher” to describe going to bed to sleep, but also to describe sex, as in the English phrases “to sleep with [someone]” or “to bed [someone]”. Belleforest uses it elsewhere, such as in his description of Fengon having defiled his brother’s bed: “il avait incestueusement souillé la couche fraternelle”. 86 When Hamlet reflects on Claudius’ treachery he uses further doubled terms describing his uncle’s treachery:

Yes, yes, by heaven, a damned, pernicious villain:
Murderous, bawdy, smiling, damned villain!
…one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

86 Belleforest, Le Cinquiesme Tome des Histoires Tragiques, 262.
Shakespeare’s French: Reading Hamlet at the Edge of English

...damned villain –
Treachery, bawdy, murderous villain!
(Q1 v.78-79, 81; vii.422-423)

O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!
My tables – meet it is I set it down
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;

...Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
(I.v-104-108; II.ii.532-533)

These lists expand upon and translate further versions of the king’s character. Hamlet’s recurrent rage at Claudius’ “smiling” also emphasises the king’s doubled personality in court and his two-faced character. Then, when Hamlet is tempted to kill Claudius in prayer, he repeats the same kinds of language that Belleforest uses, listing Claudius’ potential sins:

“when he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, / Or in th’incestuous pleasure of his bed” (III.iii.89-90).87 When the audience is privy to Claudius’ prayer they discover his use of that language, too:

Pay me the murder of a brother and a king
And the adulterous fault I have committed.
O, these are sins that are unpardonable!
(Q1 x.5-7)

Oh my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t,
A brother’s murder…
…like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
…but oh, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? ‘Forgive me my foul murder’?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th’offence?
(III.iii.36-38, 41-42, 51-56)

Here, Shakespeare translates Fengon’s “conscience [of] double impiety, incestuous adultery, and felony and parricide”, as Claudius not only identifies the horrors of his actions but does

87 Q1 reads similarly: “When he’s at game, / Swearing, taking his carouse, drinking drunk, / Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed” (Q1 x.24-26).
so by listing his offenses and, significantly, identifying the “double business” of his own crimes. Next, when Hamlet visits Gertrude’s closet he uses the same kinds of language, accusing her of living “in the rank sweat of an ensemèd bed…[with] her precedent lord, a vice of kings” and demanding that she “forgive [him] this [his] virtue…virtue itself of vice must pardon beg” (III.iv.92, 98, 153, 155). Finally, Hamlet enacts his vengeance on Claudius with part of the same language:

…venom to thy venom – die damned villain!
Come, drink – here lies thy union, here!
(Q1 xvii.96-97)

Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
(V.ii.304-305)

These examples add to the structural as well as linguistic hendiadys present in the play text.

George T. Wright explains how Shakespeare may have come to appreciate the figure of hendiadys not just from classical sources but from vernacular ones:

The earliest English rhetorician to mention hendiadys is Henry Peacham…[followed by] Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) [which] defines it correctly and gives several examples…Although either or both of these works might have put Shakespeare in mind of hendiadys, it seems doubtful that his extensive use of the figure could have been based solely on the scanty treatment it is accorded by these two writers. It seems more likely either that he inquired about it and looked again into Vergil or, more probably, that he had studied the figure in school…

Perhaps, though, he observed it in other sources such as Belleforest. Christy Desmet argues that the Q1 text is propelled by brachylogia; by removing conjunctions, she suggests that it causes language to “[roll] not trippingly, but rumblingly from the tongue”, while also creating as sense of “copiousness”, as is often noted in the relentless hendiadys of the *Hamlet* texts.

Desmet also notes that brachylogia occurs in Q2 where it does not in Q1, observing Horatio’s
relentless list of horrors at the conclusion of the play as one such example (V.ii.351-365). If Shakespeare is translating from sources other than those in English and Latin, then the content and style of Belleforest’s rhetorical doubling in describing Fengon transfers comfortably onto the stage that Shakespeare envisioned, and presence of these figures across each text indicates a complex pattern of translation. The rhetorical features of the *Hamlet* texts reflect Belleforest’s own figuration. The relentlessness of hendiadys in particular throughout the *Hamlet* texts reflects Belleforest’s overuse of the figure. Along with the brachylogia in both texts, this relationship suggests Shakespeare’s extended engagement with the Belleforest text. The playwright’s manipulation and translation of this French source extends beyond its linguistic specificity to its stylistic and narrative features. This complex series of parallels shows not only Shakespeare’s ability to parse and translate French but an interest in rewriting. In the case of the *Hamlet* texts this rewriting occurs at the initial level of translation and in the revision of the play text in the context of early modern London that resulted in (at least) three *Hamlet* texts.

**French Connections: Character and Plot**

As Hansen observes, Shakespeare “found in Belleforest’s revenge story many features that were currently fashionable on the English tragic stage”, and utilised them when he transposed the French text into the English play. In his comparison, Hansen identifies “two major excisions of material” from Belleforest. He describes the first as “the hero’s plan of revenge, together with virtually all the features that are connected with it in the narrative source”. The second is “Amleth’s adventure in England”, though he recognises that

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92 Ibid., 145.
94 Ibid., 72.
95 Ibid.
“Hamlet is indeed sent there, but is captured en route...[and returns] to Denmark.”\textsuperscript{96} Jolly also makes the observation that “several details have been taken from the French source, adapted, and then transposed to a different context in the quartos.”\textsuperscript{97} There are many noteworthy similarities between and translations of the texts’ narratives, as well as their respective words and phrases.

The main events of Belleforest’s narrative shared by Shakespeare’s text begin with Horwendille (Old Hamlet) as an established (recently deceased) good ruler of Jutland (all Denmark, based in Elsinore). Horwendille is killed by his brother Fengon (the King/Claudius) out of jealousy (this occurs prior to the beginning of the play for reasons which are initially unknown and done in secret). Fengon takes the crown and marries Geruthe (Gertred/Gertrad/Gertrude), whose son Amleth (Hamlet) feigns madness while simultaneously plotting revenge on Fengon. The king suspects that Amleth is not truly mad and conspires to test him. Some of Fengon’s men (Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Corambis/Polonius) ask Amleth questions and he answers with riddles that imply his opinions both about the world and the king. The king also tries to tempt Amleth with (discern his love for) a young woman (Ofelia/Ophelia), believing that if he is mad he will sleep with her (Polonius believes that Hamlet is “mad for [her] love”, II.i.83). One of the king’s men (Polonius) suggests that Amleth trusts his mother, and that spying on their private conversation may reveal Amleth’s true intentions. The king agrees that the man should spy on the prince and queen, and so he pretends to leave court for political reasons, and the spy hides in Geruthe’s chambers beneath a quilt and some straw (behind an arras). Amleth suspects a trap. When he reaches his mother’s room, he stabs through the quilt and straw, hoping to catch the spy (Hamlet hopes to find and kill Claudius). Geruthe is horrified by this, but Amleth turns on her, angered by her adulterous behaviour towards her first husband. He

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Jolly, “Hamlet and the French Connection,” 89.
petitions her not to keep sharing a bed with Fengon, and his words towards her become gentler by the end of their conversation. Amleth disposes of the advisor’s body (Hamlet at first hides and then reveals where Polonius’ body is). Fengon recognises that Amleth will prove dangerous to him, and arranges that he be sent to England with two guards and a letter that asks the English king to kill the prince. Amleth discovers the contents of the message and alters it so that his two companions are to be executed instead. Amleth returns to Denmark from England to seek vengeance (Hamlet escapes en route to England when pirates attack).

At this point in the narrative the events begin to vary much more widely between the two texts, but the final event that occurs across both versions is that the prince stabs the unarmed king and thus avenges his father’s death. Amleth’s vengeance is entirely self-orchestrated, while Hamlet’s eventual revenge on his father’s death comes from a reliance on providence.

Belleforest’s text extends significantly before and after the events that Shakespeare’s text covers. However, there are also other differences within the overlapping events of the narrative. Amleth’s revenge for his father begins very early in his life with his pretence at being dull-witted, and the stakes that he makes sitting before a fire in the kitchens. When Fengon’s men test Amleth, first with questions and then with the young woman, the prince is warned of their deception by an unnamed figure and friend. This is done with a piece of straw tied to a gadfly, which draws the hero’s attention. Amleth also asks that the young woman insist they did not sleep together when questioned. The tests by the king and his men are therefore entirely unsuccessful as Amleth is aware of their schemes. Conversely, the series of tests that Hamlet undergoes are less episodic within the play text, dispersed with his soliloquies and the secondary narratives surrounding Fortinbras, the Polonius family, and Denmark more generally. Also, while the tests in Belleforest’s text seem focused only on proving the prince’s sanity, Claudius’ attempts to uncover Hamlet’s intentions are driven by his desire to test if Hamlet’s madness is an act, and to try to find the reasons he might be
feigning madness. Prior to his being sent to England, Amleth asks his mother to announce his death and hold a funeral in one year’s time, with tapestries hanging from the walls at the celebration. Amleth’s return to Denmark is preceded by his sojourn in England for a year. The English king carries out the execution of Amleth’s two companions, but Amleth feigns dissent and so is compensated with gold, which he melts and puts inside two rods. When Amleth returns to the Danish court, it is amidst his own the funeral banquet. He serves wine to the gathered courtiers until most of them have passed out from drinking, then goes to the kitchens to retrieve the stakes he made. Returning to the drunken courtiers, he traps them beneath the funeral tapestries he pulls from the walls, and snags their clothing to them and the floors so they cannot move. Amleth sets the hall alight and escapes. He seeks out Fengon and kills him, having switched the king’s sword on the wall of his chamber with Amleth’s own, which had been nailed into its scabbard. The tale continues further, detailing Amleth’s defense of his actions and then his further adventures and eventual demise.

The final scene in Hamlet takes several of these main ideas and translates them to a new context. Claudius and his court drink wine as Hamlet and Laertes fence, and more (poisoned) wine is offered to Hamlet, which is later the cause of Gertrude’s death. Hamlet and Laertes switch swords during their battle, and this is not only both of their downfalls but also eventually the fate for Claudius. Furthermore, the pretence of an innocent fencing match as an excuse for Laertes to kill Hamlet is the opposite of the constructed situation of Amleth’s premeditated plan: the sharpened spikes, wall hangings, and funeral celebrations in order to kill Fengon. It is also possible that the funerary tapestries (”les tapisseries”) are translated out of this scene and into the closet scene, when Polonius hides behind the arras.98 Interestingly, both princes also endeavour to explain that “something other than a mad

regicide” has taken place, as Amleth speaks at length with gathered subjects after the fire, and
Hamlet casts his dying vote and implores Horatio to “tell [his] story” (V.ii.328).\(^99\)

The altered narrative patterns of the *Hamlet* texts reflect Shakespeare’s translation and
transposition of Belleforest’s tale.\(^{100}\) Shakespeare’s version shifts from (French) moral advice
to (English) tragic theatre. He not only translates from French to English language but also
translates many of the events from the tale into new forms for his play; to borrow Roman
Jakobson’s terms, Shakespeare undertakes intersemiotic as well as interlingual translation of
the French tale.\(^{101}\) Laurie Johnson notes the briefness of the letter trick that Hamlet plays and
the entire sequence with the pirates (as in each *Hamlet* text), in comparison with Belleforest’s
extended letter trick. He suggests that the pacing and contents of Q1 indicate the prince’s
control over his situation for a large portion of the play, as is also the case in Belleforest’s
tale:

> It is not until…Ophelia’s funeral, that Hamlet loses the control that he seemed
to enjoy elsewhere in the text…[here] is where the text of Q1 demarcates its
distinctiveness from Belleforest…Q1 allows the upshot of such familial
particulars [the creation of the Polonius family unit] only to be revealed in the
last 160 lines, during which the misrule that Hamlet has set in motion comes
back to envelop him absolutely.\(^{102}\)

In making use of the pirates in the *Hamlet* plots, Shakespeare translates elements of Amleth’s
character (speaking in “mad” riddles and sidestepping traps from other courtiers) and broader
narrative elements (such as Horvendille and Fengon seeking honour through piracy), thereby
combining them in a new off-stage contribution to the lucis of his tragedy.\(^{103}\) Hamlet’s
semblance of control in the later parts of the narrative wavers in response to the machinations

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\(^{99}\) Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet*, 76; 76-77; 77.


\(^{103}\) Early in the Amleth tale, Belleforest writes that the greatest honour for men like Horvendille and Fengon
was raiding and pirating on the seas (“le plus grand honneur que pourvoient acquérir les hommes de sorte en ce
Tragiques*, 260.
of Claudius’ control. In the introductory section to the narrative Belleforest also tells of the importance of combat in this pursuit of honour, which Shakespeare not only weaves into Old Hamlet’s characterisation as one who “smote the sledged Polacks on the ice” but also transposes to the end of the narrative in Hamlet and Leartes’ fencing match (Q1 i.52; I.i.63). Including both the general prevalence of combat and Amleth’s trickery with Fengen’s sword so that he cannot participate in their final conflict, Shakespeare has Hamlet and Laertes fight with trick swords in a duel that claims several lives. Shakespeare therefore repurposes what Belleforest creates as an introductory backdrop for the Amleth narrative.

Indeed, the Hamlet texts’ narrative begins “in media res”. Hansen argues that “the primacy of action is a general characteristic of oral narrative and therefore also of literary treatments that reproduce the oral story”. However, Shakespeare’s alterations retain a mode of instability and doubt throughout all three versions of the play text that stems from the dramatic form itself and the resulting mystery of each character. As one foil to Hamlet’s character, Ophelia enacts the melancholic self-slaughter that he cannot. Although their interactions from the nunnery scene onwards show Hamlet to be derisive towards her and to love more generally, and his language tends constantly towards Ophelia’s sexual status, whether high or low (from “are you honest?” to “lady, shall I lie in your lap?”), Ophelia is firmly grounded in the social politics of the court at Elsinore throughout the play (III.i.103, III.ii.99). Once again, a sense of uncertainty pervades this alteration to the

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104 An exception to this could be in Hamlet’s switching of letters on the ship sent to England, and the dramatic convenience of him having his father’s signet ring. For more on letters in Hamlet and Shakespeare’s work broadly, see: Alan Stewart, “Rewriting Hamlet,” in Shakespeare’s Letters. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Stewart argues that Shakespeare “brings his story into a recognisably sixteenth-century milieu” by having Hamlet specifically rewrite, rather than merely alter, the letter to the English king (261, 279). See Chapter 6 for a new way to consider Hamlet’s writing as part of his rhetorical agency in the play.

105 Maxwell suggests that Olaus and Johannes Magnus’ histories from the mid-1500s provide an alternative source for Old Hamlet’s smiting on the ice. See Maxwell, “Counter-Reformation Versions of Saxo: A New Source for ‘Hamlet’?” 537-544.

106 Hansen, Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet, 69.

107 Ibid., 73.

108 Ibid., 69.
narrative, as she wavers between the roles of courtier, sister, daughter, and lover while political machinations determine much of how her story ends. Although she is much expanded upon from the young woman of Fengon’s plot, she is most likely an amalgamation of two of the women in the Amleth myth: the unnamed young woman is known to Amleth from his childhood, and the English princess is mild and deferent to her father. Ophelia combines these traits by being Hamlet’s lover, attempting to be Polonius’ obedient daughter, and ending up mad from love.\textsuperscript{109} She is thus translated and transformed from these three women from the Amleth myth.

Laertes and Fortinbras, two of the other foils to Hamlet’s character, do not exist in any form in Belleforest’s narrative, “[illustrating] the reversal of the relative importance and interest of action and character” that Shakespeare undertakes.\textsuperscript{110} Both Laertes and Fortinbras lose fathers and seek revenge, more closely aligned with Amleth’s course of action than Hamlet. As Fortinbras seeks to regain land his father ceded, and Laertes seeks answers for the death of his sister and father, Hamlet asks himself why he “[unpacks] his heart with words” and yet is a “coward” who “can say nothing” (II.i.538; 523; 521). William Lawrence notes how Fortinbras’ role in the \textit{Hamlet} narrative does not have a pre-existing counterpart:

\begin{quote}
He plays no part in the pages of Saxo Grammaticus or Belleforest. He is apparently a distinctively English and distinctively dramatic addition to the story. He serves an important purpose: a distinguished person is needed to succeed to the Danish throne, to close the action with a formal speech, and, as a matter of stage necessity, to see that Hamlet is born honourably to his bier, and the dead bodies carried off. The final catastrophe and the events following it in the old story were quite unsuited to the theatre.\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}

His argument suggests that Shakespeare is still undertaking translation in creating Fortinbras. The Norwegian prince represents contextual concerns with royal succession while simultaneously providing theatrical closure to the text. The same applies to Laertes’

\textsuperscript{109} The Scottish queen whom Amleth marries in Belleforest’s tale is known for killing potential suitors. She is represented partially by Ophelia (she rejects being courted) and partially by Gertrude (who is, can be, or perhaps once was a formidable queen).

\textsuperscript{110} Hansen, \textit{Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet}, 73.

\textsuperscript{111} William Lawrence, “Hamlet and Fortinbras,” \textit{PMLA} 61.3 (1946): 673.
Importantly, the effectiveness of both characters as foils is exacerbated by a major change that Shakespeare has made from both Saxo and Belleforest, “the killing [of Old Hamlet] is done in secret, and the killer does not acknowledge his act, or rather he acknowledges it only in his private prayers”. The Ghost is the means by which Hamlet knows his duty of vengeance, while in the Belleforest tale Horwendille’s death is publicly known to have been carried out by Fengon. Hansen suggests that this “complicates the story” and that “most of the other major new complications in the main plot are logically connected to and to some extent follow from the secrecy of the initial murder”. These include Hamlet’s antic disposition and Claudius’ initial confusion about Hamlet’s alleged madness. The king has no reason to suspect Hamlet’s knowledge of the act, provided in Shakespeare’s text by the Ghost. Claudius’ uncertain tests, aided by Polonius, are concerned with how to understand Hamlet’s madness. They only become attempts to prove that he is feigning, or planning vengeance, as the narrative progresses. Moreover, “Shakespeare complicates this feature [of feigned madness] further by making ambiguous the extent of Hamlet’s mental stability”, while in Belleforest’s tale Fengon suspects Amleth from the outset because the knowledge of Horwendille’s death is widespread. The Ghost itself adds to this uncertainty as, although multiple characters see Old Hamlet in the opening scenes, he is visible only to Hamlet when he reappears in Gertrude’s closet. The Mousetrap play “simultaneously confirms the suspicions” of both Hamlet and Claudius, in that the latter “is convinced that Hamlet may try to kill him, and Hamlet is convinced that Claudius killed his father”. This addition provides yet another layer of uncertainty to Hamlet’s task as Hamlet reaches the

112 Hansen, Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet, 76, my italics.
113 Ibid., 76.
114 Ibid., 76-77.
115 Ibid., 77.
116 Ibid.
conclusion of its fourth Act. It is only once Hamlet relinquishes his attempts to control the means by which he can commit revenge that he becomes successful, albeit at the price of his own life. While “all Hamlets delay” in the variations on the narrative, “in Saxo and Belleforest…the obstacles to the hero’s revenge are completely external in nature”. As such, Shakespeare creates a text that relies on uncertainty and instability in order to proceed through its own narrative. From the play’s ambiguous first line, “who’s there?”, the fluidity and flux between characters and audience culminates in the final scene towards which the revenge tragedy has been building (I.i.1).

**A fool by any other name**

The single-letter difference between the princes’ names in Belleforest and Shakespeare’s various texts indicates the translation of the tale between languages as well as from Danish folk tale to the London stage. The French pronunciation of “Amleth” [æmlət] creates the illusion that the name is already French, even though it has been translated from Danish and Latin. Hansen transcribes the Danish “Amleth”, but notes that “Amloði” and other variations on the name survive in Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish. As Hansen and Israel Gollancz have argued, this group of names can be traced to a long oral tradition of fool as hero. Features of Shakespeare’s narrative that are purely additions, rather than translations of existing material, are largely comical. These additions draw attention to the status of the *Hamlet* text as a play text rather than a moralising narrative like Belleforest’s. They also contribute to Hamlet’s status as a fool in the play, as Shakespeare linguistically

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117 Ibid., 75.
transforms Belleforest’s extensive use of “le fol” to describe Amleth’s act of insanity into Hamlet as fool.\textsuperscript{121} Each of these elements emphasises Shakespeare’s role as a translator in his use of genre as well as in plot and character. The false friendship between these respectively French and English terms evokes the archetype typically allocated to the Amleth or Amlodi character, who is a hero acting as fool.

Shakespeare then marries this tradition with a dramatic tradition of fooling on the early modern stage. Belleforest’s Amleth has a ready wit, as evident when Fengon’s men question him, and Hamlet’s language is also strewn with wordplay. However, he also performs in the costume of the fool. When Ophelia describes Hamlet’s antic entrance into her closet, her words reflect both the staged tradition of the fool and Belleforest’s iterations of Amleth’s dishevelled appearance:

\begin{quote}
…with his doublet all unbraced,  
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,  
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,  
Pale as his shirt…
\end{quote}

(II.ii.76-79)

Elizabethan actor Richard Tarlton was described in an extremely similar manner when presenting as a fool: he “came like a rogue in a foule shirt without a band, and in a blew coat with one sleeve, his stockings out at the heeles, and his head full of straw and feathers”.\textsuperscript{122} Hamlet’s “putting on” of roles, whether the physical clothes of mourning or of the fool, or the more figurative guise of an antic disposition, emphasises the way that his fooling identity is tied up in clothing in the text. This is typical of the oral narrative and romance genres to which the Amleth myth belongs, and also to the play text, and so Shakespeare here has not transformed but instead transplanted a shared aspect of the Saxo and Belleforest’s text into his own work.

\textsuperscript{121} See Johnson’s \textit{The Tain of Hamlet} for an extended reflection of Hamlet as the fool.\textsuperscript{122} J. Isaacs in Arthur McGee, \textit{The Elizabethan Hamlet} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 87.
“Hamlet” is not, as Hansen emphasises, an anagram or a translation of “Amleth” into English from a Scandanavian language.123 “Hamlet” and “Hamnet” were common enough names in early modern England. One of Shakespeare’s children was his son Hamnet, who died at the age of eleven in 1596. Katherine Hamlet (or Hamlett) was a woman found drowned in the Avon River in 1580.124 However, Shakespeare’s decision to use this name for a Danish prince is indicative of the actively English decision he has made in translating not just the tale but also the prince’s name, even though according to Derrida, the very act of translating a name should be impossible. Through Shakespeare’s transformation of the Amleth myth, “we sense the impossibility of deciding” where the eponymous prince falls in either text.125 The choice not just to anglicise the name, but rewrite it as an existing English name, results in a name that is simultaneously impossible to translate and a successful translation, like Babel. The translation of the Amleth myth is thereby more than a transposition of the narrative from page to stage. Shakespeare undertakes translatio when naming his prince and his play “Hamlet”, not because he is transforming between languages – although this is true – but because he produces an impossible task in the form of this transposed name.126

Hamlet himself is the prime example of Shakespeare’s translation of both name and character in Hamlet, but another minor instance worth noting is the foolish figure of Corambis/Polonius. While his character remains roughly aligned with Fengon’s advisor in the Belleforest tale, Shakespeare’s versions of him are more theatrically conscious. Polonius’ insistence on reading Hamlet’s letter aloud in Q2/F texts is effective, but not because we hear Hamlet’s supposed words to Ophelia. Unlike in the Q1 text, we hear Polonius read lines that

123 Hansen, Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet, 6.
126 “Hamlet” is not the only instance of Shakespeare’s Englishing of names. As You Like It features the Forest of Arden, from Ardennes, and Jaques, from Jacques, to name only a few examples.
he himself interrupts in order to analyse the quality of the love letter, and hear his response to their implied relationship:

Polonius: I have a daughter – have while she is mine –
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this. Now gather, and surmise.
‘To the celestial, and my soul’s idol, the most beautified Ophelia,’ –
That’s an ill phrase, a vile phrase, ‘beautified’ is a vile phrase – but you shall hear. Thus:
‘In her excellent white bosom, these, et cetera.’
Gertrude: Came this from Hamlet to her?
Polonius: Good madam stay awhile, I will be faithful.
‘Doubt thou the stars are fire…’

(II.ii.106-115)

This continues when Polonius contrives to meet with Hamlet, too, as Hamlet’s words circle closer and closer to the truth, asking “have you a daughter?” (II.ii.180). Polonius’ response, “though this be madness, yet there is method in’t”, is equally indicative of both his unconscious understanding that Hamlet is not mad and his foolishness in not recognising Hamlet’s behaviour as an act (II.ii.200-201). His inability to recognise the theatricality of Elsinore is ultimately Polonius’ downfall when, in continuing his spying role, attempting to be “some more audience than a mother”, he “[o’erhears] / The speech”, is thought to be playing another part – that of Claudius, or at least some kind of foolish royal advisor – and killed (III.iii.31, 32-33). The very theatricality of this example ties together the remainder of my argument in this chapter. Shakespeare’s translations imply a chronology for and development of Hamlet as a character, and the playwright’s movement from cautionary tale to theatrical tragedy is equally essential to his development of a complex translation that lacks omniscience.

Perhaps Shakespeare’s most interesting revisionary translation is his intersemiotic translation of Amleth into several Hamlets. Considering some of Hamlet’s soliloquies line-by-line not only reveals the thoughts of an action-driven protagonist from Belleforest, but also the differences in these speeches across the three texts. Shakespeare’s translation process
is of character and form, not just language. As Hansen suggests, “the soliloquy [is] the
dramatic convention by which a character may…communicate…private thoughts to the
audience”, and the differences in these speeches indicate the ways Shakespeare has
undertaken intralingual translation in shifting both Amleth and Q1 Hamlet into the prince of
Q2 and F.\footnote{127} Hamlet is far less certain of his role as avenger throughout the Q2 and F plays
than in Q1, but is otherwise quite typical of the revenge tragedy genre common on the
Elizabethan stage.\footnote{128} Although Belleforest describes Amleth’s melancholy at his father’s
dead, Amleth delays Fengon’s death only through necessity of protecting his own life. By
contrast, the reasons for Hamlet’s delay range from these to his cowardice to his doubt and to
his conviction about the nature of revenge itself. Whatever contribution Hamlet makes
towards Claudius’ death as vengeance for Old Hamlet’s “unnatural murder”, it comes at the
cost of not only the death of an innocent Ophelia, but also of Polonius, Rosencrantz,
Guildenstern, Laertes, Gertrude, and himself (Q1 v.20; I.v.25). As such, a major alteration
from Belleforest to Shakespeare’s text is in the death of the prince. Notably, each of the
deaths in the play save Claudius’ occur as a result of some kind of misunderstanding, where
language or meaning becomes convoluted: Polonius is thought to be Claudius, Rosencrantz
and Guildenstern are deceived by the contents of a forged letter, and Laertes, Gertrude, and
Hamlet die as a result of poison secretly planted directly (the wine) or indirectly (the fencing
foil) by Claudius. Translation of language is still, therefore, central to Shakespeare’s
intersemiotic translation of Hamlet.

A simple way to track Hamlet’s transformation, melancholic and otherwise, is to note
the changes in the contents of the early soliloquies across the play texts. While Belleforest


\footnote{128} A typical point of comparison would of course be Hieronimo’s speeches in \textit{The Spanish Tragedy}. Thomas
mentions Amleth’s “melancholie”, we get very little access to the prince’s inner thoughts.\footnote{Belleforest, Le Cinquième Tome des Histoires Tragiques, 266.} Amleth’s act of madness (“il contrefaire le fol”) is always intentional and purposeful within the narrative: he “runs mad”, and is both “deceptive” and “wily”.\footnote{Ibid., 265; 267; 290. Belleforest’s phrases are respectively “il courroit comme un maniacle”, “la tromperie” and “le cauteleux Amleth”.} At no point is the proverbial listener of Belleforest’s version under the impression that the prince will not fulfil his responsibility as avenger. In Q1, the omissions that Shakespeare makes to the tale require him to “[reject] the bloodthirsty, proactive, avenging aspects” of what will become Hamlet’s character.\footnote{Jolly, The First Two Quartos of Hamlet, 185.} We watch less of Amleth’s actions in Hamlet, and instead hear the inner thoughts not initially revealed to us by Belleforest.

While each of Shakespeare’s Hamlets promises to put on an “antic disposition”, only the Hamlet of Q1 has a melancholy equal to Amleth’s, while the later Hamlets are significantly more world weary (I.v.172; Q1 v.140). In Q1, Hamlet’s first soliloquy is quite different to its equivalents in Q2 and F:

\begin{quote}
O that this too much grieved and sallied flesh
Would melt to nothing, or that the universal
Globe of heaven would turn all to a chaos!
O God, within two months, no not two – married
Mine uncle! O, let me not think of it,
My father’s brother; but no more like
My father than I to Hercules.
Within two months, ere yet the salt of most
Unrighteous tears had left their flushing
In her galled eyes, she married. O God, a beast
Devoid of reason would not have made
Such speed! Frailty, thy name is Woman.
Why, she would hang on him, as if increase
Of appetite had grown by what it looked on.
O wicked, wicked speed, to make such
Dexterity to incestuous sheets
Ere yet the shoes were old
With which she followed my dead father’s corpse
Like Niobe, all tears. Married! Well, it is not,
Nor it cannot come to good;
\end{quote}

\footnote{Jolly, The First Two Quartos of Hamlet, 185.}
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.
(Q1 ii.55-75)

The frustrated tone is clear throughout this speech, evoking in particular the grief and anger Hamlet feels at having to “hold [his] tongue” rather than act. The speech’s third line about chaos evokes the fiery and impassioned tone that seems to remain throughout this speech, and is appropriate for a translation of the Belleforest warrior prince, “with his hands tied”.\textsuperscript{132}

Indeed, the presence of a soliloquy at all is already a step away from Amleth’s character, who actually says very little throughout the Belleforest text. While that is appropriate to the oral form, this speech is more appropriate in the theatre. The Q2 soliloquy expands to include several more lines that contribute to Hamlet’s melancholy, and they address not only the situation causing him grief, but his broader outlook on the world:

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on’t, ah fie, ‘tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature,
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!

...  
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly – heaven and earth,
Must I remember [?]\textsuperscript{133}
(I.ii.129-137, 139-143)

The soliloquy’s focus shifts from frustration at the revenge that cannot yet be undertaken, as one might imagine Amleth saying, to a more apathetic tone. Of particular importance is the fact that neither Amleth nor Q1’s Hamlet consider self-slaughter directly as a solution to the situation. However, Q2 Hamlet’s description of the world as “weary, stale, flat and

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} I have quoted only lines that are significantly different to the Q1 text. In the remainder of this chapter I will not restate lines that are transposed from Q1 to Q2 and retain much of their meaning and word choice in each of the soliloquies.
unprofitable” indicates the melancholy that pervades his character and sets him apart from Amleth. When Hamlet acknowledges how he is prevented from self-slaughter, his tone is one of desperation; in his wish “that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon” against it the prince reveals his desire that the opposite were true instead. Rather than expressing anger or grief in animated ways, Hamlet’s grief and melancholia come through in this speech as absence instead. This absence is Amleth’s lack of action-driven personality as seen in Q1’s Hamlet. Rather than this being replaced by another trait, Shakespeare’s decision to leave out that characteristic allows for Hamlet in both Q2 and F to turn inward and berate himself for that very emptiness: he “[has] that within which passes show” but “like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of [his] cause” cannot do or say anything (I.ii.85; II.ii.520). The “unprofitable” nature of the world is exemplified in its flatness or emptiness, and so is another indication of the prevalent melancholy indicated by Hamlet’s empty inwardness. Q1’s “let me not think of it” is transposed into the other two texts as “let me not think on’t”, but the addition of “Must I remember?” emphasises that same idea. The desperation of the questioning modal “must I…?” reiterates Hamlet’s desire to be free of memory, and therefore understanding, of what he sees as an emptiness in his existence. While it is significantly longer than Q1’s speech, this translated soliloquy thereby elaborates on Hamlet’s melancholy and weariness through absences in his language and character.

Like the first soliloquy, the “host of heaven” soliloquy following the Ghost’s appearance retains a similar series of ideas across the Hamlet texts but expresses them differently in accordance with the emotional iteration of Hamlet present in each text. In Q1, the emphases are on Claudius’ villainy and on remembrance:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? 
And shall I couple hell? Remember thee?
Yes, thou poor Ghost.
From the tables of my memory, I’ll wipe away

134 See Chapters 3 and 5 for more on Hamlet’s inwardness.
All saws of books, all trivial fond conceits
That ever youth or else observance noted,
And thy remembrance all alone shall sit.
Yes, yes, by heaven, a damned pernicious villain:
Murderous, bawdy, smiling, damned villain!
My tables – meet it is I set it down
That one may smile and smile and be a villain.
At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.
So, uncle, there you are, there you are.
Now to the words: it is ‘Adieu, adieu. Remember me.’
So ‘tis enough. I have sworn.

(Q1 v.71-85)

The additions to this speech in Q2 and F expand on the aforementioned image of “tables” to become centred on the idea of memory as a book:

O fie! Hold, hold my heart,
And you my sinews grow not instant old
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?
Ay thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
...
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter: yes, by heaven!

O most pernicious woman!

(I.v.93-97, 103-105, my italics)

Here, Hamlet implores his body to act and “bear [him] stiffly up”, unlike his Q1 variant, who seems to rely solely on his anger towards the “murderous, bawdy, smiling, damned villain”.

The speech’s final line is also of interest, as the subject of the adjective “pernicious” shifts from Claudius to Gertrude. In re-translating this speech, Shakespeare draws more attention to Hamlet’s disgust at his mother and to the inward physicality of his fear. These changes enhance the effects of the theatrical form, further suggesting the chronological development of the Amleth myth being translated and re-translated.

The “To be or not to be” soliloquy is most renowned for its difference in Q1 to the other two texts, but contains much of the same contemplation as its more famous counterparts. Q1 Hamlet, like Amleth, carefully but rather impersonally contemplates his question about whether death is his best avenue. He asks the questions broadly, and in light of a neo-Stoic, Christian worldview in which conscience and “an everlasting judge” maintain
their power over his choices.\textsuperscript{135}

To be, or not to be – ay, there’s the point.
To die, to sleep – is that all? Ay, all.
No, to sleep, to dream – ay, marry, there it goes,
For in that dream of death, when we’re awaked
And borne before an everlasting judge
From whence no passenger ever returned –
The undiscovered country, at whose sight
The happy smile and the accursed damned.
But for this, the joyful hope of this,
Who’d bear the scorns and flattery of the world –
Scorned by the right rich, the rich cursed of the poor,
The widow being oppressed, the orphan wronged,
The taste of hunger, or a tyrant’s reign,
And thousand more calamities besides –
To grunt and sweat under this weary life
When that he may his full quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would this endure,
But for a hope of something after death,
Which puzzles the brain and doth confound the sense –
Which makes us rather bear those evils we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Ay, that – O, this conscience makes cowards of us all.
(Q1 vii.115-136)

This speech and its more familiar version overall retain a similar set of problems that the prince poses to himself: What if I were dead? How can I know what death is like? If that question could be answered, why would anyone suffer life? Conscience is a strong force that prevents him from facing that final question. Interestingly, the undiscovered country is a form of “joyful hope” rather than uncertainty. However in Q2/F, while this framework remains the same, the lines that are added alter the prince’s focus in his speech from the hypothetical to the personal:

\textsuperscript{135}See Chapter 4 for more on neo-Stoicism and Christianity.
Devoutly to be wished…

... For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There’s the respect
That makes calamity of so long life,
    ...the whips...of time,
Th’ oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
The pangs of despriized love, the law’s delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th’unworthy takes,
...
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sickled o’er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action…

(III.i.56-64, 66-74, 84-88, my italics)

This soliloquy is the key moment for each Hamlet to consider self-slaughter. However, while it seems that Shakespeare’s Q1 prince has embraced his more melancholic side, his words indicate not a true consideration of “self-slaughter”, as in the case of Q2/F, but a more level-headed rhetorical experiment on the problem he faces. By contrast, the Q2/F Hamlet becomes further entrenched in contemplation, and his speech nearly doubles in length compared to the Q1 speech. This Hamlet transfers the focus of the overall speech from a humanist consideration of the option of self-slaughter and instead into a personal one. His comment that death is “a consummation devoutly to be wished”, and the lines preceding it, both modify the topic of his speech. Unlike the first soliloquy, in which he wryly reflects on wanting to know about existence after death, his combination of religiously charged terms (“consummation” and “devoutly”) and emphasis on individual suffering exaggerates the inward, personal subjectivity of belief and of doubt. This emphasis in turn draws out the theatricality of this re-translation, as Shakespeare tests the limits of drama for translating inward character into outward speech and action.

Hamlet’s next three soliloquies expand on the character that Shakespeare translates for him in the first half of each play text. However, the seventh soliloquy, present in Q2 only,
is an interesting development that works within Jolly’s suggested chronology of “source > Q1 > Q2 sequence”. She argues for the development of the text in time, so the absence of the Q2 speech in F could only work in this understanding as a result of another edit, by Shakespeare or someone else (if F was written or at least printed from a version adopted after Q2). The seventh soliloquy boasts an un-Amleth-like uncertainty about his role as avenger, even at a late stage of the narrative: “I do not know / Why yet I live to say this thing’s to do” (IV.iv.43-44). To have a speech wavering on the brink of a decision but only resolve to decide on vengeance (not yet to enact it) is another form of translating Amleth’s character into Hamlet.137

The language of translation

Tracing aspects of Shakespeare’s translation implies that the printed chronology of the *Hamlet* texts is in the same order as the written chronology, albeit at a different scale. His structural alterations of Belleforest’s cautionary tale to a theatrical tragedy are essential to his development of a complex translation that lacks omniscience:

> There is now no third person, no omniscient observer, no objective voice…we move from an objective narrative world to a subjective dramatic world, a world of appearance…[and] in giving up the narrator, the audience loses its privileged certainty and joins the characters in a world of uncertainty and limited knowledge.138

Some of the examples I have discussed above indicate the possibility that Q1 is linguistically closer to Q2. Others suggest a broader series of French English connections between the source and the *Hamlet* texts. These observations are of equal value to me. Jolly suggests that “one reason for the lack of unanimity [about Q1 and Ur-*Hamlet*] among scholars is that, of the three principal theories, memorial reconstruction is really the only one to have been

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136 Jolly, *The First Two Quartos of Hamlet*, 190.
137 See Chapter 5 for further reflections on the six and seventh soliloquies in light of the texts’ chronology.
explored extensively”. My comparative work indicates the value of other avenues still worth considering.

It is not my project to discover the true chronology of each Hamlet text. However, I agree with Jolly’s argument that “the sequence and evidence that the three texts provide suggest that Shakespeare had access to the French source and Q1 when he redrafted”. Considering the order in which the texts were written further reveals the extent of Belleforest’s influence on each of the Hamlets. The close relationship between them is one firm reason to reconsider the Ur-Hamlet myth. Furthermore, if early references to a Hamlet on early modern stages refer to one or more of the versions by Shakespeare, before print, then another French source must also be considered. Because the existing critical work for Shakespearean sources has for the most part ignored Shakespeare’s French, or assumed that he encountered the Amleth myth in another form, this main source has been left to one side: Michel de Montaigne’s Essais. The French editions of Montaigne’s text form the basis of the rest of this thesis. By considering not only the possibility that the multiple Hamlet texts trace the development of Shakespeare’s translation, but also that non-English sources were integral to Hamlet, I begin the process of un-Englishing the play texts. By shifting the focus from Shakespeare’s English to Shakespeare’s language, Anglophone and otherwise, we glimpse him as a new and multilingual author.

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140 Ibid., 190.
2. Un-Englishing Shakespeare’s Montaigne

The version [of Montaigne’s essays translated] by Florio was long the sole ordinary medium, through which a conversance with the book was possible for anyone not an exceptionally advanced French scholar. But that it is a deplorably bad one there cannot be any doubt… His undertaking to-day is almost worthless. Different was the case, when it saw the light. It tended to promote the moral and political influence of Montaigne in England, and to enrich our literature with fresh ideas and suggestions. Its literal fidelity or otherwise could not stand in the way of that.  

Why read Montaigne’s work alongside *Hamlet*? When critics write a list of texts they presume that Shakespeare read, it is usually a bilingual list: English for his geographical location and Latin because of his grammar school education. He is then generally believed to have had a great interest in material beyond standard school reading lists. In the case of Michel de Montaigne’s *Les Essais*, critics have tended to compare John Florio’s 1603 translation with Shakespeare’s work and thereby make their claims about relationships between them. However, Shakespeare’s knowledge of French is highly possible, and it is reasonable to assume that he could read some French. The existing education system of early modern London primed students in the art of translation, in and out of Latin, and in the relationship between Latin and English. French, while not taught in most grammar schools, was widely spoken and widely printed: ergo, widely read. If scholarship is willing to consider Shakespeare as an involved and extensive reader, it must also willingly consider Shakespeare reading in French. Montaigne’s French text is frequently quite different from Florio’s translation, as noted in this chapter’s epigraph. Furthermore, Florio’s *Essays* was published in the same year that *Hamlet* Q1 was printed; in the case of all the *Hamlet* texts, one or more of which existed in at least 1600 and perhaps significantly earlier, Florio’s text is a dead end for source study. Because of this timeline, even prior to the discovery of Q1 (that is, when the

two known Hamlet texts were published in 1604 and 1623 respectively) Florio’s text cannot be a point of comparison, even though it appears to have strong similarities with the Hamlet texts.

Academic interest in the presence of Montaigne in Hamlet is still generally mediated through Florio’s text. However, the option that Shakespeare read Florio or another’s translation circulated in manuscript is not impossible. In 1600 William Cornwallis notes that “duers of [Montaigne’s] peeces I haue scene translated”.142 Reading the Hamlet texts closely suggests that even though they share sententiae with Montaigne’s text, the essayist’s ordering of those ideas is what allows for that relationship to thrive. Even Hamlet’s most famous soliloquy appears to have been influenced not by Montaigne’s ideas alone but their expression in his original French text. With reference to Montaigne’s short essay, “De l’Âge” (On Age), I argue that Shakespeare’s ability to parse the French text is made evident through an analysis of his French English. This chapter then forms the basis for the remainder of my comparative work with Montaigne’s text.

The OED gives definitions of “English” as a transitive verb, meaning “to translate (a book, passage, etc.) into English; to give the English equivalent for (a word or phrase)” or “to transform into plain English; to describe in plain terms”.143 This chapter explores possible answers to accessing Montaigne in French that lead to a chronology for the Hamlet texts in tandem with Chapter 1. Viewing Shakespeare as a translator allows for the Hamlet texts to be read as examples of Shakespeare Englishing Montaigne’s philosophy. To recognise this is to un-English Shakespeare, and think productively about his sources at the fluid edge of English.

143 See OED “English, v.” l.a. and 2.
Source Hunting for Shakespeare’s Montaigne

The critical history of comparing John Florio’s 1603 translation of Montaigne’s essays with Shakespeare’s works is extensive. It begins in 1779 with Edward Capell’s suggestion that Gonzalo’s Act II speech in The Tempest is unmistakably inspired by Montaigne’s “Des Cannibales”. Capell writes that “the person who shall compare this passage [Gonzalo’s speech] with the translations that were extant in Shakespeare’s time, will see reason to think he read it in French”. The passage from Florio’s translation appears to be the framework on which Shakespeare builds Gonzalo’s speech:

It is a nation…that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie; no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kindred, but common, no apparell but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corne, or mettle.

I’ the commonwealth I would by contraries Execute all things; for no kind of traffic Would I admit; no name of magistrate; Letters should not be known; riches, poverty, And use of service, none; contract, succession, Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil; No occupation; all men idle, all… (The Tempest II.i.146-153)

Capell is generally attributed with first noting this connection between Florio’s translation and Shakespeare, but closer examination reveals that his work only observes the potential for a connection “in French”, not via the English translation. It is Edmond Malone a few years later who comments that the observation is obviously correct, but that Capell “knew so little

145 Capell, Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare, 341.
146 Florio, “Of the Cannibals,” n.p. Montaigne’s original reads: “C’est une nation…en laquelle il n’y a aucune espèce de trafique; nulle connaissance de lettres; nulle science de nombres; nul nom de magistrat, n’y de supériorité politique; nul usage de service, de richesse ou de pauvreté; nuls contrats; nulles successions; nuls partages; nulles occupations qu’oisives; nul respect de parenté que commun; nuls vêtements; nulle agriculture; nul métal; nul usage de vin ou de blé”. Montaigne, “Des Cannibales,” 206.
of his author as to suppose that Shakespeare had the original French before him, though he 
has almost literally followed Florio’s translation”.\(^{147}\)

Literary critics generally attribute this idea of Florio’s influence on *The Tempest* to 
Capell rather than Malone, and agree that this parallel is valid.\(^{148}\) However, they tend towards 
only comparing Shakespeare with the English, rather than Montaigne’s French. Opinions 
range widely as to the other possibilities for Montaigne’s essays as a source for Shakespeare. 
The main objections in scholarship to the relationship between Montaigne and Shakespeare 
are that any relationship must be based on material that may well emerge from early modern 
commonplacing traditions or a shared earlier source, and that many of these parallels 
discussed are too vague.\(^{149}\) There are two main categories under which scholarship has 
tended to place the relationship between Shakespeare and Montaigne as likely to have 
occurred through Florio, or at least in English rather than French. The first is the group of 
contextual cues, such as Cornwallis’ comments on having read Montaigne in English, or that 
the Earl of Southampton was patron to both Shakespeare and Florio and thus indirectly 
orchestrated ways for the two to meet. The second is the question of Shakespeare’s 
knowledge of French and his access to Montaigne’s original text rather than, or perhaps as 
well as, Florio’s. Each of these perspectives contributes valuable information to my overall 
question of the relationship between Montaigne’s *Essais* and the *Hamlet* texts specifically.

(London: Samuel Johnson, 1803), 63-64; 63. Another early critic who undertakes a more thorough comparison, 
after dismissing Shakespeare’s indebtedness to the French text, is John M. Robertson. See *Montaigne and 

\(^{148}\) See: Stephen Greenblatt and Peter G. and Platt, *Shakespeare’s Montaigne: The Florio Translation of the 
Alice Harmon’s “How Great Was Shakespeare’s Debt to Montaigne?” *PMLA* 57.4 (1942): 988-1008; Harold 
Jenkins’ *Hamlet* (London: Methuen, 1982); T. Olivier’s “Shakespeare and Montaigne: A Tendency of 
Shakespeare*; George Coffin Taylor’s *Shakespeare’s Debt to Montaigne* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 
1925); and Alfred Horatio Upham’s *The French Influence In English Literature: From the Accession of 

\(^{149}\) See, among many, Harmon, “How Great Was Shakespeare’s Debt to Montaigne?”.
The historical progression of tracing Montaigne’s influence on Shakespeare begins with identifying parallel words and phrases, develops into commentary on their shared consideration of certain philosophies and, in the last decade or so with critic Hugh Grady, shifts slightly to consider the plays in conversation with other Renaissance philosophies. Harold Jenkins suggests “the obvious possibility that Shakespeare knew Montaigne in the French”, but ultimately holds to the Cornwallis theory to explain Montaigne’s possible influence on Hamlet.\textsuperscript{150} Indeed, the claim that Shakespeare read Florio’s text is not unfounded, as evident in Capell’s parallel from The Tempest. Aside from this textual evidence, the historical connections between Florio and Shakespeare are frequently raised as proof of the latter’s access to Montaigne in English. A. H. Upham mentions that the Earl of Southampton was patron to both Florio and Shakespeare, and that the two authors “[may] have been on familiar terms” and shared their work, supporting the possibility that Shakespeare read the translator’s drafts before 1603.\textsuperscript{151} Ronald Knowles mentions the likelihood of Shakespeare’s access to Florio’s manuscript prior to 1603.\textsuperscript{152} Stephen Greenblatt and Peter G. Platt note the fact that Shakespeare and Florio shared the Earl of Southampton as their patron during the 1590s as further evidence to assume that they moved in the same circles, and that Shakespeare may have had access to Florio’s drafts, or to his assistance in reading French.\textsuperscript{153} Robert Ellrodt acknowledges that the playwright could have read Montaigne in French as well as in translation, but writes that this clarification is “unnecessary”, as Cornwallis, “in his own essays written before 1600, praised a translation of Montaigne circulating in manuscript” to which Shakespeare was likely to have had access.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{150} Jenkins, “Introduction,” in Hamlet, 109.
\textsuperscript{151} Upham, The French Influence In English Literature, 281.
As already outlined in my first chapter, Shakespeare’s grammar school education would have been mediated by texts in Latin, through which pupils learnt rhetoric and translation. The latter skill prepared Shakespeare for his career of reading and adapting texts for the stage but also probably attuned his eye and ear to the relationships between Latin and English, and then other language pairs. Many multilingual texts were printed and circulated in and beyond London, and these provided other textual opportunities for Shakespeare to see, read, and understand French. Shakespeare was also lodging with a French Huguenot family, the Mountjoys, in 1604 if not earlier. The Huguenots were French Protestants, thousands of whom migrated from France between 1550 and 1700 due to Catholic persecution. In the 1612 Bellott v Mountjoy court case, a “Willm Shaks” was called upon as a witness, and his responses indicate that he knew the Mountjoys from at least 1602 onwards: “this deponent sayeth he knoweth the parties plaintiff and defendant and hath known them both as he now remembreth for the space of ten years or thereabouts”, wherein the plaintiff and defendant were Stephen Bellott and Christopher Mountjoy respectively. The transcript also refers to another deponent, Joan Johnson, who confirms Shakespeare’s involvement in the case at hand and that he rented a room at the Mountjoys’ home. Stephen Greenblatt is in good critical company when he suggests that this housing arrangement may explain parts of the more colloquial French in Henry V. When Katherine learns parts of the body in English, “the scene ends with a flurry of dirty puns that depends on a familiarity with French obscenities”, and suggests the possibility of Shakespeare even having a domestic fluency in the language. Shakespeare’s educational, financial, and even household situations seem to suggest his familiarity with translation and with the French language. Comparing this contextual backdrop with Shakespeare’s output suggests that the playwright had a degree of

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156 Ibid.
dexterity in French. The task of reading Montaigne’s original French as a possible source for
_Hamlet_ is therefore essential, even though other critics have so far mostly avoided it.

The practice of tracing parallels between Shakespeare and Montaigne’s works (via
Florio), while less popular today, is the main content of much scholarship going more than a
century back into critical literary history. Historically, that source study has been limited to
shared words and phrases. This is one, but not the only, aspect of the relationship between
Montaigne and Shakespeare’s work. Upham agrees that Gonzalo’s speech can be traced to
Florio’s translation but is wary of the volume of parallels often cited between Montaigne and
Shakespeare.\(^{158}\) Dismissing earlier critics’ suggestions that Shakespeare was “indebted to
Montaigne” for “the excellence of the dramas”, Upham takes it upon himself to “[sift] the
data fathered by these enthusiasts and [give] it a fair interpretation”\(^{159}\). Upham warns against
“commonplaces about death and Stoicism” prevalent in both writers’ works, and compiles a
list of parallels that feature “[resemblances] of phraseology” that he sees as noteworthy.\(^{160}\) He
discusses five particular parallels between “That to Philosophise is to Learn How to Die” and
Shakespeare’s works and that “the wavering, inconclusive operations of the Dane’s mind are
strikingly similar to the Pyrrhonistic speculations of the French essayist”.\(^{161}\) He concludes by
observing that the parallels indicate Shakespeare’s tendency for “adapting, consciously or
unconsciously, from a great storehouse [of material] like the _Essais_” via Florio’s
translation.\(^{162}\)

George Coffin Taylor summarises the early history of connections between
Shakespeare and Florio’s translation of Montaigne in literary criticism.\(^{163}\) He argues that
“Shakespeare was…profoundly and extensively influenced by [Florio’s] Montaigne…[in]

\(^{158}\) Upham, _The French Influence In English Literature_, 282.
\(^{159}\) Ibid., 281.
\(^{160}\) Ibid., 283.
\(^{161}\) Ibid., 283-285, 285.
\(^{162}\) Ibid., 286.
\(^{163}\) Taylor, _Shakespeare’s Debt to Montaigne_, 3-4.
vocabulary, phrases, short and long passages, and…in thought”. However, he also warns readers about the commonplace phrases and philosophers with which Florio, Montaigne and Shakespeare would all have been familiar, such as Plutarch and Seneca. He adds that both Shakespeare and Florio were “doubtless reading the same books, or talking with the same…people”. Taylor’s main contribution is seen in his list of parallel passages from Shakespearean plays from 1603 onwards that have corresponding “phraseology” to Florio’s translation. He argues that these passages “point clearly to the conclusion that in almost every instance Shakespeare, before arriving at his destination, had made a détour through the forest of Montaigne” and that they “justify the inference that [Shakespeare] had read the Florio practically from cover to cover”. Furthermore, he suggests that each one of Shakespeare’s plays written during or after 1603 includes material directly influenced by Florio’s Montaigne. Taylor also includes another list, “phrases in Montaigne used by Shakespeare only during 1603 and after”, because in observing the common phrases between the two authors, “their number is too great…to allow them to be brushed lightly aside”. He suggests that this list “[indicates] Shakespeare’s intimate acquaintance with the Florio”. Taylor also lists direct passages from Florio by number of references, with Hamlet and King Lear indicating the most examples: fifty-one and twenty-three respectively. Florio’s task of what Taylor calls “forcing” the essays into English is another reason for his influence upon Shakespeare, in that the playwright’s “sudden expansion in vocabulary” in 1603 appears to

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164 Ibid., 5.
165 Ibid., 5-6.
166 Ibid., 6.
167 Ibid., 9; 9-27. Taylor lists Hamlet among these, but I have been unable to discern why this is the case. It is generally accepted that the play was first performed in either 1600 or 1601, not 1603. Without an Ur-Hamlet, the play would have existed even earlier. See Chapter 1.
168 Taylor, Shakespeare’s Debt to Montaigne, 27.
169 Ibid.
170 Ibid. 49; 27.
171 Ibid., 28.
172 Ibid., 28-29. The gap between these two texts as first and second is telling, even if chronology disallows a relationship to Florio for any early versions of Hamlet. Taylor does not work from Q1.
correlate with Florio’s use of “words new and never spoken before in England”. While he acknowledges that Shakespeare’s use of language may not necessarily stem solely from Florio’s work, Taylor argues that “the sudden expansion of the vocabulary of one already seised and possessed of an enormous estate in words, with such a work as [Florio’s] Montaigne close at hand…has to be reckoned with”. Taylor proposes that in general, “the influence of Montaigne on Shakespeare was strongest during those years immediately following the publication of the Florio”. He also argues that Montaigne’s influence seems most consistent in Shakespeare’s “discursive, digressive portions of…speeches”. Taylor observes that “a change seems to have come over the spirit of Shakespeare’s plays” from 1603. Florio’s work is perhaps the reason for this connection.

Alice Harmon provides a brief summary of connections between essayist and playwright, too, beginning with Capell’s note and then arguing that “Shakespeare follows the wording of Florio so closely that his indebtedness is unmistakable”. She then continues her review of several key critics, but ultimately argues that most work intending to draw a connection between Montaigne and Shakespeare has “failed to take sufficient account of the wide currency in the Renaissance of ideas common to the two writers”. Harmon lists works available to Shakespeare in English translation that Montaigne was also likely to have read, perhaps in their original languages, along Stoic lines of thought from Seneca, Plutarch, Erasmus and Cicero. As such, she argues that these provide the majority of commonplace Renaissance ideas, particularly in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* often attributed to

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174 Ibid., 29; 30.
175 Ibid., 32. Taylor’s exceptions to this are in *The Tempest*, written much later, and *Othello*, which, though written close to 1603, displays little connection with Montaigne.
177 Ibid., 39.
179 Ibid., 989. Those mentioned directly are G. F. Stedefeld, Robertson, Taylor, Elizabeth Hooker, A Brandl, C. R. Baskervill, Pierre Villey, Suzanne Türck, John Dover Wilson, and Joseph E. Baker (Harmon 988-989).
Montaigne’s influence on Shakespeare via the Florio translation. Harmon thereby concludes that her examples prove that “aphoristic matter which Montaigne and Shakespeare have in common was easily accessible to Shakespeare in other sources”. She argues that “[building] up an elaborate theory of literary “influence” upon the evidence of parallel passages alone is unsound, unless coincidences in idea and wording are unmistakable, and…are not to be found in other accessible sources than the supposed “influencing” author”. 

Jenkins points out that “a temptation to dismiss [parallels] as insignificant is met with the fact that the words which specifically link Florio with Shakespeare are often absent from the French”. This particular example is actually evident in the parallel identified by Capell. In Montaigne’s French, the passage from “Des Cannibales” quoted earlier concludes with a further two sentences, the second of which reads, “combien trouverait il la république [republique] qu’il a imaginée, éloignée de cette perfection”. Florio translates this as “how dissonant would he find his imaginary common-wealth from this perfection?”. Capell does not comment on the word “commonwealth”, even though Shakespeare uses it, rather than Montaigne’s “republic”, in Gonzalo’s speech. The shared word choice between Florio and Shakespeare seems to validate a parallel between the translation and the playwright, not the original French, and thereby supports Jenkins’ own perspective. However, “commonwealth” was the more common word in English at the time, and so Shakespeare’s word choice is, in a

181 Harmon, “How Great Was Shakespeare’s Debt to Montaigne?”. 991-1007. A particularly interesting note that Harmon observes is that Lucretius and Seneca can be traced in Shakespeare’s work – in this particular example, in Measure for Measure – but does not mention whether Lucretius was readily available in Shakespeare’s time (Harmon 1000). Stuart Gillespie’s summary of Lucretius in Renaissance England reveals minimal influence and availability of the text in translation until a few years after Shakespeare’s death. While he may have read in the original language, the lack of translations implies lesser interest in the work overall, and thereby implies that Shakespeare’s access to Lucretian ideas could have been through Montaigne.
183 Ibid., 1008.
sense, a translation of the word “republic”. “Republic” may also have had political resonances that Shakespeare wished to sidestep, or that censors asked him to avoid.

However, the general objection to source hunting in Montaigne’s essays for Shakespearean phrases, associated with commonplace phrases and commonplacing practices, is more complex matching word with word. Ideas about “all lives…passing…to eternity”, or of man returning to dust or being a “piece of work”, each evoke Renaissance understandings about life and death that grow out of both scripture and philosophical texts (I.ii.72-73, 71; II.ii.286).¹⁸⁷ For example, Hamlet specifically often reiterates ideas that Montaigne in turn quotes from Lucretius, and Lucretius was not as widely read in English until later in the seventeenth century than when Shakespeare was reading. The elements of Lucretius found in Hamlet, and Shakespeare’s wider oeuvre, appear to result from the playwright’s encounters with the Essais. Philip Ford identifies Lucretius as “the second most frequently cited poet after Horace” in Montaigne’s essays.¹⁸⁸ He notes that Montaigne not only refers to Lucretius alongside other poets and philosophers, but engages closely with or against his arguments in order to support his own, particularly in “Apologie de Raimond Sebond”.¹⁸⁹ As well as in “Apologie”, Ford observes that in “Que Philosopher C’est Apprendre à Mourir”, the closing passages “are punctuated by quotations from Nature’s words on death…which seek to assure the reader that death is natural and desirable”, and that the conclusion to “De l’Expérience” also refers to Lucretius.¹⁹⁰ Stuart Gillespie traces the influence of Lucretius in the English Renaissance, arguing for his importance while acknowledging that the poet “had less impact on English writers than any other major Latin poet by 1650”.¹⁹¹ He also mentions John

¹⁸⁷ For example, see Genesis 3:19.
¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 237; 237-238.
Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s quotations of Lucretius in 1603. Shakespeare came across many of his philosophical ideas from Lucretius via Montaigne, and this is evident even after only a cursory glance at “De l’Âge”. In this essay, Montaigne discusses the commonness of death and then, in keeping with his Stoic convictions and Lucretius’ often-morbid perspectives, thereby suggests to his reader that we should be unsurprised by death in any of its guises. Hamlet’s “To be” soliloquy is only one of many instances in which he toys with Stoic ideas about death, which Montaigne addresses at several points in the Essais, including in “De l’Âge”.

Some recent comparative work turns away from strict parallels between Shakespeare and Montaigne’s work. Instead, it focuses more on the way both writers address self-consciousness and subjectivity, which were key to early modern philosophical interests. This is an essential for comparing the two writers’ works as it reveals the possibility of Shakespeare’s indebtedness not only of key phrases but of phrasing, philosophy, and sometimes even rhetorical style. Ellrodt seeks connections between Montaigne and Shakespeare with regards to their sense of “self-scrutiny”, particularly in Hamlet. He proposes that Shakespeare reading Montaigne could have “preceded the writing or rewriting of Hamlet…[and] account for the heightening and refinement of self-analysis in this tragedy”, while acknowledging that self-consciousness in Shakespeare’s play is not solely a result of the Essays. While access to Montaigne early in Shakespeare’s career is possible,
Ellrodt writes that he is less convinced of parallels in the early plays.\(^{196}\) He contends that many of the connections proposed between the authors are not true parallels:

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\text{…it is easy…to supply ‘descriptions of the beauty of the heavens quite like those just quoted from Montaigne’s Essays and from Hamlet’… a real analogue would be a passage expressing a mood in which ‘this brave o’erhanging firmament’ appears no other thing ‘than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours’…[and] such a mood does not appear in the loci communes cited.}^{197}
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Instead, Ellrodt observes that while Hamlet “seems to borrow his ideas from [Montaigne] and his words from Florio”, the prince “often reacts in another way”, and gives an example in his example is in the striking difference between the “To be or not to be” soliloquy and “Of phisiognomy”.\(^{198}\) Ellrodt closes by suggesting a difference between the authors. Because Shakespeare, “unlike the French essayist, was not self-centred”, he “could create self-conscious characters but not confine his attention to them”, and Ellrodt writes that this, regardless of Montaigne’s direct influence on Shakespeare, exemplifies the “heightening of self-awareness in which many minds were engaged by the end of the sixteenth century”.\(^{199}\)

T. Olivier summarises major criticism on the topic, as above, and concedes that Capell’s example is the “only indubitable echo of Montaigne”, through the lens of Florio’s translation.\(^{200}\) Olivier also agrees with Ellrodt’s convictions that “self-scrutiny” in the authors’ work is noteworthy, particularly in regards to Hamlet.\(^{201}\) Olivier gives the example of Hamlet’s consciousness, and how he “becomes less able to act the more conscious he becomes of the task”.\(^{202}\) However, Olivier also argues that “there is a likeness of thought and

\(^{196}\) Ibid., 39.
\(^{197}\) Hardin Craig in ibid., 40.
\(^{199}\) Ibid., 49; 49; 50.
\(^{200}\) Olivier, “Shakespeare and Montaigne,” 43.
\(^{201}\) Ibid., 45; 48.
\(^{202}\) Ibid., 49.
expression about the world and about [man]” that extends beyond the idea of self-analysis.203 Furthermore, Olivier proposes that Shakespeare does more than repeat Montaigne’s thoughts:

Shakespeare does not simply follow an apparent conservatism in Montaigne here, as one’s preconceptions about his distaste for civil disorder might suggest…[instead] we have a more thoroughgoing parallel with Hamlet which, at this point, presents a similar view as a result of similar reasoning.204

Olivier concludes that Hamlet “shows the same tendency of thought as we find in Montaigne’s essay”, but without simply repeating the convictions in the Essais.205 Oliver’s work forms an interim between criticism focused mostly on parallels and critical work that consider subjectivity and the philosophical closeness of Shakespeare and Montaigne in more general terms.

Knowles considers the importance of Renaissance subjectivity, arguing that “the question of subjectivity is a much debated issue”, particularly with regards to Hamlet.206 He analyses Hamlet’s rhetorical forms, particularly chain-syllogism – “a series of enthymemes, or abridges syllogisms, taking the last word of a sentence or clause to begin the next” – 207 frequently present in his soliloquies and long speeches. Knowles suggests that the image of dust, wherein Hamlet “[seeks] for [his] noble father”, “suggests the reversal of a commonplace of Renaissance humanism, that of homo erectus”.208 Hamlet’s speech simultaneously undertakes and mocks philosophical inquiry; in the “quintessence of dust” speech, he writes, “Hamlet knows that the philosophical impersonation will amuse his auditors while at he same time this guise actually reveals what he thinks to the audience of the play”.209 Knowles argues that apparent connections between Montaigne and Shakespeare could be due to shared source material in the work of Pierre Boaistuau, the translation of

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203 Ibid., 51.
204 Ibid., 56, my italics.
205 Ibid., 58.
207 Ibid., 1047.
208 Ibid., 1048.
209 Ibid., 1049. This Renaissance understanding of humankind’s uniqueness in walking upright grates against Hamlet’s frequent discussions of earth and “crawling” in the dust (III.i.125).
which was readily available in England in Shakespeare’s lifetime.\textsuperscript{210} He suggests that while Shakespeare appears to have been “strongly influenced” by Montaigne, both authors were perhaps “reacting to the same tradition – fifteen hundred years of [philosophical] debate epitomised in Boaistuaau”, which perhaps indicates a reason for Hamlet’s pessimism.\textsuperscript{211} However, he acknowledges that other influences of Montaigne on this play “remain an issue of debate”.\textsuperscript{212} With a brief nod to being aware of Renaissance commonplaces, Knowles turns to the “rediscovery of classical Pyrrhonism”, which Montaigne writes about in “An apology for Raymond Sebond”, though Shakespeare may have accessed these ideas through the \textit{Hypotyposes} (Sextus Empiricus).\textsuperscript{213} Working through portions where Montaigne’s work may have direct links with \textit{Hamlet} via the Florio translation in regards to Pyrrhonic thought, Knowles comments that “the irony of such Pyrrhonic echoes is that we can discern behind the modish posture the impossibility of Hamlet’s ever really being able fully to adopt the sceptic’s stance”.\textsuperscript{214}

Grady examines connections between Shakespeare and Montaigne alongside Machiavelli, whose work was catalytic for both authors’ “mediations on modern subjectivity”, and suggests that new historicism has focused too narrowly on the influence of Machiavelli over Montaigne in Shakespeare’s work.\textsuperscript{215} He proposes that while connections between Montaigne and Shakespeare are “probably less questionable than a Montaigne-

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid. Knowles notes Theodore Spencer’s \textit{Shakespeare and the Nature of Man} (1943) as the source for his idea here. Boaistuaau collated six stories into the \textit{Histoires Tragiques} that would later be updated by François de Belleforest with a further twelve tales, including that of Amleth, who would become Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

\textsuperscript{211} Knowles, “Hamlet and Counter-Humanism,” 1052; 1053.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 1053.

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 1054-1055; 1055. Thomas Nashe had access to the work in translation in the early 1590s, and Knowles suggests this may have been Shakespeare’s source, rather than Montaigne, for these ideas.

\textsuperscript{214} Knowles, “Hamlet and Counter-Humanism,” 1056-1057; 1056.

Machiavelli connection”, Machiavelli’s “method and subject matter” are similar to Shakespeare’s, too.\textsuperscript{216} Reiterating Montaigne’s self in the phrase “I cannot keep my subject still”, Grady suggests that this is “the most important [passage]” in Montaigne’s work.\textsuperscript{217} He writes that Montaigne “encapsulates a fluidity and flux…in the celebrated free-form, chaotic order of his essays” that exemplifies the fluid subject he is trying to represent, and therefore “defining the unfixed subjectivity that is…crucial” in the philosopher’s work.\textsuperscript{218} Grady also argues that “Montaigne’s approach to Machiavellian logic…[seems] similar to many of Shakespeare’s key themes”, and lists several previous critics’ work in summary of the “thematic debt to Montaigne by Shakespeare”.\textsuperscript{219} He proposes that both Montaigne and Shakespeare “[deliver] us into a world of permanent moral crisis”, and that this, along with fluid subjectivity, “is an index of the dilemma in which modernity finds itself entrapped”.\textsuperscript{220}

Rather than analysing parallels between the essays and the plays, these critics identify shared philosophies between the two writers. Given that Montaigne also adopted ideas from a variety of sources, often restating other philosophers’ work, these critics’ claims allow them to consider connections more generally, or through having shared sources of their own.\textsuperscript{221} However, literary criticism tends towards comparing Florio’s translation and Shakespeare when parallels are discussed, not Montaigne’s French. There are a few exceptions who do: Edward Capell, as discussed above, and William Carew Hazlitt, the latter of whom suggests that Shakespeare was “not necessarily indebted to the English version” of the essays.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{216} Grady, “Shakespeare’s Links to Machiavelli and Montaigne,” 125.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid. 131.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 132; 132-133, my italics.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{221} See Chapter 4 for a discussion of Shakespeare and Montaigne’s shared sources concerning religious philosophy.
\textsuperscript{222} Hazlitt, \textit{Shakespeare}, 271. He argues that Florio’s translation, though widely-read, was “deplorably bad”, and suggests that while Shakespeare may have read it, the playwright “probably had facilities for mastering salient passages and points…in the original language” (278; 276). As such, Hazlitt proposes that Shakespeare’s option to read the essays in either language allowed him a wider understanding of Montaigne’s ideas and led him to rework the essayist’s ideas into his plays to great effect (312).
Interestingly, Upham argues that Florio’s translation is required for these parallels by noting that the playwright’s “all men idle, all,” has obviously misinterpreted Florio’s ambiguous rendering, “no occupation but idle”, for the original “nulles occupations qu’oysifves”. Inadvertently he, too, seems to have identified an instance where Shakespeare’s knowledge of French may come to the fore.

This history of source study indicates elements of Shakespeare’s engagement with Montaigne’s wording (or indeed Florio’s) or Montaigne’s philosophy, but rarely both at once. However, reading the French source alongside the three *Hamlets* reveals more than a passing relationship between each text. That French connection exists in what might be thought of as the philosophical heart of the *Hamlet* texts: the “To be, or not to be” speech. Montaigne reflects on the edges of life and death in “De l’Ã­ge”. In Q2 and F, Hamlet likewise uses the metaphor of a “bourn”, or “edge”, to reflect on the limit of our knowledge about life and death (III.i.80). Specifically, the French term “borne” from the essay “De l’Ã­ge”, becomes a French English term in *Hamlet*.

**Borne/Bourn**

Etymological relationships between French and English are integral to understanding the translations being across “De l’Ã­ge” and *Hamlet*. Travis D. Williams observes that unlike the common English use of “borne”, meaning “carried” or “delivered”, the noun “borne” or “bourn”, meaning “border”, “edge” or “limit” appears in printed English only once before the 1604 *Hamlet*. A rather satisfying coincidence about this observation is that Capell’s work on connections with *The Tempest* also include the word “bourn”. Williams acknowledges that Shakespeare is likely to have read some, if not all of, the English translation of

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223 Upham, *The French Influence in English Literature*, 283. Literally, “no occupations which are idle”.
224 Williams, “The Bourn Identity,” 255.
Froissart’s *Chroniques*, but proposes a connection between the French in “De l’Âge” and Hamlet’s “country / From whose bourn no traveller returns” (III.i.79-80). Williams identifies the following excerpt from Montaigne’s “De l’Âge” to compare with “To be, or not to be”: “mourir...est bien la borne au delà de laquelle nous n’irons pas”, or “dying...is the edge or limit beyond which we will not go”. He argues that the presence of this term in *Hamlet*, which shares subject matter with Montaigne’s language, indicates the possibility that Shakespeare has read the essay in French prior to writing the soliloquy, and that “it is plausible to claim that “bourn” entered Shakespeare’s idiolect from the original French”.

Florio is traditionally credited as the means by which Shakespeare read Montaigne. The limitation of this is the chronology of the *Hamlet* texts and Florio’s translation, as both the First Quarto (Q1) and Florio’s book were published in 1603. However, Shakespeare’s English responds to Montaigne’s French terms about borders and edges.

This word “bourn” is a French English term, but the soliloquy and “De l’Âge” share further linguistic connections. The paragraph in which Montaigne uses “borne” ends with another key word:

“[Old age] is an exemption that [Nature] gives by special favour to one in the space of two or three centuries, relieving them of the trials and difficulties that she has given to others along that long path [cariere].”

If “carrière” is translated as “life” – as was a use for the word at the time – the Montaigne’s phrase is highly similar to another phrase in Hamlet’s soliloquy: “there’s the respect / That makes calamity of so long life” (III.i.79). In early modern French, “carrière” can mean “life”, “course”, or “path”, and is often used to describe a “cours de la vie” (a “course of life”, or “lifetime”). However, it is also possible that Shakespeare has read Montaigne’s “carrière” as if it is the same word in English, particularly because Montaigne’s French orthography lacks

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226 Montaigne in Williams, “The Bourn Identity,” 256.
227 Williams, “The Bourn Identity,” 257.
228 Montaigne, “De l’Âge,” 326. Original: “C’est une exemption qu’elle donne par faveur particulière à un seul en l’espace de deux ou trois siècles, le déchargeant des traverses et difficultés qu’elle a jeté entre deux en cette longue carrière [cariere]”.

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the grave. The OED defines “career” in use in Shakespeare’s era as meaning “racecourse”,
“course”, and “course of action”, as well as its current use as synonymous with “job”.\(^{229}\)
Hamlet’s “so long life” appears very close to Montaigne’s “cette longue carrière”. In Florio’s
1603 translation of this sentence he uses this equivalent English word, which further implies
this similarity, and therefore fluidity, between the languages: “this long *cariere* and
pilgrimage”\(^{230}\). Florio also uses the word when translating other essays, like “That to
Philosophise is to Learn How to Die”: “le but de notre carrière, c’est la mort” becomes “the
end of our cariere is death”\(^{231}\). Florio’s work reveals how readers familiar with English and
French interpreted Montaigne’s work and chose English terminology accordingly. The
connections exemplify the problems frequently found by source hunters, which is that a
definitive influence is difficult – or often impossible? – to locate. However, both “borne” and
“carrière” together suggest Shakespeare’s sustained interest in both the ideas and language
that Montaigne uses. The connection is not impossible if mediated by Florio, but the French
English linguistic connection makes a greater case for Shakespeare’s engagement with
Montaigne’s French instead. That connection becomes more complicated but nevertheless
noteworthy when reading the Q1 text.

The “To be, or not to be” soliloquy in Q1 is different from Q2/F in many ways,
including the meaning of “borne”. The earliest printed version of the soliloquy begins:

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To be, or not to be – ay, there’s the point.
To die, to sleep – is that all? Ay, all.
No, to sleep, to dream – ay, marry, there it goes,
For in that dream of death, when we’re awaked
And borne before an everlasting judge
From whence no passenger ever returned…
(Q1 vii.115-120)
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\(^{229}\) I have omitted definitions deemed irrelevant in the context of Montaigne’s ideas, such as references to horse
racing and hawking, as well as those dated after 1600.
\(^{230}\) Florio, “Of Age,” my italics.
\(^{231}\) Montaigne, “Que Philosopher,” 84; Florio, “That to Philosophise is to Learn How to Die”.
Q1 therefore uses the much more common English meaning for “borne”: “carried”. This quarto is often assumed to be one of two options: a memorial reconstruction, produced by one of the actors, or an earlier draft that Shakespeare reworked later. Marcus outlines these possibilities but also proposes a third alternative that other critics also support writing that Q1 may have been a performance version of the script, written for touring outside of London.232

If Q1 is the result of an actor trying to remember speeches from a chronologically earlier Q2 text, then perhaps they remembered that “borne” was used in the speech, but guessed its place within the speech in accordance with the word’s common use (“carried”) at the time. Memorial reconstruction would be a reasonable explanation if this were the case. However, it remains possible that Q1 is an earlier draft. With a less philosophical and more action-driven plot, Shakespeare has engaged on a surface level with some of Montaigne’s ideas, but to a less radical degree, and possibly for a different audience from outside London. As argued in Chapter 1, the Q1 text is also closer to the Belleforest narrative, and that narrative would suit this alternative audience.

However, if Q2 is Shakespeare’s later iteration of the play, it has been written after he has reread the essays, whether in French or English the second time around. Could Shakespeare have read the Essais, written Q1, then read Montaigne again, via Florio’s translation, and, finally, written Q2? The Q1/F versions of the “To be” soliloquy are more closely aligned to the philosophy of “De l’Âge”, suggesting an editing process of some kind. Shakespeare’s experiment with a new meaning for the word “borne”, from the French, is in these later texts. That process happens after Shakespeare considers it as synonymous with “limit”, perhaps because it is fluid between English and French, as well as because he is already complicating the philosophical drive of Q2/F. Returning to a source text to do so

232 Marcus, Unediting the Renaissance, 150-152. Theatre closures in the city were common at this time as a result of the plague, and this third option can exist concurrently with the idea of Q1 being Shakespeare’s earlier draft.
seems an obvious choice. If this is the process, the Q1 text is translated into a new and more controversial play text that would become Q2 and F.

Although “no edition can claim to provide the text which Shakespeare’s company put on stage”, there are several connections between Q1 and Q2/F which build on Williams’ and my own analysis so far. While Q1 does not include “so long life”, it has the phrase “this weary life”, which also aligns with the earlier, proximate “cette longue carrière”, as “weary” implies the same as “long(ue)”. The Hamlet of Q1 is also characterised as far less world-weary than his Q2/F counterparts, and this suggests Shakespeare’s development of his character after reconsidering Montaigne: the Q1 soliloquy presents a hypothetical argument on the benefits of living or dying, while the later versions are introspective and melancholic. Additionally, the OED defines “bourn” as “the limit or terminus of a race, journey, or course”. The dictionary editors quote the “To be” soliloquy from Q2 as their example of “bourn”, and its connection with courses and journeys also brings us back to “carrière” again. Another connection to consider between Q1 and Q2/F is that another definition for “borne” is “terminus”, which gives a sense similar to “point”: a place to stop or rest, or an end-point. This once again invokes the “ay, there’s the point” from the opening line of the Q1 soliloquy. Finally, the conclusion to Montaigne’s essay is also aligned with Shakespeare’s language somewhat in Q1 and to a greater extent in Q2 and F:

\[\text{Il me semble que, considérant la faiblesse de notre vie, et à combien d’écueils ordinaires et naturels elle est exposée, on n’en devrait pas faire si grande part à la naissance, à l’oisiveté, et à l’apprentissage.}^{235}\]

It seems to me, considering the weakness of our life, and the many ordinary and natural rocks or pitfalls to which we are exposed, that we should not make so much of birth, idleness or learning.\(^{236}\)

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234 I am not hunting for parallels but instead observing proximate phrases and ideas. Grammatically, Q2 and F have an indefinite article in “sweat under a weary life”, while Montaigne writes “cette” rather than “une” before carrière”. See Montaigne, “De l’Âge”, 326.

Shakespeare’s “thousand natural shocks” correlates directly with this passage, appearing in the Q2 and F versions of the speech, while Q1 has instead “thousand more calamities” (III.i.62; Q1 vii.128). The minor differences here nevertheless imply the same cumulative links between essay and soliloquy.

While Florio’s own translation is in this instance quite close to the French, any of his influence on Shakespeare’s work remains heightened because of the blurred edge that divides English and French. Whether Shakespeare read “De l’Âge” in French or English, the French that remains visible in Florio’s text is also present in the Hamlet texts.

Textual borders

The connections between Hamlet and its various French language sources complicate the playwright’s language as neither certain nor even inherently English. Instead, the plays are products of a fluid process of translation, adaptation, reading, and writing across French and English. In the case of Montaigne’s Essais, the Hamlet texts are almost equally placed between linguistic and philosophical indebtedness. Grady suggests that Montaigne’s “fluidity and flux” in his essays “defined the unfixed subjectivity” in his work.237 Perhaps Shakespeare’s Hamlet represents this same fluidity between his and Montaigne’s languages. But the connection extends beyond that fluidity. In his observations about translating the First Quarto into Italian, Alessandro Serpieri notes that “translating any play by Shakespeare necessarily implies editing it”.238 That editing process is already at work in the multiple, fluid Hamlet texts.

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236 Florio writes: “Methinks that considering the weakness of our life, and seeing the infinite number of ordinary rocks, and natural dangers it is subject unto, we should not so soon as we come into the world, allot so great a share thereof unto unprofitable wantonness in youth, ill-breading idleness, and slow-learning prentissage”. See: Florio, “Of Age”.
238 Serpieri, “The Translator as Editor,” 167.
I agree with Marcus when she suggests that “our sense of the deep ambiguity of [Hamlet] is closely connected with its lack of a clear text”. But, the Essais as a whole lend their own set of textual uncertainties to the Hamlet texts, too. Analysing “De l’Âge” on its own shows how Shakespeare pays close attention to text and its ideas. Likewise, the Belleforest text reveals a similar relationship to Hamlet. However, turning to Montaigne’s Essais as a collected work, and comparing its particular lines of thinking with Hamlet, suggests an extended engagement with the language and ideas of these two groups of texts. This is first made clear in a pair of Montaigne’s essays that share their language, philosophy, and chronological development with each of the Hamlet texts.

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239 Marcus, Unediting the Renaissance, 133.
Part II: Synchronisation
3. “Make assay”: death and repentance à la borde d’anglais

By the image of my cause, I see
The portraiture of his.
(V.ii.77-78)

Considering Montaigne as a source for Hamlet is an unfinished task in literary criticism. As outlined in Chapter 2, existing scholarship on Shakespeare’s French sources generally uses John Florio’s 1603 translation of Montaigne as a point of reference. The main problem with referring only to Florio is that Hamlet was performed, and therefore written, before Florio translated the Essais. In this chapter, I borrow Kent Cartwright’s descriptions of source study as “diachronic” (traditional chronology) and “synchronous” (simultaneous) and consider how Shakespeare’s knowledge of French allowed him access to Montaigne’s writing. 240 There is a synchronic relationship between Montaigne and Shakespeare, in that they are writing at the same time, but also an intricately diachronic relationship between these groups of texts. Hamlet emerges out of Montaigne’s philosophy. Synchronic relationships between Essais and plays consolidate the texts’ diachronic relationship through shared words and groups of ideas about grief, repentance, and regret. This allows for new comparative work on the relationship between early modern English and French. Here, I am less interested in how Shakespeare may have worked with a copy of Montaigne—in French or in English—in front of him, though this may have been the case, and forms parts of my analysis. Instead, connections can be traced both diachronically and synchronically, and their presence in each text’s multiple versions emphasises their blurry linguistic and philosophical edges. Following in the source-hunting tradition reveals shared phrases and ideas between Montaigne and

Shakespeare. However, Shakespeare interacts with the same ideas as Montaigne in more abstract ways, too. Florio’s translation then functions as another border, through which Shakespeare’s French English passes in later editions of his play. In the same way that the essays evoke “different Montaignes who are all Montaigne,” Shakespeare writes different Hamlets who are all Hamlet, and different *Hamlet*s that are all *Hamlet*.242

Both Montaigne and Shakespeare consider the same series of ideas about selfhood. While selfhood emerges in both authors’ work and many Renaissance sententiae, the three texts of *Hamlet* also respond to how Montaigne organises his ideas. Towards the end of the play, Hamlet’s concern with his own rashness is one example of the text’s relationship with Montaigne. In Q1, before being made to spar with Laertes, Hamlet tells Horatio that he regrets “forgetting himself” at Ofelia’s funeral. He assures Horatio that his response towards her brother was rash:

> Believe me, it grieves me much, Horatio,  
> That to Laertes I forgot myself  
> For by myself methinks I feel his grief  
> Though there’s a difference in each other’s wrong.  
> (Q1 xvii.1-4)

The grief he refers to is Laertes’ response to the loss of both Corambis and Ofelia. However, it also implies grievances or problems, so the sympathy that Hamlet seems to harbour for Laertes is muddied by the bitterness of this additional meaning. In F, the tenor of his response is similar, but he describes his and Laertes’ shared experience as a cause rather than as grief:

> I am very sorry, good Horatio,  
> That to Laertes I forgot myself,  
> For by the image of my cause, I see  
> The portraiture of his. I’ll count his favours.  
> But sure the bravery of his grief did put me  
> Into a towering passion.

241 My thanks to Aidan Norrie, co-editor of *On the Edge in Early Modern English Drama*, for his comments on Florio’s work as an edge that directed my initial rewriting process for this chapter. A different version of this chapter is to be included in that forthcoming collection.

This grief is only the more traditional response to loss. Even though he understands that “the image of [his] cause” has similarities with Laertes’ cause, Hamlet does not attempt a comparison of his response to Old Hamlet’s death (and Claudius’ responsibility) with Laertes’ response to losing Polonius and Ophelia (at Hamlet’s hands). Both versions include an ambivalent phrase: “forgot myself.” Hamlet is describing losing his temper, but the phrase that he uses for this mimics a discussion that Montaigne has about how knowing his “self” can be both easy and utterly impossible. This discussion comes in his essay, “Du Repentir” (On Repenting), where Montaigne rewrites himself and his essays, having already claimed that he is the subject of his book. Likewise, Shakespeare responds to Montaignian ideas as he rewrites Hamlet (the character) and Hamlet (the text).

Both “Du Repentir” and another essay, “Que Philosopher C’est Apprendre à Mourir” (That to Philosophise is to Learn How to Die), correspond to the Hamlet texts. In “Du Repentir”, Montaigne outlines the intention of his writing process, which is to portray a multiple self:

Others form man: I account for and represent him in a particularly bad form, which, if I had to shape again, I would make better than he really is…the features of my painting do not err, even though they change and diversify. The world is merely in perennial motion. Everything wavers without ceasing…constancy is nothing more than languid motion. I cannot maintain my purpose. It staggers and falters, with a natural drunkenness. I take it at this point, as it is, in the moment that I enjoy it. I do not paint being. I paint becoming…It is necessary to adapt my story to the time at hand. Sometimes I may change, not only by chance, but intentionally…If my mind could get a foothold, I would not be essaying myself, but rather resolving myself; instead, it is always an apprentice and on trial.

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Montaigne asserts that he does not portray “being”, but rather portrays “becoming”, because he “may change, not only by chance, but intentionally”. The language he uses in his discussion of these differences between being and becoming – “peindre”, evoking painting, portraiture, or representation – is the same as the language in the Folio where Hamlet compares portraiture to identity: “by the image of my cause, I see / The portraiture of his” (V.ii.77-78). Montaigne argues that “the features of [his] painting do not err, even though they change and diversify.” In the same way that the earth is in “perennial motion”, he calls constancy “nothing more than languid motion.” Clarifying this allows him to defend the inconsistency of his thoughts across the essays. “Branler,” or what Florio will translate as “swaying,” resonates at multiple frequencies in Montaigne’s argument. Montaigne asserts that there is something central to every person’s “self” that guides their decisions. However, “branler” also echoes with uncertainty in the same way that the word “wavering” might be used to describe someone’s indecision. “Wavering” evokes hesitation, wavering between the certainty of instinct or control and the uncertainty of those easily “swayed” by decisions in one way or another.

While Montaigne’s essays can function as individual chapters, they are consciously part of his broader project. A central statement in the excerpt from “Du Repentir” above is “je ne puis assurer mon objet”, which can be translated into English in several ways. When translating this essay myself, my instinct was to write this phrase as Donald M. Frame translates it: “I cannot keep my subject still”. Florio writes “I cannot settle my object” and

d’intention…Si mon âme pouvait prendre pied, je ne m’essaieraïs pas, je me résoudrais: elle est toujours en apprentissage et en épreuve”.

246 Ibid., 804.
247 Ibid., 804, 805.
M. A. Screech writes “I cannot stabilise my subject”. In my own translation I settled on “purpose” as my translation of “objet”, largely because the multiple implications of “subject” and “object” pose more questions than they solve and do not, in my view, evoke the overall intention of Montaigne’s work; his rhetorical project does not and cannot remain static. “Objet” can mean “subject”, “object”, or “purpose”, but these differences destabilise Montaigne’s apparent conviction about his own unpredictability. In English, the word’s possibilities are interchangeable. Logic in the French text dictates that he is talking about his subject – his “self” – but “object” is an interesting parallel idea to consider when reading and translating Montaigne simultaneously. If the word becomes the English “object”, then Montaigne’s words mean that he cannot keep his subject, the object of his study, still. His “self” is therefore simultaneously knowable and unknowable. Across the collection of essays Montaigne is struggling with both sides of this, even though this particular phrase logically dictates that he is describing his uncertain “objet”, which in turn is his “subject” or “self”. This obsession with the idea of a self recurs in Montaigne and Shakespeare’s works at the level of word choice and in the ideas they express.

The title of “Que Philosopher” reads as a phrase that could come from Hamlet’s own mouth. Jonathan Bate notes the correlation between Hamlet’s words and the essay in a review of Stephen Greenblatt and Peter G. Platt’s edition of Florio’s translations:

Imagine that Hamlet could have read Montaigne. He would have found a meditation on the pros and cons of suicide in an essay called “Of a custom of the Isle of Cea”, but he would most characteristically have turned to the essay in Montaigne’s first volume, strongly influenced by Cicero, called ‘That to Philosophise is to Learn How to Die’.

To philosophise is Hamlet’s way of learning to die, and this philosophical education develops across the three play texts. Close ties depend upon repentance and regret in “Du Repentir” also

figure in more complex ways in what I propose are the later Hamlet texts. Claudius’
characterisation reveals less of a “French connection” between his English language and
Montaigne’s work, but rather an apparently diachronic engagement and reengagement with
the essayist’s thoughts on responsibility and guilt. Both Claudius and Hamlet develop in
parallel with the Essais text as it is written and rewritten, rather than referring only to Florio’s
translation of the essays’ later editions. Just as Hamlet is a text that is always in progress,
with its multiple forms, so Montaigne’s conception of the self is also something that is
always being revised. Each of these versions exemplifies Montaigne and Shakespeare’s
processes of writing and rewriting. The relationships between Shakespeare and Montaigne’s
ideas are thus synchronic and diachronic. The entry point for discussing both texts is French
English, or the fluid edge between these two languages.

**Fear and Grief**

Near the beginning of “Que Philosopher”, Montaigne comments on the relationship
between acting and personhood. Florio translates: “what person a man undertakes to act, he
doeth ever therewithal personate his own”\(^{253}\). Montaigne’s interest in the overlapping edges of
living a life and playing a part extends throughout the essay. In Florio’s translation once
more, he continues:

\[
\text{…the distribution and variety of all the acts of my comedy is performed in one year. If you have observed the course of my four seasons, they contain the infancy, the youth, the virility, and the old age of the world. He hath played his part.}^{254}
\]

Peter G. Platt notes that “personate” in the previous quotation is being used in the sense of
acting: to “play” or to “personate [a] role”.\(^{255}\) He also gives his reason for providing


\(^{255}\) Platt, *Shakespeare’s Montaigne*, 357.
“comedy” in his edition, instead of the original word “commoditie”: “Florio has ‘commoditie’ but Montaigne has ‘comédie’, and the theatrical metaphor is clear”\textsuperscript{256}. Montaigne’s interest in theatricality is broad and these examples are two out of many.\textsuperscript{257} However, Florio’s translations do not draw attention to the shared verb “jouer”, meaning “to play”, in both of Montaigne’s phrases. The relationship between “jouer” and “comédie” and the English “play” as both verb and noun respectively exemplifies the edge at which Shakespeare translates from French into French English.\textsuperscript{258}

The tenor of Montaigne’s argumentation in “Que Philosopher” echoes through Hamlet in the parallels between phrasing and word choice via the essayist’s French. Both writers also contemplate fearing death. Montaigne begins the essay by referring to Cicero, solidifying the connections between philosophy and death that form the essay’s subject:

Cicero says that to philosophise is nothing other than lending oneself to death. This is specifically because study and contemplation in no way remove our mind from us…all the wisdom and discourse in the world results at this point of teaching us not to fear dying.\textsuperscript{259}

Those connections also point to Hamlet’s eventual dependence on providence by learning to die. Although Montaigne establishes that philosophy teaches us not to fear death, he is equally concerned with the fact that, by nature, we do fear death: “nature nous y force”.\textsuperscript{260} Paradoxically, going against nature is what allows us to keep reason in the face of fearing death. His essay’s focus is largely on not fearing death because it is both a necessary object or purpose and the “origin of another life”.\textsuperscript{261} Montaigne also asserts that death only arrives

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[256]{Platt, Shakespeare’s Montaigne, 359.}
\footnotetext[257]{For more on theatricality in Montaigne’s work and Florio’s engagement with that material, see William M. Hamlin, “Florio’s Theatrical Montaigne,” in Montaigne’s English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare’s Day (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 35-49.}
\footnotetext[258]{The connection between these words and the fact that “play” is both grammatical forms is doubled in Hamlet’s antic disposition; the relationship that Montaigne identifies between impersonation, acting and selfhood, emerges in the madness that still has “method in’t” (II.ii.200-201).}
\footnotetext[259]{Montaigne, “Que Philosopher,” 81.}
\footnotetext[260]{Ibid., 92.}
\footnotetext[261]{Ibid., 84; 93. Original: “la mort…est objet nécessaire de notre visée” and “la mort est origine d’une autre vie”.
}
\end{footnotes}
at the right time: “no one dies before their hour. What you leave of time is no longer yours any more than that which passed before your birth and...where your life finishes, that is [the end]”. While Montaigne focuses on death itself, these providence-based ideas inevitably imply mourning, although his examples separate an individual’s fear of death from fear of others’ death. He warns that avoiding thoughts about dying will result in being horrified and surprised by it: “when death arrives...what torment, cries, rage, and despair overwhelms them! Have you ever seen anything so diminished, so changed, so confused?” Montaigne suggests that we must counter this loss of reason. In fact, since “at any moment death does not seem to us to hold us by the collar”, Montaigne’s overall advice about a response to death is this: “if this enemy [death] were avoidable, I would counsel you to borrow the weapons of cowardice. But this it cannot be...[so] learn to stand firm and to fight it”. Because neither fearing nor avoiding death is an option, he urges his reader to counter fear and cowardice with courage by “learning” – as in “nous apprenons”, “we learn” or “we are learning” – to stand firm. Given that death has many ways to surprise us, he proposes that his reader “have nothing so often on the mind as death”. Each of these ideas is invoked in Hamlet, particularly in the way the prince’s introduction on stage is countered by his resolve towards death by the text’s conclusion: “the readiness is all” (V.ii.194-195).

Hamlet’s philosophising, in which he learns how to die, frames the play, bookending his development from grief to both action and death. The Q1 text responds to the “nul ne meurt” passage when the king assures Hamlet that “none lives on earth but he is born to die”
The idea of birth as preparation only for death is not revisited in the play text until Hamlet tells Horatio “if danger be now, why then it is not to come, there’s a predestinate providence in the fall of a sparrow” (Q1 xvii.45-46). There is no equivalent phrase to the “none lives” line in either the Q2 or F text. However, both echo Montaigne’s description of avoiding thoughts of death: “the vulgar remedy is not to think about it, but from brutal stupidity can come such a gross blindness”. The English “vulgar” is used in Claudius’ much longer speech at the same point in the plot as the “none lives” line when he describes Hamlet’s mourning as “a fault…to reason”, because death is “as common / As any the most vulgar thing to sense” (I.ii.101, 98-99). Montaigne’s focus on grief is different from Claudius and Hamlet’s concern in Act I, even though their resolutions are very similar. Claudius’ invocation of unreasonable grief as “a fault to heaven” implies Montaigne’s suggestion that “our religion has no greater assurance than the misery of human life” (I.ii.101). However, Montaigne’s next few sentences conclude, as noted earlier, that “nature forces us” to fear death. This shared tension between reason and nature arises in the relationship between Hamlet and his uncle across all three texts, but is exemplified by the extent to which Shakespeare draws Hamlet out from the edges of Montaigne’s French and into English. Hamlet’s characterisation becomes more complex as Shakespeare writes him more fully into English by complicating his response to Montaigne’s ideas.

The king’s assurances to Hamlet in Q2 and F share the same content, but become a reprimand instead. In Q1 the king tells Hamlet to “cease laments”, while in Q2 and F he is

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268 The phrasing here perhaps mimics the grammatical structures of the French “nul ne meurt” and “non plus votre naissance”, but this moves so closely to the obsessive parallelism of early source-hunting that I am reluctant to comment further than this. The philosophical idea itself is close enough.

269 Montaigne, “Que Philosophe,” 84. Original: “le remède du vulgaire c’est de n’y penser pas. Mais de quelle brutale stupidité lui peut venir un si grossier aveuglement?”.

270 Ibid., 91.

271 Ibid., 92.
told to “throw to earth” – that is, bury, like the dead – “this unprevailing woe” (Q1 ii.44; I.ii.106; 107). Claudius continues to admonish Hamlet’s expression of grief:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{...to persever} & \\
\text{In obstinate condolement is a course} & \\
\text{Of impious stubbornness, ’tis unmanly grief,} & \\
\text{It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,} & \\
\text{A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,} & \\
\text{An understanding simple and unschooled.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]
(I.ii.92-97)

His language simultaneously berates and supports Hamlet’s “mourning duties” and philosophical pursuits (I.ii.88). In both cases, the order to stop grieving is because it is improper. However, the fact that Hamlet’s return to Wittenberg “is most retrograde” to the king and queen’s desires is at odds with the king’s identification of grief as unreasoned (I.ii.114). In Q1, the king and queen deny Hamlet’s return to Wittenberg because they “hold it most unmeet and unconvenient” (Q1 ii.29). In the other two texts, Claudius calls Hamlet’s grief “unschooled” while simultaneously forbidding him to return “to school in Wittenberg” (I.ii.113). Regardless of Claudius’ encouragements against grief tied with “unschooled” language, and of his location in Elsinore, Hamlet of course continues to think about death throughout the text.\(^{272}\)

Hamlet spends the play thinking of death in order to learn how to die. His thoughts therefore mirror those outlined by Montaigne. Hamlet’s grief and antic disposition become unreason – whether actual madness or otherwise – and form the basis of his character. The sense throughout this essay of the closeness of death aligns with his general language about providence, such as when Montaigne writes that “knowing how to die frees us from all subjection and constraint”.\(^{273}\) This phrase then captures both Hamlet’s initial constraint of vengeance and his eventual freedom from this as a result of his having learnt how to die:

\(^{272}\) While he returns to it differently by the end of the play, the prince’s language frequently focuses in on ideas about death, even in comic scenes such as the conversation with Polonius about “kissing carrion” (II.ii.180; Q1 vii.207).

\(^{273}\) Montaigne, “Que Philosopher,” 87.
again, the readiness is all. Without this knowledge supporting this “readiness” of his
character’s philosophy, his shifting attitude towards death is, ironically, unreasonable.

**Repentance and Regret**

Montaigne builds on his argument from “Que Philosopher”, about the effects of
reason, when he comes to write “Du Repentir”. In this later essay, Montaigne asserts that
“vice, like an ulcer in the flesh, leaves repentance in the soul”, while reason counters
“sadness and sorrow”, and causes “grievous” repentance from within.\(^{274}\) He establishes that a
person’s inner and outer selves cannot correspond perfectly: “no one…knows if you are
cowardly and cruel, or loyal and devoted”.\(^{275}\) Rather than seeing someone’s inner self, others
“guess through uncertain conjectures” and so can see their “art”, or their outward self, rather
than their true nature.\(^{276}\) Montaigne makes use of a theatrical metaphor to contrast outwards
pretence with inward discipline.\(^{277}\) Florio takes his use of the phrase “au batelage” further in
his own translation, where he writes that “everyone may play the juggler and represent an
honest man upon the stage”.\(^{278}\) His translation captures some of the complexity of inward and
outward conflict from the original French, when he writes that “the master be such inwardly
by himself as he is outwardly, for fear of the laws and respect of men’s speeches”.\(^{279}\)
Montaigne therefore connects inwardness with uncertainty.

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l’àme, qui toujours s’ég ratigne et s’ensanglante elle-même”.

\(^{275}\) Ibid., 807.

\(^{276}\) Ibid.

\(^{277}\) Ibid., 808. Original: “Chacun peut avoir part au batelage et représenter un honnête personnage en l’échafaud;
mais au dedans et en sa poitrine, où tout nous est loisible, où tout est caché – d’y être réglé, c’est le point”. See
Chapter 5 for more on Montaigne’s interest in theatricality, performance, and selfhood in relation to the *Hamlet*
texts.


même, comme il est au dehors par la crainte de la loi et du dire des hommes”.

99
Montaigne also builds on the effects of outward dishonesty and inward uncertainty as he separates “impetuous” sins from premeditated and repeated ones. He writes that the latter must exist only if willed or intended by whoever possesses them, and that their claimed repentance is “a little hard for [him] to imagine.” Montaigne describes a man formerly a thief and now given to repaying his debts as an example:

…he regards larceny as a dishonourable action and hates it, but less than he hates poverty. He repents of it in itself, but because it was counterbalanced and compensated, he does not.

Montaigne’s perspective is that one cannot “be pardoned and retain the offence” (III.iii.56). In his eyes, repentance like this, or from premeditated or enjoyed sins is not true repentance:

My actions are ruled and conformed by who I am and my condition. I cannot do better. And repentance does not touch things that are not in our control; that, instead, is regret.

The language that he uses to describe regret and repentance is the same as the language that Shakespeare uses to differentiate Hamlet’s uncertain view of his uncle from the audience’s knowledge of the king’s guilt. In the shift from Q1 to Q2 and F, Claudius’ role expands in both its length and emotional range. His first lines presiding over the court and his much later prayer are two focal points that show this expansion most clearly. Claudius regrets but does not repent, and reveals no outward signs of either to other characters. His characterisation in Q2/F is, as with other characters, more complex than in Q1.

Both his deceit and his experience of guilt are extended in the language of the longer texts. Here, the diachronic relationship shows that Shakespeare’s approach to both regret and repentance is magnified in these changes. In Q1, the king’s first lines on stage concern diplomatic matters:

Lords, we here have writ to Fortenbrasse, Nephew to old Norway who, impudent

\[280\] Montaigne, “Du Repentir,” 812.
\[281\] Ibid.
\[282\] Ibid.
\[283\] Ibid., 813.
And bedrid, scarcely hears of this his
Nephew’s purpose.

(Q1 ii.1-4)

This speech establishes his political relationships—his outward self—but the scene does not
grant any access to his inward self or directly acknowledge his marriage to the previous
regent’s wife; inward and outward remain entirely separate. Later, the King tells Rossencraft
and Gilderstone about Hamlet’s madness, followed by a discussion with Corambis about
Ofelia and Hamlet interrupted briefly by Voltemar. Once more his speech is dominated by
diplomacy:

Right noble friends – that our dear cousin Hamlet
Hath lost the very heart of all his sense
It is most right, and we most sorry for him.
Therefore we do desire, even as you tender
Our care to him and our great love to you,
That you will labour but to wring from him
The cause and ground of his distemperance.

(Q1 vii.1-7)

The diplomatic tenor of this speech dominates once more, with appropriate deference to
“cousin” Hamlet and his “noble friends”, but without any betrayal of the King’s true
perspective on how Hamlet’s actions affect the court at large or raise the King’s suspicion.
However, the tonal shift in the king’s movement from affectionate language (“dear”,
“tender”, and “love”) to violent language (“labour” and “wring”) implies his more vicious,
inward self, and blurs the distinction between them. While an actor could either emphasise or
downplay the honesty or irony of their delivery, the lines themselves read as strangely
opaque. Shakespeare’s language responds to Montaigne’s description of a leader’s inward
state evoking this same kind of opacity:

The admiring people publicly escort him to his door: he drops his role as
he drops his robe, and the higher he has climbed, the lower he falls back
down. Inside, in his home, everything is tumultuous and vile. If humility
can be found at all, it takes keen and good judgement to perceive it
among his low and private actions.  

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284 Ibid., 809.
In the same way, the King’s externally smooth transition to replace his brother effaces not only Old Hamlet but also the King’s own inward self and any chance for his repentance.

In both Q2 and F, Shakespeare blurs both the lines between inwardness and outwardness. These two texts and Q1 respond to Montaigne’s work to a different extent. Claudius is more imposing and manipulative than the king of Q1. His lines afford an actor great flexibility in the extent to which the irony might be emphasised or kept subtle at this early stage of the narrative. While much of this scene maintains a polite veneer, Claudius’ first fourteen lines are no longer about international politics but about navigating Denmark’s political innards in spite of marrying his sister-in-law and supplanting Hamlet:

```plaintext
Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother’s death  
The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe,  
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature  
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
Therefore our sometimes sister, now our queen,  
Th’imperial jointress of this warlike state,  
Have we, as ‘twere with a defeated joy,  
With one auspicious and one dropping eye,  
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,  
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,  
Taken to wife 
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(I.ii.1-14)

A striking addition to the opening speech from its Q1 counterpart is the inclusion of the phrase “disjoint and out of frame” only a few lines later (I.ii.20). Claudius rejects this assumption about Denmark by Fortinbras as a result of Old Hamlet’s death, but “it [follows] hard upon” the cumulative list of opposites describing the reasons he has married Gertrude (I.i.179). Claudius’ extended acknowledgement of how he has replaced his brother, while

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285 This of course invokes Hamlet’s description of Claudius’ actions after meeting the Ghost. For Hamlet, his acknowledgement that “time is out of joint” draws attention to both his role as avenger and Claudius’ hand in upsetting the balance of the Danish court (I.v.189).
couched in politesse, is also undercut by the rhetorical effect of dismissing previous Norwegian and Danish conflict:

He [Fortinbras] hath not failed to pester us with message
Importing the surrender of those lands
Lost by his father, with all bands of law,
To our most valiant brother. So much for him.
(I.ii.22-25)

Here, “he” and “him” can be ambiguously attached to multiple subjects. This allows Claudius to dismiss Fortinbras and Old Hamlet simultaneously. While he still speaks in a courtly manner and has not revealed his hand in his brother’s murder, his multi-layered language is no longer as opaque as in Q1. It is important to note that Hamlet does not actively suspect his uncle of murder until told so by the Ghost; again, as Montaigne notes, “no one knows if you are cowardly or cruel”. However, more of Claudius’ language here implies the responsibility he will later admit. The secondary implications of Claudius’ words in Q2/F reveal more of what eventuates in unsuccessful prayer as his inward and regretful – rather than repentant – self. Shakespeare repurposes this inward fragmentation, from Montaigne’s discussion of fragmentation and inwardness, to Denmark’s disjointedness and Claudius’ dismissal of his brother, which in turn reveal the king’s splintered inward self in his Q2/F prayer.\(^\text{286}\) This opening speech engages not so much with the language that Montaigne uses, but rather with the same ideas as “Du Repentir”. The contents of Claudius’ early speeches become the “role” and “robe” that he drops when praying.

The prayer sequence in these texts exemplifies Claudius’ attempts to articulate himself in prayer while also responding to Montaigne’s project of essaying, or trying, to articulate himself. In Q1, the King’s prayer, revealing his guilt, is quite short, and is his only regretful moment thus far. He acknowledges his crimes as “the murder of a brother and a king” and his “adulterous fault”, and calls them “unpardonable” (Q1 x.5-7). Although he

\(^{286}\) See Chapters 5 and 6 for more on Montaignian fragmentation and textual uncertainty.
considers “contrition”, he also calls himself “wretched” and seems to accept his inability to pray even before he identifies it as such (Q1 x.9, 11). However, while his speech is more personal than his previous scenes, his inwardness is still not fully revealed. The King’s supposedly inmost thoughts are more rhetorical than repentant. He is less concerned with his salvation in a similar way to Q1’s Hamlet. In the “To be or not to be” speech of Q1, the prince is more concerned with the philosophical contemplation of his questions about suicide and the afterlife than his status before God. This concern about God’s judgement is extrapolated further in the Q2/F texts. Claudius’ prayer in Q2/F is a much longer and more detailed reflection on regret as compared to repentance. Furthermore, the difference between Q1 and the other two texts again aligns with the emotional tenor of his language and the shifting philosophical focus on repentance and regret. While the prayers share some similar lines, the Q2/F versions of the prayer change their tone:

Oh my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
   ...Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent.
   (III.iii.36, 38-40)

Claudius’ view of his transgressions is more personalised. Recognising that he lacks a repentant heart, he questions the legitimacy of his pursuit of forgiveness:

   ...what form of prayer
   Can serve my turn? ‘Forgive me my foul murder’?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder ...
   May one be pardoned and retain th’offense?
   (III.iii.51-54, 56)

Claudius’ rhetoric from Q1 becomes more of an internal debate in light of his status before God. His language includes many more expressions that evoke fever and decay to describe his poor moral health, as well as “the corrupted currents” of the world at large (III.iii.57). He refers directly to the same ideas about true repentance that Montaigne does:

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287 For an extended reflection on the differences in this speech between the Hamlet texts, see Chapter 2.
Shakespeare’s “assay” results in Claudius’ inward contemplation mirroring Montaigne’s own “essaying” (“essayer”, or “to try”) of his self.\textsuperscript{288} The Q2 text contains “assay” four times, while by comparison, each of Shakespeare’s plays include it either once or twice at most. Furthermore, Hamlet’s intrusion on this moment – “trip him…that his soul may be as damned and black / As hell…This physic but prolongs thy sickly days” (III.iii.93-96) – exemplifies the disjunction between Claudius’ inner and outer selfhood, as Hamlet chooses not to act upon the assumption that his uncle is “seasoned for his passage” (III.iii.86). The dramatic irony created by the audience’s insight into both the struggle to pray, and the result that the words only “fly up”, while “sins” and “words” remain below, emphasises the metatheatrical work here, too (Q1 x.32-33; III.iii.97-98). Claudius identifies the crux of his crisis of faith in the same vein as Montaigne, whose writing emphasises both his critical distance between the essays’ revisions and a difficulty with capturing his “objet”.

In the 1595 edition of “Du Repentir” Montaigne includes an extra sentence before his analysis of vice: “malice sucks up most of its own venom and so poisons itself”.\textsuperscript{289} That edition was published posthumously from his own heavily annotated copy of a 1588 edition. Montaigne’s emphasis on poison, alongside the image of a fever’s temperatures being stronger from within than from without, mirrors much of the diseased, feverish, and rotten terminology in the Q2 and F texts.\textsuperscript{290} This addition is late in Montaigne’s writing process, having only been published posthumously. Florio’s translation of the essay collection came from this 1595 edition. The relationship between these texts therefore suggests a chronology

\textsuperscript{288} See Chapter 6 for more on the Hamlet texts as essays.
\textsuperscript{289} Montaigne, “Du Repentir,” 806. That edition was published posthumously from his own heavily annotated copy of a 1588 edition.
\textsuperscript{290} Ibid. Original: “la raison efface les autres tristesses et douleurs, mais elle engendre celle de la repentance, qui est plus griève, d’autant qu’elle naît au dedans; comme le froid et le chaud des fièvres est plus poignant que celui qui vient du dehors”.

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of the *Hamlet* texts in correlation with Shakespeare’s access to both French and English texts. All three plays contain this group of words and ideas; they indicate Shakespeare’s facility with French and are instances of a diachronic relationship. Q1 contains less, particularly in Hamlet’s visceral descriptions of his uncle and mother and their relationship.291 By contrast, Q2 and F include more extensive examples of “an unweeded garden”, “contagion” and related words, as well as the changes in Claudius’ prayer (I.ii.135).292 The other mention of fever in the Q2/F texts is Claudius’ invocation to Hamlet’s executioners: “Do it England, / For like the hectic in my blood he rages, / And thou must cure me” (IV.iii.61-63). There is neither fever nor poison in the narrative source of the Amleth myth.293 The lateness of the additions in Montaigne and Shakespeare’s work, in conjunction with the appearance of Florio’s translation of the *later* edition of essays, implies the potential chronology of the *Hamlet* texts in correlation with Shakespeare’s access to both French and English texts. The images appear after reading Montaigne’s French, but develop even more once the essays are available in English. The metaphor is not definitively diachronic. However, it indicates that the playwright’s representations of inward and outward selfhood work with the same ideas as those presented in the essays. The philosophy in *Hamlet* addresses this same Montaignian inwardness. Recognising this decentres Shakespeare’s English by merit of his work with Montaigne’s French.

**Edges and Philosophers**

291 In Q1, examples include the Ghost’s words to Hamlet about his crimes being “purged and burnt away” and the story of his death “rankly abused” (Q1 v.6, 32), the recurring use of “foul” and its derivatives, and poison in the narrative via the Mousetrap, Laertes’ foil, and the wine prepared for Hamlet at the duel.

292 Other examples include Claudius’ words after Ophelia’s first “distracted” entry – “this is the poison of deep grief” (IV.v.74) and Hamlet’s words to Gertrude after killing Polonius: “that flattering unction…will but skin and film the ulcerous place, / Whiles rank corruption, mining all within, / Infects unseen” (III.iv.146, 148-150).

So far I have focused on tracing a relationship between the plays and Montaigne’s original French. However, Florio’s text also allows for further connections between them. His translation functions as a different kind of border. What Claudius calls Hamlet’s “unreason” is of course a central part of the prince’s characterisation, and we see this both in his public and private moments on the stage. Unreason develops even more out of Florio’s “That to Philosophise” in the longer play texts. In addition to his theatrical metaphor, “au batelage”, Montaigne returns to inward orderliness, saying that to be settled inwardly “is the point”. This reads in parallel to the Q1 “To be, or not to be” speech: “c’est le point” and “there’s the point” (Q1 vii.115). The expression is not uncommon in English at this time, either, and Florio translates identically. The parallel is not adequate on its own, but the proximity of this phrase with the paragraph where it occurs, and the content of the speech, is more noteworthy. A central image of the “To be” speech in both Q2 and F is Hamlet’s discussion of “[taking] arms against a sea of troubles”, and here his language echoes Montaigne’s suggestion that we “learn to stand firm, and to fight” (III.i.59). There is no equivalent line in the Q1 soliloquy, while Florio’s translation picks up on both “nous apprenons” and “combattre” in the phrase “let us learn to stand and combat [death] with a resolute mind”. By the time Q2 was published in 1604, Florio’s translation had been in print for a year. Florio and his English hover at the edge of Shakespeare’s re-drafting process, re-reading and re-writing after revisiting Montaigne’s French.

The uncertainty in these pervasively unfinished and multiple texts makes Shakespeare’s language even more Montaignian. Hamlet’s “becoming”, rather than “being”, is of course evoked in the cyclical tragic narrative structure of the play in all three of its versions, as Horatio is tasked with retelling his story. However, the play maintains an

294 Montaigne, “Que Philosopher,” 86.
296 This retelling is the subject of Chapter 6.
uncertain status between English and French as a result of its uncertain sources and their languages. In “Du Repentir”, Montaigne draws specific attention to the title of his entire collection when conjugating “essayer”, meaning “to try”, writing “if my mind could get a foothold, I would not be essaying myself, but rather resolving myself: instead, it is always an apprentice and on trial”.297 His approach to each of these essays implies that each written project must inherently be about an attempt, rather than a solution, to any given philosophical problem. Even though Montaigne mock-boasts about his expertise about himself, being “the most learned man alive” on his chosen topic, the uncertainty at play in other parts of the essays evokes Montaigne’s self-deprecating “what do I know?”.

298 The uncertainty remains central throughout his essays in a wry counterargument to his expertise about himself as an “object” rather than a “subject” for study. Claudius, Hamlet, and Hamlet share aspects of this internal uncertainty.

The proximity of multiple “Hamletian” ideas in the Essais (whether originally “Montaignian” or sourced elsewhere, such as through sententiae and the commonplace tradition) supports Shakespeare’s process of translation. The question of whether Florio functioned as an intermediary edge through which Shakespeare moved is only a small part of the textual relationship.299 Scepticism, for example, is of course not solely attributable to Montaigne, but rather Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, and others who preceded them. Nevertheless, textual parallels appear in more than one guise, and look different when addressed in light of Shakespeare’s French. Both “Que Philosopher” and “Du Repentir” contain shared words, phrasing, and ideas that reoccur in Hamlet through its text and its dramatic plot. Claudius and Hamlet present opposite forms of the same kind of tension between repentance and regret, where their “inward man” does not represent their outward

299 See Chapter 2 for more on Florio’s relationship to the Hamlet texts and to Shakespeare’s oeuvre more broadly.
self. Claudius exemplifies both the disjunction between inner and outer selves and the relationship between repentance and regret, as his inward and outward selves diverge. However, Hamlet’s repentance, regret, and particularly his sense of guilt, counter Claudius’ own. From in his first lines on stage, where he insists that he “[knows] not seems” to having an even pulse but being “mad in craft” with an “antic disposition,” Hamlet’s inward and outward selves blur until their edges are indistinguishable (I.ii.76, III.iv.189, I.v.172). Both Montaigne’s organisation and discussion of these ideas are integral to Shakespeare’s reading of the *Essais* in *Hamlet*. French English is a means of accessing that reading.

The nature of synchronic study is such that it encourages fragmentary and comparative reading. The next chapter takes this approach to heart, interrogating Hamlet’s and *Hamlet’s* philosophy surrounding faith and fellowship. These concepts are over and through Montaigne’s *Essais* and Florio’s translation, rather than being present only in one essay or language. This more fragmented comparison complicates the edges that separate not only my main pair of texts and of languages, but also the not-so-self-contained material of these dramatic and essayistic forms.

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309 Q1 Hamlet’s equivalent lines hold the same meaning in different words: “outward semblance / Is [not] equal to the sorrow of [his] heart” but his actions are “not madness” (Q1 ii.36-37, xi.90), “Antic disposition” remains the same in all three texts (Q1 v.140; F I.v.171).
4. “Yet what I shall choose I wot not”: dubitatio and an apology for Horatio

Are you my friend, Horatio?301

I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
(Q2 V.ii.320)

Shakespeare’s texts recognise elements of faith within Montaigne’s philosophy. Such comparison has been undertaken through diachronic source hunting before, but often without sustained consideration of the religious underpinnings of Montaigne’s text. Shakespeare develops a response to Montaigne’s theology across the three Hamlet texts and a particularly affected model is fellowship. In Shakespeare’s reading of Montaigne we find a central concern about doubt as a key component of both classical friendship and Christian faith. This develops not only in response to Montaigne but as a result of a shared theological source. Paul, one of the letter writers in the New Testament, addresses many of the key concerns that Montaigne and Shakespeare consider. Paul also makes frequent use of dubitatio, or “feigned perplexity”.302 This figure bleeds into Montaigne’s rhetoric, and in turn affects the ways that Shakespeare addresses the essayist’s philosophies.

In “Apologie de Raimond Sebond”, what is often thought of as Montaigne’s central claim is an instance of dubitatio. He asks “que sais-je?”, or “what do I know?”, in jest.303 The very project of the essays indicates his knowledge, no matter whether he feels that his knowledge is complete or expansive. Equally, though, he acknowledges that “of all who are

vain, the most vain is the man who presumes that he knows, without knowing what knowledge is.” If faith is certainty without sight (“faith is the substance of things hoped for, [and] the evidence of things not seen”) then Montaigne’s acknowledgement of doubtful knowledge recognises the presence of doubt behind all forms of knowledge or faith.305

Hamlet’s own reflections frequently echo the self-deprecatory tone of Paul and Montaigne’s *dubitatio*. When he asks “What is this quintessence of dust?”, Hamlet misleads Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to assume that his disposition is true melancholy, rather than a series of acts (II.i.290).306 Hamlet and Horatio both impersonate Montaigne’s deprecation and quiet boasting at different points and to different ends. Overall not being ruled by passion, Horatio remains the counterpoint to Hamlet’s more emotional response to his circumstances; the prince relies heavily on his friend’s rationality. Horatio’s language is closer to Montaigne’s, whose descriptions of his trust in Etienne de la Boétie throughout the *Essais* are not unlike Horatio’s dedication to Hamlet. Montaigne describes his shared love with his friend within his grief for de la Boétie’s death. Horatio’s desire for Hamlet to reject “the king’s pleasure” in the final scene performs Montaigne’s same grief at the (impending) death of a true friend (V.ii.175). At the play’s conclusion, Horatio must then also perform Montaigne’s part as the true friend left behind to philosophise.307

Developing from my discussion of “Que Philosopher” in Chapter 3, this chapter considers “fellowship” as a concept that encompasses friendship – in the classical model – as well as faith and doubt. The word “faith” already points to ideas about fellowship and

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304 Montaigne, “Apologie,” 449. Original: “de toutes les vanités, la plus vaine c’est l’homme; que l’homme qui prénomme de son savoir, [mais] ne sais pas encore que c’est que savoir”.
305 Hebrews 11:1.
307 I return to the idea of Horatio retelling Hamlet’s story in Chapter 6 to discuss scholarly editing and the role of readers, critics, and editors of these texts.
friendship, as it encompasses agency, fealty, trust, and obligation. It can describe “the fulfilment of a trust or promise”, or the qualities of “fidelity” and “loyalty”. Faith can also be “the duty of fulfilling one’s trust”, such as “allegiance owed to a superior”, “fealty”, or “the obligation of a promise or engagement”. Other broader definitions might include “firm trust or belief in or reliance upon something”, or “belief based on evidence, testimony, or authority”. The word also covers ideas of “belief, trust, [and] confidence”, and furthermore describes “system[s] of religious belief”. In this lattermost category, faith could mean “belief in and acceptance of the doctrines of a religion”. In theological terms, faith is “the capacity to spiritually apprehend divine truths, or realities beyond the limits of perception or of logical proof, viewed either as a faculty of the human soul, or as the result of divine illumination”.

The OED records the specific Christian resonances of the word in English:

Earlier evidence refers almost exclusively to the Christian religion, divine revelation being viewed as contained either in Holy Scripture or in the teaching of the Church. In this context faith is often considered in relation to justification before God, and contrasted with works.

The complexity of this term is essential firstly for reading Hamlet alongside Montaigne’s convictions about friendship and faith. It is important secondly for reading Shakespeare and Montaigne’s shared sources and in light of their synchronic writing process. It is finally also significant for understanding the theatrical form of the Hamlet texts as a different but parallel example of the limits of perception.

In his review of the critical history between Shakespeare and Montaigne, Ellrodt suggests that Hamlet and the Essais share a philosophical style:

[Montaigne’s influence is] found by Harry Levin in the atmosphere of the play, the attitude of questioning and doubt and ‘a certain essayistic movement of thought’. If ‘to raise all the important questions without obtaining the

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308 See OED “faith, n.”. This paragraph condenses the range of definitions listed for “faith”. 
answers’ is the philosophical characteristic of Hamlet, it is also the distinctive trend of the Essays.\textsuperscript{309}

These doubts are characteristic of these texts, and also of the uncertain fellowship between Hamlet and Horatio. Andrew Hui argues that “[Horatio’s] real function is that of a philosophical rhetorician”, and that he “embodies the early modern fusion of Stoic and Protestant rationality”.\textsuperscript{310} Whether antic or otherwise, Hamlet is in many ways Horatio’s opposite; they are not only impeded from sameness by status but by their respective rhetorical and philosophical outlooks. Nevertheless, Hamlet’s soliloquies perform his essayistic movements of thought. This kind of doubt as a means to think is integral to the way that Shakespeare and Montaigne navigate fellowship in their texts.

There are two relationships between the Essais and Hamlet in this chapter that can be described as different kinds of false friends.\textsuperscript{311} Firstly, even though they retain a degree of trust between them that becomes all encompassing at the conclusion of the play text, Horatio and the prince can only simulate friendship. As Laurie Shannon argues, “mere simulation can look a lot like the similitude friendship celebrates” and “flattery [therefore] presents an epistemological dilemma for friendship practice”.\textsuperscript{312} They are not identical, socially or otherwise, and each is aware of this inequality at different points in the text. Secondly, erasing John Florio’s translation from these textual connections emphasises the instances of false friendship between French and English; this is a point of entry into philosophising about Montaignian and Shakespearean fellowship, false and otherwise. Shakespeare and Montaigne are thereby also false friends, sharing their ideas not via the chronology of source studies but through the medium of French. Adding Florio back into the comparison, as I do, raises


\textsuperscript{310} Andrew Hui, “Horatio’s Philosophy in Hamlet,” Renaissance Drama 41.1-2 (2013): 153, 156.

\textsuperscript{311} See OED “false friend” in “false, adj., adv., and n.”.

\textsuperscript{312} Laurie Shannon, Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 47.
further questions as to the truth of the “friendship” between these texts: thus, still false friendship. Portions of Montaigne’s “De l’Amitié” (On Friendship), “De la Physiognomie” (On Physiognomy), “Des Prières” (On Prayer), and “Apologie de Raimond Sebond” (Apology for Raymond Sebond) provide insight into his ideas about fellowship and faith. Shakespeare’s responses to these then highlight the importance of doubt. These three concepts interact around an important philosophical doubt: each text contemplates suicide. The concepts also inform Hamlet and Horatio’s navigation of (false) friendship. Doubt, via the figure of dubitatio, is therefore a useful topic for interrogating the synchronic fellowship between the Hamlet text and the above essays from Montaigne’s collection.

A. D. Cousins argues that we might associate Francis Bacon’s essays with the form of the soliloquy – Hamlet’s in particular – to generate a productive conversation about how the textual form “disingenuously uses a technique at the heart of Humanist pedagogy, the deployment of classical or otherwise ancient authority…[and emphasising] how malleable and equivocal that technique is”.\(^\text{313}\) These early modern essays and soliloquies also often juggle religious ideas and convictions. There is a risk of trying to identify Montaigne’s perspectives as variously Stoic and neo-Stoic, while leaving out how biblical Christian endurance and hope are described, in Paul and others’ letters to early Christian churches. Montaigne’s iterations of fellowship are only comprehensible alongside both his neo-Stoic education and Catholic convictions. In turn, the religious elements of the Hamlet texts inform both an understanding of the relationship between them and Montaigne’s texts, and how they might function as synchronic early modern texts with differing forms.

“He that thou knowest thine”

Hamlet and Horatio’s friendship is nominally one of amicitia, or “the humanist doctrine of friendship between like-minded, virtuous men”. However, Montaigne’s discussion of perfect friendship, or “amitié”, reveals the doubt implicit in their fellowship. In “Of friendship”, Francis Bacon cites Aristotle’s Politics to argue that “whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god”. He therefore argues for the importance of friendship, stating that “no receipt openeth the heart but a true friend, to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift or confession”. Bacon’s emphasis on the heart occurs right before his discussion of favourites and of “[wise princes] who have oftentimes joined to themselves some of their servants, whom both themselves have called friends” outside of their social stations. He therefore balances the rationality of good fellowship between true friends within the importance of social identity. His argument acknowledges both values but nevertheless maintains that friendship overrides social standing when it is true. This is comparable to Hamlet’s speech beginning “Nay, do not think I flatter”, where he “implicitly retrieves the ancient idea of friendship as a relationship that mutually reinforces virtue”.

Similarly, Montaigne’s “De l’Amitié” considers rationality and the sincere trust between friends that can transcend other boundaries. He describes “perfect friendship” as one where “each gives himself entirely to his friend that he has nothing left to share with another”. Importantly, the word “amitié” that he uses covers several meanings, as outlined by Screech:

[The word] includes many affectionate relationships, ranging from a father’s love for his child (or for his brain child) to the friendly services of a doctor or lawyer, to that conjugal love felt by Montaigne for his wife…[it] include[s]
friendship, loving-friendship, benevolence, affection, affectionate relationships and love.\textsuperscript{320}

The absence of true fellowship heightens Hamlet’s loneliness. His isolation prompts him to speak to three apparently absent listeners – God, Old Hamlet, and the play’s audience – and one present listener, Horatio, who is Hamlet’s only true confidant. Due to their unequal status, though, Hamlet’s dependence on Horatio cannot truly deliver. For example, András Kiséry describes Hamlet’s “talking of friendship” as his “way of making Horatio an offer he can’t refuse”.\textsuperscript{321} Hamlet may insist “do not think I flatter”, but his relationship with Horatio must by necessity be mediated by the early modern humanist social structure in which they exist (III.ii.45). When unattended on stage, Hamlet cannot command another’s friendship or servitude to himself. He also cannot command a solution for his problem to appear. Voicing his problems does not truly deliver an answer, but in articulating his thoughts to an absent listener or friend, he nevertheless engages in the rhetorical project at hand to attempt to find a solution. In these instances, the audience functions as the closest he has to a “perfect” friend to whom he can “unpack [his] heart” (II.ii.538).

Horatio has a kind of faith – fealty – in his friendship with Hamlet, whose albeit scattered reliance on his friend results in Horatio knowing much that other characters do not. As Hui argues, “in a plot replete with treacheries, treasons, and betrayals, [their] amity proves to be the only authentic relationship at the end”.\textsuperscript{322} This trust between them allows Hamlet to stage his antic disposition and the Mousetrap, but is actually a neglected two-way system from Hamlet’s side of the relationship, as he does not articulate his troubles to Horatio, but rather to the audience. Horatio watches much of what occurs at court, maintaining an indeterminate role in the hierarchy of its other members. Hamlet trusts in him, but only

\textsuperscript{320} Screech, introduction to “On Affectionate Relationships”, 205.
\textsuperscript{322} Hui, “Horatio’s Philosophy in Hamlet,” 158.
somewhat, and to his downfall. Michael Neill emphasises how Hamlet’s words place Horatio at Hamlet’s own level:

Horatio deferentially offers to place himself “at [the prince’s] service”...[and] the prince responds in language that redefines their relationship as a “conversation” of equals...identifying Horatio as the “second self” of classical friendship: “Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice / And could of men distinguish her election / [Sh’ath] sealed thee for herself” [III.ii.42, 53-55].

Neill also suggests that “the unexpected gendering of Hamlet’s soul underscores the implied contrast between the perfected constancy of masculine friendship, and the “frailty” he attributes to the love of women”, including Ophelia. In gendering his own soul as feminine even in his relationship to Horatio, Hamlet problematises the equality he wishes for in their fellowship. I include this also because of the French grammatical requirement for Montaigne that the soul be feminine, at least when the writer – as Montaigne frequently does throughout his essays – uses the feminine “âme” as the word for “soul”. In addition to the contrast between Ophelia and Horatio, the feminine soul Hamlet identifies in himself creates a distance between his inward self and his outward princely self that must expound only the most masculine values. Hamlet’s difficulty with this task of outward identity is made more evident in this example of gendered language, which is in turn a feature of French and a likely a different kind of example of false friendship.

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325 “Âme” is feminine after the Latin “anima”. Shakespeare would perhaps have already thought of the soul as feminine from the Latin term, which is found in church texts like the Magnificat: “magnifican anima mea dominum” (based on Mary’s song in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke).
326 Florio maintains this gendered element in his translation, so it does not indicate whether this source was a key player in Shakespeare’s language for Hamlet at this moment. For example: “Now our heart being ruled and our soule commanded by faith, reason wilitheth that she drawes all our other parts to the service of her intent, according to their power and facultie” as opposed to “Or, nostre coeur et nostre ame estant regie et commandée par la foy, c’est raison qu’elle tire au service de son dessin toutes noz autres pieces selon leur portée” (Florio, “Apologie,” n.p.; Montaigne, “Apologie,” 446). Furthermore, other English texts gender the soul when writing about it. Nevertheless, Neill’s observation highlights a feature that exists recurrently in my own comparative project.
Each character that professes a fellowship with Hamlet is misled, save Horatio, who – while the prince identifies him as his true friend – recognises the failings of Hamlet’s attempts at faithfulness. Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Polonius, Laertes, Elsinore’s guards, and the Players all remain at arm’s length, either because Hamlet recognises their duplicity, or as a result of their own deference to or distance from the prince’s station. Conversely, Horatio presumes nothing in his relationship with Hamlet. At the point where Horatio could enact his true dedication to the prince through self-slaughter, he is stopped and, rather than holding his tongue, must “tell [Hamlet’s] story” (V.ii.328).

When Horatio comes to consider his own death, he then challenges the construction of equality between himself and Hamlet and the significance of faith as a deterrent to suicide. Horatio’s potential self-slaughter occurs in stark contrast to Hamlet’s ongoing questions of whether or not he will die. As discussed in Chapter 3, both Claudius and Hamlet navigate their fear of death and judgement. Horatio, the humanist, not so much. By claiming himself “more an antique Roman than a Dane”, he aligns himself with Stoicism and Seneca’s own suicide, as well as with Montaigne’s essay that lauds philosophy as the avenue to death (V.ii.320). Horatio does not seem to fear death at all. His response to its possibility is couched in the situation of the court’s collapse and the death of his friend. He asks that “flights of angels sing [Hamlet] to [his] rest”, but Horatio’s words remain otherwise secular (V.ii.339). However, they function in opposition to Hamlet’s own shift in character and consequent Christian rhetoric of providence. Hui suggests that “paradoxically, for the scholar who studied in the same town as Luther, who had a high view of God’s authority in guiding human actions, there is no divinity that shapes Horatio’s end”. However, Hui argues that the secular and religious views can still coincide for Horatio:

327 See Montaigne, “Que Philosopher,” 81-96.
328 Hui, “Horatio’s Philosophy in Hamlet,” 164.
Horatio’s ‘accidental judgments, casual slaughters’ can…be accommodated in the same worldview as Hamlet’s ‘there is a special providence in the fall of sparrow’…[being] a Neostoic [who] would try to hold both of these together, however uneasily.329

When Horatio tries to reconstruct Hamlet’s story at the play’s conclusion, his difficulty is perhaps a result of being more an antique Roman (a secular Stoic) than a Dane (a stand-in for an early modern Christian humanist).

Koinonia

Paul writes often about fellowship within a Christian framework. He uses the term koinonia (κοινωνία), meaning “fellowship” or “partnership”, to describe the relationship he wants his Christian brothers and sisters to cultivate in their churches.330 This fellowship is the opposite of the classical model, as it is predicated on differences, rather than sameness. In his discussion of fellowship in a letter to the Philippian church, Paul uses dubitatio to comment on what Shakespeare will go on to identify as self-slaughter in the Hamlet texts. Paul’s call to cultivate trust between fellow Christians as a result of their shared faith in God (and despite any differences), is among other things a self-directed call to remain alive for the sake of others:

…now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith…331

N. Clayton Croy argues that Paul does not consider suicide for himself here, but rather combines “a figure of speech and a figure of thought” in his rhetoric.332 Christianity broadly

329 Ibid., 165.
331 Philippians 1:20-25, my italics.
332 Croy, “Does Paul Contemplate Suicide?” 525.
recognises God’s goodness even in the face of earthly suffering, and calls for believers to withstand whatever comes their way in life. Whether suffering for faith – martyrdom – or other suffering, Paul and others call Christians to trust God’s ultimate providence and the promise of a future eternity: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”. There is no room for true doubt in God, even in the face of suffering. If reading within that faith, Paul’s apparent suicidal ideation is a form of dubitatio. Paul’s “desire to depart” stems from a desire to be in that painless place with Christ, as opposed to in prison, but is not a true question of suicide, or of lost faith. In writing “what I shall choose I wot not”, he emphasises the need to “abide in the flesh” for his fellow Christians, as well as for Christ. The combination of faith and koinonia trumps his individual desires.

Montaigne refers directly to Paul’s text in “Costume de l’Isle de Cea”, writing about how desiring death in the form of suicide can not only be warranted but also hopeful rather than despairing:

…sometimes one also desires death for the hope of a greater good. I want, said St Paul, to be released to be with Jesus Christ. And who will release me from these bonds?…it appears so improper that we call despair this voluntary dissolution to which the heat of hope [instead] often brings us…

However, a classical perspective calls for a different kind of endurance to the point of death. Rather than what Paul posits, Montaigne notes how the classical model encourages suicide in appropriate settings. He articulates the tension that can exist between Christian and classical philosophies of suicide: “the force of Plato’s dialogue, about the immortality of the soul,

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333 Revelation 21:4. In addition to Paul, John is understood to have written significant portions of New Testament teaching that complement Paul’s injunctions to faith, including the book of Revelation.

334 Montaigne, “Costume de l’Isle de Cea,” 360. Original: “…on désire aussi quelque fois la mort pour l’espérance d’un plus grand bien. Je désire, dit Saint Paul, être dissout pour être avec Jésus Christ; et: Qui me déprendra de ces liens?…il appert combien improprement nous appelons désespoir cette dissolution volontaire à laquelle la chaleur de l’espoir nous porte souvent”. It is hard not to notice Montaigne’s use of “dissoudre” and “dissolution” (to dissolve; dissolving) and connect it to Hamlet’s desire that his flesh would “melt to nothing” or “melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew” (Q1 ii.56; I.ii.129-130).
drove some of his disciples to kill themselves, so they could more promptly enjoy the hopes that he gave them." This echoes Paul’s own idea; for those followers of Plato, individual desire trumps other worldly pleasures, including that of fellowship, which is what Paul says stays his hand.

**Faith, Action, and Sight: What a man seeth**

Both *Hamlet* and the *Essais* frequently articulate religious faith or doubt in terms of limited sight or knowledge. However, the writer to the Hebrew church considers faith as being sure of what is hoped for rather than: “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”. The same idea is present in Paul’s letter to the Roman church:

> [Christians] are saved by hope: but *hope that is seen is not hope*: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Montaigne addresses faith broadly throughout his work, differentiating between his individual experience of faith (according to himself), and concepts of belief (according to

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336 Croy observes the differences between a rhetorical exercise surrounding suicide, Paul’s own reasons for this – whether there is any truth to his rhetorical expression of desiring death – and, importantly, that Paul’s brief mention of it does not encompass his broader perspective on whether he condoned or condemned the act. Montaigne’s perspective on his illness in light of his faith encapsulates what can be seen as illogical in a secular view, as his refusal to die by his own hand highlights the very faith that sustains him. Selected critics hunting for the centre of Paul’s thoughts about suffering (and perhaps suicide) include: Croy, “Does Paul Contemplate Suicide?” 517-531, particularly 525-531, L. Gregory Bloomquist, “Subverted by Joy: Suffering and Joy in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians,” *Interpretation* 61.3 (2007): 270-282; and David A. deSilva, “No confidence in the flesh: The Meaning and Function of Philippians 3:2-21,” *Trinity Journal* 15.1 (1994): 27-54.

337 Hebrews 11:1.

338 Romans 8:24-25, my italics.
God). Shakespeare’s approach to belief informs his dramatic texts, particularly as he considers the significance of sight as a part of belief within the very nature of performance. However, Shakespeare does not shy away from the religious sphere. *Hamlet* is teeming with examples of Protestant and Catholic conflict via questions raised directly or indirectly by the Ghost, the ideas of forgiveness, and vengeance, and Hamlet’s considerations of suicide. These and other religiously charged concerns can be mediated through Montaigne’s reflections on faith and on prayer, which are frequently aligned with Paul’s. Montaigne also gives space to questions about self-slaughter, an idea that Paul and other Christian writers like Augustine would consider in opposition to hope through faith. The balance that Montaigne strikes between Stoic and Christian approaches to self-slaughter and hope is also reflected in the *Hamlet* texts. Both Shakespeare and Montaigne use the metaphors of sleep and dreaming in that discussion, but also address similar concerns with different conclusions. Shakespeare appears to respond to Montaigne’s reflections quite directly through Hamlet, but Horatio provides an interesting counterpoint. Horatio is faithful in his friendship even when social or religious expectations might prompt a response that denies any dedication that classical fellowship might require.

Whether through a commitment to sameness (in classical fellowship) or shared faith (in Christian belief), both forms of friendship call for the participant to live for the other rather than themselves. Hamlet and Horatio’s friendship is thus both perfect and false because it is predicated on doubting either kind of faith. It is impossible for Hamlet to give himself completely to Horatio, and the prince in turn forbids his friend from giving himself completely, in death. While Horatio might be expected to flatter, in their unequal social standing, it is Hamlet that does so more often. Their relationship requires flattery not only

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339 “Selon moi” being “according to myself” rather than “selon Dieu”, or “according to God”. However, Montaigne differentiates between opinion and faith rather than opinion and God’s opinion: “ce que je discours selon moi, non ce que je crois selon Dieu”. See: Montaigne, “Des Prières,” 323; Screech, “On Prayer,” 362, n. 20.
because all of the prince’s relationships are mediated by humanist values that preclude him from true sameness (there are no other princes in the text with whom he can be friends), but because he already believes himself to lack perfect friendship. Even in the face of Horatio’s dedication, Hamlet does not reciprocate his friend’s trust. The prince also assures Horatio that “things in heaven and earth” expand beyond the philosophy his friend can dream, but only identifies their philosophy as shared – “our”, rather than “your” – in the Folio text (Q1 v.135-136; Q2 I.v.166-167; F I.v.167). As Hui suggests, “the difference of [this] one printed letter opens up a field of philosophical questions about the play”. 340 This idea of a shared philosophy contributes the sense of fellowship between Hamlet and Horatio, despite their differences. Shakespeare thereby constructs Hamlet and Horatio’s relationship in response to both classical and Christian approaches to friendship and to faith.

Horatio nevertheless provides a more interesting contrast to Montaigne than Hamlet. Horatio and Montaigne share some ideas of belief and diverge on others; the former is characterised as a Protestant student and rhetorician, while the latter is a devoted Catholic. Hui argues that “[Horatio’s] real function is that of a philosophical rhetorician”, and later also suggests that he “embodies the early modern fusion of Stoic and Protestant rationality”. 341 These observations connect Horatio with a Protestant rhetorical tradition. While not overzealous, Montaigne’s own faith, Catholicism, is so significant to him that it becomes his main self-defence for expressing his perspective. He articulates this conviction in “Des Prières”:

Like those who advertise questions for debate in our Universities I am seeking the truth not laying it down…I would loath to be found saying anything ignorantly or inadvertently against the holy teachings of the Catholic,

340 Hui, “Horatio’s Philosophy in Hamlet,” 152.
341 Ibid., 153, 156. Hui explains Jean Calvin’s criticism of “new Stoics”, who were apathetic towards rather than passionate about faithful Christian living, and identifies the extended history of Stoicism and Christianity being aligned (156). Hui also continues in a footnote, writing that “the attempt to reconcile Stoicism with Christianity is almost as old as Christianity itself”.

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Montaigne maintains this perspective, even though “the notions which [he is] propounding have no form and reach no conclusion”\(^{343}\). His essays do not always appear to seek truth, but he insists that he still upholds truth, event amongst that uncertainty. Montaigne’s commitment to uncertainty seems to respond to both the absolute nature of his faith, not troubled by clear or cloudy sight, and to Paul’s own use of doubt as a means to confirm faith. Horatio maintains the same Stoicism for much of the play, but through a sceptically Protestant lens. Indeed, he lets Stoicism override the more stridently Christian view that Montaigne advocates. Hamlet, by contrast, straddles both of their views, choosing and changing his mind on matters of faith – religious or otherwise – until narrowing his available options at the conclusion of his narrative. Horatio’s relationship with Hamlet occurs through a mixture of rational and religious thought, tempered by the prince’s overreliance on his friend that nevertheless lacks true trust. This trust becomes most evident in Horatio’s approach to suicide, which contrasts greatly with Hamlet’s. Interestingly, though, both Hamlet and Horatio’s approaches can be mapped onto Montaigne’s reflections.

Hamlet’s ruminations on sleep and death, particularly in soliloquy form, have been variously associated with classical references and Montaigne’s work.\(^{344}\) However, these lines also refract Paul’s *dubitatio* on the value of death. Two key examples appear in the Q2/F

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\(^{343}\) Ibíd.

\(^{344}\) Perhaps the most automatic classical association to make here is that of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculane Disputationes* [*Tusculan Disputations*], transl. J. E. King (Loeb Classical Library 141. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927).
texts, in Hamlet’s first conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and in “To be or not to be”. In Q2, Hamlet tells them about his bad dreams:

**HAMLET** I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

**GUILDELSTERN** Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

**HAMLET** A dream itself is but a shadow.

**ROSENCRANTZ** Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow’s shadow.

**HAMLET** Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars’ shadows.

(II.ii.243-251)

In his soliloquy not long after this, Hamlet’s reflections turn from formless dreams to merely unknown ones:

To die, to sleep –
No more; and by a sleep we mean to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to – ‘tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep –
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there’s the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come…

(III.i.60-66)

In Q1, there is no equivalent to Hamlet’s discussion of bad dreams, and his soliloquy only addresses sleep and dreams in a shorter form:

To die, to sleep – is that all? Ay, all.
No, to sleep, to dream – ay, marry, there it goes,
For in that dream of death…

(Q1 vii.116-118)

When Montaigne discusses the relationship between sleep, waking, and clarity in “Apologie”, he considers how our minds are deceived by both states of being. He first writes:

Those who have compared our life to a dream are reasonable, and perhaps more than they thought. When we dream, our soul lives, acts, and exercises all faculties, not more than when we are waking, but perhaps more softly and loosely. Not as differently as night from clear day, but rather more like night and shadows: here she sleeps, her she slumbers, more or less.  

Montaigne, “Apologie,” 596. Original: “Ceux qui ont apparié notre vie à un songe, ont eu de la raison, à l’aventure plus qu’ils ne pensaient. Quand nous songeons, notre âme vit, agit, exerce toutes ses facultés, ne plus ne moins que quand elle veille; mais si plus mollement et obscurément, non de tant certes que la différence y

345
In the posthumous edition of this essay Montaigne adds more detail still:

We are awake when sleeping, and sleeping when awake. I see less clearly when sleeping, but when awake I cannot see clearly or purely enough. Deep sleep sometimes even puts dreams themselves to sleep, but our wakefulness is never so awake as to purge and dissipate waking visions that are worse than real ones…why do we not question whether our thoughts or actions are nothing more than another type of dreaming, and our waking some other kind of sleep?  

When Florio translates Montaigne’s 1559 edition, his version of this second passage from “Apologie” seems to match what other scholars have suggested is a parallel to related material in “De la Physiognomie”, via Florio:

If [death] be a consummation of one’s being, it is also an amendment and entrance into a long and quiet night. We find nothing so sweet in life as a quiet rest and gentle sleep, and without dreams.

The difficulty that Montaigne acknowledges in waking restlessness and the peace of sleep both echoes Paul’s restlessness and points to Hamlet’s discontentment.

Some of Montaigne’s language seems to have been translated into Shakespeare’s English. Here I am also more willing to consider how Florio might be a key player in this textual relationship. John M. Robertson argues that Florio’s “Of Physiognomy” could correlate with Shakespeare’s use of “consummation” in the speech. A. H. Upham makes a similar claim alongside the few sentences that Florio provides prior to those above:

I know I have neither frequented nor known death, nor have I seen any body that hath either felt or tried her qualities to instruct me in them. Those who fear her presuppose to know; As for me, I neither know who or what she is, nor what they doe in the other world. Death may peradventure be a thing indifferent, happily a thing desirable. Yet it is to be believed that if it be a transmigration from one place to another, there is some amendment in going

soit comme de la nuit à une clarté vive; oui, comme de la nuit à l’ombre: là elle dort, ici elle sommeille, plus et moins”.

346 Ibid. Original: “Nous veillons dormans, et veillons dormons. Je ne vois pas si clair dans le sommeil; mais, quand au veiller, je ne le trouve jamais assez pur et sans nuage. Encore le sommeil en sa profondeur endort par fois les songes. Mais notre veiller n’est jamais si éveillé qu’il purge et dissipé bien à point les rêveries, qui sont les songes des veillons, et pires que songes…pourquoi ne mettons nous en doute si notre penser, notre agir, n’est pas un autre songer, et notre veiller quelque espèce de dormir?”


to live with so many worthy famous persons that are deceased, and be exempted from having any more to doe with wicked and corrupted Judges.\(^{349}\)

In the introduction to his edition of *Hamlet* for Arden Shakespeare, Harold Jenkins argues that “scattered correspondences of thoughts” are more noteworthy in a comparison between Shakespeare and Montaigne, rather than “concentrated borrowings”.\(^{350}\) He continues by explaining:

Montaigne is more likely to cite, and perhaps to know, his source; but he and Shakespeare shared an inexhaustible interest in the vagaries of the human mind as it confronts the great issues of life and death, and were liable to make their own ‘what oft was thought’ about them. If therefore they frequently give expression to the same sentiments, this in itself is not evidence of any direct relationship.\(^{351}\)

Jenkins does also acknowledge the connection seen in “consummation”.\(^{352}\) Overall he suggests the possibility of relating the two authors along synchronic and diachronic lines. While he observes the significance of Florio’s translation to this connection, and does not dwell on Shakespeare’s French as a possibility, Jenkins’ work emphasises the synchronicity of the ideas in various Shakespearean texts and the *Essais*.\(^{353}\) As Jenkins explores in his longer notes, Shakespeare’s approach to Montaigne’s sleep and dreams is more than translation, whether through Florio or otherwise.\(^{354}\)


\(^{351}\) Ibid., 108-109.

\(^{352}\) Ibid., 110.

\(^{353}\) Ellrodt makes a similar observation: “Hamlet, of course, often reacts in another way than Montaigne even when he seems to borrow his ideas from him and his words from Florio: ‘Death may peradventure be a thing indifferent, happily a thing desirable…If it be a consummation of one’s being, it is also an…entrance into a long and quiet night. We find nothing so sweet in life, as a quiet rest and gentle sleepe, and without dreames’”. See: “Self-consciousness in Montaigne and Shakespeare,” 41; Florio, “Of Phisiognomy,” n.p.

\(^{354}\) “The sleep of death is not, as in Montaigne, ‘without dreams’; the ‘wisdom’ of thinking too precisely is for Hamlet three parts cowardice; his mother does not ‘imagine’ what she sees not, but fails to see the Ghost at all. Nevertheless such signs of an ever-active mind putting what it borrows to new use do not in any way diminish the likelihood of a debt. Perhaps no single word or group of words is sufficiently remarkable for its use to be conclusive in itself; but they have a cumulative weight. Moreover, a temptation to dismiss them as insignificant is met with the curious fact that the words which specifically link Florio with Shakespeare are often absent from the French. I incline therefore to think that of the ideas which Shakespeare so lavishly bestowed on Hamlet a few at least were prompted by his recent reading in Florio’s Montaigne”. Jenkins, “Introduction,” 110.
Shakespeare does seem to have inverted the ideas from Montaigne in Hamlet’s words. The single reference in Q1 notes the same ideas as Montaigne’s own earlier edition. The two examples in the Q2/F texts reflect a more thorough reading of a later edition, perhaps but not definitively via Florio’s copy. Hamlet argues that death is both a kind of sleep and a kind of dream. His concern in these instances is not with the afterlife itself, but with how to address it rhetorically. As Ronald Knowles suggests, “with the dramatically most introspective of perhaps all soliloquies, Hamlet’s personal experience yields to the rhetorical disposition of the thesis”. Knowles also notes that “the antithesis [of “To be or not to be”] reveals Hamlet’s mind or being, although this and what follows in the famous soliloquy, the likeness of sleep and death, largely derives from Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations…[and] any educated auditor would have recognised it and the rhetorical mode of Hamlet’s speech”.

Interestingly, Hamlet’s reflection on self-slaughter in Q1 is focused around the rhetorical pleasure of considering the question of self-slaughter rather than engaging in its philosophical depths, perhaps more so than the other two versions of the speech. Shakespeare’s iterations of Hamlet trial different perspectives on sleep, dreams, and death, as if “seeking the truth” rather than “laying it down”.

In expanding the text and perhaps returning to Montaigne via Florio or another means, the rhetorical focus becomes less significant, and the addition of and reflection on new, secondary ideas reflects Montaigne’s own practices of editing and updating his philosophy.

Interestingly, Hamlet’s soliloquies also have the flavour of Paul’s injunction to pray without knowing what to pray. In the letter to the Roman church, Paul writes:

…we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of

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356 Ibid.
357 See Marcus, Unediting the Renaissance, 150-152.
359 See Chapters 2 and 6.
the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.\textsuperscript{360}

Here, communicating with the Holy Spirit allows Christians to speak with the Spirit’s groans instead of their own words; this is a means for them to articulate and qualify their suffering, and so understand it and pray about it accordingly. Hamlet’s soliloquies address God more than rhetorically – a feature they share with other early modern soliloquies – and wrestle with a religious understanding of the disjunction between words and actions. The “O God, God” of “O that this too too solid flesh” can be entirely sincere (I.ii.132, 130). The clash between Hamlet’s faith and action follows on with Montaigne’s identification of faith that is discordant with actions, such as in “Des Prières”:

\ldots we should only rarely pray to God, especially because it is not easy for us to return our minds frequently to that regulated, reformed and devoted plate where it must be to be able to do so; otherwise, our prayers are not only vain and useless: they are depraved. Forgive us, we say, as we forgive those who trespass against us…However we [still] call on God and his help to contribute to our faults, and invite him to injustice…At the foot of the house which they are about to scale and rob, [men] say their prayers, their intentions and hopes full of cruelty, lust and avarice.\textsuperscript{361}

Montaigne’s criticism here specifically identifies the hypocrisy of deferential or imploring rhetoric – a kind of religiously flavoured sophism – in opposition to the actions of someone truly faithful. This sense of faithful propriety encompasses Hamlet’s difficulty with both religion and fellowship, straddling both Catholic and Protestant iterations of prayer and belief. As prince, he cannot express any faith alternative to what is appropriate to his station, whether his trust in God or others. His attempt to unravel his problems when alone delivers very little save for his realisation that he must “hold [his] tongue” (I.ii.159).

\textsuperscript{360} Romans 8:22-27.
\textsuperscript{361} Montaigne, “Des Prières,” 323-324.
Hamlet and Hamlet span both what Montaigne emphasises as the importance of works as part of faith and the Protestant perspective more driven by the state of the inward heart. As deSilva identifies, “essential to the Anglican approach to preaching was the manner in which it addressed the doctrines of grace and predestination with respect to the free choice of the will and human responsibility”. Montaigne’s essay on prayers speaks to readers familiar with prayer and its importance to faith, at least socially if not personally to them. The call to proper faithfulness is a logical one in the context of early modern Europe, particularly amidst the French Wars of Religion. While Montaigne is specifically Catholic in his focus on actions to accompany faith, his concern is not demarcated solely by this denominational conviction. Catholicism would expect works and faith as two sides of the one coin, while Protestant faith would consider good works as an outpouring of faith. Denomination aside, Paul expects Christians to believe completely, without doubt, even in the face of doubt. Both Shakespeare and Montaigne maintain this paradox of uncertainty and doubt in their texts. That reliance on providence is what sustains both Hamlet and Montaigne, but falls short for Horatio by the conclusion of the text. The language of Shakespeare’s play texts nevertheless invites readers to consider the significance of belief or non-belief.

“It is required”

Hamlet’s philosophical turn from hopelessness to providential joy is frequently understood to lack a degree of logic. Francis Barker asserts that “at the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing”. But Hamlet’s philosophical turn is

363 Francis Barker, The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection (London: Methuen, 1984), 37. Claiming that other critics are misled in their conviction about Hamlet having an interior, Barker suggests they overstate what is “actually dramatised by the text”. He argues instead that “the [Hamlet] text dramatises its impossibility”, and not “the plenitude of an individual presence”. In saying this Barker proposes that “the Hamlet who delays…is replaced by one who simply waits”. However, the progression that Barker follows is framed within the cultural materialist setting of his work on subjectivity. His monograph is not concerned with the religious
both more and less radically logical than this and other scholarship has suggested. It is more radical because it requires that we “awake [our] faith” in a religious framework that promotes faith over reason, even though the latter is the basis of much scholarship.\(^{364}\) It is less radical, though, because with all their confusion about heaven, hell, and human purpose, the *Hamlet* texts still point their audience to earthly suffering, providence, and a rest after death. In this way, *Hamlet* functions differently to other revenge tragedies that leave Christian tradition aside at their resolution. Take, for example, *The Spanish Tragedy*, where Revenge and the Ghost of Andrea gloat over the secularised “endless tragedy” in store for some of those now dead.\(^{365}\) Here, Kyd’s text is speaking to both classical and religious afterlives. While *Hamlet* has classical references throughout, it presents a stronger Christian framework in its conclusion. However, both classical and Christian iterations of faith and fellowship carry through in interesting ways when the *Hamlet* texts are adapted.

In a different but not necessarily less observant context than traditional scholarship, online fan communities pick up on elements of fellowship between Hamlet and Horatio. One user suggests:

*Imagine a* production of Hamlet where in Act 4 Horatio’s always around, always in the background, and he sees what’s going on, he sees the king and Laertes plotting, and as soon as he gets the letter from Hamlet he rushes to him because he needs to tell him and [—] Hamlet keeps cutting him off. All through the graveyard scene Horatio’s grabbing his shoulder and opening his mouth and Hamlet’s not interested, and not paying attention, and distracting him… and then they’re summoned and he tries and the court shows up and all he can manage to get out is “If your mind dislike any thing, obey it” and then the king is there and he can’t say anything more and Hamlet still isn’t listening.\(^{366}\)

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resonances of the play text, and he consequently leaves them to one side. However, rejecting the prevalence of faith as a driving force in the *Hamlet* texts leaves the illogical shift in Hamlet’s outlook firmly in place. In contrast, if Hamlet’s dependence on providence is Pauline, then it is also what allows Horatio and the audience to reread Hamlet’s characterisation in light of the same neo-Stoic perspective that Montaigne reports throughout his essays.

\(^{364}\) *The Winter’s Tale* V.iii.95.


Their identification of and imagination about Hamlet not listening is insightful, and the choice to pick out this specific line from Horatio encompasses both his logic and powerlessness as the play moves towards its climax. In being both too trusting towards Horatio and not intimate enough, Hamlet neglects his own social station and their true inequality, and therefore the threat to his life. Fellowship as identified by the early modern humanist is essential to consider in both religious and philosophical terms, but the above reader has nevertheless identified the inequality between them that appears at the level of Shakespeare’s text, and which is heavily reliant on its religious tenor and its staged qualities. Many commentators in online communities emphasise the queer elements of the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio. The example above is noteworthy because it entertains that possibility but also frames it in terms of an uncertain, early modern fellowship between them, predicated on theatricality.

Some performances and adaptations of Hamlet excise or shift both the text’s overarching Christian framework and Horatio’s character or relationship to Hamlet. This is interesting not because it is incorrect but because it shows how both elements influence the affect of the play text. The parts of Hamlet attuned to Christianity are often missed in contemporary Anglophone performances, not least because Western audiences are less attuned to Christian references than they may have been, for example, fifty or a hundred years ago. Furthermore, scholarship often focuses on elements other than religion, too, so the work on fellowship is then also secularised. An interesting alternative to secularising Hamlet is to shift its religious focus, as is the case in The Al-Hamlet Summit. In this adaptation, Sulayman Al-Bassam reorients the Hamlet narrative to fit within a politicised religious regime over an indeterminate but highly referential unnamed Arabic country. His play does not contain a Horatio figure. The closest equivalent is the figure of the Arms Dealer, who will

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play the confidant to any character with enough power or money to afford advice or secrets. Even if and when religious elements are not entirely sidelined, and Horatio is retained in the script, productions frequently diminish Horatio’s role as confidant and/or friend. In the Hamlet performed by Belvoir Theatre, Sydney, in 2013, Horatio was removed, replaced by Rosencrantz-and-Guildenstern hybrid friend, and his lines distributed among that not-quite-trusted friend and other key characters in any given scene. Although friend-like, Hamlet did not truly trust this hybrid character. An anxiety about friendship plays out in Heiner Müller’s Hamletmachine (Die Hamletmaschine), too. While Müller heavily adapts the Hamlet text, he retains Hamlet’s worry about trusting others:

Horatio, do you know me? Are you my friend, Horatio? If you know me how can you be my friend? … I knew you’re an actor. I am too, I’m playing Hamlet.

Hamlet’s lack of faith in his friends removes the fellowship between him and Horatio, even though faith has a twofold importance in both the essay and play texts. The Renaissance humanists argue that faith in both friends and God counters some elements of melancholia, though not suffering in a general sense. Both of these faiths also prepare the individual for death, eschatologically alongside but separate to any philosophising about it. The presence of faith is ironic in biblical terms for Hamlet via the claims in Hebrews and Romans that true faith does not require visual evidence: “faith is the substance of things hoped for, [and] the evidence of things not seen”.

While ironic in a theatrical setting – where what is seen must be taken simultaneously as fictional truth (but nevertheless false in its very enactment) – Montaigne’s claims about faith and sight appear in Shakespeare’s texts. As an audience to this tragedy we are witnesses to prayerful soliloquies where Hamlet and Claudius hold varying degrees of faith in what

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368 Huw Griffiths described this production as “Friendless Hamlet”, or one where Hamlet could only confide in the audience. See: Griffiths, “Friendless Hamlet in Sydney,” Shakespeare Newsletter 64.1 (2014): 37-39.
369 Müller, “Hamletmachine,” 54, my italics.
370 For more on philosophy as a means to contemplate death, see Chapter 3.
371 Hebrews 11:1.
they have seen and whether others are listening. The connection between Shakespeare and Montaigne’s work via Paul’s writing is evident not necessarily as a standalone example but as one conscious of the broader Christian resonances in early modern fellowship. An antidote to the doubts within Hamlet and Horatio’s fellowship is the faith that both exercise in speaking to an abstractly unseen audience: Hamlet in his soliloquies, and Horatio in his promised retelling of the tragedy. Both they and their audience are required to “awake [their] faith”. Unlike a printed text, a play requires a broader sensory engagement from its audience to comprehend the events on stage. The belief that all is true, rather than false, is achieved through this theatrical form. It suspends the doubt of the theatrical experience, while doubt within the narrative still propels the tragedy that unfolds from the page and onto the stage.
Part III: Stories
5. Anatomising Hamlet’s “shreds and patches”

Montaigne frequently explains his understanding of fragmentary selfhood with metaphors about fabric and patches. Using this metaphor is helpful for understanding the status of the Hamlet texts as well as their relationship to Montaigne. Cloth is woven from warp and weft, where the latter term describes the horizontal rows of thread on a loom. Another obsolete meaning for “weft” is “a film formed over the eye”.372 Robert Lovell’s Panzologicomineralogia suggests various cures for what are presumably cataracts: “The ashes of the head of a black Cat…put into the eye…helpe the haw, weft, and web in the eye” and “the gall [of the Rock-goat] cureth the weft in the eye”.373 This idea of weft, encompassing both fragmentation and imperfect sight, exemplifies my reading of the Hamlet texts in response to Montaigne’s essays on fragmentary character. However, the “weft” is only half of the weaving process. The “warp”, or vertical strands of this fabric, makes up the other half. This can be conceived as the site for which Hamlet was written, a theatre, where violent self-awareness is as much of a character as the ones the actors portray. Weaving these threads of (in-)sight and violent outward performance together creates the fabric of a theatrical text.

372 See OED “weft, n.”
Hamlet is Montaigne-like in its textual form. Each of the Hamlet texts contains many instances of the same language that Montaigne uses to describe the inherent fragmentation of selfhood. As a trio, the Hamlet texts are then fragmentary in their shared, individual, and altered lines. Turning attention away from direct textual comparison, this chapter considers Richard Hillman’s concept of circulation as a means to compare texts that share “a common cultural space...rather than attempting to prove relationships of source and influence according to quasi-judicial principles”.374 The culture of early modern theatre in England must by necessity include dramatic and anatomical theatres, as has been well documented by Jonathan Sawday, David Hillman, Neill, and others.375 The fragmentation present in both kinds of theatre further reveals Shakespeare’s approach to the various piecemeal elements of Hamlet. These in turn respond to Montaigne’s comments on character as inherently fragmentary.

The relationship between anatomical and theatrical stages occurs through the idea of fragmentation, which both acting and anatomising reproduce. An interior is made exterior by fragmenting and then reassembling a whole in order to comprehend it. Both the anatomical and dramatic theatres of the early modern period provided an opportunity to display interiors as exteriors. In drama, a character’s internal state (whether their motivation for murder or thoughts of love) is brought to life only when shown or spoken on the stage (enacted with the

374 Hillman, French Origins in English Tragedy, 2.
body, or somehow made exterior). In the anatomy theatre, the entire purpose of the body’s
dismembering is to make the interior (organs, sinews, or bones) exterior. Importantly, both
instances allow the audience or anatomist to understand the interior more fully by distorting
and fragmenting that inward reality to make sense of it in an external or extra-bodily form.
Both theatres exemplify the integral function of fragmentation as a means to comprehension.

The early modern interest in anatomy evident in Hamlet is also a response to
Montaigne’s conception of fragments that make up a whole without fully representing it.
Conversely, these fragments create inconstant interiors that conflict with each other,
alongside exteriors that do likewise. By anatomising Montaigne’s “Des Boiteux” (On the
Lame) and “De l’Inconstance de Nos Actions” (On the Inconstancy of Our Actions)
alongside the three Hamlet texts, we come closer to understanding their inconstant and yet
interconnected relationships. By anatomising the “whole” of Hamlet, or of its variant texts,
we come to understand its different parts, too.

Montaigne’s “Inconstance” in particular evokes the brand of uncertainty that is at
work in Hamlet. Both the prince and the play address the problem of what is real, as opposed
to what only might be seen to be real. This is not surprising for a play text. Indeed, Katharine
Eisaman Maus identifies this when writing that “chronic doubts about the adequacy of what
can be seen tend to make [early modern] theatre an art of incompletion: a form of display that
flaunts the limits of display”.

However, beyond questions of incomplete display, the
question of uncertain display also looms large. Montaigne argues that inconstancy in our
actions is to be expected, but that this does not reveal anything certain about ourselves. In
other words, even if our actions are complete or supposedly true to our self, our actions do
not always align, so we must acknowledge that we nevertheless cannot know those plural,
uncertain, and inconstant interior selves. Montaigne makes use of an extended metaphor

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376 Katharine Eisaman Maus, Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance, (Chicago: Chicago
about patches to ruminate on how anyone’s internal self will be made up of “shreds and patches” (III.iv.102). Unlike in “Du Repentir”, where he suggests that something central to each person is their true self that helps them made decisions, the self that is fashioned only from “scrap” is less stable. Metaphors of patches, plots, and fabric emerge in Shakespeare’s recurrent fragmentary imagery, largely but not solely through Hamlet himself. Mediated through Montaigne’s own discussion of inconstancy, the multiple Hamlets and Hamlet texts are examples of complete but nevertheless uncertain and fragmentary displays of character and text.

Continuing with my analysis of Shakespeare’s French English I will discuss how Montaigne’s French phraseology and terminology in “Inconstance” emerges in the Hamlet texts. By anatomising texts on the dramatic stage and the printed page, readers dismember Hamlet and Hamlet, then reassemble them both to apprehend their entirety. This dissection is most effectively undertaken at the end of the play. Rhodri Lewis rightly observes the importance of Shakespeare’s use of aposiopesis at the conclusion of Hamlet. The OED defines this figure as “a rhetorical artifice, in which the speaker comes to a sudden halt, as if unable or unwilling to proceed”. It also provides a telling explanation of the figure from Thomas Tymme’s translation of Jean Calvin’s commentary on Genesis: “a figure called Aposiopesis, after the which something not expressed is to be understood”. Maus’ idea of limitation informs what is not expressed, or interrupted, and is one that I develop through this discussion of fragmentation.

The fragmentary, cloth-like metaphors in “Inconstance” are taken up in Shakespeare’s piecemeal characterisation of Hamlet so as to legitimise the inconstancy of his actions. These

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377 Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 336. Original: “notre fait, ce ne sont que pièces rapportées”.
378 Lewis, Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness, 38.
379 See OED “aposiopesis, n.”.
fragments are splintered further in any given iteration of Hamlet/Hamlet. The prince’s inward view of himself, along with characters’ and readers’ external views – as spectators – are most effectively understood in light of Montaigne’s ideas about fragmentation. How, then, does thinking outside Englishness also invite us to read the play as a fragment of a larger whole? Is the play effectively a series of fragments and drafts? In this case I am not tracing many linguistic parallels, though there are a few scattered (fragmented?) throughout this chapter. Instead, Montaigne’s ideas about interior and exterior fragmentation, expressed in French, refract in Shakespeare’s recurrent piecemeal metaphors and the “scraps” of Hamlet’s character in particular.

Anatomy, violence, and cruelty

The publication of De Humani Corporis Fabrica (1543) by Andreas Vesalius was hugely influential on the role of the early modern anatomist. Sawday suggests that in comparison to “earlier depictions of anatomy demonstrations…what irrevocably shifts” on the cover of Vesalius’ work “is the sudden eruption of a crowd into the anatomy theatre”.\(^\text{381}\)

It makes sense, therefore, that the theatrical stage – with its audience – has already been fruitfully compared to both anatomical theatres and execution scaffolds, and often in light of questions about early modern subjectivity. Smith explores the relationship between the culture surrounding executions and the contents of Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy:

In Kyd’s treatment of the body as spectacle, we witness most vividly the earliest coalescence of the theatrical and punitive modes in Elizabethan England…[as well as] how the ambivalence inherent in the public hanging as spectacle…separated spectators from the spectacle.\(^\text{382}\)

Hillman notes that “to early modern ears…language [of the body] had not yet mutated beyond its corporeal referents…[and] what we now call inwardness or interiority was inseparable

\(^{381}\) Sawday, The Body Emblazoned, 66.

from the interior of the body”.\footnote{Hillman, \textit{Shakespeare’s Entrails}, 2.} He connects Hamlet’s interests in inwardness and corporeality within the network of thinking that Montaigne also championed:

Hamlet’s statement about “that within” entails a separation of, at one and the same time, self and other (you cannot know what is inside me), corporeal inside and outside (what is outside cannot represent the interior), and body and disembodied interiority (what within passes show because it is non-material). It is the fantastised conjunction of the three registers that created modern subjectivity.\footnote{Ibid., 86.}

Informed by Sawday and Barker among others, Neill argues that “Renaissance anatomy lectures were highly self-conscious performances”, and discusses how the theatres for these lectures resembled the architecture of playhouses, allowing theatres like The Globe “to make capital out of their physical resemblance to the scene of dissection” in London.\footnote{Neill, \textit{Issues of Death}, 115; 134.}

While Montaigne’s subject matter is not violence itself, his interest in fragmentation aligns with early modern anatomisation – opening something out – as a means to acquiring knowledge. In the theatre, revenge tragedy’s violence tore bodies apart in an impersonation of or response to executions and anatomies, while the spectator or reader of a text undertakes the figurative violence of tearing a character apart to comprehend them or the events of their theatrical world. What Sawday calls the “culture of dissection” was pervasive:

To deploy a phrase such as the ‘culture of dissection’ is to suggest a network of practices, social structures, and rituals surrounding this production of fragmented bodies, which sits uneasily alongside our image...of the European Renaissance as the age of the construction of individuality – a unified sense of selfhood. But, the ‘scientific revolution’ of the European Renaissance encouraged the seemingly endless partitioning of the world and all that it contained. Robert Burton’s \textit{The Anatomy of Melancholy}...with its vast superstructure of divisionary procedures (a text divided into parts, then subdivided into sections, members, and subsections), is a late but nevertheless paradigmatic textual example of this delight in particularization...partition stretched into all forms of social and intellectual life: logic, rhetoric, painting, architecture, philosophy, medicine, as well as poetry politics, the family, and the state were all potential subjects for division. The pattern of all these different forms of division was derived from the human body. It is for this reason that the body must lie at the very centre of our enquiry. And it is in this
urge to particularise that ‘Renaissance culture’ can be termed the ‘culture of dissection’.386

Sawday’s observation notes not only the pervasive culture of dissection but the extant textual relationships of that culture with print culture.

Montaigne identifies how outward appearances cannot replicate inward shreds and patches, which is not unlike Hamlet’s “inky cloak” (I.ii.77). Hillman describes Hamlet’s cloak as “a paradigmatically sceptical avowal of the unbridgeable gap between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’”, but as a costume, the cloak also draws attention to the staged embodiment of this disjunction between inward and outward self.387 During both anatomical demonstrations and executions, the theatre was a space in which to comprehend the inward truth of whatever was to be anatomised. Making something inward outward was an attempt to understand it. An anatomist’s opening of an abdomen would display the process by which organs might interact in the body. An executioner’s victorious display of a victim’s detached head signalled the sacrament of punishment; the outward sign of an inward truth of that person’s “deserved” suffering. Torturers, actors, and audience members all break their object of interest (alleged criminal or character) into pieces – figurative or otherwise – in order to get to the heart of their mystery. The inner mysteries of an actor are the same ones that Montaigne is attempting to derive from the outward appearance and character of those he observes, as well as the outward and inward versions of himself. The realistic, rather than affected, style of acting that Hamlet asks the players to undertake is there to allow for this dissection and apprehension by the audience.

Hamlet’s lines about acting reflect anatomical procedures and ideas about natural philosophy at the level of specific words. In Q1, Hamlet demands the following:

…give everything [your] action with temperance. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig fellow to tear a passion in tatters, into very rags,

387 Hillman, Shakespeare’s Entrails, 85.
to split the ears of the ignorant – who for the most part are capable of nothing but dumbshows and noises – I would have such a fellow whipped for o’erdoing Termagant: it out-Herods Herod!...Mend it altogether! There be fellows that I have seen play...that, having neither the gait of Christian, pagan nor Turk, have so strutted and bellowed that you would ha’ thought some of Nature’s journeymen had made men (and not made them well), they imitated humanity so abominable.

(Q1 ix.5-11, 14-20)³⁸⁸

His language oscillates between Montaignian and anatomical ideas. “Tatters”, “rags”, “parts” are from Montaigne, mending and imitations are in both sets of texts, and “temperance” with “Nature’s journeymen” – rather than humans – is only in Shakespeare’s work. These colliding images suggest how the idea of “abominable” acting (the description of which implies a monstrous alternative to humanity) works at odds with the human inconstancy of passion “in tatters”.

However, it is in Q2/F that we see the contrast drawn more strongly via anatomical implications. As well as saying much the same as in Q1, Hamlet warns against “[overstepping] the modesty of nature” (III.ii.16). He argues that playing has always and is meant to “hold... the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (III.ii.18-20). By emphasising the importance of Nature, the body and its modesty, the image, and the mirror (all of which are central to early modern anatomical practices), Hamlet enacts the anatomisation of acting itself. By fragmenting feature, image, age, form, and so on, the prince draws attention to the inward features that must be brought outwards to act well. Actors should use their perspective as anatomists, peering into their inwards selves, so as to perform that inwardness outwardly

³⁸⁸ An historical aside: It is hard not to recognise Marlowe’s Tamburlaine here. A tyrannous Turk simultaneously associated with both Christians and pagans who “[splits] ears” and struts or bellows like the biblical Herod of mystery plays evokes the Marlovian, bombastic style and “mighty line” that Jonson identifies in his eulogy to Shakespeare no less. I note the connection only to suggest that this cumulative series of references place the Q1 text quite early, as I have already proposed in my chronology for the Hamlet texts. Tamburlaine 1 is generally dated in 1587, with its sequel in either same or the following year. This would put both of them on stage prior to 1589 and Thomas Lodge’s report of “Hamlet, revenge!” (see: Hillman, Shakespeare’s Entrails, 81). The Q2 and F texts tone down these references. Perhaps this is because Marlowe’s works were not at their peak at the time that either of these different versions was constructed?
and accurately. Hamlet’s advice is both anatomical and inward looking, and the latter in particular because he too looks inward as he plays the antic fool and tries to anatomise himself. The implications of the anatomical theatre and indeed of Vesalius’ practices continue in the rest of Hamlet’s advice. Playing, he says, “overdone…though it makes the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of which one must in your allowance o’erweigh a whole theatre of others” (III.ii.21-24). He emphasises that clowns should not be allowed to improvise, either, as that entertains only “barren spectators” (III.ii.33); no “modesty of nature”, here. While Hamlet’s language is perfectly appropriate for describing stage practices, it also echoes the cover image of Vesalius’ *Corporis*. The print displays a crowded theatre of spectators with a corpse at its centre, her empty womb cut open for all to see. Hamlet’s expanded, anatomical language allows for the Q2/F texts to probe more deeply into the ideas of Q1 and dis-member them. In doing so, his words both recall or at least respond to the same ideas as Q1.\(^{389}\)

There is also a productive and specific connection to be made between anatomising and cruelty. Montaigne opens the second book of his essays referring to Emperor Nero’s cruelty at odds with his sympathy:

> Who would believe that Nero, the very image of cruelty, who when faced with signing a sentence to condemn a criminal to death, responded, “Would God have not allowed me to learn to write!” So much was his own heart struck by condemning a man to death.\(^{390}\)

Hamlet is figured as Nero’s opposite for much of the play. Hamlet’s heart is struck by how his philosophising does not move him from static contemplating to action; he is at odds with himself, like Nero, but contemplating the opposite idea. He realises that there must be a change in heart where his intellectual questions cease and are replaced by actions that answer

\(^{389}\) This holds regardless of their true chronology or synchronism. See Chapter 3 and Cartwright, “Diachronic and Synchronic,” 184-205.

\(^{390}\) Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 332.
them. For all Hamlet’s hesitation about enacting vengeance, he does not profess an aversion to violence. In Q1, before meeting with the queen, he says:

    My mother she hath sent to speak with me!
    O God, let ne’er
    The heart of Nero enter this soft bosom.
    Let me be cruel, not unnatural.
    I will speak daggers. Those sharp words being spent,
    To do her wrong my soul shall ne’er consent.

(Q1 ix.232-237)

In Q2 and F he adds:

    ‘Tis now the very witching time of night,
    When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
    Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,
    And do such bitter business as the day
    Would quake to look on…

(III.ii.349-353)

He also says that in speaking daggers, his “tongue and soul [will] in this be hypocrites” as he feels pulled towards “bitter business” instead of soft words (III.ii.348, 358). Regardless of his intentions, though, Hamlet both speaks metaphorical daggers and uses a literal one. His mother cries that his words are “killing words” or that “like daggers [the words] enter in [her] ears” (Q1 xi.23; Q2 III.iv.95). The literal sword follows these metaphorical blades as he stabs the arras and the eavesdropper behind it. Hamlet’s physically violent cruelty can be staged prior to this scene – as is often done in his domineering conversation with Ophelia, for example – but Corambis/Polonius’ death results from the first violent act that the play text unquestionably demands. Hamlet’s cruelty is no more an uncharacteristic feature of his subject than it is simply an example of Montaigne’s ongoing discussion of inconsistency. His potential for violent cruelty is implied in the scene beforehand, as Claudius prays, and is then brought fully onto stage when Hamlet kills Corambis/Polonius. The scene also includes the spectacle of a “dead” body – that of the living actor of Corambis/Polonius’ – alongside the actors who play the queen, Hamlet, and the Ghost of Old Hamlet, though the lattermost only if staged with a physical presence of some kind. An image of cruelty is also represented by
the discussion of Claudius lacking the moral standards or right to rule, doubled by his false body (his portrait) alongside Old Hamlet’s.

When staged, Hamlet is then also being played by another actor. The focus on finding inward truth to enact on a stage is rife with problems, not least of which being the deceptive nature of what drama is. The performances of executions, anatomisations, and plays attempt to show different forms of inner truth, but are always imprecise or imperfect. In *Hamlet*, the imprecision of inward and outward correlation multiplies internally as a result of the Mousetrap, and indeed reverberates throughout every element of surveillance and spectatorship in the narrative. The watched and the watching are often taking each others’ places. Barker argues that “there is no well-founded division between those who perform and those who are spectators, between the subjects and objects of communicative sight”. The staged subject’s centre is instead a reflection of its audience. Whether anatomising or acting, Hamlet and those with whom he shares the stage are created by the combination of interior and exterior uncertainties that are at the centre of any Montaignian subject.

Neill argues that Vesalius prioritised the intellectual and analytical dissection process of the anatomist, as opposed to medieval tradition where dissections were carried out as

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392 Ibid., 36.
393 Ibid., 37.
menial work and served only to accompany anatomical readings and writings.\textsuperscript{394} While questions of anatomical significance were asked in many fields, the staging of these anatomical questions bled – literally and otherwise – into early modern theatre and onto its stage. Many of the critics I have mentioned so far pick up – directly or otherwise – on the \textit{memento mori} element of anatomising. In doing so they reiterate the importance of memory as part of these bodily spectacles and in turn the memorial aspects of theatrical spectatorship. In \textit{Hamlet}, memory is important for spectators not only in thematic features of the text but in the conclusion to the tragedy, where Horatio promises to “truly deliver” the bloody narrative that the audience has just witnessed. The anatomist, though, dis-members in order to re-member; to fragment a body into its constituents is to strive to apprehend and recreate that body. An essayist perhaps tries the same kind of anatomical exercise with their “sharp words” (Q1 ix.236). A play text does more, directing actors and their bodies to enact this kind of staged, living anatomisation. \textit{Hamlet’s} triune status only seems to invite this dis-/re-membering all the more.

**Exterior masks and interior monsters**

Montaigne’s emphasis on observation – detailed judgement – is the same obsession that Hamlet articulates when he harps on “seeming”. Hamlet’s “suits of woe” speech and explanation of his antic disposition to Horatio and Marcellus appear quite early in each play text, as Montaigne’s hypothesis on uncertainty also appears in his essay (I.ii.86). The essayist uses the verb “flotter” at several points, in phrases like “we float [nous flottons] between different thoughts, we want nothing freely, nothing absolutely, and nothing constantly”, as

\textsuperscript{394} Neill, \textit{Issues of Death}, 103-104.
written in his late drafts. Imprecise verbs like “flotter” and “branler” emphasise his uncertain tone throughout the *Essais*. For Hamlet, both his rhetorical purpose and his attempts to couch it in uncertain language to avoid detection are present simultaneously, adding to the uncertainty of his character. On one hand, the method behind his more incomprehensible madness is to declare statements that help him discover the truth of Claudius’ actions and intentions. On the other hand, the uncertainty of his act to any onlookers produces not only the confusion he hopes to use to mask his plan, but is the catalyst for his rash decision making and the downfall at Elsinore. While Claudius is responsible for Old Hamlet’s death, his actions in themselves do not trigger destruction at court; that honour goes to Hamlet and his catalytic, albeit delayed, action. Even though the ghost’s visitations are a result of Claudius’ actions, Hamlet’s response of feigned madness to the call of vengeance – his attempt to harness uncertainty – has sparked the tragic narrative. Indeed, while the uncertainty of Claudius’ involvement in Old Hamlet’s death could be identified as the reason for the prince biding his time, the multitude of other elements at work are so tangled that the difficulty of teasing them out keeps certainty at bay indefinitely.

In “Inconstance”, Montaigne expresses his difficulty believing in anyone’s constancy, the consequent ease with which he believes that everyone is inconstant, and his conclusion to that thought because of such inconstancy: “any who judges in detail and distinctly, piece by

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396 Hamlet’s own antic disposition prompts Elsinore’s courtiers to rely entirely on his outward appearance to discern his intentionally uncertain character. Later, his relatively public claim that he is “but mad north-north-west” functions within the framework of a visual change in weather. Conversely, though, his assurance to Gertrude that he is “mad in craft” complicates whether these claims of partial or temporary sanity can be true, as this claim is only in her presence. Before the Mousetrap Hamlet warns Horatio that he “must be idle”, so we assume that in any instance that they are alone, Hamlet would not be “antic” (II.ii.80). Nevertheless, the play points to this only indirectly, and Horatio’s reluctance in Act V to approve or celebrate Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s death in Hamlet’s place shows how the prince’s friend is not privy to all of Hamlet’s inwardness. See Chapter 4.
Likewise, Hamlet articulates his frustration with the uncertainty generated by seeming (his “suits of woe” and apparent grief) even as he uses it to his advantage in his “antic disposition” (I.ii.78, I.v.172). Conversely, Hamlet’s insistence that he is “but mad north-north-west” and only “mad in craft” works at odds with his concern that seeming and being cannot coincide (II.ii.347, III.iv.189). Hamlet’s set of selves that he portrays “distinctly”, and “piece by piece”, is most evident in the tension between his antic self and his desire to escape the tragedy embodied by the “prison” of Denmark (II.ii.234).

At the conclusion of “Inconstance”, Montaigne reiterates that one’s external self or actions are a kind of mask, while the inmost part remains fragmentary and unclear:

> It is not steadfast judgement to judge us simply by our outward actions; you have to look inside, and see that which makes things move; but especially since it is a risky and great enterprise, I would like less people to meddle in [that kind of judgement].

Hamlet’s attempts to “catch” the king by watching him watch the Mousetrap are impossible. Montaigne would not approve of this “risky” judgement of outward expression. Hamlet’s approach is what Montaigne would call meddlesome, because he is trying to find the answer only by others’ exteriority. When he delays killing Claudius at prayer, his reliance on outward signs still takes precedence, even though the prince takes great care to object to the power of his own outward appearance: “all forms, moods, shapes of grief…are [only] actions that a man might play” (I.ii.82, 84). Claudius, too, of course both actively deceives the prince by putting on his various outward masks and deceives himself, in attempting to divine Hamlet’s inwardness. This is unsuccessful because Claudius attempts to do so by observing

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397 Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 332. Original: “Je crois des hommes plus mal aisément la constance, que toute autre chose, et rien plus aisément que l’inconstance. Qui en jugerait en détail [et distinctement pièce à pièce,] rencontrerait plus souvent à dire vrai.” Montaigne adds “et distinctement pièce à pièce” to the copy that becomes the 1595 posthumous edition of his works. See Chapter 6 for more on how this fragmentation affects the texts themselves.

398 Ibid., 338, my emphasis. Original: “ce n’est pas tour de rassis entendement de nous juger simplement par nos actions de dehors. Il faut sonder jusqu’au dedans et voir par quels ressorts se donne le branle; mais d’autant que c’est une hasardeuse et haute entreprise, je voudrais que moins de gens s’en mêlissent”.

399 For more on confession and Claudius’ prayers, see Chapter 3.
Hamlet’s antic exteriority, and yet simultaneously decides that he recognises both Hamlet’s inward and outward selves for what they are.

The Q1 text does not allow the king much time to put words alongside the actions he plays out or otherwise orchestrates. However, in the Q2/F texts, Claudius orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to analyse Hamlet’s transformation because “nor th’exterior nor the inward man / Resembles that it was” (II.ii.6-7). Moreover, while Claudius identifies a cause from Hamlet’s outward self, whose “father’s death…thus hath put him / So much from th’understanding of himself” (II.ii.8-9) – a phrase that implies Hamlet’s grief cuts off his own access to his inwardness – the king also says he “cannot dream” of what could possibly alter Hamlet, inwardly or outwardly (II.ii.10).

Claudius is not solely responsible for his imprecise view of Hamlet’s intentional inconstancy; Polonius is another culprit, turning his daughter, the king, and the queen into spectators of false, outward appearances. When the counsellor suggests that Ophelia’s actions “hath made [Hamlet] mad”, he is really accusing himself of encouraging the conflict between his daughter’s “true” interior and “false” exterior selves to be more apparent to the prince and to others. Ophelia plays into this conflict by obeying her father’s orders to refuse Hamlet’s access to her and, later, returning his favours. Nevertheless, she is a puppet to and spectator of her father’s dependence on outward appearances that he engineers to fulfil his own desires.

No wonder Hamlet attempts to know Claudius’ heart by endeavouring to “observe his looks”, and tells Horatio to watch Claudius “with the very comment of [his] soul” when the Mousetrap “comes near the circumstance” of Old Hamlet’s death (III.i.549; ii.69, 66-67). Hamlet is very attuned to the idea of his antic appearance throughout the lead up to the performance of the Mousetrap. In response to being asked “how fare you?” he answers “excellent i’faith, of the chameleon’s dish: I eat the air, promise-crammed. You cannot feed
In the pun on “fare” we see the same ideas about inconstancy that Montaigne discusses, mediated through similar language about appetite and uncertainty:

…our fashion is to go after the inclinations of our appetite, to the left, the right, upwards, downwards, as the wind of the occasion takes us. We don’t think what we want, except at the instance in which we want, and we change like that animal that takes the colour of whatever place we put it…it is nothing other than swaying and inconstancy, and we are lead around by others. We do not go: instead, we are carried along like floating things, gently or violently, depending on whether the water is agitated or calm.  

Montaigne’s last few sentences here are highly similar to what he discusses in “Du Repentir” with words like “branle”. Hamlet’s reference to a chameleon, the creature whose skin “chaungeth into dyuers colours, according to the thynge that he seeth…[and] is nourished onely by ayre” implies that the prince sees himself not only as changeable but as changed by what he sees.  

Carried along by the theatre of Elsinore’s court, Hamlet can only respond to each event as he sees it. His attempt to impose the same effect on Claudius comes to the fore in the sequence where he calls himself a chameleon. In Q2/F, the king responds with “these words are not mine” and Hamlet, triumphant, responds “No, nor mine now” (III.ii.85-87). Here is Hamlet’s acknowledgement that it is not only words, but rather the actions of theatre and what Claudius sees, that must play their part in forcing him to look inwards at his guilt and reveal it outwardly to onlookers in the court and in the audience. Perhaps unfortunately for Hamlet, his thesis is initially disproved, because the dumb show does not incite a response from Claudius (at least, not in words).  

The prince must wait – until somewhere between his own barbed explanation of “Lucianus, nephew to the king” and the player’s pouring of  

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400 Or, “I’faith, the chameleon’s dish, not capon-crammed – feed o’the air” (Q1 ix.66-67).
401 Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 333. Original: “Notre façon ordinaire, c’est d’aller après les inclinations de notre appétit, à gauche, à dextre, contremont, contre-bas, selon que le vent des occasions nous emporte. Nous ne pensons ce que nous voulons, qu’à l’instant que nous le voulons, et changeons comme cet animal qui prend la couleur du lieu où on le couche…ce n’est que branle et inconstance, Ducimur ut nervis alienis mobile lignum. Nous n’allons pas; on nous emporte, comme les choses qui flottent, ores doucement, ores avec ques violence, selon que l’eau est ireuse ou bonasse”.
402 Thomas Elyot, The Dictionary of Syr Thomas Eliot Knight (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1538), XVIII.
403 When staged, Claudius may well respond in kind, by enacting his response to the dumb show. However, it takes the more complete, language-driven retelling of his crime to force a stronger emotion (perhaps rage? or guilt?) to the surface.
poison into another’s ear – to see the result of Claudius’ response to both words and actions (Q1 ix.142-170; III.ii.221-239). In agitating the waters of Elsinore with the Mousetrap, Hamlet responds to Montaigne’s later image of floating along in unpredictable waters, “[wanting] nothing freely, nothing absolutely, and nothing constantly” in the unpredictable sea of exterior seeming.\textsuperscript{404}

Hamlet’s frustration towards both acting and seeming is because, like Montaigne’s own idea of inward, piecemeal selfhood, he sees these responses as masks covering inward truth. However, he still relies on outward show. This is his inconsistency. During the players’ performance, all three texts call for Hamlet to insist upon a “suit of sables” in remembrance of his father’s death that has already, it seems, been forgotten. This is another example of Hamlet’s reliance on exteriority. His obsession with appearances has another side, though, in this frustration towards others’ unreadable outward selves. According to Maus, Hamlet’s words to his mother much earlier in the play “[distinguish] between the elaborate external rituals of mourning and an inner, invisible anguish”, and she emphasises that “his black attire, his sigh, his tear fail to denote him truly not because they are false…but because they might be false”.\textsuperscript{405}

Acting, falseness, and masks are evident in Ophelia’s staged meeting with the prince to return his “remembrances” (III.i.93). This scene also features a conversation that flirts with the paradox of constancy. Hamlet’s “Montaignian” list describing his character mirrors the tone of Montaigne’s glib self-criticism in his essay entitled “Des Boiteux”. Hamlet may dismiss all women as frail, but he is also preoccupied with all men being “monstrous” (III.i.134). His view of makeup as a kind of moral face paint indicates his disgust with

\textsuperscript{404} Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 333. Original: “Nous flottons entre divers avis: nous ne voulons rien librement, rien absolument, rien constamment”. Montaigne adds this entire sentence onto the Bordeaux copy, which becomes the 1595 edition.

\textsuperscript{405} Maus, Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance, 1. I will return to the importance of clothing in the final section of this chapter.
outward falseness, particularly when he claims that this kind of falseness “hath made [him] mad” (III.i.140-141). Hamlet is not aware of Polonius’ orders that she “[not] give words or talk with [him]” (I.iii.134). Ophelia’s responses can only be minor interjections, cut off each time by Hamlet’s barraging anger, but they are also attempts to explain her own apparent inconstancy:

| OPHELIA | My lord, I have remembrances of yours |
|         | That I have longèd long to re-deliver… |
| HAMLET  | …I never gave you aught.                |
| OPHELIA | My honoured lord, you know right well you did… |
| HAMLET  | …if you be honest and fair, you should admit no discourse to your beauty. |
| OPHELIA | Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty? |
| HAMLET  | Ay truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd, than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once. |
| OPHELIA | Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so. |
| HAMLET  | You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not. |
| OPHELIA | I was the more deceived.                 |

(III.i.93-94, 97, 107-118)406

Hamlet’s anger towards Ophelia’s apparent dishonesty and, thereby all women’s frailty, turns to the same language that Montaigne uses in his mention of Virtue’s mask:

[We are made of patches…and] we try to acquire honour by false means. Virtue will not be followed by virtue, and if we sometimes borrow her mask she will tear it from our face immediately.407

Again, this choice of wording, “patches” or “pièces rapportées”, emphasises the idea of fragmentation. Hamlet agrees that it is useless to dissemble himself to appear more virtuous. However, he accuses others of undertaking this self-anatomisation. Montaigne argues likewise:

I myself consciously do not lie. While I do not frequently give credence and authority to what I say, I find myself often getting heated about the matter at

407 Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 336. Original: “Notre fait, ce ne sont que pièces rapportées…et voulons acquérir un honneur à fausses enseignes. La vertu ne veut être suivie que pour elle-même; et si on emprunte parfois son masque pour autre occasion, elle nous l’arrache aussitôt du visage”.

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hand… increasing and inflating my subject with my voice, gestures, the vigour and force of my words, and so by extension and amplification am no longer interested in the naïve truth. However, I do this on the condition that the first to demand plain truth from me receives it without exaggeration, emphasis, or padding. Lively and boisterous words like mine can so easily become hyperbolic.

I am myself indifferent honest, but I could accuse myself of such crimes…O, I am very proud, ambitious, disdainful, with more sins at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth? …We are arrant knaves all. Believe none of us…

(Q1 vii.164-171).

I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious…

(III.i.122).

Montaigne’s review of his own character matches Hamlet’s opinion of his monstrous, inward self. Each avoids lying, but could be accused of that sin and of others, and should not be entirely trusted. Becoming more aggravated, like in Montaigne’s “heated” arguments, Hamlet insists that if Ophelia must marry at all, she must “marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them” (III.i.133-135). The word “monstrous” also evokes Montaigne’s inward deformity in “Des Boiteux“:

I have not seen anything more expressly monstrous and miraculous than myself in this world. One tames oneself of all strangeness with custom and with time, but the more I haunt myself, and know myself, the more my deformity astonishes me, and the less I understand myself.

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408 Montaigne, “Des Boiteux,” 1028. Original: “Moi-même, qui faits singulière conscience de mentir et qui ne me soucie guère de donner créance et autorité à ce que je dis, m’aperçois toutefois, aux propos que j’ai en main…je grossis et enfle mon sujet par voix, mouvements, vigueur et force de paroles, et encore par extension et amplification, non sans intérêt de la vérité naïve. Mais je le fais en condition pourtant, qu’au premier qui me rameine et qui me demande la vérité nue et crue, je quitte soudain mon effort et la lui donne, sans exagération, sans emphase et remplissage. La parole vive et bruyante, comme est la mienne ordinaire, s’emporte volontiers à l’hyperbole”. The final sentence here is a later addition. Montaigne’s tendency towards hyperbole perhaps aligns with Hamlet’s boast that he is revengeful in the Q2/F text; it is hard to believe this statement from the prince, though as viewers we perhaps agree more happily with his self-appraisal about his pride and ambition.

409 Ibid., 1029. Original: “Je n’ai vu monstre et miracle au monde plus exprès que moi-même. On s’apprivoise à toute étrangeté par l’usage et le temps; mais plus je me hante et me connais, plus ma difformité m’étonne, moins je m’entends en moi.”. I borrow the translation of “usage” as “custom” from Screech. See Screech, “On the Lame,” 1164.
Here, he comes close to his renowned “what do I know?”⁴¹⁰ Of course, Montaigne promises that anyone who “[demands] plain truth” will receive it, unlike Hamlet’s derision towards honesty, best summarised in his assertion that men “are arrant knaves all”. The prince’s purposeless mood verges on the vision of darkness that Lewis proposes, as found in “Too too solid flesh” and “To be or not to be” (I.ii.129, III.i.56).⁴¹¹ However, it also leads Hamlet into his angry assertion about false appearances: “I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another…it hath made me mad” (III.i.137-141). Here, his language evokes not only the image of painting already discussed in the previous chapter, but also more of Montaigne’s discussion of inconstancy:

[Authors] choose a universal feature, and according to its image, arrange and interpret all of someone’s actions; if they cannot twist their features enough, they accuse them of dissemblance instead.⁴¹²

The “features” of this mask of inconstancy invert Montaigne’s ideas about maintaining an inward, “swaying” self, as he suggests instead in “Du Repentir”.

A musical interlude

In Hamlet’s metaphor of playing on a pipe, “as easy as lying”, Shakespeare responds to Montaigne’s commentary on the “harmony” of an imaginary person who is whole and comprehensible, rather than discordant (III.ii.324). Both writers thus correlate the harmony with constancy or certainty, as Montaigne explains:

If someone could prescribe and establish certain laws and a certain policy in his mind, we would see, shining throughout his life an evenness of habit, an order, and an infallible relationship between all these things…This would be an easy person to understand…if anyone touched one part of them, they would

⁴¹⁰ Montaigne, “Apologie,” 527. Original: “Que sais-je?” Frame notes that “[“Apologie”] has been the most influential and remains one of the most perplexing. The extreme scepticism of the famous “Que sais-je?” (What do I know?) was accepted for centuries as Montaigne’s central position, though recent scholarship sees it rather as a step towards the convictions of Book Three”. See: Frame, “Apologie,” 196 and Chapters 4 and 6.
⁴¹¹ See: Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness*.

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touch on all of them. There is an undeniable harmony of sound between it all. For us, however, much of what we do must be judged more particularly.\textsuperscript{413}

If someone this level headed and logical existed, we would be able to see and comprehend a part of them and then, by extension, their entirety. After the Mousetrap, Hamlet accuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of thinking him “easier to be played on than a pipe” (III.ii.334). The instrumental figure works as both metaphor and metonymy, representing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s bumbling attempts at insight and Hamlet’s (possibly anguished?) inward discord. Hamlet rejects his former friends’ ability to “to know [his] stops...[and] pluck out the heart of [his] mystery” (III.ii.330-331).\textsuperscript{414} This is not only because he has no intention of revealing his intentions, but because he cannot produce a single note, as in Montaigne’s commentary, that will adequately “make [the organ] speak” (III.ii.333). As the pipe cannot be sounded by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, so too is Hamlet unable to produce “undeniable harmony”.\textsuperscript{415}

Ophelia identifies Hamlet’s discord, too, in his deceptive “music vows” and in his “noble and most sovereign reason, / Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and harsh” (III.i.150, 151-152). This only holds in Q2 and F; in Q1 the music is instead her description of the prince “all dashed and splintered”, and in these words she stresses the fragmentary imagery once more (Q1 vii.197). Florio translates Montaigne’s words above thus: “He that touched but one step of it hath touched all. It is an harmony of well-according tunes and which cannot contradict itself”.\textsuperscript{416} When the translation occurs, the musical metaphor does not become any clearer, and instead adds to the pervasive sense of uncertainty. However, the chronology of course indicates the possibility of Q2 being written before Florio’s work, too.

\textsuperscript{413} Ibid., 334.
\textsuperscript{414} The difference in Q1 is less obvious. Hamlet accuses his friends of wanting to “search the very inward part of [his] heart and dive into the secret of [his] soul” (Q1 ix.205-206). This indicates either an interesting distinction between one’s heart and soul, or otherwise simply that Q1 Hamlet’s language is less ambiguous than the “mystery” of Q2/F.
\textsuperscript{415} Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 334.
\textsuperscript{416} Florio, “Of the Inconstancy of Our Actions,” 93.
This is not to say that the harmony is unclear in the French. Shakespeare and Montaigne connect harmony and reasoning on one side, and discord and fragmentation on the other. Montaigne’s words “harmonie” and “accordants” in particular are of course homophonic to (and “harmonic” with) their English counterparts. Whether synchronicity is in full play or left to one side, a reader need not have fluent French to see that the idea is being addressed likewise in both sets of texts.

As Maus suggests, Hamlet’s obsession with falseness is part of his “distinction between interior and exterior”, which is both a “familiar rhetorical tactic” of the era and also a means to “privilege whatever is classified as interior”. However, as Maus also takes note, “inwardness as it becomes a concern in the theatre is always perforce inwardness displayed: an inwardness, in other words, that has already ceased to exist”. The playwright must make the inward invisible for the play to function, as Maus observes that Shakespeare must, as a playwright. Montaigne is not so limited in form. Hamlet and Ophelia’s spoken uncertainty corresponds with Hamlet’s fragmentary antic disposition that he takes on to deceive others, even though in doing so he perhaps fragments and confuses himself all the more.

**Shreds and patches**

At three points in “Inconstance”, Montaigne uses similar wording to describe fragmentary states. He establishes that our inconstancy is because “we are made up of nothing but patched-up pieces”. He uses the metaphor of painting to capture constancy and inconstancy, and proposes that the former is impossible:

> Anyone who does not draw their life towards a certain end will find it impossible to arrange each of their particular actions. It is impossible to arrange the pieces without the idea as a whole in your head. Why provide

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418 Ibid., 32.
419 Ibid., 33.
yourself with colours if you don’t know what to paint? No one can draw their whole life; they can only sketch out parts of it.\textsuperscript{421}

Montaigne therefore asserts that understanding someone’s inconsistency is not possible, because their actions will always be inconstant. He notes that everyone is made up of these inconsistent “pieces”, that “these are so unformed and diverse, that each piece and each moment plays its part”, and that those parts are “as much different from each other as we are from each other”.\textsuperscript{422} Montaigne’s frequent use of this fragmentary imagery of pieces and patches emphasises his conviction that anyone’s wholeness is in fact impossible.

Translators Frame and Screech make note of the impossible uncertainty that Montaigne addresses throughout his writing itself. In a note at the beginning of his translation of “On the inconstancy of our actions”, Screech writes:

\begin{quote}
In Montaigne’s French \textit{inconstance} is a term which includes fickleness and variability as well as inconsistency of conduct. In Latin, \textit{constatia} (inner consistency and steadfast constancy) were the ideals of Stoic philosophy. Montaigne…now moves more boldly into new areas of exploration of himself and the nature of Man, both of which he finds subject to fickleness and marked by inconsistent qualities.\textsuperscript{423}
\end{quote}

Frame footnotes his translation by saying that “throughout the chapter, as the context shows, “inconstance” can mean both inconstancy and inconsistency, just as “constance” can mean both constancy and consistency”.\textsuperscript{424} Hamlet himself only refers to his constancy in direct terms once, and only in the Q2 text, responding to the lord sent to invite him to fence with Laertes: “I am constant to my purposes” (V.ii.175). Nevertheless, Shakespeare and Montaigne’s unwillingness to portray constancy or certainty is most clear in their use of

\textsuperscript{421} Montaigne, “De l’Inconstance de Nos Actions,” 337. Original: “A qui n’a dressé en gros sa vie à une certaine fin, il est impossible de disposer les actions particulières. Il est impossible de ranger les pièces, à qui n’a une forme du total en sa tête. A quoi faire la provision des couleurs à qui ne sait ce qu’il a à peindre? Aucun ne fait certain dessin de sa vie, et n’en délibérons qu’à parcelles”.

\textsuperscript{422} Ibid. Original: “Nous sommes tous de lopins, et d’une contexture si informe et diverse, que chaque pièce, chaque moment, fait son jeu. Et se trouve autant de différence de nous à nous mêmes, que de nous à autrui”.

\textsuperscript{423} Screech, introduction to “On the Inconstancy of Our Actions,” 373, his italics.

\textsuperscript{424} Frame, “Inconstance,” 142, his italics.
language that evokes tension, theatrical and otherwise. Fragments, patches, and pieces are one subset of this kind of language.

Hamlet’s seventh soliloquy, only present in Q2, concludes with the couplet “from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth”, signalling an (apparent) end to Hamlet’s indecision (IV.iv.65-66). In Q1 and F, Hamlet’s commitment to vengeance, at this point in the narrative, is yet to be confirmed. The closest he gets to vengeance is in his fear at the ghost’s reappearance when reprimanding his mother. Philip Edwards suggests that the inclusion of the Q2-only soliloquy drastically alters Hamlet’s resolve. The Q2 prince discredits any virtue from Fortinbras, sending an army of twenty thousand “for a fantasy and trick of fame” (IV.iv.60). Edwards elaborates:

> Hamlet’s common sense about the absurdity of Fortinbras’s venture shows the pointlessness of his envy. In the Hecuba soliloquy, Hamlet worked through his futile envy of the Player; in this soliloquy, the contradiction remains unresolved.425

Shakespeare’s fragmentary terminology in the extended Q2 scene accumulates throughout the scene. It is full of examples like Montaigne’s recurrent use of “pieces” and similar words, but also develops past instances of individual words that might be indebted to Montaigne. Instead, the sequence of fragmentary terms responds to and develops the conversation occurring about the Norwegian army being poised “against some part”, going “to gain a little patch of ground” (IV.iv.11, 18). Hamlet asks if the offensive is against “the main…or for some frontier” of Poland (IV.iv. 15-16). He ruminates on the small fragment of land as “an egg-shell”, both breakable and worthless (IV.iv.53). He also describes “a plot…which is not tomb enough” for the soldiers who will “go to their graves like beds”, where “enough” encompasses Hamlet’s sense of inadequacy in the face of his task as well as the limitations of a plot of land lacking adequate burial space (IV.iv.62-64). He realises that he is overthinking in “a thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom / And ever three parts coward” but

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does not know why he still insists “this thing’s to do” (IV.iv.42-42, 44). Unable to reconcile the “pieces” of his self, Hamlet cannot “arrange…[his] particular actions”, because his task of vengeance is irreconcilable with any “certain end” he may have planned for himself.\textsuperscript{426}

Irresolution (between Hamlet’s envy toward those who can act easily and his own delay) exemplifies Hamlet’s inconstancy both across the different versions and within any given version. F and Q1 do not include this speech, so the development of Hamlet’s characterisation must wait until the graveyard scene. The result is that his development is more linear. In the Folio he remains unresolved. The addition of this speech in Q2, though, keeps Hamlet uncertain and interrupts his linear progression towards certainty and revenge. The highly fragmentary accumulation of this rhetoric collides with Q2 Hamlet’s resolve, disintegrating the Senecan “certain end” of Hamlet’s decision only to have “bloody” thoughts (IV.iv.66).

The Q2-only scene contains answers to the same questions that Montaigne asks about interior inconstancy. Shakespeare’s use of fragmentary metaphors and images does not just “match” the content of Montaigne’s discussion, but is also enhanced by the parallels between Hamlet and Fortinbras as inconstant characters. Hamlet observes that Fortinbras’ actions seem incongruent with his view of the Norwegian prince, or with Fortinbras’ own “self”.

While Hamlet admires Fortinbras for his action, here in this speech Hamlet identifies some of what actually corresponds between the two princes. Both of them respond to the need for a father’s vengeance in ways that are not consistent with their aims: Fortinbras fights for something with little value, and Hamlet fails, until the very end, to fight at all. Montaigne’s piecemeal language exemplifies what he sees as the impossibility of knowing someone fully because of their fragmentary behaviour:

\textsuperscript{426} A more specifically anatomical word in this scene is “impostume” (IV.iv.27). Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 337.
Those who try to control others are most prevented when they try to patch
someone together and “show them in one light”; they contradict each other in
such a strange fashion that it seems impossible for them to come from the
same shop.\textsuperscript{427}

Montaigne suggests that while “it seems fair to judge someone by the common traits of their
life”, the instability of anyone’s personality prevents this, and “even good authors are too
stubborn in trying to weave anyone into one constant and solid fabric”.\textsuperscript{428} This fabric
metaphor appears twice more in the discussion. Montaigne describes everyone as “made from
scrap”\textsuperscript{429}. Towards the end of the essay, he then proposes that these fragments are the true
difference between each person:

\begin{quote}
We are all make from plots of fabric, and each one is so unformed and diverse,
with each piece and each moment playing its part; to find the difference
between them is to find the difference between us and others, too.\textsuperscript{430}
\end{quote}

The metaphors of fabric and of being woven together remain at the fore in Florio’s
translation, too: “we are all framed of flaps and patches and of so shapeless and diverse a
contexture, that every piece and every moment playeth his part”.\textsuperscript{431} Florio’s own work
translating between languages, and his extensively uncertain and theatrical transformation of
Montaigne’s work indicates the kind of reading that other Renaissance figures may have
undertaken.\textsuperscript{432} The uncertainty of \textit{Hamlet} is generated not only by its narrative but by the

\textsuperscript{427} Montaigne, “Inconstance,” 331. Original: “Ceux qui s’exercent à contrôler les actions humaines, ne se
trouvent en aucune partie si empêchés, qu’à les rapiécer et mettre à même lustre: car elles se contredisent
communément de si étrange façon, qu’il semble impossible qu’elles soient parties de même boutique.”

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 332. Original: “Il y a quelque apparence de faire jugement d’un homme par les plus communs traits de
sa vie…il m’a semblé souvent que les bons auteurs mêmes ont tort de s’opiniâtrer à former de nous une
constante et solide contexture.” There is a satisfying resonance in this example about “good authors” in
Shakespeare’s insistence on \textit{Hamlet}’s “flaps and patches” that cannot be solidly woven together. \textit{Hamlet}’s
inconsistency is his character.

\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., 336.

\textsuperscript{430} Ibid., 337. Original: “Nous sommes tous de lopins, et d’une contexture si informe et diverse, que chaque
piece, chaque moment, fait son jeu. Et se trouve autant de différence de nous à nous mêmes, que de nous à
autrui”.

\textsuperscript{431} Florio, “Of the inconstancy of our actions,” 98; Ellrodt, “Self-consciousness in Montaigne and Shakespeare,”
44. See Chapter 1 for more on the relationship between ragged clothing, fooling, and \textit{Hamlet}’s characterisation.

\textsuperscript{432} William M. Hamlin suggests that Florio’s translation draws out the theatrical elements of Montaigne in
relation to the dramatic traditions in England. “Montaigne resorts with some regularity to theatrical metaphors”,
but Florio enhances them and also “introduces theatrical expressions where Montaigne does not”, adding to the
characterisations that result from the contemplative work Montaigne undertakes in the “patchy” images. Hamlet responds to some but not all “patches” of Fortinbras’ character, even though he acknowledges the senselessness of battle yet to come, by revisiting his admiration towards the “tender prince” (IV.iv.48). Shakespeare’s pervasively fragmentary language therefore mimics both the content and the language in Montaigne’s discussion of fragmentary “characterisation”, whether that characterisation is of characters in texts or of the readers who approach and comprehend those texts.

Hamlet’s “How all occasions” soliloquy identifies the inconstancy of Hamlet’s actions and his fragmentary “self” across the texts. At this point in the narrative, Hamlet is poised to reveal his inward nature more clearly to the audience or reader, given both rhetorical space and better information about his situation in relation to Claudius. The sequence does not occur in the Q1 or F texts. However, by the time Hamlet dies, Shakespeare has at no point truly made the prince’s inner self apparent to other characters or the audience in full, but rather provided a collection of inconstant and confused “scraps”. This is the case in all three texts. Fragmenting something and then reassembling it might assist us in understanding something, but we are never afforded a “whole” view of Hamlet’s character.

Sometimes, though, the play’s uncertainty is countered by rhetorical clarity. In the cloud-watching exchange with Polonius, Hamlet combines his intentional opacity with a similar rhetoric to that used by Montaigne. In Q2/F, when Hamlet likens a cloud to a camel, weasel, and finally a whale, he does not backtrack to explain his previous analogies (III.ii.339-344). Instead, his fragmentary images combine and accumulate meaning, without relinquishing any features of those images, even when they appear logically contradictory. How can something be like all three animals? Hamlet’s language does not in fact directly

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433 See Chapter 6 for consideration of “De l’Expérience” as an even more interesting comment on this uncertainty.
contradict itself. The cloud is “almost” a camel, “like” (more certain than “almost”) a weasel – “backed like” one, according to Polonius – and “like” a whale. This seems to follow Montaigne’s fragmentary style: rather than replacing his figures, Hamlet adds more of them, building up a chimeric view of a cloud that is all of those animals and none of them, but also a cloud that seems to represent them nonetheless. In Q1 Hamlet speaks differently. Initially, he describes the cloud “in the shape of a camel”, but changes his mind, saying “now methinks it’s like a weasel...or like a whale” (ix.223-224, 226, 228, my italics). Here, the cloud is not like all of these things to different degrees, but a thing that he cannot adequately describe with language, and therefore cannot comprehend. Alternatively, his perspective changes here and so the differences seem fragmentary but are nevertheless accurate. Of course, a cloud is none of these animals, and the extent to which Corambis/Polonius humours the prince is largely up to the delivery of the play as a dramatic text, and directorial choices about delivery and style. Hamlet’s continued false distinction between exterior and interior via sight drives the conversation. His acknowledgement of the inadequacy of his descriptions reflects his broader concern with the slipperiness of language and performance.

In addition to providing a kind of counter-clarity to the uncertainty of these texts, this exchange about clouds is followed almost immediately by the conversation between Hamlet and his mother. In this scene, each of the three Hamlet texts revolves around the “clouts”, rather than “clouds”, of Old Hamlet’s usurper. When the Ghost interrupts Hamlet’s confrontation with his mother in Q1, the prince’s tirade about the king is cut off, mid-sentence:

HAMLET: To leave him that bare a monarch’s mind
For a king of clouts, of very shreds!
... 
QUEEN: Hamlet, no more.
...thou cleaves my heart in twain.
HAMLET: O, throw away the worser part of it,

434 In turn, we see him mirroring Montaigne’s fragmentary editing style. See Chapter 6.
And keep the better –

Enter the GHOST in his night-gown.

Save me, save me, you gracious powers above,
And hover over me with your celestial wings! –
Do you not come your tardy son to chide…?

(Q1 xi.44-45, 50, 55-60)

Hamlet’s language here hearkens back to the conversation about clouds, with the slant homophonic “clouts” to describe Claudius’ raggedness, improper usurpation and false role as king all at once.435 In Q2/F, this dialogue changes:

HAMLET: A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the previous diadem stole
And put it in his pocket.

GERTRUDE: No more!

HAMLET: A king of shreds and patches –
Save me and hover o’er me with your wings,
You heavenly guards! – What would your gracious figure?

(III.iv.96-104)

The Arden editors of their Folio text place the Ghost’s entry is between “A king of shreds and patches” and “Save me and hover o’er me…” instead. This implies that “shreds and patches” is part of Hamlet’s description of Claudius as unfit for kingship. However, the Cambridge edition keeps the Ghost’s entry before “shreds and patches”. As such, the Ghost’s “shreds” suggest his grave clothes, his night clothes – as in Q1 – or perhaps another element of the actor’s costume when dressed as the Ghost.

The homophony of clouds and clouts is an example of how uncertain shapes and words function across the play texts. The sounds of the words in Q1 imply the other conversation about clouds as well as the idea of patches that emerges in Q2/F. However, the word “clouts” implies several meanings that can be read helpfully in this scene alongside

435 Aside from the voiced alveolar stop “d” and voiceless alveolar stop “t”, these words are homophonic. In contemporary English, the vowels of “cloud” would often be said more slowly than those of “clout”. David Crystal suggests the words rhyme exactly in early modern English. See “cloud” [klɔʊd] and “clout” [klɔʊt] in Crystal, The Oxford Dictionary of Original Shakespearean Pronunciation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
Montaignian fragmentation.\textsuperscript{436} The verb, “clout” can mean “to cuff heavily”, but also “to mend” or “to patch”, or “to join awkwardly or coarsely together” (as Johnson defines) from at least the 1380s.\textsuperscript{437} The OED editors also suggest “to patch clumsily or botch up” as another definition alongside Johnson’s. The noun refers to any “patch, flat piece, shred” or “piece of cloth…etc.” for repairs, but is also identified as “a small piece of shred produced by tearing or rending”. Not only is the clout made from destruction, but it is generally “worthless”, or is a word “applied contemptuously to any article of clothing”. The term can also describe a clot or clod of earth. Perhaps the two most interesting implications of the word are closer to Shakespeare’s own time. The expression “man of clouts” or “king of clouts” describes “a mere ‘doll’ in the garb of a man, a king, etc.; a ‘lay-figure’” from the 1460s. The phrase “as pale or white as a clout” is found in print from the 1550s, too. If Hamlet describes his uncle’s unworthiness to rule Denmark, “clouts” encompasses the destructiveness of his rule and his responsibility perhaps for the nation’s fragmentation, as well as Hamlet’s. If instead the prince describes his father’s Ghost, as is left ambiguous in Q2/F, the word’s meaning shifts to encompass Old Hamlet’s plot of earth for his grave, destroyed and fragmented now, at least figuratively, by the Ghost’s quasi-resurrection. It also suggests his paleness in death, his sham royalty as only the likeness of a living king, and his ragged grave clothes or battle armour. While Q1 identifies the Ghost in his night gown, the word “clout” provides these potent images and possibilities that make up the fragmented scene on the page and stage.

**Interruption**

Lewis notes how Shakespeare employs the uncertain figure of aposiopesis “time and time again…to frustrate completion, closure, and meaning”.\textsuperscript{438} Returning to the seventh

\textsuperscript{436} See OED “clout, n.” and “clout, v.”.
\textsuperscript{437} See Johnson in OED “clout, v.”.
\textsuperscript{438} Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness*, 38.
soliloquy, we see how a fragmentary not-quite ending “frustrates completion” of the Q2 text by interrupting Hamlet’s progression towards wholeness. It also interrupts the chronological progression that seems to be implied by the development from Q1 to F in print. This messy group of texts nonetheless make up *Hamlet*. The extent to which uncertainty is essential to the play stretches beyond any individual character or text. Hamlet’s closing words in each version invite, and indeed implore, that readers reconsider the text in light of its completion. However, any sense of certainty or completion in the face of the plural texts is false.

But this false certainty is exciting for the conclusion of the play, too. Aposiopesis usually describes an unfinished sentence or idea, or a kind of silencing. Hamlet’s final line in Q2 is “the rest is silence”, and is traditionally the one used in performances (V.ii.337). More interestingly, F has “the rest is silence”, followed by four wordless sounds that still somehow convey emotion, up to interpretation, but nevertheless not silent: “O, o, o, o” (F V.ii.312-313). In both these versions, Horatio responds with a call to “flights of angels [to] sing” him to his rest (Q2 V.ii.339; F V.ii.315). Q1, different again, has “farewell Horatio. Heaven receive my soul” (Q1 xvii.111). Here, Horatio is denied the right to be the reply, the voice of reason, as his name roughly translates, as Fortinbras arrives on the bloody scene. The possibility of a certain ending – of silence, finally, in death – breaks apart into fragments in much the same way as Montaigne argues that certainty cannot be found in anyone, or in any text. Instead, the “fabric” of the writing process is re-woven both in each printed version and in every new staged version of the dramatic text.

Reading these three versions of *Hamlet* alongside Montaigne’s treatment of uncertainty reveals what is perhaps an underlying relationship. Shakespeare and Montaigne share language and ideas beyond source hunting or general, related commonplace sources. Their philosophy about inwardness runs in parallel to their own editorial processes and their acknowledgement and perhaps delight in the alterability of text from the writer’s mind to the
page or stage. Unlike Montaigne’s work, whatever form Shakespeare’s editing process took is now silent to us. Hamlet insists that the story is over, though he asks Horatio to retell it. Montaigne does likewise in his final chapter, “De l’Expérience”, going so far as to leave an annotated edition of his complete essays for posthumous publication. The multiple *Hamlet* texts are also an essay in the process of being written and rewritten. Turning to Montaigne’s writing and editing processes in my final chapter, I suggest that his self-analysis of how to finish writing frames the uncertainty also found in the *Hamlet* texts and their various editions.
6. “To tell my story”: Montaignian editing and the tragic sense of ending

O fie, Horatio. An if thou shouldst die
What a scandal wouldst thou leave behind?
What tongue should tell the story of our deaths
If not from thee?
(Q1 xvii.106-109)

O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.
(V.ii.323-328)

Early in his essay “De l’Expérience”, Michel de Montaigne asks, wryly, “when is it agreed between us that ‘this book has enough, and there is nothing more to say about it’?” 439 His comment emerges from his discussion of editing and glossing legal texts – he was a lawyer by training – but his words can be rather tellingly applied to scholarly editing practices, including those surrounding Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Both Hamlet and the Essais, whether edited, glossed, or simply replicated, are neither singular nor intact. Montaigne’s explanations of editing and indeed of ending can then be found in different forms within each and across all of the Hamlet texts. In this way, Shakespeare’s play texts are an essay constantly in the process of being (re-)written.

Montaigne identifies three main features of his own editing practices. The first is that everything is a part of the text, and the working out of the self in textual form is as much a

process as a final result: “I myself am the subject of my book”. The second is that writing is always a form of communal and repetitious editing. Montaigne argues that no book’s difficulty is solved by adding more editorial commentary. The more glosses on a text, the more tangled it becomes. He laughs at how lawyers – and, by extension, scholars – “do nothing but annotate each other’s work” or, more literally, at how we “inter-gloss ourselves”. The third is that essaying may require the writer to add or expand, but they should never excise. Here, I exaggerate a little; Montaigne’s editions show that some of his work was removed or replaced. However, his essays are frequently contradictory because he rarely deletes previous work when editing. This is most evident in what is known as the Bordeaux copy: a heavily hand-annotated text that his wife Françoise de la Cassaigne edited, with his literary executor Marie de Gournay, for posthumous publication. While the final essay, “Expérience”, is likely to have been written late in the overall process, Montaigne edited the complete essays twice more, including those annotations found in the Bordeaux copy.

In the editorial notes to his translation, Screech suggests that Montaigne’s final essay is “not an ‘essay’ which happened to come last but the final chapter of the final book”. Even though Montaigne’s view of editing is that it is never complete, and he sees essaying as nebulous and contradictory, Montaigne nevertheless recognised his final essay as one that would be an ending. It closes with a tone of contentment, acknowledging an ending for himself as well as for his writing project:

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440 Montaigne, “Au Lecteur,” 3. Original: “je suis moi-même la matière de mon livre”. This process is perhaps clearest in the swaying or changing subject I have mentioned in my previous chapters, particularly Chapter 3.
442 Ibid., 1069.
443 Screech, introduction to “On Experience,” xlv.
Vouchsafe, O Son of Latona, that I may enjoy those things I have prepared; and, with my mind intact I pray, may I not degenerate into a squalid senility, in which the lyre is wanting. This could be interpreted as a mock-hopeful citation to mask Montaigne’s begrudging conclusion, but I read this as his celebration, through citation, of the joy that an ending can be. Such an approach is also found at the conclusion of *Hamlet* when Horatio’s promise to retell the story immediately points back to the text’s beginning. Shakespeare’s essay-like play texts respond to Montaigne’s final essay in its contents but also its approach to both editing and the end of editing. In undertaking this comparison, I suggest that Montaigne’s approach can be found within the *Hamlet* texts and in the editorial apparatus of various *Hamlet* editions.

**Tragic form and essay form**

Frame suggests that Montaigne’s writing is propelled by the death of his friend and his consequent need to find new ways to express his most important thoughts and feelings:

> When [Montaigne] started his book he had lost a dear friend, Etienne de La Boétie, to whom he had been able to express, as he never could to any one person again, his every thought, view, and feeling. Self-sufficient though he was, he had an imperious need to communicate. The *Essays* are his means of communication; the reader takes the place of the dead friend.

This substitution of a dead friend with a living readership is comparable with the dramatic spectator who becomes a living audience member for the dead prince’s tale at the conclusion of *Hamlet*. Montaigne’s essays are an expression of his desire to communicate with La Boétie. Hamlet pleads with Horatio as to the urgency of the tale his friend must, by virtue of their bond, relate: “if thou didst ever hold me in thy heart” (V.ii.326). As spectators we have already witnessed Horatio’s dedication; Act V directs us to remember the previous acts in light of what will be retold. Productions could work against this cyclical conclusion:


Fortinbras might kill Horatio, or Horatio might take his own life after explaining the scene to the Norwegian prince, and these are not the only alternatives. Nevertheless, the textual end of *Hamlet* always points back to its beginning. That ending interrupts itself in aposiopesis before it can be completed, and concludes with a promise (but not delivery) of its re-beginning.

When a reader moves towards the end of a tragedy they appreciate the unravelling or dénouement of the text. Frank Kermode draws attention to the way in which readers or audiences apprehend the end of a tragedy. He describes a “sense of an ending” in *Hamlet* “not [as] a universal end, [but] merely an image of it”, suggesting that “to make sense of their span [men, like poets,] need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems”. Revenge and tragic resolution provide no catharsis if the audience has forgotten the premise of the story. When they reach the end, they step outside the text’s fictional time and consider its events simultaneously, and can experience the resulting catharsis. The same process happens when reading an edited or otherwise altered version of text, and now features an additional step: interruption. I mentioned aposiopesis at the conclusion of my previous chapter as one way to understand the non-ending of the *Hamlet* texts.

Both changeable selves and changeable texts interrupt each other throughout Shakespeare and Montaigne’s assays (“essais”). *Hamlet* hinges on irreconcilable characterisations, further problematised by the presence of multiple versions of any given character. The uncertainty of any given version of Shakespeare and Montaigne work might include major and minor editorial decisions such as specific choices of words, and characterisation and commentary more broadly. Montaigne’s essays evoke a version of himself that he edits and reedits, while Hamlet himself is also figured as a character that is

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446 See: Aristotle, *Poetics*, transl. S. H. Butcher (The Internet Classics Archive. 2009), particularly Part XVIII.
writing and rewriting the tragedy. Some of those sharing his stage do so too, including Ophelia in her own notably tragic arc. Montaigne’s analysis of rewriting and of ongoing, fluid characterisation thus frames the uncertainty of the Hamlet texts. The linguistic border they share only complicates this relationship further, allowing for Shakespeare’s play(s) and characters to be “essais” (trials) and essays (edited texts) simultaneously. In light of a broader reflection on both tragic form and Montaigne’s approach to editing, the non-ending of the Hamlet texts invites closer analysis of what an ending is and is not, and how we should read both as editorial interruptions.

In an earlier essay, “Des Boiteux”, Montaigne discusses only knowing his perspectives nominally because he constantly revisits his ideas. I quoted the following excerpt in Chapter 5 to discuss Montaigne’s sense of inward deformity, but it also reflects his sense of deficiency when attempting to articulate himself:

I have not seen anything more expressly monstrous and miraculous than myself in this world. One tames oneself of all strangeness with custom and with time, but the more I haunt myself, and know myself, the more my deformity astonishes me, and the less I understand myself.448

As the “subject of [his] book”, Montaigne makes his own deficiencies clear in the self-reflexive uncertainty inherent to his essaying project.449 Moreover, the determination with which he edits and reeds his work exemplifies the urgency he feels at attempting to redeem his uncertain and imperfect self, even as he acknowledges this impossibility. Montaigne’s perspectives on uncertainty and on editing, in “Expérience”, can be mapped onto Hamlet as a participating editor in his own tragedy.

One primary difference between Montaigne and Hamlet’s essays is that while Hamlet implores Horatio to retell the story, Montaigne’s final essay is the last time he assays to know

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448 Montaigne, “Des Boiteux,” 1029. Original: “Je n’ai vu monstre et miracle au monde plus exprès que moi-même. On s’apprivoise à toute étrangeté par l’usage et le temps; mais plus je me hante et me connais, plus ma difformité m’étonne, moins je m’entends en moi.” I translate “usage” as “custom” in accordance with Screech’s translation, as the English “usage” reads awkwardly in this phrase (Screech, “On the Lame,” 1164).

himself: “not an ‘essay’ which happens to come last but the final chapter of the final book”.\(^{450}\) Among the last few sentences of this final chapter Montaigne writes that “the most beautiful lives are, in my opinion, those that fit within a common model”.\(^{451}\) However, Montaigne’s essays point to common life being made up of confusion, complexity, and inconstancy, each of which make themselves known in the very form as well as content of his work. If we read Shakespeare’s \textit{Hamlet} as essayistic retellings, the playwright undertakes the same process as Montaigne. Any iteration of \textit{Hamlet} does not perform the same rhetorical functions as Montaigne’s writing; the latter is writing himself as his subject. However, while Shakespeare’s subject is another’s subjectivity, the retellings of the play function like Montaigne’s own editorial work, and sometimes as if Hamlet himself is writing them. The essayist’s sardonic perspective on editing (as opposed to how he applied himself to editing) then holds a mirror up to scholarly editing and the endless editions of those texts known as “classics”.\(^{452}\)

**Editing Hamlet’s essays**

If Hamlet writes essays, then he is responding to an extant literary form that developed from early modern French vernacular writing. John Lee argues that “the term [essay] uncovers a literary tradition long practised”, but in the Renaissance, “writing secular and non-fictional literary works in English was a relatively recent occupation”.\(^{453}\) He argues that “‘essay’ is a rather retrospective term, used originally more to identify a literary tradition than to define a new literary form”.\(^{454}\) Prior to the burgeoning of the essay in English, from

\(^{450}\) Screech, “Introduction,” xlv.
\(^{451}\) Montaigne, “De l’Expérience,” 1116.
\(^{452}\) Other early modern texts with multiple versions present similar concerns, whether Shakespearean or otherwise. See: Christopher Marlowe, \textit{Dr Faustus} and Thomas Kyd, \textit{The Spanish Tragedy}.
\(^{454}\) Lee, “The English Renaissance Essay,” 437. Lee notes that while both Bacon and Montaigne’s essays have their roots in classical writings, the fact that they wrote in their vernacular distinguished their work at least initially from other literary essays of the era (437-439).
Bacon, critical work in the vernacular made its way to England in the guise of none other than Montaigne’s *Essais*, the first volume of which was published in 1570. Lee argues that both Montaigne and Bacon “discovered that writing sequences of essays…allowed them to exploit the provisional nature of the essay in new ways”. While both writers consider “the nature and status of human knowledge” and discuss many of the same topics, Lee suggests that there is a “difference in register” between them. Although Lee argues that both sets of essays “have one great drawback” (their “self-contradictions”, in the words of Ben Jonson), he proposes that rather than this being “carelessness…what seems more likely [is that] the ironies and inconsistencies are intended, and Bacon and Montaigne are intent on creating ambiguous and contradictory texts”. However, Lee argues that the latter’s works “portray different Montaignes who are all Montaigne”, as the French essayist comes to understand “the impossibility of…constancy”. This is perhaps best summarised in “Du Repentir”. Montaigne writes that “there is no one who, if he listens to himself, does not discover within himself a singular, swaying form”, where “swaying” describes both a kind of internal compass and an every-changing series of convictions. Each different claim or self is like a retelling of that claim or self, distinct from its predecessor but nevertheless corresponding to it. However, Lee notes that “what shocked Montaigne…was that the essays were not as repetitious as they should have been”. He summarises the variability of Montaigne’s essays as follows:

> The essays become the formal device by which Montaigne represents the truth, as he sees it, that life is not being – ‘essence’ – but becoming – ‘passage’. For Montaigne, unlike Bacon, it is not our knowledge of the world

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455 Ibid., 439.
456 Ibid., 439; 440.
459 Montaigne, “Du Repentir,” 811. Original: “il n’est personne, s’il s’écoute, qui ne découvre en soi une forme sienne, une forme maîtresse, qui lutte contre l’institution, et contre la tempête des passions qui lui sont contraires”. See Chapters 3 and 5.
or even of ourselves that is provisional, because we err and lack information, but rather it is ourselves that are provisional, as we vary through time. The essays portray different Montaignes who are all Montaigne.\textsuperscript{461}

In assembling a self through writing, Montaigne exemplifies his own argument at the beginning of “Expérience”: “There is no desire more natural than the desire of knowledge. We assay all the means that can lead us to it. When our reason fails, we use experience instead”.\textsuperscript{462} However, Montaigne’s approach always leads him to an incomplete self-knowledge. Kate Lilley also draws attention to the development of the essay as a genre that invites openness and self-reflection:

If the longevity and ubiquity of the essay as a genre is due, at least in part, to its potential openness literally to all possible varieties of knowledge and experience, in practice the essay has always been both a venue for, and a self-conscious representation of, experiments in thought as a means to self-knowledge.\textsuperscript{463}

The form and content of Montaigne’s individual essays, and of the Essais as a collection, therefore drives his creation of his self through both writing and editing.

Hamlet is also only able to know or articulate himself incompletely. He assays to contemplate what he wants to do and what he feels he must do within the realm of the play. He frequently develops his ideas from single thoughts that he then analyses in soliloquy form. Figured as a tragic hero from early in the narrative, the prince knows his role in the tragedy as avenger but is reluctant to acknowledge that, regardless of his identity, this will mean action rather than thought, and will result in his death. It takes the course of the play, and the full range of Hamlet’s rhetorical faculties, for him to reach a resolution: “the readiness is all” (V.ii.194-195). Hamlet’s conversations with Horatio are also significant – his friend, after all, being named for his reason and his oration, the latter of which is a rhetorical art – as they

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{462} Montaigne, “De l’Expérience ,” 1065. Original: “Il n’est désir plus naturel que le désir de connaissance. Nous essayons tous les moyens qui nous y peuvent mener. Quand la raison nous faut, nous y employons l’Expérience”.
allow him to map out the “invention” of his case against Claudius through the figure of correctio: a form of correction, emendation, or interruption, often through negation.464

In its simplest form, Hamlet’s “What a rogue and peasant slave” soliloquy is a means to assay the disjunction between his thoughts and his actions. He asks whether it is “monstrous” that the player’s conceit can be “all for nothing”, while his own “motive and cue” only produce his “unpregnant” response of “[saying] nothing” (II.ii.504-505, 509, 513, 520-521).465 His language produces the effect of being aware of his place in the tragic theatrical form. He notably makes use of correctio, negating and replacing his claims, particularly at two key points of the speech. About a third of the way through, “Yet I” interrupts his accumulative description of the player’s ability to act, even “for nothing” (II.ii.518, 509). Another third of the way through, “oh, vengeance!” is followed quickly by “Why, what an ass am I!” and a shift in Hamlet’s self-directed anger from what he should have done, to what he can do: “play something like the murder of [his] father” (II.ii.534-535, 548). Hamlet’s essaying apparently comes to an end once his soliloquies are complete.466

Interrupting the proceedings at Ophelia’s graveside, Hamlet declares either “Behold, ‘tis I” or “This is I”, then claims his identity of “Hamlet the Dane” (Q1 xvi.147; V.i.224, 225). A far cry from being a “dunghill idiot” or “rogue and peasant slave”, Hamlet’s accurate self-identification before Horatio, Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude signifies the beginning of his dependence on providence, rather than reasoning or essaying (Q1 vii.404; II.ii.502).

This moment in the graveyard is not pivotal because the prince is suddenly whole rather than fragmentary. Instead, like Montaigne, Hamlet acknowledges that his fragmentary

465 Here we might hear an echo of Montaigne’s identification of his uncertainty as “monstrous”. Montaigne, “Des Boiteux,” 1029.
466 Whether he comes to a conclusion is, I feel, up to debate, depending on whether the seventh Q2-only soliloquy is included. See Chapter 5.
selves are his complete self. Rather than searching for answers as to what he should do,
Hamlet focuses on the fragmentary and swaying form of his self; he then turns that form
inside out by articulating his inward inconstancy outwardly. By bringing his inward self
outwards Hamlet represents what Montaigne describes as “an evenness of habit [and]
order…an easy person to understand”, who, “if anyone touched one part of them, they would
touch on all of them”.  
Shakespeare’s concern with Montaigne’s idea that someone can be
to knowable is already ironic in a play, where characters are not in fact real people, and
where the tragic plot must by necessity contain unknowns. I return to the passage above, from
“Inconstance”, because it works at odds with Montaigne’s description of himself throughout
“Expérience”. His selves, described and preserved in the two essays, are both him even
though they are inconstant and irreconcilable. It is no wonder that the essays feel
fragmentary, given that Montaigne spends much of his book asserting these paradoxes.
However, his final chapter balances these seemingly irreconcilable, or at least unrelated,
inward parts that make up his “objet”.  
His underlying focus throughout the chapter is on
the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Distinguishing between the two allows
Montaigne to comment on how his perspectives and selves have changed, while the long
form descriptions of each aspect of his thoughts and life exemplify the inward multitude of
his selves.

As Cousins suggests, comparing essay and soliloquy forms draws attention to their
shared rhetorical features.  
By undertaking their task, editors essentially undertake
*correctio*; they add to the rhetorical effect of the *Hamlet* text, in the same way that

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tête, nous verrions tout partout en sa vie reluire une égalité de mœurs, un ordre et une relation infaillible des
unes choses aux autres…Le discours en serait bien aisé à faire…qui en a touché une marche, a tout touché; c’est
une harmonie de sons très-accordants, qui ne se peut démentir. A nous, au rebours, autant d’actions, autant faut-
il de jugements particuliers. Le plus sûr, à mon opinion, serait de les rapporter aux circonstances voisines, sans
entrer en plus longue recherche et sans en conclure autre conséquence”.

468 See Chapter 5.

469 Cousins, “Humanism and the Disingenuous Soliloquy”.

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Montaigne’s awareness of the limits of editing enhance the fragmentary experience of reading his various editions. Within any of the individual plays, Hamlet’s soliloquies, the extent of his and Ophelia’s madness, Claudius’ guilt, Gertrude’s complicity, and the irresolution of the narrative itself all contribute to its uncertainty. This drives Montaigne’s constant “essaying” but is also present in both Hamlet’s “essaying” and in the uncertainty between each of the printed texts. Of course, the focus of this thesis has included the multiple sources and alleged origins of the *Hamlet* texts, exacerbated by the commonplace phrases both within them and in Montaigne’s own work. Knowles suggests that “Hamlet is imprisoned by rhetoric, the enemy within”, with his subjectivity affected by the limitations of this kind of speaking. However, the essay is also a helpful frame within which to read the *Hamlet* texts. They respond to the rhetorical structures of the *Essais* texts while also containing and being edited within rhetorical structures that contribute to the fragmentary effect of multiple editions.

The scholarly reader is not the only one affected by this fragmentary consciousness. The attentive audience member of any production of the play text can comprehend how Hamlet’s characterisation is at odds with the play in which he finds himself. As Anne Righter describes, the conclusion of *Hamlet* can be read as one where the prince sees the end his theatrical tragedy for what it really is:

...the people of the Danish court [stand] terrified and uncertain outside the deadly circle of the tragedy and, all at once, seems to sense the distance which separates the events now violently concluded from those of the normal world. In his mind, these onlookers resemble actors who have been given no speaking parts at all, spectators who have remained somehow remote from the play at hand.

When Hamlet describes his spectators as those “that look pale and tremble at this chance...but mutes or audience to this act”, Righter suggests that “the play

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470 See Introduction and Chapter 1.
world…[encompasses] the theatre audience” (V.ii.313-314). The audience becomes diegetic as it is drawn into the tragedy, and tragedy’s form and spectatorship become tangled together. In his survey of form in the Renaissance theatre, Timothy Reiss emphasises how the early modern spectator developed from the Senecan spectator and reader, and both were “integral to tragedy’s medium, not just recipient of its messages”. He also notes that “the poet as orator” was an important feature of Senecan tragedy that translated into early modern tragic forms. Reading, hearing, and watching theatre are thereby treated as somewhat, if not entirely, equal ways to interpret a tragedy. What happens when we combine these, by viewing the reader of an essay as the spectator of a play text? Rather than being separate, readers, spectators, and authorial figures are connected by the ways in which they appeal to each other in *pathos*: “action has to be staged so as to affect the spectator”. Tragedy functions through the emotional response of its audience or reader.

By contrast, Ophelia’s experiences are told, retold, and corrected in her life and death. Polonius, Laertes, Gertrude, and Hamlet each retell Ophelia’s stories as relationships to other people or events, and she speaks for herself only when she trades her sanity for intentionally ambiguous but nevertheless sharp rhetoric. As with many other features of the Q1 text, Ophelia’s “distracted” scenes move quickly to establish her mental state. She sings both “How should I your true love know” and “Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s Day”, gives out flowers for remembrance, and cries “God be with you” both times that she exits (Q1 xiii). However, in Q2/F she also ruminates specifically on endings. In response to Claudius’ “Pretty Ophelia!” she replies, “Without an oath I’ll make an end on’t” (IV.v.56-57, my italics). After reflecting on withered violets, when she re-enters, Ophelia also says “they say a

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476 Ibid., 240.
made a good *end*” (IV.v.181, my italics). The Ophelia of Q2/F reflects on the sense of an ending in death that is always arriving but never arrives for Polonius and for her. Neither receives a completed burial, staged or otherwise, in the text itself. Like Hamlet’s tragic narrative, that Horatio promises but never provides, Ophelia’s drowning is promised in Gertrude’s speech but also never occurs on stage. Instead, the event after the end (death) is muddied by the dirt of her grave, her interrupted funeral, and by something asked by the sexton but never clarified: does she “wilfully [seek] her own salvation”? (V.i.1-2). While distracted in her final moments, Ophelia’s speeches tell her story in an albeit fragmentary form, pointing back to her beginning perhaps as Hamlet’s lover even as she moves towards death. The multiple iterations of this scene retell her story, too: the audience joins in the scene, observing along with the other figures around her who grant her little or no sympathy. The gravediggers’ discussion of how and why she died situates the audience to hear yet another retelling, without hearing Ophelia tell her own story. This disintegration of her truth through the distorted perspective offered to the audience mirrors the broader textual fragmentation of the three play texts.

The emotional ending in *Hamlet* does not function in quite the same way as other early modern plays, whether Shakespearean or otherwise. I would not go so far as to say that the play is telling retellings of retellings, as in P. J. Aldus’ work, but the text’s self-reflexive ending nevertheless signals a specific kind of tragic conclusion.\textsuperscript{477} Horatio’s promise to retell the story is not, like a conclusion by a chorus, simply confirming what the audience (or reader) already knows to be the moral lesson of the story. Instead, the resolution points to its own repetition both within the narrative – Horatio’s retelling – and external to it, as we view a performance or read a text that has already been inevitably retold to us. Tragedy, writing, and editing exist concurrently. No early modern playwright wrote for singular performances,

and the same applies to Montaigne’s writing (though he pretends to be coy) and to Shakespearean scholarship’s editorial history. Horatio becomes the teller of the tale; Shakespeare, his editors, and his readers, the retellers.

**Editing and retelling the Hamlet texts**

Edited versions of both Shakespeare and Montaigne’s texts extend these retellings. Those retellings of retellings are another entry point to discussing them as unfinished, cyclical, and self-conscious groups of texts. The *Hamlet* versions are like Montaigne’s philosophical retellings of his self. In performance, the characters navigate a theatrical space that by nature is always unreliable. Montaigne writes on multiple occasions that knowing himself leads to less, rather than more, self-understanding: “the more I…know myself…the less I understand myself.” The uncertainty of these texts’ respective subjects and forms inform each other. The relationship between the three texts is already fraught with uncertainty, not least because the documentation about their history is fragmentary, unclear, or lost. These versions invite uncertain rereadings *ad infinitum*, and recent editorial practices invite this kind of fragmentary reading.

Only in recent decades have Shakespeare’s play texts been consistently edited, read, or thought about as separate versions. In a recent chapter, Paul Werstine suggests that Shakespeare’s work does not definitively give evidence of the playwright’s revisionary process. However, his review of scholarly opinions reveal that even the most current accepted perspectives are eventually held to the test, and often found at fault:

…[even] memorial reconstruction would itself come under skeptical scrutiny, so that it would be concluded that such imagined reconstruction by actors

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478 See Chapters 3 and 4.


480 Examples of this kind of scholarship in the form of edited texts include René Weis’ parallel edition of King Lear and Bernice W. Kliman and and Paul B. Bertram’s *The Three-text Hamlet: Parallel Texts of the First and Second Quartos and First Folio* (New York: AMS Press, 2003).
could give no convincing demonstration whatsoever of how the 1597 *Romeo and Juliet* came to be, and, while impossible to dismiss altogether in connection with the 1603 *Hamlet*, such reconstruction could not account for the origin of very much of it. 481

As I noted in Chapter 2, memorial reconstruction is a widely held view to explain the relationships between the *Hamlet* texts. That theory can even figure as another kind of retelling in my potential textual narrative. However, the very uncertainty of these texts’ relationships is often ignored in favour of making key claims about the texts, whether as collations, reconstructions, or revisions. Montaigne’s approach to ambiguity instead calls for simultaneous certainty and uncertainty in a text. By approaching the task as a means to apprehend the text, scholarly editions can miss the satisfying paradox created by that relationship between knowledge and doubt. That attempt to understand, without the drive to find a singular answer, is the task of an essay. The “rogue and peasant slave” soliloquy is therefore doubly useful as an example for reading the editorial notes surround the soliloquy and inform a reader’s approach to *Hamlet* as essayist and *Hamlet* as essay.

Reading seven copies of *Hamlet* – the second Arden edition (1982), the third Arden editions (Q1 and F, 2006), a revised Norton edition (1992), a revised New Cambridge edition (2003), and the Modern Critical and Critical Reference editions of the recent New Oxford Shakespeare (2017) – shows how these different notes work to different ends. A. D. Cousins suggests that “[exploring] the affinities between [Francis Bacon’s “Of Truth” and Hamlet’s soliloquies] is to appreciate more clearly how each is an exercise in fiction-making.” 482 Cousins’ chapter points to how the essay is already an effective lens through which to read soliloquy. The editorial framing of these texts is then another form of interruptive essaying that affects *Hamlet*.

482 Cousins, “Humanism and the Disingenuous Soliloquy,” 93.
Each edition from which I have read this speech contains a different range of editorial commentary. Describing the textual notes found at the bottom of Shakespearean editions, David Bevington asks: “What is one to make of such telegraphic information, written evidently in a strange sort of code…?” 483 Jenkins’ second Arden edition has by far the most detailed footnotes.484 In addition to these extended comments on the phrases and words’ meanings – definitional and interpretive – Jenkins also invites the interested reader to refer to his long notes (extended end notes at the back of his edition, abbreviated as “LN”) no less than six times in this single speech. The introduction to the third Arden edition’s Q1 and F volume includes a warning to the reader: “in order to make use of this volume, a reader will need access to Ard Q2 [third edition] (but not vice versa)”.485 Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor’s notes for the Q1 speech, “Why, what dunghill idiot slave am I!”, define some key terms and give an interesting note about interpreting some words, in light of Serpieri’s analysis, which I mentioned in Chapter 2.486 Serpieri suggests that the three lines in question “might evoke a courtroom rather than the ‘stage’ of Q2/F”.487

Amaze the standers-by with his laments
Strike more than wonder in the judicial ears,
Confound the ignorant and make mute the wise…
(Q1 vii.411-413)

Thompson and Taylor also suggest that “make mute” is equivalent to “dumbfound (i.e. all spectators, the judicious or discriminating as well as those who know nothing about it, would be struck dumb with amazement”)488. They only give one reference to the OED in this section,

483 David Bevington, “The Words: Teacher as Editor, Editor as Teacher,” in Teaching Shakespeare: Passing It On, ed. G. B. Shand. (Chichester, West Sussex Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 43. The code can be focused on different things. Bevington gives examples that draw attention to the Folio and Quarto version of King Lear.
486 Shakespeare, Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623, Q1 vii.404-435. See also: Serpieri, “The Translator as Editor”.
487 Ibid., Q1 vii.411-412 n.
488 Ibid., Q1 vii.413 n.
for the verb “twits”, meaning “insults”. 489 In their Folio text, the editorial notes are largely made up of citations to others’ editions, with some additional references to the OED. 490 In short, the newer Arden copy gives far less detail. The Norton edition only contains a small number of short notes. Cyrus Hoy’s only long note for this speech paraphrases Jenkins’ commentary on “Oh, vengeance!” and cites him accordingly. 491 The Cambridge edition, which I have been citing throughout the majority of this thesis, keeps most explanations short and simple. Edwards derives definitions and explanations from other editions, but often does so without referring to the source in question. For “John-a-dreams” he only writes “apparently a nickname for a dreamy person”. 492 However, in other sections he establishes clearer claims in longer notes, such as his annotation for “Oh, vengeance!”:

This cry, the great climax of the rant with which Hamlet emulates the Player, exhausts his futile self-recrimination, and he turns, in proper disgust, from a display of verbal histrionics to more practical things. Q2 omits the phrase altogether, and many editors unfortunately follow suit. This short line and the silence after it are the pivot of the speech. 493

Edwards does sometimes provide full citations for others’ ideas, though. He explains the line “very potent with such spirits” by saying “it was a commonplace of ghost-lore that melancholies were specially prone to visitation by demons. See Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge”. 494 The New Oxford Shakespeare’s Modern Critical Edition is quite similar to the third Arden edition and Cambridge edition. 495 The editors give only minimal indication of where ideas are from. They provide some longer explanations, but, like Hoy in the Norton edition, do not really offer extended commentary. In the Critical Reference edition, the

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489 Ibid., Q1 vii.418 n.
490 Ibid., II.ii.543-600. However, some of that detail is made up in the corresponding Q2 volume, which I am not focusing on here.
492 Shakespeare, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, II.ii.520 n.
493 Ibid., II.ii.534 n.
494 Ibid., II.ii.555 n.
Editors include some longer notes, and there are many more citations given for others’ explanations of words or phrases. Whether including minimal or extensive notes, these editions are also engaged in a form of *correctio*.

Are editions further retellings of *Hamlet*? Do we seek a kind of scholarly catharsis from retelling Shakespeare through editorial intervention? Many editions retain a kind of “narrative anxiety” with which we stifle the rather wonderful confusions and clashes of the *Hamlet* texts without taking a side. Neill identifies early modern narrative anxiety as “the end…[that] the tragic dramatist most wishes to bring about, but…also what (in common with his characters) he most dreads; it is both the end of his writing, and the very thing it wishes to defer”. 496 He shows how there is a “specific connection between these signs of writerly violence and the writing of tragedy”. 497 Neill gives the example of “self-conscious metadrama” in Hieronimo’s end, “in which a professing dramatist [writing] his own in blood allows an unusually sharp glimpse of the ambivalence attaching to such designs” and argues “it can be no accident that the characters of Renaissance tragedy so frequently envisage their ends in heavily narrativised terms”. 498 He also argues that “Elizabethan tragedy showed itself unusually knowing about the relation between mortal and narrative endings”. 499 Among several examples his comments about *Macbeth* are particularly relevant:

The horror of Macbeth’s fate lies precisely in the sense of desperate narrative incoherence produced by the contemplation of his own death: when the end is recognised not as fulfilment but as an utter emptying out of meaning, then life is reduced to the senseless confusion of ‘a tale told by an idiot’. 500

This idea of “senseless confusion” lends itself to a discussion of *Hamlet*, where the ambiguity of characters and texts already invites that confusion. However, as Lewis argues, Shakespeare is “neither frustrated nor inarticulate” even though the play is “anything but a unicursive

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497 Ibid.
498 Ibid., 204; 205.
499 Ibid., 206.
500 Ibid., 205.
I agree with Lewis when he suggests that *Hamlet* is an example of atypical tragic “sublimity”, arguing, for example, that in it, “the divine playwright is only a cosmetic presence, invoked to plaster over bad faith, expediency or desperation”. Towards the end of his book, he explains that the resistance to closure in *Hamlet* is an attempt to show the revisionary processes required for an extended piece of humanist writing, not an expression of meaninglessness:

> It might be objected that I am describing *Hamlet* as a work of nihilism, in which nothing signifies “but as ‘tis valued” [*Troilus and Cressida*, II.ii.52]. Not so. Rather…Shakespeare took [pains] to represent the cultural world of humanism as fundamentally indifferent to things as they really are, and as one in which the pursuit of truth is therefore all but an impossibility.

While Lewis’ work is not concerned with Montaigne’s relationship to the play, his comments here support Neill’s suggestions. Confusion and narrative incoherence are essential to the incompleteness of truth in a tragedy. Neill also comments on the added Painter scenes in *The Spanish Tragedy* as examples that “[highlight], in a most striking fashion, the narrativity of revenge design, its ferocious concentration upon ending” as typical of early modern drama.

However he also touches on the modifications in 1602, noting how the author:

> …who may well have been Ben Jonson, seems more sharply aware of the play’s implications than the typically intuitive Kyd himself; and in the justly celebrated Painter scene, he created an episode which highlights, in a most striking fashion, the narrativity of revenge design, its ferocious concentration upon ending.

These authorial/authoritative images of a writer extend to their editorial role. Narrative anxiety and tragic endings are a useful way to consider a kind of metatheatrical but also

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502 Ibid., 307; see also Lewis’ chapter, “Shakespearean Tragedy”, 304-314.
503 Ibid., 309.
Shakespeare’s French: Reading Hamlet at the Edge of English

metatextual editing process, referring to their own endings as they seek for the project or experience to be over, but also dreading that end.

Shakespeare and Montaigne each construct a changeable subject and a changeable text at the heart of their respective projects. However, the way we come to read their texts also affects how changeable the text is. When describing the typical Renaissance essay, Lilley articulates something that could apply to the editing process for any Shakespearean text:

[Essays are] almost always encountered in single-authored volumes destined to be amplified, revised, rendered, and reissued in a series of editions, as Montaigne’s were, in an attempt to keep pace with the changing circumstances of the author and the market, both before and after his death...[and these collections] in many ways epitomise and thematise the perceived value of piecemeal self-accounting.\(^506\)

Lukas Erne picks up the call for editions to be continually revised. His rather wry review of editorial practices in his contribution to a recent collection from the Shakespeare Association of America, which I quote almost in full, is directed at Shakespeare studies:

It is easy to complain about editors. They waste time and energy on commas, collation, and compositors. Their work is cumulative and mechanical, not worthy of the recognition that comes with essays and monographs. It is also derivative...They misrepresent the original text, impose artificial clarity upon it, close down its openness. They add to the original text. They rewrite the author in their own image. Editors do not annotate enough, or they drown the text in commentary. They write incomprehensible collation notes that no one cares about. They base their editorial decisions on unverifiable hypotheses about the provenance of texts. There are also far too many Shakespeare editors. They repeat each other, and themselves. They are only in it for the money. All these complaints are well known. Some of them are even justified, sometimes.

What may be more difficult than complaining about editors is to appreciate what we owe to them. There is a simple reason for this, which is that much of their work tends to be invisible.\(^507\)

This invisibility is less and less the case when new editions come to light and put under the scholarly microscope in journal reviews and the like. The editor can always be found lacking.

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\(^{506}\) Lilley, “Dedicated Thought,” 97.

Very rarely do they offer the proverbial reader something they want. Any of the editors’ visible contributions, though, can make huge differences to a reader’s experience of a text, even if they produce uncertainty or dissatisfaction, rather than conviction.

While Montaigne focuses on legal procedures in “Expérience”, his discussion prompts a reading of the law of the Hamlet play texts: what is true or right in these narratives, and how can we read and edit them in light of their irreconcilability? How can Montaigne know himself while being aware that he must always revisit his work to rewrite it, and knowing that the more he knows, the less he understands?508 He discusses this conflict in relation to legal exegesis. These are processes of annotation, and so Montaigne’s work indirectly focuses on edges as spaces where writers wrestle with meaning. Hopkins notes a similar interest in Hamlet:

*Hamlet* hovers obsessively around a number of literal and metaphorical edges; indeed its concerns could almost be thought of as being summed in an apparently throwaway remark towards the end of the play…when Horatio observes ‘I knew you must be edified by the margin ere you had done’…it is indeed from the margins that we must be edified in our makings of meanings.509

Any editorial text is by necessity also focused on its own edges in the form of annotation. Being “edified” by those annotations is an essential part of reading texts that are mediated by an editor. Whether that editor has treated the text the way their reader would prefer is not really relevant; the editor has already mediated that text. Montaigne identifies the problem with legal editing in much the same way as we might self-reflexively comment on our scholarly insistence on rereading and reanalysing the same texts: “when is it agreed between us that ‘this book has enough, and there is nothing more to say about it’?”510 Montaigne’s

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510 Montaigne, “De l’Expérience,” 1067; “le centième commentaire le renvoie à son suivant, plus épineux et plus scabreux que le premier ne l’avait trouvé”.
question gives him leave to turn to his own similarly cyclical writing process.\textsuperscript{511} His amusement, exasperation, or frustration then comes through in the text in similar ways to Hamlet’s own exasperation about his place in a tragedy that requires actions he cannot bring himself to carry out: “I do not know / Why yet I live to say this thing’s to do…[and] let all sleep” (IV.iv.43-44, 59). Shakespeare’s rewriting process already adds another layer of retelling; the Q2 text is the only one that contains those particular lines from Hamlet.

Similarly, our own reading of Montaigne or of Shakespeare’s works is so often mediated through editorial gloss. When Montaigne describes returning (“renvoie”) to the same text more than once, the word choice implies not only that the text continues to be glossed and annotated, but that the reader and writer continually re-sends their work for others to read and perhaps annotate in turn.\textsuperscript{512} The editorial process he describes is one of constant communication, not one in which an individual works and reworks a text in solitude. Montaigne’s description confirms a known connection between editing and philosophy. Shakespeare and Montaigne’s processes of rewriting become metatextual for us, too, as we read them with glosses.\textsuperscript{513}

I therefore ask Montaigne’s question to editors at large: “when it is agreed between us that ‘this book has enough’…?”\textsuperscript{514} Shakespeare’s texts first hold a mirror up between Shakespeare and Hamlet as joint authors of the tragedy by the play’s conclusion. Hamlet’s closing words in Q2 and the Folio implore readers to reconsider the text in light of its completion: “tell my story…the rest is silence” (V.ii.328, 337). As noted in Chapter 5, Shakespeare employs aposiopesis “to frustrate completion, closure, and meaning” in

\textsuperscript{511} There is something pleasing here in the fact that early modern English legal texts were written in Law French, but often glossed in Latin or English; translation is an inherent part of glossing, which is in turn a form of retelling.
\textsuperscript{512} As in “le centième commentaire le renvoie à son suivant”. See: Montaigne, “De l’Expérience,” 1067, and TL.Fi “renvoyer”.
\textsuperscript{513} These might be editors like Edwards or translators like Florio, Frame, or Screech, who each retell Montaigne, replete with footnotes and introductions.
\textsuperscript{514} Montaigne, “De l’Expérience,” 1067.
Horatio’s call to set the stage for a new performance interrupts the ending in play, and this reoccurs in every staged and newly printed version of the dramatic text. (A stage jig at the conclusion of an early modern performance would also interrupt what is allegedly the end of the text.) In Q1, Horatio demands that Fortenbrasse and the ambassadors to England “look upon this tragic spectacle” of the dead, and promises he will “[show] / The first beginning of this tragedy” via “a scaffold…in the market-place” (Q1 xvii.114, 120-122). In Q2, he uses more theatrical terms, saying “give order that these bodies / High on a stage be placèd” and “let this same be presently performed”, and Fortinbras orders Hamlet to be borne “to the stage” (Q2 V.ii.356-357, 372, 375). F retains the same language. Mimesis is important here. Impersonate something realistic yet tragic and you have the point of a tragedy: catharsis.

While Montaigne argues that “no art can achieve true similitude”, he also suggests “[leaving] it to artists…to settle our inconstancy”. He grapples with this mimetic conflict in a similar way to his work in “Inconstance”, saying, “not only does [he] find it difficult to connect our actions to one another but…[also] difficult to designate each to a principle quality, [because] each is so doubled or variegated by various lights”. Does catharsis occur when the resolution of the tragedy never quite arrives? At the point where catharsis should emerge, when the dénouement is complete, we find Horatio instead, promising Hamlet’s tragedy. But Horatio does not conclude the Hamlet text by actually retelling the story. Instead, he establishes an exigence in which the story could be told and is indeed promised. What if we argue that catharsis arrives at the promised retelling of the story, rather than the retelling itself? Are we satisfied with Horatio’s promised mimesis?

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515 Lewis, Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness, 38.
517 Ibid., 1076-1077.
No, and we cannot seem to leave the text alone. New editorial work retells both the tragic narrative and the historical textual narrative of that text, but often with the cumulative excess of refusing to excise any material or taking the alternative approach: excising almost everything. Editorial work should both commit to an ending and point to its retelling, but deference to long lists of previous scholarship is only one way to acknowledge predecessors. Those editions that retain glosses sometime do so by avoiding a true claim for their own edition. Those that reject former glosses reject the layered, editorial process that should function at the forefront of scholarly inquiry within the footnotes of an edition for scholars or students alike. Neither of these produces scholarly editions that encourage attention in the right places, even though the editorial imperative is surely to produce a text that “edifies”.

Brandi Kristine Adams has recently suggested reorganising edited collections around something other than the figure of an author. What other possibilities might we be missing?

Montaigne’s sardonic perspective on editing holds a mirror up to the endlessness of the scholarly editions of texts we know colloquially as “classics”, and the multitextual *Hamlet* is an extreme case. For example, the *Hamlet* in the *The New Oxford Shakespeare* is based on the Q2 text; at the time of preparing this thesis the *Alternative Versions* volume is yet to be published, but will contain the 1603 and 1623 texts separately, too. Their editions published so far are strident in their approach but nevertheless contain so much material that reading them in their entirety is an exceedingly complex narrative of its own. By including almost every detail possible, the Oxford team seem to acknowledge the multiple certainties in the text, but the result is a text that makes almost no claim at all. The essays that accompany Oxford’s texts of the plays and poems (the “Authorship Companion”) make key claims that

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518 Adams presented her ideas about editing at the Shakespeare Association of America meeting in April 2019. Her work was then edited for online publication. See: Brandi Kristine Adams, “Mediators of the Wor(l)d: Editors, Shakespeare, and Inclusion,” *Before Shakespeare: The Beginnings of London Commercial Theatre, 1565-1595*, June 3, 2019.
their respective authors hold, but function as if they are separate from the annotations on the Shakespearean texts themselves. The essay – trial – of a collected perspective on a group of plays, never mind a single play, seems impossible to hold together. Reading the edition becomes an exercise in reading glosses on their own, rather than reading glosses as contributions, indeed editorial additions, to a text.

**The heart of the essay**

Montaigne’s general and specific comments on editing essays offer a new way to read Hamlet as an essayist, *Hamlet* as an essay, and editorial interjections as further editions of those essays. In “Des Boiteux”, Montaigne contemplates how he can sometimes be convinced of perspectives beyond his own when he becomes overexcited, “[finding] himself often getting heated about the matter at hand…and so by extension and amplification…no longer interested in the naïve truth”. 519 He suggests that human reason is strange because, “if you propose facts to someone, they usually spend more time looking for reasons for those facts, rather than finding out whether they are true”. 520 These observations about reason are perhaps reflective of scholarly approaches to editing for the sake of editing. While I am not overly interested in identifying whether Shakespeare thought of Montaigne’s discussion of editing when he (re-)wrote *Hamlet*, all of the features I identify in Montaigne’s writing allow for Shakespeare (and Hamlet himself) to be cyclically (and sometimes cynically) rereading, rewriting, editing, and interrupting themselves, without necessarily having the intention of a wholly complete text. Rather than proposing a definite narrative, I have sought a necessarily incomplete version, which is in itself appealing to me. Montaigne’s final essay and the ending of *Hamlet* also share a thematic concern with incompleteness that is met with contentment. Montaigne spends much of “Expérience” recounting the difficulties he has had

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520 Ibid., 1026.
with his health, emphasising how and what his experiences have taught him. His discussion of his failing health is expansive in more detail than is frankly necessary, but the volume of his discussion is indicative of both the difficulties he has experienced and his acceptance of both the experiences and what they have taught him. “If you tell me that [my] illness is dangerous and mortal,” he quips, “which of them are not that?” In what can only be described as an ironic feature of his editorial work, it is his posthumous written self that continues a few sentences later with Senecan phraseology: “you do not die because you are sick; you die because you are living. Death kills you well enough without assistance from sickness”. Towards his own impending end, Hamlet’s body begins to betray him. Both Q1 and Q2 have him confide his fear and his feeling of anxious nausea to Horatio: “my heart is on the sudden very sore all hereabout”, or “thou wouldst not think how ill all’s here about my heart – but it is no matter…[i]t is but foolery” (Q1 xvii.41-42; Q2 V.ii. 185-186). The F text does not have Hamlet identify the state of his heart but he nevertheless implies it, before interrupting himself: “thou wouldst not think how all here about my heart – but it is no matter” (V.ii.160-161). This concern with the heart of course also echoes Francisco’s heartsickness in Q2 and F (Q2 I.i.9; F I.i.7). A little earlier in the essay, Montaigne is more serious, and harks back to “Inconstance” again:

> It is necessary to learn to suffer what we cannot evade. Our life is composed, like the harmony of the world, from contrary things, and also from diverse tones, both sweet and harsh, sharp and flat, and soft or loud. What would the musician who does not like one of these want to say? He must know he needs all of them mixed together.

Here, the harmonic metaphor responds to constant inconstancy of varied experience, rather than the variability of someone’s inward self.

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522 Ibid.
523 See Chapter 4 for more on hearts and fellowship.
The actual end of the essay welcomes a peace with death in much the same way that Hamlet accepts “providence” in all three texts (V.ii.192). However, Montaigne does not lose his wry streak: “it is an absolute perfection, or divine, to know how to enjoy our being [but we still] search for other conditions…[though] on the highest throne in the world we are still sitting on our arse”.\textsuperscript{525} Montaigne celebrates the ridiculousness of our supposed grandeur to the very end. His final quotation, which I cited at the beginning of this chapter, recalls his varied images of harmony that I discussed in Chapter 5:

\begin{quote}
Vouchsafe, O Son of Latona, that I may enjoy those things I have prepared; and, with my mind intact I pray, may I not degenerate into a squalid senility, in which the lyre is wanting.\textsuperscript{526}
\end{quote}

Here, Montaigne celebrates his idea of complex and variable inwardness, no matter the outcome, which is inevitably a true ending in death. The difference between his perspective and that of Hamlet is that Montaigne is both experiencing old age and writing from a place of experience that results from those years of his life: “old age has a need to be treated most tenderly”.\textsuperscript{527} Hamlet’s tone of acceptance by the play’s final scenes reflects Montaigne’s tone at his end, too. While the final paragraph of “Expérience” was edited in the subsequent editions that Montaigne oversaw, he nevertheless maintained that variety, the ridiculousness of grandeur, and death remain immovable. For him and for Hamlet, difference and death are constant, and endings only arrive when the story is no longer being told.

Montaigne and Hamlet’s reflections on their imminent end – textual and literal – mirror each other in a way that scholarship perhaps celebrates and mourns editions of texts as they are produced and then made obsolete by their new editions. While previous editions are obsolete in a formal sense, and indeed are often replaced (Thomson and Taylor’s Arden \textit{Hamlet} literally replaces Jenkins’), the individual editions contain what can often be vastly...

\textsuperscript{525} Ibid., 1115.
\textsuperscript{527} Montaigne, “De l’Expérience,” 1115.
different material. The allegedly obsolete editions thus often remain valuable for revealing a different perspective or reading. Perhaps most obviously, these previous editions form parts of the gloss that new editors include in their copies of the text. Older editions also provide insight into scholarship itself, too, revealing not only an editorial perspective on a text but a broader philosophical one. The annotations become a new kind of philosophy to study in their own right.

Much of Montaigne’s discussion of editing and glossing is about legal systems, but particularly about how lawmakers fall short of their duty. He emphasises “the advice to everyone to know themselves,” not least because it has already been venerated at the temple of Apollo, in Delphi.\(^{528}\) In the same paragraph he includes a warning against self confidence, too: “So, in this knowledge of ourselves, each one sees themselves so resolutely and satisfactorily, [and] each things they have been sufficiently understood, which [proves] that no one understands anything”.\(^{529}\) While his topic is that self-knowledge is both essential and impossible, we would do well to keep ourselves under Montaigne’s critical eye in textual scholarship. This scholarship believes him when he tells us “there is no end to our inquisitions… [until] the next world”.\(^{530}\) Neill’s anxiety seems more at work in our editorial practices for Shakespearean texts than Kermode’s sense of an ending. If we edit with a mindset that there is a singular answer for how to present the *Hamlet* texts, for example, we have already fallen short. The edge that separates the story from its retelling is already a fine line that only becomes complex when taking the existing narrative, texts, philosophies, and editions that contribute to *Hamlet*.

If *Hamlet* is an essay, always in the process of revision, then its editing is always incomplete. A desire to find a true and final ending will always be thwarted not only by the

\(^{528}\) Ibid., 1075.
\(^{529}\) Ibid.
\(^{530}\) Ibid., 1068.
imitations of editorial practices but by the text’s internal structures that point back to its beginning. Editing a text like *Hamlet* should allow space for both asserting the current sense of an ending, as scholarship sees it in the present, and knowing that it will be interrupted again. Philosophising about Shakespearean texts, or indeed any texts, must include being always prepared to edit them again.
Shakespeare’s French: Reading Hamlet at the Edge of English
Conclusion: A further edge

If I allow myself to be honest…my private salvation, which cannot and should not be anybody’s concern, is that I disowned my native language…English is to me as random a choice as any other language. What one goes toward is less definitive than that from which one turns away.531

Who’s there?
(I.i.1)

Political borders are tightening. In the weeks surrounding the initial drafting process of this conclusion, Donald Trump and Kim Jong-Un met for the Hanoi Summit, an unsuccessful negotiation of North Korea’s denuclearisation and US sanctions. The location of Vietnam for their second summit is highly charged with questions about borders; Vietnam and Korea share histories of a north-south divide directly affected by civil and international conflict. The relationship between these neighbours and their internal/external borders also points to other borderline. I am writing this thesis from Australia, a nation whose offshore processing is a contemporary issue, but which has been part of Australian border control policies for several decades. Mary Crock observes this history: “we used offshore processing, in a sense, after the Vietnam War. The regional processing regime established right across South East Asia was predicated on an offshore processing-type idea”.532 The newly re-elected Liberal government is led by Prime Minister Scott Morrison, whose move to reopen detention facilities on Christmas Island, whatever ills that portends, is more border control of the same calibre.533 Before those borders were being controlled, others were being

531 Yiyun Li, “To Speak Is To Blunder but I Venture,” in Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life (New York, Random House, 2018), 139, 142.
obiterated; Indigenous custodianship of country continues to be ignored and disrespected. The supposedly postcolonial world is still highly anxious about its borders and its languages.

And yet, literary borders are strangely open. In 2018, Kurdish Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani published a memoir, *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*, that was written through a series of text messages. It won not one but two of Australia’s national literary prizes: the Victorian Prize for Literature and the Victorian Premier’s Prize for Nonfiction. In an overview of “The best books of 2018, and a few more as well”, in the Australian newspaper *The Age*, Robert Manne wrote that “Boochani’s terrifying and chastening *No Friend but the Mountains* (trans. Omid Tofighian, Picador), is almost certainly the most important Australian book published in 2018”. However, the book’s eligibility for the prizes had to be debated, as the awards are for Australian citizens; Boochani was made exempt. The fact that both were awarded anyway indicates something of how the text’s challenge to borders has been taken more seriously than that of political gerrymandering.

A writer’s choice of language communicates cultural hierarchies of one form or another. Who speaks, and who feels led to, allowed, or barred from expressing something through language does so within an extant framework of freedoms or limitations. In the case of reading Shakespeare, the English language itself becomes a mediator (and too often a gatekeeper) through which the reader must pass in order to reach their goal. The weight of Shakespeare’s cultural capital draws its own set of borders. My project asks what could

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537 Boochani was also acknowledged with a special award as part of the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards in April. He was ruled as ineligible for Book of the Year because he is not an Australian citizen. However, at the Australia book industry awards in May of this year, Boochani’s book was also awarded general non-fiction book of the year. See: Dee Jefferson, “History of Aboriginal Archaeology Wins Book of the Year at NSW Premier’s Literary Awards.” *ABC News*, April 29, 2019 and Alexandra Spring, “‘Extraordinary and Beautiful Storytelling’: Boy Swallows Universe wins ABIA book of the year,” *The Guardian*, May 2, 2019.
change, though, if Shakespeare’s most-performed play is divorced, or at least estranged, from English and Englishness. I quoted Manne’s comments above in full because they made specific reference to Tofighian’s translation of Boochani’s text. After all, the book would have carried no weight if it had remained illegible to the Australian literary elite. It had to be in English and, furthermore, the individuals translating that text were essential to its distribution across languages and borders. How might the contemporary interest in personal writing (such as Boochani’s text, or memoir more broadly) allow for a new way to write in, between, or past political, linguistic, and literary borders?

One ambition resulting from writing *Shakespeare’s French: Reading Hamlet at the Edge of English* is to see my project turned inside out and reimagined. What is English about the French translations of *Hamlet*? What do their French elements communicate? Do they pick up on elements of the French sources that Shakespeare read? This final question points towards a new project on translating Shakespeare, rather than Shakespeare as a translator. Another ambition for projects beyond this one is to move away from Shakespeare entirely. My initial focus on Shakespeare and then more narrowly on *Hamlet* overemphasises the question of the value of English as a result of literary history. Of course, my research on the multilingual texts circulating in early modern London indicates that Shakespeare is a tiny contributor to a larger series of questions about how we locate the development of contemporary English in relation to other languages, places, and times. One project currently underway in Montpellier, France, is “Les représentations de la France, du français et des Français dans le théâtre anglais de la Renaissance”, examining references to and representations of France on the early modern English stage.538 Playwrights like Christopher Marlowe (whose canonical status is admittedly not far behind Shakespeare’s own in early modern studies) but also lesser known playwrights made extended use of languages other

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538 At the time of submitting this thesis, the “Representations” resource is under maintenance. See “Ressources,” Institut de Recherche sur la Renaissance, l’âge Classique et les Lumières.
than Latin and English – those we might expect to hear – throughout the early modern period. To expand my field of vision to other early modern playwrights is to steer away from questions about Shakespeare’s cultural capital while retaining the question of the status of English.

The late translator and poet Yves Bonnefoy writes of the joy of moving across English and French, (particularly in the medium of poetry, for which forms function differently in those two languages) in his translations of Hamlet. Because of the very grammar of French sentence structure, Bonnefoy is conscious that meaning cannot be found in a French phrase until its conclusion.  

By contrast, English can make meaning phrase by phrase, as it goes along; Bonnefoy argues that “the greatness and richness of English poetry comes from…any given word [that] can open up a world”, while French poetry works differently. While he describes English poetry as more open, Bonnefoy sees French poetry as a “more cautious, more self-contained kind…[where] the words seem to state what they denote and immediately to exclude…whatever is not denoted”. Bonnefoy suggests that the mediocrity of French translations of Shakespeare may stem from the fact that “they are…a compromise between two linguistic structures”. When interviewed about the process of translation, he describes the difficulty of moving from English to French. He argues that “poetry doesn’t spring forth in a single bound from the depths of one’s mind and spirit, but must free itself from various obstacles that are a function of the particular nature of language or cultural tradition”, and these obstacles include the aforementioned poetic differences between English and French. As a poet, Bonnefoy sees that his translation project could

540 Ibid., my italics.
541 Ibid., 219.
542 Ibid., 221.
543 Ibid., 257.
544 Ibid., 258.
not have been “anything other than a personal act of poetry…simultaneously reinventing a meaning and a form in the French”.

These observations capture what Bonnefoy sees as a limitation but also a challenge to his francophone project working with the English language.

Conversely, and in a very different personal act of writing, Yiyun Li identifies English as a freeing, alternate language, but only by coincidence. Li describes her choice “to renounce [her] mother tongue”, Chinese, capturing her own “tinge of guilt” at abandoning it at the same time as acknowledging her tie to an unstable mother through it. She observes that “the intimacy between one and one’s mother tongue can demand more than one is willing to give, or what one is capable of giving”. English represents the finality of being cut off from her background of trauma. Or, rather, a language that is not Chinese fulfils that function: “English is to me as random a choice as any other language”. In the twenty-first century, which is not the first to be a globalised one but is nevertheless facing different border crises, the capital of the English language is changing. Li insists that her choice is arbitrary, writing “my abandonment of my first language is personal, so deeply personal that I resist any interpretation – political or historical or ethnographical”. But her choice nevertheless carries advantages to her status as a writer based in the US. Her English cannot be entirely separated from its political weight.

*Shakespeare’s French* has been an exercise in reading borders. The sense of translation as a cultural marker of the Renaissance era is not new, but it seems only to have been minimally tied to Shakespeare’s works. Perhaps this is because any concern with Shakespeare as a translator is immediately countered, on first consideration, by the eulogy in

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546 Li, “To Speak Is To Blunder but I Venture,” 139.
547 Ibid.
548 Ibid., 142.
549 Ibid., 141.
which he is attributed with “small Latin[e] and less Greek”.\textsuperscript{550} Perhaps it is also because Shakespeare’s status as author or writer looms too large to allow for another label like “translator”. However, if we take the eulogy as a good-natured jibe about Shakespeare’s lack of university education, we are faced with having to connect the plays and poems with other literature of the day, including that written outside of English. I use “outside” to evoke the false border that remains even today between English and other languages. Loan words prevail. English borrows others’ words all the time: schadenfreude, RSVP (“répondez s’il vous plaît”), karaoke, or apparently even ketchup.\textsuperscript{551} When fantasy author Neil Gaiman was approached about writing the script for the English voice dub of Japanese film \textit{Princess Mononoke (Mononoke hime)}, he agreed, only to find interesting instances of what could be translated and how, given certain shared words between English and Japanese.\textsuperscript{552} He described the challenges of translating for the two film studios involved in the project:

“Samurai” they left; we got to keep “samurai.” We lost “sake”; “sake” became “wine.” We lost “Japan,” interestingly enough, and we even lost China—at one point [in the original version] they talk about these guns that come from China.\textsuperscript{553}

In drawing attention to these differences, Gaiman also identifies his role amongst a system of distribution. Latin used to be prized as the source language for translations, while the vernacular was delegated for ease of reading. English now functions as the pivotal language and thus maintains its grip into the globalised twenty-first century. Gaiman’s translation maintained value for its language; only the final precision of the contents was up for debate between the two studios.\textsuperscript{554}

\textsuperscript{550} Jonson, “To the reader,” line 31.

\textsuperscript{551} “Ketchup” seems to have developed from Hokkien Chinese and Malaysian dialects. See OED “ketchup, n.”.

\textsuperscript{552} See: \textit{Mononoke hime}, directed by Hayao Miyazaki (Koganei, Tokyo: Studio Ghibli, 1997).


Translation is as significant as a cultural marker now as it was in early modern England. We must therefore also acknowledge Shakespeare’s place in this setting as translator, playwright (“play-maker”, not “play-writer”), and even editor. But the “who” of translation is as important in this project as the “what” of text or language. Shakespeare’s French English matters because it allows for a new reading of Hamlet that is not un-historicist but nevertheless points forwards into our “translation century”. 555 On the one hand, Shakespeare’s cultural centrality to that text tugs at the English categorisation I want to decentre. On the other hand, alternate texts working from translations in the era seem to be more comfortably associated with languages outside of English, but perhaps at the cost of their status within English and English literature. To consider Hamlet alongside Montaigne’s Essais is not only a project in translation, but also one concerned with the purposes and philosophy surrounding writing. The borders that separate language from language, print from performance, or version from edition each contribute to the power of their groups of texts. Tracing both these texts’ individual features and wider relationships indicates something more broadly applicable to scholarship. Close, word-by-word analysis and the alternate end of philosophical inquiry are equally valuable means for comparative literary work and, most importantly, must not be bound by the borders of language or nation.

To keep Shakespeare’s work beneath the umbrella of English and Englishness is to miss the exciting multilingual resonances of many of his texts. By working at the fluid boundary of English and French, as they would tend to be categorised, Shakespeare and others have experimented with where linguistic edges might be, and then promptly ignored them. By ignoring categories or repurposing them, these kinds of writers – whether prodding at linguistic or generic boundaries – make those borders more porous. This kind of literary gerrymandering, the rewriting of borders, not only encourages textual experimentation but

also feeds textual power. Boochani’s memoir is a concatenation of language (translated) and genre (memoir, poetry, journalism, and narrative), and pushes at the literal and figurative shorelines of an Australian readership. Political borders may be tightening, but linguistic and literary ones must remain open.
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Shakespeare’s French: Reading Hamlet at the Edge of English


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