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## CONTENTS

### HUMAN CULTURE AND A CULTURE FOR THE HUMANITIES

The Humanities and War R. S. WHITE	1
The Humanities and Knowledge Creation LUKE STRONGMAN	13
Horace as Post-Modern COLIN ANDERSON	25
Wodewoses: the (In)humanity of Medieval Wild Men HELEN YOUNG	37
Man as Machine?: the Mechanical-Human Metaphor SABINE ROSSBACH	50
Girls Taking Over the Humanities in Japan? TOMOKO AOYAMA	65

### HUMANITY, LANGUAGE AND RHETORIC

To Spur a Dull Revenge: the Rhetoric of Self-Exhortation in Revenge Tragedy PETER GIBBARD	79
Speaking to Slaves: the Rhetoric of Command in Swift and Plato THOMAS H. FORD	91

When Good Clichés Go Bad: Developing a Poetics of Malapropism in the Field of Contemporary Public Rhetoric TOM CLARK	103
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#### LITERATURE, THE HUMAN AND THE HUMANITIES

The Giants of Tristrams Saga GERALDINE BARNES	115
“A Good Length with My Short Thread”: Hubris and Anxiety in the Petrarchan Sonnet Sequence DANIJELA KAMBASKOVIĆ-SAWERS	123
“Nobler in the Mind”: the Emergence of Early Modern Anxiety LAURENCE JOHNSON	141
Milton’s Aliens: the Human and the Humanoid RONALD BEDFORD	157
Daphne du Maurier’s <i>My Cousin Rachel</i> : In the Looking Glass TERESA PETERSEN	167
More Human than Human: the Ethics of Alienation in Octavia E. Butler and Gilles Deleuze TIM LAURIE	177
Coyote Meets Moby Dick: the Productive Non-Human in Thomas King’s Fiction CLARE ARCHER-LEAN	191
The Banality of Evil: Arno Surminski’s <i>Die Vogelwelt von Auschwitz</i> HERMAN BEYERSDORF	205
Technology, the Human and the Sublime in Contemporary Literary Fiction TULLY BARNETT	219

Humorous Subversion in Women Writers from  
Latin America

MARCIA ESPINOZA-VERA

231

Living and Partly Living:  
Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie*

JENNIFER HATTE

241

## “NOBLER IN THE MIND”: THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY MODERN ANXIETY

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It would seem self-evident that the literatures and cultural practices of the early modern period reflect the sources and levels of anxiety incumbent upon the people of that time. A growing body of scholarship in the last three decades has delved into any number of sources of anxiety for early modern populations, and in literary studies the correlative of this scholarship has been an increasing interest in anxiety in the writings of Shakespeare and others. As a case in point, Valerie Traub's *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (1992) maps a “fractured terrain” in Shakespeare's treatment of gender and the body, characterized on one side by a more conventional romantic love and on the other by a politicized sexuality that is “simultaneously physical and psychological, often bawdy, and constituted as much by anxiety as by desire.”<sup>1</sup> Traub does not use the concept of anxiety lightly; more than a dozen pages of the book are devoted to elaborating the psychoanalytical definition of anxiety and tracing its relevance to the culture of early modern England. Some other writers are not quite so thorough, and I shall have more to say on this in a moment. In the brief reach of this essay, however, I want to consider the implications for the study of anxiety in early modern writing—and in Shakespeare in particular—of an historical problem: the word “anxiety” does not appear to gain any currency in English until the second decade of the seventeenth century. Certainly, the word is nowhere to be found in Tyndale's Bible of 1526 or the King James Bible of 1611, even though subsequent translations into English (including the New King James Version) include the word in several passages in which vaguely synonymous words like “care” or “carefulness” were used in these early English

translations. Certainly also—and of more immediate relevance to this essay—the word appears nowhere in any of Shakespeare’s plays or sonnets. How, then, can we speak with any confidence of “anxiety” in Shakespeare?

It may well be, indeed, that confidence is *not* a characteristic of treatments of anxiety in recent Shakespeare scholarship. Aaron Landau’s essay on “Skepticism and Anxiety in *Hamlet*,” for example, clearly uses “anxiety” as a key term in the title but then only uses the word on three occasions within the essay, all in the one paragraph, in order to explain the difference between the “skeptical anxiety” associated with the Reformation and the “extreme anxiety,” identified by Landau with the appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet*.<sup>2</sup> Beyond this brief explanatory point, the word disappears from the remainder of the essay, despite its prominence in the title. Similar issues are in evidence in Philip Collington’s “Sans Wife: Sexual Anxiety and the Old Man in Shakespeare’s Plays”<sup>3</sup> and Gretchen Minton’s “Discharging less than the tenth part of one’: Performance Anxiety and/in *Troilus and Cressida*,”<sup>4</sup> for example, in which two very different sources of anxiety are covered by the respective authors in quite similar terms, but historical explanations of the particular mechanisms of anxiety are sparse. Yet my point is not to claim that there is any deficiency in the work of these scholars; rather, I want only to observe what may be evidence of a kind of anxiety at work *within* the scholarship that seeks to understand early modern anxiety. When one uses the word “anxiety” to describe early modern anxieties, at least, that is, in relation to pre-seventeenth century writings, the primary materials to which one has access simply do not echo the term back to the scholar. It is not the case that a scholar must therefore avoid discussion of anxieties, but it is the case that the word “anxiety” itself will not be present in the texts used as primary evidence for such anxieties. The result is, I think, a kind of compensatory compulsion at work in recent writings about early modern anxiety. The most common manifestation is the deployment of a more recent language of anxiety, including puns such as “performance anxiety,” to overcome what seems to be the silence of the primary texts on the subject of anxiety, as if this silence is proof of the early modern writers’ anxieties, the point being that the early moderns will have avoided writing about the things that caused anxiety. Dare we suggest along these lines that Traub’s dozen or so pages on the psychoanalytic definition of anxiety may be evidence of overcompensation to some extent?

One writer who could not be characterized as lacking in confidence in any area of inquiry has also found occasion to deploy the language of anxiety in Shakespeare scholarship. In essays in *Learning to Curse* and *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Stephen Greenblatt has entertained protracted discussions on the subject. “The Cultivation of Anxiety: King Lear and His Heirs” (first published in *Raritan* in 1982) develops the comparison of Lear’s testing of his three daughters with a description of a childrearing technique from 1831, based on the prominence within both texts of what Greenblatt calls “salutary anxiety.”<sup>5</sup> Importantly, the term on which he hinges comparison is of Greenblatt’s own devising: it is not even the case that Reverend Francis Wayland uses the term in 1831 and Greenblatt reads through it to Lear; rather, Greenblatt notes a point of similarity between two texts separated by over two hundred years and coins his own term to explain the similarity. If his treatment of “salutary anxiety” shows no signs of any anxiety on his own part—the term is simply stated and then used without any qualifying comments—it may well be the case that Greenblatt is fully aware of the limitations of his own strategy and so does not entertain qualifications that may exert added pressure on an already tenuous comparative framework. Less pressure seems to bear on Greenblatt in the final chapter of *Shakespearean Negotiations*, in which another typically obscure fragment is used as a foil to discuss several plays of Shakespeare, but “anxiety” is deployed only in general terms to describe something Greenblatt sees as confronting the Elizabethan theatre *writ large*: “theatrical anxiety”.<sup>6</sup> Greenblatt’s point is that the Elizabethan stage is a locus for presentations of anxiety in order to give pleasure to an audience, which he sees being at odds with the presentation of anxiety for disciplinary purposes (as demonstrated in an obscure text from 1552). Even as he makes this assertion, however, Greenblatt inserts an endnote that qualifies his comment: “This is, however, only a *working* distinction, to mark an unstable, shifting relation between anxiety and pleasure” (*Negotiations* n.9, 193). In the next few paragraphs, while discussing this theatrical anxiety, he inserts still more endnotes, each qualifying his comments with further care. Such qualifications evince even in Greenblatt’s work a degree of hesitation in the face of early modern anxiety, a necessary willingness to compensate for the lack of the word itself in the primary text by begging the question of the existence of early modern anxiety, to some extent.

Space, of course, prevents me from pursuing recent scholarship of this kind in any greater detail. I hope instead to have simply



established a general tendency in relation to early modern anxiety: that the absence of the word from the primary text need not prevent the scholar from talking of anxiety, but it does produce an anxious discourse of its own within the scholar's treatment of the subject. I want to focus for the greater part of this essay on the question of the emergence of the word "anxiety" at a time that would seem to have been characterized by anxiety. My contention is that the word "anxiety" becomes necessary in English around the turn of the seventeenth century precisely because a discursive universe had built up in the preceding century around the concept of a physically troubled mind, culminating among other things in Shakespeare's presentations of some of the most troubled minds on the early modern stage. This is particularly significant in relation to the larger project toward which the present study makes a contribution: I am interested in the notion that early modern writings provide us with insight into the historical moment on the cusp of Cartesian dualism, when mind and body had not yet been conceptually separated and when the language of abstraction was as yet the language of the body. In what follows, then, I shall also outline the significance of my observations regarding the emergence of early modern anxiety in relation to this much broader investigation into what I am calling the early modern body-mind.

Before we can discuss the emergence of the word as a phenomenon of the turn of the seventeenth century, there is however a small obstacle that must be considered. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "anxietie" appears in English in Thomas More's *De Quatuor Novissimis*, circa 1525. There are a number of aspects of this citation that I think warrant closer scrutiny, rather than leave it as read that the word appearing in More indicates that it was readily available to authors throughout the sixteenth century. First, there is the issue of dating More's use of the word. In the OED, it is given as *circa* 1525, since the date of the composition of the *Novissimis* is in fact a matter of conjecture. More's prefatory note refers to his text—a "Treatise Upon Those Words of Holy Scripture, Memorare novissima ... (etc.)"<sup>77</sup>—as having been "Made about the year of our Lord 1522," although it is clear that this note refers only to the time at which writing commenced on the treatise. The treatise was in fact never finished, so the date allocated to the writing of the passage in which More uses the word "anxiety"—it is used twice, once each in consecutive paragraphs in "Part 3: Of Covetousness, Gluttony, and Sloth"—is doubtless based on sound scholarship, to be sure, but remains nevertheless speculative. Of course, I may seem to be quibbling

over a trifle in this instance: whether the word was written in 1522, 1525, or any other year in close proximity, there is obviously no case to argue against the fact that More wrote the word “anxiety” in a text written in English sometime in the third decade of the sixteenth century. Yet it is worth noting that the *Novissimis* was never finished in More’s lifetime, and it did not appear in print until William Rastell’s *Workes of Sir Thomas More* was produced in 1557.

This question of the date of the *Novissimis* is important, I think, if we are drawn to speculate on whether More is using a word readily available in his native tongue or whether he introduces a word that was not in common usage at the time. At this point, it is worth venturing beyond the OED for some clarification on the issue. The word is not given, for example, in the *Medulla Grammaticae* (from around 1480), in relation to the Latin “*Anxietas*,” which is defined as “anglice noye” (the English *noye*, meaning annoyance).<sup>8</sup> By 1538, a good decade after More uses the term in the *Novissimis*, the word is not used by Thomas Elyot in his *Dictionary*, wherein we find *Anxietas* and *anxietudo* explained with two pairs of English words thus: “anguysshē or sorowe” (anguish or sorrow) and “care or heuynesse” (care or heaviness).<sup>9</sup> The same is true of many other early to mid-sixteenth century dictionaries and glossaries consulted via the Lexicon of Early Modern English, all of which contain entries on or references to the Latin word *anxietas* and its variant forms *anxietatis*, *anxius*, and *anxifer*, for example, but no instance of the word “anxiety” in any English form. John Withals’ *Short Dictionary for Young Beginners* (1556) even defines the English words “peine, ache or grefe” (pain, ache or grief) with, among other things, the phrasing “*anxietas, tatis, i. corporis cruciatus*” yet there is no similar entry for “anxiety.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is not until 1587 that the anglicized form of the word finds its way into any of the texts investigated. Thomas Thomas’s *Dictionarium* defines the Latin *Scrupulositas* as “Curiousnes of conscience, scrupulositie, anxiety, spicednes of conscience,”<sup>11</sup> which in itself seems somewhat out of place with the sense previously given for *anxietas* in association with “*i. corporis cruciatus*,” dare we suggest. It is also interesting that Thomas’s definition of *Anxietas* repeats the use by earlier definitions of anguish, sorrow, and such like, but does not use the word “anxiety.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is in the dictionaries of the early seventeenth century that the word “anxiety” begins to appear with greater frequency, and carries with it this enlarged sense of conveying notions of doubt, curiosity, and even hoariness, along with its more Latinate sense of anguish, grief, or heaviness of care. Thomas Wilson’s *Christian Dictionary* (1612) includes the word

“anxiety” in definitions for “Doubting,” “Feare,” and “Thought,” for example, but it does not contain an entry for “anxiety” itself.<sup>13</sup>

It is not until Thomas Blount’s 1656 *Glossographia*, so far as I can glean, that any lexicon of English words contains a dedicated entry for “anxiety.”<sup>14</sup> The variant spellings, “anxitie” and “anxietie” do appear as entries in the dictionaries of Robert Cawdrey (1604)<sup>15</sup> and Johyn Bullokar (1616)<sup>16</sup> respectively, but we can observe that these variant spellings do not appear any earlier than “anxiety” in the various lexicons we have surveyed as a part of the definitions provided for other words. To summarize this detour into the lexicographical record: until 1587, there seems to be no use of the word “anxiety” or any variant English spelling in any of the books that contribute to lexicographical knowledge of English or Latin words; the meanings associated with the Latin *anxietas* rarely gravitated away from its derivation, aligned with *angere* (strangulation, pain, distress) until the late sixteenth century; and in the seventeenth century, the English word “anxiety” and a number of variant forms such as “anxious” and “anxiferous” begin to appear with frequency in association with a range of new meanings related more generally to many different mental states besides anguish or distress. Along these lines, it is worth mentioning here Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which of course in 1621 lists “anxiety” unproblematically as one of the known symptoms of melancholy, albeit very late in the book—it is mentioned in the third last sub-section of the final section of the tome—and the word is notable for its absence from the detailed index that follows.<sup>17</sup> Anxiety is also mentioned twice in the prefatory Democritus section, yet on the occasions that anxiety is mentioned in Burton it is always coupled to synonymous terms—“troubled with perpetual fears, anxieties, insomuch” (707); “these men’s discontents, anxieties” (709); “full of continual fears, cares, torments, anxieties” (6737), and so on—which suggests that the term is used at this stage of its life in English in somewhat circumspect fashion. My point here is that even in those discourses in which we might expect the word to gain currency rapidly at this time, such as medicine or psychology in their formative guises, the word is not yet, by 1621, being used with a clear sense of what it means in its own right.

What, then, we ask, is the word doing in one of More’s more obscure writings *circa* 1525? I stated before that there were a number of aspects of the OED citation that were worth further consideration. In addition to the date, observe that the word is used both times in what appear to be paraphrases from scripture. Might

we conjecture that in these two passages More is simply transliterating from a Latinate form into an anglicized form, rendering *anxietas* as “anxiety.” Indeed, along these lines, it can be pointed out that the spelling changes from one paragraph to the next—that is, from “anxitie” (90) to “anxietie” (91)<sup>18</sup>—suggesting perhaps that More was experimenting rather than writing from familiarity with the word. Regardless, though, my sense of the use of the word in More is not so much that the word was available at the time of writing, nor even perhaps at the time of publication (hence, perhaps, an error by the compositor of the *Workes* rather than in the original penmanship), nor even that More *introduced* the word into English; rather, I suggest that More pre-empts the emergence of the word in English in the latter half of the sixteenth century and its sudden uptake in the next as a result of what may well be nothing more than mere happenstance. If it is the case that a later reader is prompted by More’s text to mimic the use of “anxitie” or “anxietie” as English forms for the Latin *anxietas*, it certainly can have been no earlier than 1557, and the fact that it is not until a further three decades later that the word appears as “anxiety” in print suggests to me that there is no link between More’s earlier use and the subsequent later uses of the term.

It is at this point that Shakespeare can be brought into the picture. We know that Shakespeare was a voracious collector of new words, and it is to be assumed that if he wanted to convey something like anxiety in his plays *and* he knew of the existence of the word, then he most surely would have used it on at least one occasion. We may wonder whether Shakespeare would have read More’s *Novissimis*? The evidence from established scholarship of textual sources in Shakespeare’s plays—including the play of *Sir Thomas More* itself, albeit in line with disputes over the authorship of this play—suggests that he was certainly familiar with the historical figure, would have read a portion of the most famous works, but likely read very little if any at all of the smaller doctrinal writings. This is of course a very speculative overview, and justice cannot be done to the long history of debates over some of these matters. Suffice to say, though, that a search through this large body of writings will come up empty on the question of whether Shakespeare was influenced by or familiar with the obscure treatise on the *Novissimis*. An alternative consideration may be whether Shakespeare was familiar with Thomas’s *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* of 1587, and its inclusion of the word “anxiety” in the definition of the Latin *Scrupulositas*? Of course, there can be no expectation of any specific evidence either way on this score, but

we could at least ponder whether Shakespeare would have been likely to draw upon a lexicon of Latin words in English translation as a source for the words to use in his writing? We can be fairly certain that he was able to read Latin,<sup>19</sup> but this does not mean that he did so by preference in sourcing material for plays that were to be staged for an audience of lower educational standing. Without knowing for certain whether Shakespeare read the *Novissimis* or Thomas's Latin-English lexicon, it is at least fair to claim, I think, if he did not acquaint himself with either of these texts, then he would not have known of the two best and perhaps only examples of the use of the word "anxiety" in English prior to 1611.

John Florio's Italian-English dictionary, *Queen Anna's New World of Words*, printed originally as *A World of Words* in 1598 but expanded with the royal seal of approval in 1611, has an entry in the later edition for *Ansietà*, defined as "anxiety, curiosity, a longing desire, a sorrowing care."<sup>20</sup> Now of course we know that Florio *was* well known to Shakespeare, since he tutored the playwright in French and Italian, but again we must assure ourselves that if Florio had introduced him to the English "anxiety" at any time before 1611, it would have surely found its way into his plays during the so-called "tragic period" of 1600 to 1608. Indeed, we can confirm that in the 1598 edition of Florio's book, the word "anxiety" is missing, with the entry for *Ansietà* defined thus: "curiositie, longing, desire, thought, anguish, sorrow, care, toile."<sup>21</sup> If we accept, then, that the word "anxiety" does not find its way into more common use earlier than around 1611—recall that the King James Bible of 1611 has no mention of the word—it would be fair to say that Shakespeare just missed the boat on anxiety, since we also know that he wrote little, at least without collaboration, in the last two years of his career before retiring to Stratford in 1613. We return then to the question on which the first paragraph of this essay rested: how can we speak with any confidence of "anxiety" in Shakespeare?

What this history of the emergence of the word in English tells us is that at just this moment, while Shakespeare was plying his trade in London, there became a clear need for a word like "anxiety" to pull together a range of meanings that are associated on the one hand with the Latin word *anxietas* and on the other hand with doubting, fear, thought, and other cognitive states. Perhaps we may consider that Shakespeare does not miss the boat as such; rather, might we consider that Shakespeare's writings contribute to the establishment of a wider need, out of which we may see the sudden uptake of the word in the decades immediately after his

career ended as something of a consequence. A language of anxiety is everywhere to be found in Shakespeare's plays, particularly during that later period in which the great tragedies were written; the only thing missing from this language is the word itself. We find in its stead an accumulation of soliloquies and piquant phrases in which descriptions of the mind and inward dispositions are linked directly to—or, I would argue, contained wholly within—descriptions of bodily suffering. For the purpose of concision here, we need look no further for a prime example of this than what may be the single most famous speech in the history of the theatre. The speech is from *Hamlet*, a play written around the start of this so-called tragic period of Shakespeare's career. It begins, innocuously enough, with a tiny conundrum: "To be, or not to be—that is the question" (3.i.55).<sup>22</sup>

With no small exaggeration, this single line is often quoted as *the* quintessential statement of existential angst: to exist or not to exist or, in short, to live or die. This is of course well married to the reading of *Hamlet* as a play about the inner turmoil of its central character. Yet I want to look a little more closely at how this very speech calls the nature of inwardness itself into question. Having established the principal terms of the question, Hamlet immediately disassembles. We must not forget that the most recent words we have heard from Hamlet are the presentiment of triumph at the end of 2.ii: "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King" (539–40). At the end of this scene, he exits, and Act 3 begins with the entry of the royal entourage, and Claudius speaking in no uncertain terms about needing to "Get from him why he puts on this confusion" (3.i.2). Recall, of course, that in the Quarto texts there are no act or scene divisions, so we only separate the "play's the thing" speech from his next words based on a convention established by the later editors. Closer analysis of 2.ii and 3.i, I suggest, shows that no such separation in time needs to be presumed, as the action of one flows naturally into that of the next. The arrival of the royal entourage does not come with an attendant flourish. On the two occasions prior to this in which the King and his entourage take to the stage, their arrival is met with a flourish. After this point, Claudius comes and goes from the stage on numerous occasions but only in his arrival for the central play scene and in his appearance before the final duel is his return met with similar signals. It is clear that on all other occasions, the return of Claudius to the stage is in the context of his ongoing scheming, which must be seen to be taking place away from the eyes of the public or, more importantly, from the eyes of his nephew. This is

of course the first such occasion, so to mark the distinction between an official and a private dialogue, Shakespeare removes the flourish and has Claudius entering in mid-sentence: “And can you by no drift of conference ...” (3.i.1).

The fact that Claudius is at this moment grilling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on the nature of their most immediate conversations with Hamlet, which make up the greater part of the dialogue of 2.ii, carries the weight of this idea that the action is nigh on continuous. Hamlet’s long monologue at the end of 2.ii, which culminates in his triumphal statement that he shall indeed catch the conscience of the king, gives ample time for his two colleagues to have returned to Claudius with news of their interaction with the Prince, during which subsequent conversation they enter the stage again to complete the business that they had commenced with him at the very beginning of 2.ii. Indeed, the passage of time from the departure of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their return is the same length of time from the departure of Hamlet at the end of 2.ii to his return during 3.1: the former depart at line 483 and return 56 lines later at the beginning of 3.i, and the latter departs at the end of 2.ii and begins speaking on his return in 3.i at line 55. For me, this evinces a clear indication that the action is all but continuous across this imposed scene division. Thus, I contend further that when Hamlet returns to the stage he is indeed only newly filled with a sense of confidence immediately prior to saying the words that are so often read as an expression of inner turmoil and existential angst. Whence, then, this turmoil?

In what follows his initial statement of the principal terms of the question—“To be, or not to be”—Hamlet does not drift off immediately into his extrapolation of the broader issues related to this question; rather, he restates the question:

Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them;  
(3.i.56–9)

In what follows the first line of the soliloquy, then, the initial terms are immediately restated as a binary dictum that is not simply concerned with living or dying: “To be” has as its analogue “to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” whereas “not to be” has as its analogue the taking up of arms “against a sea of troubles.” The second is of course presented as an impossible

option, for none may take up arms against a sea, thus its inevitable outcome is the ending of troubles via the ending of being. Of greatest interest to me here, though, is that the terms of this dissimulation are presented not solely in terms of the physical, nor are they presented solely in terms of an inner turmoil. Hamlet expresses the binary in terms of which path is nobler *in the mind* but that what one does in pursuing either pathway within one's mind is to take part in an action that has a physical counterpart: to suffer slings and arrows, or to take up arms. The confusion that, as Claudius says, Hamlet "puts on" is thus not only confined to some "true state" as Guildenstern calls it (3.i.9).

Rather than turmoil delimited by the mind, Hamlet's is a turmoil that does not find expression only in a language of interiority: even as it is given to the mind, it is aligned with physical suffering or action on either side of the dilemma. This duplicity is precisely what the word "anxiety" names, I will suggest. Derived from *angere* (to strangle, cause pain, or distress), *anxietas* names worry of the kind that possesses a physical analogue, causing the sufferer to feel pain: slings and arrows indeed. Yet in the late sixteenth century, as we have seen, the emergence of "anxiety" in English also involved carrying forward the meanings of the Latin *anxietas* along with a range of new meanings related to cognitive processes in general. This leads me to speculate in no small measure about the prospect that "anxiety" comes to name "thought" during this period because a discursive universe was in the process of being formulated about the very question of interiority. To put it simply, I suggest that the thought of thought being set apart from the body was itself a source of anxiety, to wit, the cause of pain or distress. By this claim I do not mean that the early modern individual was mindful of the imminence of Cartesian dualism, and feared its arrival. I suggest instead that we find in the plays of the turn of the century—certainly in Shakespeare—and elsewhere, perhaps, simply the embryonic gestures toward an inquiry into the nature of the body-mind relation. We can put this into perspective by imagining in the first instance that pre-modern cognition does not discriminate between mental phenomena and physical states or bodily form. In such a discursive universe, the language of mind is already a subset of the language of the body. Even the merest gesture toward a relation *between* mind and body is, therefore, a terrifying prospect.<sup>23</sup>

When Hamlet stoops to question which form of physical distress is nobler in the mind, he is voicing this prospect. No surprise, then, that he continues to raise the issue of death in relation to the *problem* of sleep:



No more, and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heartache 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,  
 (3.i.60–4)

Sleeping and, perchance, dreaming provide compelling conceptual problems for the early modern body-mind. Emotions or feelings are not quite so problematical, since even “heartache” is equated here with the natural shocks to which the flesh is heir. Yet sleep is said here to end such natural shocks: twice, on lines 59 and 63, a precise correlation is made between the verbs “to sleep” and “to die.” Sleep is thus equated with the end of flesh and yet—here indeed is “the rub”—it has an activity that can be associated with it: “perchance to dream.” The *problem* of sleep for the early modern body-mind is that it provides us with an example of an activity in which the physical body plays no part. Importantly, however, “what dreams may come” (3.i.65) in that sleep of death cannot be fully extricated from the calamity of life, as the catalogue of the “fardels” (75) borne by those who choose to sweat “under a weary life” (76) will attest, since it is the “dread of something after death” (77) that makes cowards of us in the face of a life or death choice. The dreams we experience now can only feed such dread if they already *exceed* the natural shocks to which our flesh is heir while we are alive and, by being set apart from the flesh, if they leave open the promise of dreams to come after the flesh has ended.

Surely, though, such a reading of this speech confirms the assessment that it is indeed truly an expression of existential angst: to live or to die? Certainly, I agree that the dilemma phrased as “to be or not to be” is a statement concerning suicide, and not a predicate in need of a subject, as D. H. Lawrence, for example, once famously noted: “The question, to be or not to be, which Hamlet puts himself, does not mean, to live or not to live. It is ... To be or not to be King” (177).<sup>24</sup> Yet the direction in which I have been heading with this argument is that this is a statement *concerning* suicide, and not a genuine contemplation of the same. Previously, in his verbal joust with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet establishes a clear pattern of speaking in opposition to the apparent realities surrounding him: the baby Polonius, the hawk from the hand saw, and so on. During this verbal joust, of course, the players arrive and Hamlet hits upon his plan to trap Claudius. To the player

and thereafter in his aside while left alone on stage, Hamlet speaks with assurance about matters over which he maintains control: the selection of the play to be performed, the insertion of some twelve or sixteen lines and, importantly, the fact that he has until now been duplicitous—“unpack my heart with words” (2.ii.520)—since he has only a devil’s word on which to base his revenge but at last has “grounds more / Relative” (538–39). Here, then, we have Hamlet telling us in an aside that he has been routinely duplicitous, so presumably he must continue to do so at least until his newly devised plan has been put into full effect.

When Hamlet enters the stage in what is now designated as Act 3, he thus has a renewed commitment to his duplicity. He has most likely followed Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who he knows were “sent for” by his uncle, and indeed enters the stage that is still occupied by Ophelia (unconcealed) and Claudius and Polonius (concealed behind the arras, but possibly known to him, dare we suggest). When he utters words that bespeak a contemplation of suicide, then, I suggest that he is indeed engaging in a deliberate display of *seeming* anxious. Hamlet is certainly no stranger to the idea that appearances can be deceptive, and indeed he refers to both Claudius and Gertrude in terms of “seeming” at different points prior to the playing of the *Murder of Gonzago*: Gertrude is described as a “seeming-virtuous Queen” (1.v.46) and Hamlet declares he shall monitor the King’s reaction to the play “in censure of his seeming” (3.ii.83). Yet I do not wish to make the point about “seeming” on the grounds that it speaks only to the idea that the early modern body-mind hinges on exposing the difference between appearances and substances, or between deeds and thought, although there is certainly plenty of fodder for a reading of *Hamlet* along these lines. I focus on the “to be or not to be” speech here precisely because it shifts the terrain of the body-mind problem in an early modern context. Here Hamlet is seeming neither virtuous nor ready for action—neither a quality nor an apparent deed—but is seeming contemplative, doubtful, and, in short, anxious. He is staging, for the benefit of his onlookers, concealed or not, the greatest of dilemmas—life or death—expressed in terms of the increasingly troubled relationship between the outside and inside of the body and the most dreadful notion that the inside of the body is in fact entirely separable from it.

In seeming anxious, Hamlet stages the intertwining of those things that were at this very time about to be captured together under the umbrella of the word “anxiety” itself: distress, anguish,

sorrow (as were naturally carried forward from the meanings of *anxietas*), but also thought itself as a source of doubt and uncertainty. This is to say that Hamlet stages both the contemplation of death, and the anxiety occasioned by the possibility that thought is itself a kind of death: the end of the body. In *Shakespeare's Entrails: Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body*, David Hillman argues for the widespread emergence of *homo clausus*, the “demarcation of the interior of the human body as separate from and problematically related to the exterior world”<sup>25</sup> throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In an otherwise detailed reading of *Hamlet* in terms of *homo clausus*, Hillman curiously omits the “to be or not to be” speech from his frames of reference. Perhaps the point to be made from the reading of this speech in the present essay is that it speaks of a resistance to *homo clausus* even as it seeks to extend the notion: Hamlet speaks to nobody (since he is ostensibly alone), yet in this respect he is *staging* a speech to nobody (since he is not alone, with others already on stage in differing levels of concealment), and he speaks of the possibility of an end to the body (he stages contemplation as no body, if you will). There is thus separation of the body from its exterior world but also, and perhaps more importantly, separation of the interior from the body altogether. For these reasons, I contend, while Shakespeare did not have the language of anxiety at his disposal, he stages the staging of anxiety at a moment in time when the word becomes necessary to capture, in a word, the notion that the human mind and its various processes may be set apart from the flesh that had until this point adequately contained it.

#### NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 2.
  - <sup>2</sup> Aaron Landau, “‘Let me not burst in ignorance’: Scepticism and Anxiety in *Hamlet*,” *English Studies* 3 (2001): 218–30 [223].
  - <sup>3</sup> Philip D. Collington, “Sans Wife: Sexual Anxiety and the Old Man in Shakespeare’s Plays,” *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe: Cultural Representations*, ed. Erin Campbell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 185–208.
  - <sup>4</sup> Gretchen E. Minton, “‘Discharging less than the tenth part of one’: Performance Anxiety and/in *Troilus and Cressida*,” *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 159–89.

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- <sup>5</sup> Stephen J. Greenblatt, "The Cultivation of Anxiety: King Lear and His Heirs," *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 80–98 [90].
- <sup>6</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 134.
- <sup>7</sup> Thomas More, *The Workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght, 1557*. Facsimile reproduction. The Thomas More Studies Library site. Date consulted: 2 February 2009. URL: [http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/library\\_1557Workes.html](http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/library_1557Workes.html). 72.
- <sup>8</sup> Ian Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons of Early Modern English*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Library and University of Toronto Press, 2006. Date consulted: 6 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=537-1057](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=537-1057)
- <sup>9</sup> Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 6 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=53-915](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=53-915)
- <sup>10</sup> Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 6 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=78-3966](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=78-3966)
- <sup>11</sup> Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 5 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=179-31622](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=179-31622)
- <sup>12</sup> Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 6 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=179-2530](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=179-2530)
- <sup>13</sup> Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 8 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=308-757](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=308-757); [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=308-2316](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=308-2316); and [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=308-3672](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=308-3672)
- <sup>14</sup> Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 8 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=478-571](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=478-571)
- <sup>15</sup> *A Table Alphabetical*. Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 20 May 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=276-159](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=276-159)
- <sup>16</sup> *An English Expositor*, Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 20 May 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=323-250](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=323-250)
- <sup>17</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (eBooks@Adelaide, 2007), date consulted: 25 May 2009. URL: <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/burton/robert/melancholy/>
- <sup>18</sup> More, Workes. Date consulted: 2 February 2009. URL: [http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/1557Workes/A\\_Treatyce\\_upon\\_the\\_last\\_thynges\\_part\\_3.pdf](http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/1557Workes/A_Treatyce_upon_the_last_thynges_part_3.pdf).
- <sup>19</sup> See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2004), 24–8.
- <sup>20</sup> Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 6 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=299-3569](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=299-3569)

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- <sup>21</sup> Lancashire, ed. *Lexicons*. Date consulted: 7 February 2009. URL: [leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=231-2116](http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry.cfm?ent=231-2116)
- <sup>22</sup> All references to the play are from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds. *Hamlet*. Arden Shakespeare Edition (2006).
- <sup>23</sup> For a discussion of *Hamlet* as an expression of resistance to the emergent philosophy of dualism, see Paul A. Cefalu, "Damned custom ... habits devil: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Anti-dualism, and the Early Modern Philosophy of Mind" *ELH* 67 (2000): 399–431.
- <sup>24</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "An Aversion from Hamlet," *Hamlet: A Norton Critical Edition*, second edition, ed. Cyrus Hoy (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1992), 175–80.
- <sup>25</sup> David Hillman, *Shakespeare's Entrails: Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 7.