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# A Poor Ear for a Pun. Retranslating *Hamlet* and Paronomastic Fetishism

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## Abstract

This article begins by tracing the influence of the canonical translations of *Hamlet* on both oedipal translation theory (Steiner 1975, Gravonsky 1977) and the psychoanalytic pun-fetish (Freud 1927, Lacan [1958] 1977). It then offers a critical analysis, firstly, of structuralist typologies of translation 'solutions' to Shakespearean wordplay (Offord 1990, Delabastita 1993) and, secondly, of the 'performative' approach propounded by followers of Antoine Vitez (Meschonnic 1999). It argues that the 'satisfaction' derived from a quibbling translation often results from a sense of conquering *aporia*: the consummation of a fetishistic cultural desire. This attitude creates a serious problem. *Aporia* is fundamental to *Hamlet*. It can be vitiated by premature resolution. Close reading of the play's French (re)translations reveals an inverse correlation between performative metalingual success and tonal fidelity. Instead the paper commends a 'contrapuntal' approach to wordplay translation in *Hamlet*, the basic strategy of which is to accentuate the 'presence' of the wit of the original, rather than encapsulating it in its absence.

## Résumé

Cet article raconte d'abord l'influence des traductions canoniques d'*Hamlet* sur la théorie œdipienne de la traduction (Steiner 1975, Gravonsky 1977), et sur le fétichisme du jeu de mots dans la psychanalyse elle-même (Freud 1927, Lacan [1958] 1977). Puis il critique, d'une part, les typologies structuralistes des « solutions » de traduction des jeux de mots chez Shakespeare (Offord 1990, Delabastita 1993) et, d'autre part, l'approche « performative » proposée par les adeptes d'Antoine Vitez (Meschonnic 1999). Il affirme que la « satisfaction » tirée d'une traduction qui réussit un calembour provient souvent du sentiment que l'on a surmonté l'*aporie*. Il s'agit de combler un désir culturel fétichiste. Cet état d'esprit crée un problème assez important. L'*aporie* est fondamentale dans *Hamlet*. Une résolution prématurée peut l'ébranler. Une lecture approfondie des (re)traductions françaises de la pièce démontre une corrélation inverse entre la réussite de l'exploit métalinguistique et la fidélité au ton du texte. L'article préfère une approche « contrapuntique » par rapport aux jeux de mots dans *Hamlet*, dont la stratégie de traduction cherche à accentuer la « présence » de l'esprit de l'original, plutôt que de le remplacer.

**Keywords:** aporia, Bonnefoy, counterpoint, Delabastita, fetishism, Freud, *Hamlet*, Lacan, Meschonnic, Mesguich, paronomasia, puns, Shakespeare, translation, wordplay

**Mots-clés :** aporie, Bonnefoy, calembour, contrepoint, Delabastita, fétichisme, Freud, *Hamlet*, jeux de mots, Lacan, Meschonnic, Mesguich, paronomase, Shakespeare, traduction

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[KING.] But now, my cousin Hamlet and my son –  
 HAMLET. A little more than kin and less than kind.  
 KING. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?  
 HAMLET. Not so much, my lord, I am too much in the 'son'.<sup>1</sup>

(*Hamlet* [Q2]: 1.2.64-67)

## 1. Oedipal Translation and Paronomastic Fetishism: *poring over significance – pouring meaning in the ear*

### 1. (a) HAMLET DONE TO DEATH<sup>2</sup>

When William Shakespeare's Danish prince first moped on stage at the Globe, around 1600, it was already a do-over. One of the main reasons Hamlet takes so long to do over the King – while mulling over, over and over, the idea of doing himself over (punning interminably as he goes) – is the suspicion that he is but a mere shadow of his forebears: not just of his late father, but also of the 'Ur-Hamlet', Belleforest's translation of Saxo Grammaticus, and so on... a do-over of a do-over. From the outset he complains of lassitude and overexposure. Besides fuelling the play's relentless cultural penetration, the abiding sense of textual *mise en abîme* created by the strange self-consciousness of Shakespeare's adaptation – which somehow manages to feel both jaded and inexhaustible – is also a wellspring for its protagonist's astringent wordplay.

In the second scene, for example, Claudius snarkily introduces him as 'cousin Hamlet, and my son', and the world-weary young pretender mutters his obscure first words: 'a little more than kin and less than kind'. An entire paper might be dedicated to a gloss of that single line<sup>3</sup>, but suffice to say that this dark quibble on the concepts 'related, child, king, similar, equivalent, affectionate, well-meaning, congenial/congenital, and bound by filial duty' is not merely a rejection of the prince's unnatural relationship with Claudius, newly cemented by his uncle's marriage to his mother – his *fathruncler's*<sup>4</sup> marriage to his *a(u)nti(e)-mother* – but it is also a metatheatrical existential quip to which a contemporary audience might well have been attuned: i.e. 'it is no more clear than the subtle difference between these two words, in this intolerable context, what exactly my own relationship is to myself, and to my previous theatrical incarnations'. Kin or kind.

Meanwhile, at St. Paul's, North by Northwest of the Globe, a wonderfully tasteless parody of the Hamlet tragedy, John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, was being played by

child actors, who apparently didn't know a hawk from a handsaw<sup>5</sup>. It is equally unclear what the relationship is between these two plays. A little more than kin, perhaps, but less than kind.

When it comes to French versions, *Hamlet* (quite unlike the untranslated *Antonio's Revenge*) has been done over enough times to suggest that it is in fact impossible to do the play to death. Without counting multiple versions by the same writer, such as François-Victor Hugo's twin translations, or Bonnefoy's persistent reworkings between 1957 and 1988, I know of 56 different translations of *Hamlet* into French. (See Appendix 2.) There are probably even more.

It is a fair bet that no other major text can match this in the French canon. Indeed very few texts have, to my knowledge, been translated into any single language so often. 56 versions is up there with English translations of the *Iliad* and the *Bible*.

This insatiable desire to reinterpret *Hamlet* is clearly a result of the play's cultural ubiquity: a symptom of its seminal influence on romanticism in particular, and on almost every subsequent artistic and intellectual movement. As Dirk Delabastita outlines, in *There is a Double Tongue* (Delabastita 1993, 257-258), the rise of romanticism and subsequently modernism in Europe also coincided with a sea-change in the intellectual acceptability of wordplay. Where the Enlightenment had generally portrayed punning as frivolous or crude, romanticism sought to harness the 'sublimity' of various sorts of ambiguity, thus allowing modernism to embark upon even more radical refractions of the symbolic, ultimately culminating in the unsurpassed wordplay marathon that is Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. Tellingly, Delabastita traces one of the high points of this shift to the "breakthrough of Freudianism, with its emphasis on... the connections between rhetoric and erotics" (Delabastita 1993, 258). (Delabastita is ascetic when it comes to wordplay in his own prose, so one can only assume he would frown upon the rather spooneristic portmanteau 'rheterotics'.) The possible causal relationships at play here are beyond the scope of this study, but surely the simultaneous rehabilitations of *Hamlet* and the pun during this period cannot be merely coincidental.

Fast forward to the second half of the twentieth century and, in the writing of many of the major structuralist and post-structuralist French writers (e.g. Derrida, Lacan, Cixous), wordplay had become not only a focus of investigation, but almost an entire methodology. It is no coincidence that all three of the people mentioned have written extensively on *Hamlet*<sup>6</sup>.

Again, there is a suggestive dovetailing, in this period, of the desire to constantly reinterpret *Hamlet* and the apparently compulsive use of paronomasia as a structural principle in theoretical texts. ‘Paronomasia’ is intended as an umbrella term to cover all forms of wordplay in which the proximity (or simultaneity) of formally similar signifiers acts as a nodal focus for more or less semantically divergent signifieds. A marked or apparently symptomatic predilection for this is what is meant by ‘paronomastic fetishism’.

### 1. (b) Too much in the pun. Punophilia [Pun-Ophelia?]

The pathology under investigation here is a ‘kinky’ and inherently reifying approach to language that seeks out formal knots and clusters and plays with them, or pores<sup>7</sup> over them, as if their material were capable of stimulation, producing more and more semantic entanglements. “Nouer et dénouer n’étant pas ici des métaphores, mais bien à prendre comme ces nœuds qui se construisent réellement à faire chaîne de la matière signifiante,” insists Lacan (Lacan 1974, 22). *Kin... kind... king... kink...* This kind of thing can illicit genuine, if vicarious stimulation – *jouis-sens* as Lacan calls it (spell it how you like, he says: ‘conformément à l’équivoque qui fait la loi du signifiant’)<sup>8</sup> – but it tends to baffle those who do not share the ‘kink’. As with all ‘kinks’, the fact this is an implicit ‘turn-off’ for a projected ‘vanilla majority’, is an important part of the quasi-erotic effect.

Of course, ‘fetishism’ is itself a problematic concept. Its very existence, as Lacan reveals, is reliant on a heightened, almost perverse sensitivity to the ‘knot of signifiers’. In defining sexual fetishism, Freud provides the infamous example of an Anglo-German subject who describes an excessive erotic response to the ‘shine’ or ‘sheen’ on women’s noses “*Glanz auf der Nase*”, which Freud interprets as an unconscious mistranslation (a paronomastic calque) of the English phrase ‘glance at the nose’, on the grounds that the patient’s mother was English (Freud 1928). This kinky gloss allows Freud to postulate an oedipal analysis in which the projected mother’s nose acts as a displaced phallus for the subject, who is unwittingly suffering from castration anxiety. In *Seminaire VI*, Lacan uses this anecdote as a key justification for treating fetishism, indeed all forms of desire, as intimately related to the equivocal nature of the arbitrary signifier.

I do not intend to tackle Lacan’s sticky take on the metonymic nature of desire in any

depth, but I do have two very basic observations with relevance to the current study. Firstly, just like Freud, Lacan either overlooks, obfuscates or literally excises the Latin word ‘*glans*’ in the anecdote. This is a highly suggestive paronomasia that lurks, however unconsciously, just beneath the textual surface and which seems, to me at least, much less far-fetched than Freud’s rather unnatural handling of the English ‘glance’. Thus, according to the logic of psychosexual linguistics it propounds, the anecdote itself might be read as a fetishistic subject displacing the fear of its own castration (or *glansectomy*). (Such mighty phallogocentrisms from little acorns grow.) Secondly, despite later writing about Freud’s pioneering theoretical analysis of *Witz* (Lacan 1974), his rather ahistorical approach underestimates the extent to which an obsession with paronomasia, as a means of revealing hidden realms of human thought, can be traced, not to the pathology of an individual subject, or to some universal psycholinguistics of the arbitrary verbal sign, but to the cultural *milieu* of the analyst. In the case of my observation about the *glansectomy*, this would be my own postmodern milieu (in which Lacan looms large); in the case of the original anecdote, it would be Sigmund Freud’s milieu of European modernism.

The influence of *Hamlet* – and its translations – was pre-eminent in this cultural milieu. Freud’s own writings on the play make this abundantly clear. It seems likely that even the formulation of the Oedipal theory itself would have been impossible if the model of Hamlet, as unconscious oedipal analogue, had not provided Freud with the illustration of his cornerstone concept of ‘repression’ (*Verdrängung*) (Freud 1997). As such, it might be understood to play a decisive role in what Foucault would call Freud’s *épistémè* (Foucault 1966): the set of historically determined intellectual premises upon which his thinking was necessarily formulated. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, for example, Freud writes:

In *Oedipus Rex* the basic wish-fantasy of the child is brought to light and realised as it is in dreams; in *Hamlet* it remains repressed, and we learn of its existence – as we discover the relevant facts in a neurosis – only through the inhibitory effects which proceed from it. (Freud 1997, 158)

He goes on to describe this interpretative act – his entire diagnostic methodology – as ‘translating’: “I have here translated into consciousness [*ins Bewußte übersetzt*] what had to remain unconscious in the mind of the hero” (Freud 1997, 159). To which I will only add that, while Freud consistently quotes *Hamlet* in the typical contemporary mode of erudite illustration of his extant theories, this strategy seems to belie a more fundamental influence: the sort of repressed influence Harold Bloom would later call

'oedipal' (Bloom 1973). That is to say that many of Freud's ideas are seemingly tracable, however indirectly, to a reading of *Hamlet*. It is entirely in keeping with Freud's own theory that this can often only be teased out by an act of interpretative 'translation'.

For example, the fact that a 'hysterical' male subject should necessarily have an unconscious 'castration anxiety' would seem to be at the very least perfectly encapsulated in Hamlet's misogynistic, gaslighting exchange with Ophelia in act 3 scene 2. When Hamlet accuses her of thinking he is talking about 'c(o)untry matters', Ophelia says "I think nothing, my lord," to which Hamlet replies that "nothing" (and indeed "no-think") is "a fair thought to lie between maids' legs" i.e. the zero-shaped vaginal opening, the absence of a penis and testicles, and thoughtlessness itself, are equated to form an excellent but insubstantial (*fine*) conception that exists and dissembles (*lies*), between the legs of a supposed virgin (originally played by a young male actor in drag).

Simply put, Freud explicitly conceives of his Oedipal theory, with its central concept of 'repression', as best revealed in a 'translation' of *Hamlet*. And the influence appears to run much deeper. Even if the play remains only the perfect example, as he claims, and not the source of his thinking, the fact that *Hamlet* is treated both as exemplary of human psychology and as an unimpeachable point of reference for his implied readership demonstrates just how important a universalising vision of the play had become within Freud's culture. So, when writers like George Steiner and Serge Gravonsky propose oedipal translation theories (Steiner 1975; Gravonsky 1977), often with direct reference to Shakespearean translation, a problem of logical circularity is produced as a result of the pre-eminent influence of the notion of 'translating Shakespeare' on the development of oedipal theory itself. More specifically, Freud's concept of fetishism is based on glossing a punning mistranslation from English into German, an effect that is necessarily haunted, during the period, by the iconic status of Schlegel's translations of Shakespeare<sup>9</sup>.

So, bearing in mind the problem of an infinite loop of influence, I shall briefly outline two very different forms of 'paronomastic fetishism' in the analysis and practice of French translation of the wordplay in *Hamlet*, before concluding with an example of an approach which allows translator and translation critic alike to move beyond it.



## 2. A Poor Ear (1). The paradigmatic approach to wordplay translation

The first of these strategies I shall refer to as the ‘paradigmatic’ approach. This is a quasi-structuralist methodology that posits a comprehensive catalogue of ‘techniques’ of wordplay translation, extrapolated from a categorical analysis of existing ‘solutions’. It is to be found in the work of analysts like Malcolm Offord and Dirk Delabastita (Offord 1990 and 1997; Delabastita 1993). It is ostensibly objective and non-normative, usually being presented as a statistical tool for analysing cultural translation norms (after Gideon Toury) (Toury [1978] 1995) with regard to the ‘acceptability’ of wordplay in various periods and cultures.

Since it takes *Hamlet* translations as its corpus, it is Delabastita’s model that I shall briefly outline. However, the corpus of French translations of *Hamlet* 1.2.64-67 used to illustrate the model below is obviously my own.

Delabastita differentiates 9 categories of translation techniques, themselves broken down into two or three (usually) semantically defined sub-categories. The following table provides a brief synopsis of the categories, with examples taken from the corpus summarized in Appendix 2.:

1. PUN > PUN. Here a pun in the ST is, either fortuitously or forcibly, translated using a pun in the TT. It is basically what Nida would call ‘formal equivalence’ (though this can only usually be true in a reductive sense, it being entirely likely that other formal features, such as prosody, would have to be sacrificed to achieve it). Delabastita breaks PUN > PUN down into three sub-categories:
  - a) Parallel, in which ‘both’ senses in the ST pun are kept in the TT pun. Besides being highly unlikely, this category suffers from an unjustifiable restriction of the pun to binary senses, and is thus inapplicable to the *kin/kind* quibble, where there are many more than two possible readings. For the *sun/son* pun, where a binary pun is at least plausible, no examples are to be found in the corpus as no such pun exists in French.
  - b) Semi-parallel, in which one of the senses in the ST pun is kept in the TT. A possible example from our corpus might be Collin’s translation (2010): “mon *cher* neveu Hamlet, et mon fils... HAMLET. Un peu plus que ton *cher*, mais bien moins que ta *chair*.”<sup>10</sup>
  - c) Non-parallel, in which neither (or better ‘none’) of the senses of the pun in the ST are directly maintained in the TT; i.e. it is a completely different pun.

Perhaps Loayza's brilliant "je suis face aux *plus beaux des astres*" (2006) would fall into this category (unless one tolerates 'le plus beaux des astres' as an oblique synonym of 'soleil').

2. PUN > NON-PUN. No attempt is made to reproduce, emulate or compensate for the wordplay in the ST, but an attempt is made to translate the semantic content carried by the pun. He identifies three types:
  - a) Non-selective, which relies on an iteration of the senses in the ST pun (again he says 'both' rather than 'all' senses). Two possible examples from our corpus would be Lepoutre's (1983) "je suis *trop le fils du soleil*" and Maguin's clearly derivative (1995) "je suis *trop fils du soleil*".
  - b) Selective, in which only one of the senses of the ST pun is kept. The vast majority of the translations of line 67 in the corpus, starting from Hugo's (1859) "je suis trop près du soleil", seem to employ this (putatively defeatist) strategy.
  - c) Diffuse paraphrase, a clarificatory technique that is obviously more common in prose than in poetry, in which the multiple senses of the ST pun are 'unpacked' with what is essentially a gloss. Guyot's (1946) translation provides an unusually neat example of this kind of thing: "Je me tiens trop près du *soleil*, pauvre *fils* que je suis."
3. PUN > PUNOID. By 'punoid' Delabastita means any form of rhetorical compensation for the loss of the pun: "imagery, assonance, alliteration, rhyme,... ambiguity, irony, under-statement, allusion" (Delabastita 1993, 207-208), potentially also including other forms of wordplay that do not fall under his definition of the pun. Vercors's (1978) translation of line 65, for example, uses an internal rhyme as compensation: "Ton cousin, *tu m'amuses* ; mais ton fils ! *tu abuses*." Lepoutre's (1983) internal rhyme is slightly more aslant: "Un peu plus que *parent*; on ne peut moins qu'*aimant*." The Bournet translation (1994), employs alliteration: "Un peu plus que *parent*, et moins que *pareil*." (though this might just be the unintended result of a calque). For line 67, Roux (1990) cranks up the sarcastic flattery: "Votre éclat, seigneur, y a fait une percée." And, perhaps most interestingly, Déprats (1982) offers a more oblique kind of metonymy, hinting that the audience would already have the sense 'soleil' in mind (perhaps via the extremely well known Hugo translation): "le nom de fils m'éblouit trop."
4. PUN > ZERO. The content is simply cut, whether or not as an act of deliberate

avoidance. Dumas and Meurice (1847), for example, provide no translation for the ‘sun’ pun whatsoever, offering only the suggestively self-referential comment “laissons la chose telle qu’il plut à Dieu de la faire”.

5. DIRECT COPY: PUN ST = PUN TT. This is where the pun is simply kept intact in the original language. There are no examples in our corpus. Even Bonnefoy’s treatment of ‘hebenon’ (1.5.62) falls into the next category. However, a well-known example from French-English translation would be the way Derrida’s translators keep his quibble *différance* (‘difference’ / ‘deferral’) intact in French.
6. TRANSFERENCE: PUN ST = PUN TT. This is rather like DIRECT COPY, except that the pun is naturalised in some way, usually to make its phonic qualities and semantic/etymological associations more accessible to the target readership. If we accept the portmanteau within the category of the pun, it is plausible that the rendering of ‘hebenon’ (1.5.62) by Bonnefoy (1957) and his followers as ‘(h)ébénon’, falls into this category. See Appendix 4.
7. ADDITION: NON-PUN > PUN. This is where a pun is interpolated into the text, often as a classic form of compensation. Delabastita would probably consider Loayza’s (2006) extra pun on ‘fils’ – “quoique tu fisses” to be an example of this technique.
8. NEW TEXTUAL MATERIAL: ZERO > PUN. Rather like ADDITION except that the translator adds new material, with no obvious equivalent in the ST, to create a pun. Mesguich (2012), for example, inserts a set-up when he has Claudius begin his question (from li. 66) with “D’où vient cette maléfice...”, thus allowing his Hamlet to quip “vous ne sauriez dire « *le mal est fils* »”, which has little to do with the semantic content of the original.
9. EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES. This is where translators make up for the putative inability to find a ‘congenial’ pun to translate an item of wordplay in the ST by providing paratextual compensation. Included are glosses in footnotes and commentaries in prefaces and afterwords<sup>11</sup>. Most interestingly, perhaps, this category also covers ‘anthological translation’, in which translators provide multiple translations (sometimes their own, but more often a kind of historical overview) in order to cover more semantic and stylistic ground. Obviously, these are very commonly combined – i.e. a footnote will list alternative translations – but sometimes an edition will be purposely conceived to provide plural translations. This is the case, for example, of the double translation of *Macbeth* by Angellier and Montégut (Shakespeare 1876b).

True to the tenets of Noury's 'descriptive' translation studies, Delabastita explicitly denies that any hierarchy is implied within this paradigm:

At first sight my list of techniques may look like a kind of mail-order catalogue from which translators can make their choice at will. To avoid any misunderstanding it should be clear from the outset that it is possible in many cases to combine two or more techniques, that there are particular circumstances in which the application of particular techniques is *not* possible technically (cf section 3), and finally that, as opposed to certain other lists of this kind, the order in which the nine pun translation procedures will be presented does not reflect any order of preference. (Delabastita 1993, 191)

On the last point, I would certainly beg to differ. Placing PUN > PUN first very clearly implies a reductive logic of formal equivalence in which all other solutions are to be considered as inferior 'fallbacks'. Most tellingly, the decision to subsume all other rhetorical and stylistic effects under the heading 'punoid' (that which is masquerading as a pun) necessarily excludes the salience of any sensitivity to other conflicting or complementary stylistic effects a translator might discover in the ST (i.e. other than the fact it happens to pun). In truth there is no such thing as a word or phrase that is *only* a pun, any more than there is any such thing as a 'translator of puns', as Delabastita repeatedly puts it. Thankfully, translators do not work like members of an American football team, with a specialist 'punster' who can be brought in when needed, like a 'placekicker'.

Other problems are also evident in Delabastita's structuralist method that appear generally to be shared by all 'paradigmatic' approaches to wordplay translation. I would summarize them as follows:

1. 'Techniques' are reverse-engineered from outcomes, artificially imposing a model of contrastive choice as the natural cognitive approach to translation practice.
2. There is a clear semantic bias and an apparent deafness to tone, rhythm, vocal characterisation etc.
3. An implicit hierarchy is established which favours the 'congenial pun' as the translation solution best equipped to carry the 'metalingual load', identified in the ST. This consideration is arbitrarily treated as having pre-eminence.
4. The scope is highly reductive. Formal equivalence is only identified where it

relates to verbal ambiguity. Even within this narrow field, the approach is reductive because puns are theoretically limited to two senses. Sophisticated semantic plurality is overlooked. As, sometimes, are some interesting puns: (e.g. the play on *a dew/adieu* in *Hamlet* 1.2.130)

5. Retranslation and multi-version editions are only ever conceived as either replacements or aggregates. The dialogic and polyphonic dimensions of translation and retranslation are not discussed at all.
6. The ST is considered 'absent' and 'inaccessible' in the reception context.

I would suggest that all of the problems specific to paradigmatic models of Shakespearean wordplay translation can be traced to the presupposed ideality of the 'congenial pun' as a retroactively conceived 'translation solution' for an instance of wordplay in the ST. Commentaries based on this assumption are necessarily working backwards from the *j'ouïs-sens*, as Lacan would have it. The resulting deafness to other (prosodic, tonal, dramatic, multivocal) considerations is symptomatic of a repressed 'paronomastic fetish', deeply ingrained in the structuralist theories which inform this approach. The apparently stringent self-denial of all wordplay in the prose of people like Delabastita and Offord seems, at least to me, to be symptomatic of a Freudian *Verdrängung*.

### 3. A Poor Ear (2). The performative approach to wordplay translation

Unlike the paradigmatic approach, the performative approach to wordplay translation does not repress its *jouissance*, but foregrounds precisely this kind of a/effect. Deeply influenced by Antoine Vitez's slogan 'traduire est déjà mettre en scène,'<sup>12</sup> this modern approach values above all the creative input of the translator as instigating dramatist of textual performance. The implicit fundamental metaphor is of translation as 'enactment' – the TT doing what the ST does, or 'would do' if it were capable of acting in the target culture – a creative performance, from which subsequent performances are literally to take their cue. There is a natural tendency for its exponents to be actors and directors in their own right, or at least to be directly involved in theatrical productions. In our corpus, this is the case, to a greater or lesser extent, for Déprats, Lepoutre, Vittoz, Roux, Loayza, Collin and (especially) Daniel Mesguich, who since the 1970s has put on a new and different production of *Hamlet* every ten years, and claims he intends to carry on doing so.

In the translation studies literature the performative approach perhaps finds its closest ally in Henri Meschonnic, whose consistent focus is a mimetic, and supra-mimetic, realisation of the rhythmic, oral, dynamic, and dramatic features of poetic texts. Meschonnic's analysis of the French translations of the *calembours* and *paronomase* in *Hamlet*, in *Poétique du traduire* (Meschonnic 1999, 238-256) is highly pertinent to this study for two reasons. Firstly, his take on the need to capture the paronomastic knots that cluster around the naming of Ophelia in the play (fair, fear, feel, farewell, folly, failure etc.) in the chapter "Le nom d'Ophélie" is about as clear an example as it is possible to imagine, in a translational text, of what I mean by paronomastic fetishism, not least because it takes as its object the same *alluring* character as Lacan's *séminaire VI* on desire. The rather creepy *jouissance* of Lacan and Meschonnic is palpable as they feel up Ophelia. Secondly, the chapter "*La critique distinguée contre le fils du soleil*", framed as a defense – at the explicit behest of Antoine Vitez – of Raymond Lepoutre's (1983) foreignizing translation of *Hamlet* cements the performative approach to wordplay translation as exemplary of the future of dramatic translation as a whole, within a teleological metanarrative of the history of translation. Immediately after commending Lepoutre's and Déprats's handling of the *kin/kind sun/son* puns – "Lepoutre a fait le travail le plus poussé sur les calembours" (Meschonnic 1999, 238); "Jean-Michel Déprats ruse et réussit le calembour" (Meschonnic 1999, 239) – he sets out his stall:

Quelque chose change avec ce *Hamlet* dans l'histoire de la traduction. Ou plutôt le changement en cours dans la théorie et la pratique de la traduction – de la *langue* au *discours*, du *sens* au *rythme* – passe par cette aventure dans *Hamlet*. (Meschonnic 1999, 240. Original italics.)

Quite unlike the synchronic tendency of the structuralist approach, with its static snapshots of relative formal congeniality, this vision of a dynamic diachrony in the translation of *Hamlet* seems to derive from a general desire to treat translating as a process that transcends the mimetic, becoming itself a type of performative *diegesis* (in the Platonic sense), whose ongoing evolution can in turn be the subject of this kind of critical *diegesis* of a metanarrative of progressive retranslation.

It seems very likely that Meschonnic's reading has directly influenced the two most recent 'performative' *Hamlet* translations by the two Daniels: Loayza (2006) and Mesguich (2012). Loayza, in particular, appears to have been inspired to produce his virtuoso pun "je suis face au *plus beau des astres*" by the praise Meschonnic heaps on Lepoutre's combination of "je suis trop le fils du soleil" and his daring calque of

Horatio's portentous "disasters in the son" as "*désastres dans le soleil*". Meschonnic rather delphically lauds this as: *l'éclipse du signifiant*.<sup>13</sup>

More generally, Mesguich's most recent version of the play suffers acutely from a kind of *étouffement d'esprit* (a wit overload), that would seem to be a highly predictable pitfall when prioritizing the dramatic prowess of the translator, as translator: a role that is conceived as a form of self-conscious *metteur en scène*. The quibble on *maléfice / mal est fils*, mentioned above, is just one example among many where the pudding has been over-egged. Basically, Mesguich's *Hamlet* overreaches when it comes to wordplay, and the character consequently comes across as something of a smart-arse. This deformation is only slightly less damaging than its antithesis, in Boris Pasternak's Russian translation of the play, where the protagonist avoids all forms of linguistic ambiguity, and is consequently portrayed as a straight-talking man of unwavering determination, who slowly but surely orchestrates his inevitable revenge (Sulick 1977, 271-272).

This is hardly surprising, perhaps, given that Mesguich (probably the best-known acolyte of Michel Vitez) had cut his teeth on *Hamlet* in a high postmodernist 1977 production<sup>14</sup>, in collaboration with Michel Vittoz, which mixed a deliberately archaic translation with modern intertexts from sources such as Jean-Luc Godard and Hélène Cixous. Romy Heylen, an enthusiast of this kind of thing, provides an account of the extraordinary creative process involved:

There is a first translation, [...] a translation of seventeenth-century English into French of the same period. But Vittoz's seventeenth-century French is fictitious (*fictif*), a language of pleasure (*de plaisir*) in which the archaisms need not necessarily be genuine to ring true. The challenge (*la gageure*), according to Mesguich, is to write a pseudo-Elizabethan text, say a play signed "Guillaume Branlelance" of which Shakespeare's text would be only the translation, and strangely enough, the only translation in English. There is a second translation which consists of the first, or the original text, but supplemented by the historical layers that have covered it ever since the fictitious date of its production. This second translation reflects the thoughts of Mallarmé, Joyce, Ernest Jones, Sibony, Freud, and Mao. It also explicitly recognizes that the French language has evolved and that it is still in the process of changing. It "translates" French into French, it translates François-Victor Hugo, André Gide, and Yves Bonnefoy, thus placing itself within (and against) the French translation tradition of *Hamlet*. Horatio, for instance, being a student, has obviously read the traditional Western canonical

works, including *Hamlet*. His line, “That can I. At least the whisper goes so” (I, i, 79-80), is rendered by Vittoz as: “Je le puis, tel est du moins le bruit qui court, là comme Gide l’a traduit”. (Heylen 1993, 126)

This is all good fun, and there is a certain theoretical validity to this kind of self-conscious poststructuralist performance of oedipal transgression, but it fails as an artistic endeavour in its own right to achieve anything much more than ‘half-baked’ parody, or at least ‘overcooked’ translation. It is actually much less transgressive, in terms of fidelity to the ST, than the original French adaptation by Jean-François Ducis (1769) – a man so ingenuous with regard to his ‘poor ear’ that he declared in the preface to his version of the play: “Je n’entends point l’Anglois” (Ducis 1770, 2) – and its mannered archaism is done with less gusto than that of Morand and Schwob’s (1900) translation for Sarah Bernhardt. This kind of adaptation is more courageous and potentially more effective when it strikes out on its own and presents itself as genuine pastiche – like Loayza’s *Hamlet : un rêve*, 2006 – or as political *détournement* – like Cixous’s *La fiancée aux yeux bandés*.

Mesguich has watered down the postmodernist schtick in subsequent adaptations, but seems to have compensated in the 2012 version by gilding the lilly of Shakespearean wordplay, reproducing the same tendencies as other adherents of Vitez’s performative approach to theatrical translation. Below, then, is a summary of the main structural drawbacks of this approach, as I see them:

1. It encourages virtuosity and *jouissance* in translation, and therefore tends to favour a ‘eureka’ response to satisfying translation solutions that risks undermining tonal features of oral characterisation, and thus overwhelming the ST
2. Translators seem to want to ‘outdo’, ‘encapsulate’ or ‘replace’ previous versions of the text, including the ST itself, thus amplifying problem 1. Like the paradigmatic approach, the assumption is that the ST is not accessible in reception. In fact, the source text seems implicitly unavailable to those Holz-Mänttari calls ‘the target-text users’ (see Schäffner 2011) (i.e. actors and those involved in staging.), perhaps even implying that the TT is understood to be an ‘exclusive script’ for performance.
3. This approach therefore tends to conceive of retranslation as a teleological dialectic, as in Meschonnic’s translational metanarrative.
4. The inevitable self-referentiality in this kind of translation encourages the



foregrounding of the translator's own creativity, rather than any other thematic, stylistic or cultural concerns.

5. Most importantly, whilst it does often attempt to produce and to analyse dramatic polyphonic effects, the ST is not an active participant in this dialogue, and is 'drowned out'.

So, despite producing puns that can radiate a genuinely dazzling wit (*le plus beaux des astres*), the performative approach to wordplay translation in *Hamlet* tends to 'eclipse' (and thus repress) the shady subtleties and troubling ambiguities of the ST. Such translations seem to strive for (and sometimes to achieve) a sense of triumphant metalingual closure (*jouis-sens...* shooting one's 'metalingual load'), which is not at all in keeping with the protagonist's vacillations, or the more general refusal of the diegesis to resolve itself (into 'adieu'). It therefore appears to be symptomatic of a fetishistic lack of sensitivity to the displaced object of desire: resulting in 'a poor ear'.

#### 4. *Aporia*. The contrapuntal approach to wordplay translation

The pun on the Greek '*aporia*' has been heavily signposted, I admit. It is, I would suggest, the key component of the 'contrapuntal' approach to wordplay translation in *Hamlet*: one which seeks to carry through the vocal effects of the ST, not by encapsulating, mimicking, or reproducing them (in their implicit absence) – as both Delabastita and Meschonnic seem to propose, in their different ways – but on the contrary by employing a kind of Keatsian 'negative capability' to boost the sense of their presence with something akin to musical counterpoint. This would usually consist of a different stylistic effect (the sort of thing Delabastita subsumes under the heading 'punoid') with a syncopated rhythmic interaction, which, like a descant, somehow reinforces the original melody of the ST.

The syncopation – the 'off-beat' rhythmic non-alignment – is crucial to the effect. Where Delabastita generally glosses over such concerns, Meschonnic's take on the importance of rhythm in translation is primarily rooted in the notion of mimesis. The TT is judged in terms of its ability to carry through, reenact or at the very least to emulate the rhythmic effects of the ST, which it thereby implicitly replaces. The contrapuntal theory of poetic translation conceives of the relationship between ST and TT in completely different terms. The translation is designed not to reproduce the rhythms of the original, but to complement them – and indeed those of other

translations – allowing them to remain clearly distinguishable in a form of polyphonic interplay that emphasises the particularity of each metaphorical ‘melody’. It is designed to ‘bring out’ the non-excluded original by allowing it the rhythmic space to resonate.

It is the temporary dischords or deferrals of harmonic resolution in counterpoint, when it is treated synchronically, that I liken to the concept of *aporia*. I therefore do not use ‘aporia’ as a synonym for failure or for giving up. *Aporia* is a considered resistance of premature resolution: a non-possessive, and non-self-possessed mode that tolerates so-called ‘cognitive dissonance’. It is, of course, Hamlet’s primary idiom.

The best expressions of this subtly creative *aporia* in relation to the translation of *Hamlet* are to be found in Yves Bonnefoy’s numerous writings on the subject. *Aporia* haunts his haunting meditation on the word ‘hebenon’ in *La hantise du ptyx...* (Bonnefoy 2003, 108-109), and particularly his dialogic descriptions of his methodology of ‘hearing’ and ‘responding to’ Shakespeare’s voice. In an interview for *Le Monde*, for example, he put it like this: “L’enjeu, pour moi, c’était de *sauver* dans la traduction *cette voix qui monte* chez Shakespeare des situations les plus diverses qu’il met en scène. Une voix qui est expérience de l’être même.”<sup>15</sup> There is a certain ambiguity at play in the terms Bonnefoy employs that reveal the aporetic subtlety of the thinking involved – ‘sauver’ (i.e. *garder, ne pas exclure, ne pas noyer*) ‘la voix qui monte chez Shakespeare’: that is both intransitively, *la voix qui monte*: ‘the voice that emerges’, and transitively *la voix qui monte les scènes*: ‘the voice that stages’.

Stéphanie Roesler provides the best summary of Bonnefoy’s writings on the subject:

Bonnefoy conçoit la traduction en termes de dialogue : elle est écoute de cet Autre qu’est Shakespeare, en même temps que tentative de lui répondre [...] Cependant, tout en écoutant et en accueillant cet Autre qu’est Shakespeare, Bonnefoy ne s’efface pas derrière des traductions-reproductions. Il cherche à faire entendre sa propre voix de poète [...] Cette voix peut-elle résonner de concert avec celle de Shakespeare de façon harmonieuse? N’est-elle pas tentée, naturellement, de couvrir celle de Shakespeare? (Roesler 2006, 14-15)

The answer to Roesler’s apt musical question is to be found in Bonnefoy’s fascinating and deeply considered decision to translate *Hamlet* with an innovative 11 syllable poetic line of blank verse (Bonnefoy 1998, 202-206). It is the tight syncopations created by this decision that are the key to his contrapuntal success. The relationship to

Shakespeare's iambic pentameter is genuine, but also somewhat tenuous: "Ce nombre, qui paraîtra sans pour autant s'établir, ce sera en somme la régularité de Shakespeare en tant que toujours proche et pourtant toujours refusée, en tant que virtualité affleurante" (Bonnefoy 1998, 205), but, again, the aporetic ambiguity is the source of its power. As Clive Scott comments:

Bonnefoy's hendecasyllable is [...] a number of syllables constantly exploring their combinational possibilities, influenced by, and influencing, contextual lines, a space free for the translator and the translator's reader to exercise their variable responses. (Scott 1997, 42)

To which I would add that the space, above all, is left for the ST to resonate, without Bonnefoy's rhythm ever seeming to flag or become totally 'detached' from Shakespeare's. A quick survey of the prosodic solutions in the *Hamlet* corpus reveals an array of incompatible poetic structures, ranging from the utterly domesticating doggerel of the *alexandrins* in Châtelain (1864) and Cayrou (1876) – though Reinach (1880) handles the form with much more skill – to the highly foreignizing attempt by Markowicz (1996) to produce a decasyllabic line as close as possible to iambic pentameter. At both of these extremes Shakespeare's own rhythms are drowned out: in the former case because of the huge cultural and musical incompatibility, and in the latter case because the ST is 'cramped for space' or too tightly overlaid. Simply put, neither form produces an effect of counterpoint.

In the specific example of wordplay under examination here – the *sun/son* pun – Bonnefoy's translation does not shoot its metalingual load (or prematurely 'resolve itself into a dew'); it does not 'do Shakespeare over' (in either sense):

je suis **si** près du soleil  
I am too much in the '**son**'

Instead Bonnefoy favours tone and nuance, overlaying an ironically divergent vocal line, whose potential plays on '*si*' (but yes) and '*ici*' (here) at the displaced nucleus of its contrapuntal tone-group are subtle enough to remain almost unconscious. *Mais si*, it seems to say, *l'accent se trouve ici...* This reading relies on a sensitivity on the part of the implied audience to the shift of syntactic intonation brought about by a pointed adaptation of Hugo's canonical '*trop près du soleil*', whose implicitly end-loaded melody had eclipsed Shakespeare's similarly accentuated pun. This is part and parcel of the polyphonic conception of translation. Not only is the ST still considered present (or

at least accessible), but so are previous translations. It is the syncopated interaction between them that creates the counterpoint and thus a translation which Benjamin might consider *durchscheinend*, allowing the ST pun to shine through... to *transparaître*.

This highly *scriptible* translation allows Shakespeare's continually playful voice – *cette voix qui monte...* – to emerge intact in the mind of any actor, reader or spectator with a sufficient knowledge of what is after all one of the world's most famous texts. To categorise sophisticated polyphony like this as a 'punoid', like Delabastita, would be insultingly reductive. To dismiss it as '*juste une variation*' of Hugo, as Meschonnic does (Meschonnic 1999, 239), is to betray a poor ear for *aporia*.

Appendix 1. Too much in THE *Sun*

**KING CLOUDY-US  
CALLS HAMLET  
"SUNNY BOY"**

**THAT'S JUST  
GERT-RUDE!  
QUEEN TIES KNOT  
WITH KING'S BRO!**

**THRONE IT  
ALL AWAY!**

**DANE AND OUT!  
PRINCE ON HIS UPPERS**

**SCANDI-SCANDALS:  
DANISH ROYALS  
ACCUSED OF INCEST  
AND NECR-OPHELIA!**

**GHOST: I WAS  
TORTURED IN  
THE ORCHARD**

**EL SINORE:  
WHAT ELSE  
IN STORE?**

## Appendix 2. French Translations of *Hamlet*. A Timeline.\*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. La Place 1745 (adapt.)  | 27. Pourtalès 1923                            |
| 2. Ducis 1769 (adapt.)   | 28. Derocquigny 1924                          |
| 3. Le Tourneur 1779  | 29. Lascarès 1928 [Q1]                        |
| 4. Le Tourneur – Guizot 1821   | 30. Sonniès 1929                              |
| 5. Anonyme 1827 [Paris, Mme Vergne]<br>(source Le Quérard 1838)                              | 31. Lalou 1939 [Hugo heavily updated]         |
| 6. Anonyme 1833 [Paris, Lance...<br>Robertson’s English Theatre]<br>(source Le Quérard 1838) | 32. Messiaen 1941                             |
| 7. Lainé 1836 [Paris, Barba; Reynolds]<br>(source Le Quérard 1838)                           | 33. Gide 1944                                 |
| 8. Fouinet et al. 1837   | 34. Guyot 1946                                |
| 9. Michel 1839   | 35. Castelain 1947                            |
| 10. Laroche 1839   | 36. Pagnol 1947                               |
| 11. Berbrugger 1845  | 37. Bonnefoy 1957 (1959, 1962, 1978,<br>1988) |
| 12. Dumas-Meurice 1847 (adapt.)  | 38. Brousse 1964                              |
| 13. François-Victor Hugo 1849<br>[2 translations: Q1 and F1]                                 | 39. Vercors 1965                              |
| 14. Guizot 1860  | 40. Becker 1965 (adapt.)                      |
| 15. Châtelain 1864   | 41. Arnold 1966                               |
| 16. Garal 1868   | 42. Déprats 1983                              |
| 17. Guillemot 1869   | 43. Lepoutre 1983                             |
| 18. Montegut 1870  | 44. Vittoz 1986 (adapt.)                      |
| 19. Cayrou 1876  | 45. Roux 1990 [Québec]                        |
| 20. Théodore Reinach 1880  | 46. Malaplate 1991                            |
| 21. Louis Ménard 1886  | 47. Bournet 1994                              |
| 22. Cressonnois – Samson 1886 (adapt.)   | 48. Grivelet 1995                             |
| 23. Morand et Schwob 1900  | 49. Markowicz 1996                            |
| 24. Duval 1908   | 50. Carrière – Estienne 2003 (adapt.)         |
| 25. Rosny [Boex] 1909  | 51. Goustine 2003                             |
| 26. Guibillon 1922   | 52. Loayza 2006 (adapt.)                      |
|  | 53. Collin 2010                               |
|  | 54. Dalpé 2011 [Québec]                       |
|  | 55. Mesguich 2012                             |
|  | 56. Gillibert 2013                            |

\* See Bibliography for full details. This list owes much to the one provided by André-Michel Rousseau (Rousseau 1980), itself derivative of the survey by Pons (Pons 1960), with some additions taken from Helen Phelps Bailey (Bailey 1964), Romy Heylen (Heylen 1993) and Henri Meschonnic (Meschonnic 1999). However, I have modified one or two errors of publication dates and made additions of my own, including all of the translations from this century.

Appendix 3. Table of French versions of *Hamlet* 1.2.64-67

<b>Shakespeare (Quarto 2) 1604 (p. 200)</b>	[KING.] But now, my cousin Hamlet and my son – HAMLET. A little more than kin and less than kind. KING. How is it that the clouds still hang on you? HAMLET. Not so much, my lord, I am too much in the ‘son’.
<b>Le Tourneur 1779 (p. 20)</b>	[LE ROI :] Hé bien, Hamlet, mon parent & mon fils. HAMLET : Un peu plus que parent, & un peu moins qu’un fils. LE ROI : Pourquoi toujours ces ombres sur votre front? HAMLET : Et non, Seigneur, je ne suis que trop à la lumière.
<b>Guizot (Le Tourneur) 1821 (p. 192-193)</b>	[LE ROI.] Maintenant à vous, mon cousin Hamlet, et mon fils. HAMLET, à part. Un peu plus que cousin, et un peu moins que fils. LE ROI. Pourquoi ce front obscurci de nuages? HAMLET. Non, mon seigneur, je ne suis que trop à la clarté du jour.
<b>Fouinet et al. 1837 (p. 257)</b>	[Le roi. – ] Maintenant, Hamlet, mon cousin et mon fils... Ham. (à part). – Un peu plus que cousin et moins que fils. Le roi. – Comment ! des nuages encore suspendus sur votre front ? Ham. – Mais non, seigneur ; je suis trop près du soleil.
<b>Laroche 1843 (p. 206)</b>	[LE ROI.] Eh bien, Hamlet, mon cousin et mon fils, – HAMLET, à part. Quoique très proches parents, nous ne sommes pas cousins. LE ROI. Pourquoi ces nuages qui planent encore sur ton front ? HAMLET. Il n’en est rien, sire ; je suis trop au soleil pour cela.
<b>Dumas / Meurice 1847 (p. 6)</b>	[LE ROI.] Maintenant, cher Hamlet, pourquoi cet air morose, Mon cousin et mon fils ? HAMLET. Sire, laissons la chose Telle qu’il plut à Dieu de la faire : je suis Plus que votre cousin et moins que votre fils, vous le savez.
<b>F-V. Hugo 1859 (p. 180)</b>	[LE ROI :] Eh bien! Hamlet, mon cousin et mon fils. HAMLET : (A part.) Un peu plus que cousin, et un peu moins que fils. LE ROI : Pourquoi ces nuages qui planent encore sur votre front? HAMLET : Il n’en est rien, Seigneur, je suis trop près du soleil.
<b>Guizot 1860 (p. 147)</b>	[LE ROI. – ] Hamlet, mon cousin, mon fils... HAMLET, à part. – Un peu plus que cousin, et un peu moins que fils. LE ROI. – D’où vient que les nuages pèsent encore sur vous? HAMLET. – Mais non, mon seigneur ; je ne suis que trop en plein soleil.
<b>Châtelain 1864 (p. 9)</b>	[LE ROI.] Et maintenant Cousin Hamlet – et davantage Car je dirai mon fils. – HAMLET (à part). En fait de parentage Un peu plus que parent, – moins qu’un enfant pourtant ! LE ROI. Comment sur votre front se voit-il donc autant De nuages encor ? HAMLET. Monseigneur des nuages Il n’en existe pas ! ... mon front pour tels ombrages Est trop près du soleil.
<b>Guillemot 1869 (p. 4-5)</b>	[LE ROI.] Et maintenant Hamlet, notre cousin, – mon fils ... HAMLET, à demi voix. Un peu plus que cousin et beaucoup moins que fils. LE ROI. Pourquoi sur votre front ces éternels nuages ?... HAMLET. Moi, sire ! je ne suis que trop dans le grand jour !

<p><b>Cayrou</b> <b>1876</b> (p. 178)</p>	<p>[LE ROI.] Cher Hamlet ! doux cousin, mon fils ! de préférence ... HAMLET, à part avec amertume. Un peu plus que cousin, mais moins que fils je pense. LE ROI. Pourquoi porter au front un nuage pareil ? HAMLET, regardant railleusement autour de lui. Vous n’y pensez pas, Sire, il est en plein soleil !</p>
<p><b>Th. Reinach</b> <b>1880</b> (p. 29)</p>	<p>[LE ROI.] Maintenant, cher Hamlet, mon fils et mon neveu – HAMLET (à part). Un peu plus que mon oncle, un peu moins que mon père. LE ROI. Quoi ? toujours un brouillard voile ton front sévère ? HAMLET. Non, monseigneur, je suis bien trop près du soleil.</p>
<p><b>Morand / Schwob</b> <b>1899</b> (p. 33)</p>	<p>[LE ROI.] Mais toi, maintenant, Hamlet, mon cousin et mon fils... HAMLET. Un peu plus que germain, moins que du même germe. LE ROI. Comment? êtes-vous encore plongé dans les brumes? HAMLET. Non pas, monseigneur, je suis trop près du soleil.</p>
<p><b>Derocquigny</b> <b>1924</b> (p. 23)</p>	<p>[Le Roi.] Maintenant à Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils... Ham. (à part). Du « neveu » je ne veux et du « fils » je fais fi. Le Roi. Eh quoi, toujours le front obscurci d’un nuage ? Ham. Point, monseigneur, je suis trop proche du soleil.</p>
<p><b>Messiaen</b> <b>1941</b> (p. 665)</p>	<p>[LE ROI. – ] Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils... HAMLET, à part. – Neveu, ça se peut; fils, je m’en fiche. LE ROI. – Quoi, toujours assombri de nuages? HAMLET. – Que non, monseigneur; je loge au grand soleil.</p>
<p><b>Gide</b> <b>1944</b> (p. 27)</p>	<p>[LE ROI. – ] Mais à présent, cousin Hamlet, mon fils... HAMLET (à part). – De fait, hélas ! un peu plus que de cœur. LE ROI. – Toujours ces nuages sur votre front ? HAMLET. – Nuages, non, Sire ; me voici trop près du soleil.</p>
<p><b>Guyot</b> <b>1946</b> (p. 23-25)</p>	<p>[Le Roi.] Et maintenant, notre neveu Hamlet, et notre fils, – Ham. (A part). Un peu mieux qu’un parent, mais pas tout à fait avec des sentiments d’un fils. Le Roi. Pourquoi donc un nuage pèse-t-il toujours sur ton front ? Ham. Oh non pas, monseigneur ! Je me tiens trop près du soleil, pauvre fils que je suis.</p>
<p><b>Castelain</b> <b>1947</b> (p. 9-10)</p>	<p>[LE ROI.] Maintenant, Hamlet, mon cousin et mon fils... HAMLET, à part. Un peu plus qu’un cousin et moins qu’un fils ! LE ROI. Comment se fait-il que des nuages pèsent encore sur votre front ? HAMLET. Des nuages, monseigneur ? Je suis trop près du soleil !</p>
<p><b>Pagnol</b> <b>1947</b> (p. 50)</p>	<p>[LE ROI :] Et toi, Hamlet, mon cousin et mon fils... HAMLET (à part) : Un peu plus que cousin, mais pas fils tout à fait. LE ROI : Pourquoi cette ombre, toujours suspendue sur ton front? HAMLET : Cette ombre, monseigneur? Je ne suis que trop en lumière!</p>
<p><b>Bonnefoy (1)</b> <b>1957</b> (p. 985)</p>	<p>[LE ROI :] Mais vous, Hamlet, mon neveu, mon fils... (HAMLET : Un peu plus qu’un neveu, mais rien moins qu’un fils. LE ROI : D’où vient que ces nuées vous recouvrent encore ? HAMLET : Allons donc, monseigneur, je suis si près du soleil !</p>
<p><b>Brousse</b> <b>1964</b> (p. 20)</p>	<p>[LE ROI. – ] ... Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils... HAMLET (A part). – Un peu plus qu’un neveu, mais beaucoup moins qu’un fils. LE ROI. – D’où vient que votre front soit toujours couvert de nuages ? HAMLET. – Oh ! Monseigneur, je ne suis que trop exposé au soleil.</p>



<b>Becker 1965</b> (p. 14)	[LE ROI. – ] Mais vous, cousin Hamlet, mon cher fils... HAMLET. à part. – Un peu plus que « cousin », mais rien moins que fils ! LE ROI. – Pourquoi toujours ces sombres nuages sur votre front ? HAMLET, s’inclinent légèrement vers le Roi. – Des nuages, Monseigneur, mais non, je suis bien trop près du soleil...
<b>Vercors 1978</b> (p. 28)	[CLAUDIUS.] Mais maintenant, Hamlet, notre cousin, mon fils... HAMLET, à part. Ton cousin, tu m’amuses ; mais ton fils ! tu abuses. CLAUDIUS. Comment, Hamlet ! toujours le front dans les nuages ? HAMLET. Je ne pourrais, seigneur, étant près du soleil.
<b>Déprats 1982</b> (p. 57)	[LE ROI :] Mais vous, Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils... HAMLET : Un peu plus que neveu, moins fils que tu ne veux. LE ROI : D’où vient que les nuages planent toujours sur vous ? HAMLET : Pas tant que ça, mon seigneur, le nom de fils m’éblouit trop.
<b>Lepoutre 1983</b> (p. 20)	[LE ROI.] Mais vous, Hamlet, mon cousin et mon fils, mon soleil... HAMLET. Un peu plus que parent; on ne peut moins qu’aimant. LE ROI. D’où vient que les nuages encore pèsent sur vous ? HAMLET. Non, non, Monseigneur; je suis trop le fils du soleil.
<b>Vittoz 1986</b> (p. 65)	CLAUDIUS. À nous Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils. HAMLET. Un peu plus neveu que je ne veux, un peu moins que fils. CLAUDIUS. Pourquoi toujours ces nuages suspendus à votre front? HAMLET. Que non, Monseigneur, je suis trop proche le soleil.
<b>Bonnefoy (5) 1988</b> (p. 23-24)	[LE ROI.] Mais vous, Hamlet, mon neveu, mon fils... HAMLET, à part. Bien plus fils ou neveu que je ne le veux ! LE ROI. D’où vient que ces nuées vous recouvrent encore ? HAMLET. Allons donc, monseigneur, je suis si près du soleil !
<b>Lorant 1988</b> [CHECK PAGE]	[LE ROI.] Mais vous, Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils... HAM. (A part :) Un peu plus que « neveu » et moins que fils affectueux. LE ROI. D’où vient que ces nuages vous assombrissent encore ? HAM. Non pas, Monseigneur, je ne suis que trop près du soleil.
<b>Roux 1990</b> (p. 10)	[LE ROI.] Eh, bien ! Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils... HAMLET. Un peu moins que neveu et fils, si peu. LE ROI. Comment ? Toujours perdu dans vos nuages ? HAMLET. Votre éclat, seigneur, y a fait une percée.
<b>Malaplate 1991</b> (p. 21)	[Le Roi.] Mais à présent, Hamlet, mon cousin et mon fils... Hamlet. Un peu plus que parent, mais un peu moins que fils. Le Roi. Comment ? Vous voilà donc toujours dans vos nuages ? Hamlet. Impossible, seigneur, aussi près du soleil.
<b>Bournet 1994</b> (p. 193)	[CLAUDIUS.] Mais lors, mon cousin Hamlet, et mon fils... HAMLET. Un peu plus que parent, et moins que pareil. CLAUDIUS. Pourquoi ces nuées toujours suspendus sur vous? HAMLET. Ce n’est rien, messire, elles ne tiennent qu’à un fil.
<b>Grivelet 1995</b> (p. 883)	[CLAUDIUS. –] Mais maintenant, mon cousin Hamlet et mon fils – HAMLET. – Un peu plus qu’un parent, moins que tendre pourtant CLAUDIUS. – Pourquoi toujours ce nuage au-dessus de vous ? HAMLET. – Que non pas, monseigneur, je suis trop au soleil.
<b>Maguin 1995</b> (p. 73)	[LE ROI.] Pour vous, cousin Hamlet, qui est mon fils... HAMLET. Un peu plus que cousin, mais moins que l’un des tiens. LE ROI. Comment ? Les nuages sont donc encore sur vous ? HAMLET. Du tout, monseigneur, je suis trop fils du soleil.

<b>Markowicz</b> <b>1996</b> (p. 19-20)	[LE ROI.] Mais vous, Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils... HAMLET (à part). Neveu qui ne veut pas, et fi du fils... LE ROI. Toujours tant de nuages qui vous couvrent?... HAMLET. Non, monseigneur, je suis trop au soleil.
<b>Carrière / Estienne</b> <b>2003</b> (p. 23)	[CLAUDIUS.] Mon cousin Hamlet, / et mon fils. HAMLET. Un peu plus que parent, / pas très proche, pourtant. CLAUDIUS. Encore ces nuages, au-dessus de vous? HAMLET. Il n'en est rien, / je suis trop au soleil.
<b>Loayza</b> <b>2006</b> (p. 13)	[CLAUDIUS :] Mais à présent, Hamlet, mon neveu et mon fils... HAMLET : Quoi que tu fisses, bien moins que tu ne veux. POLONIUS : Ah ! Ah ! CLAUDIUS : Pourquoi ces nuages couvrent-ils encore votre face ? HAMLET : Mais Monseigneur, je suis face au plus beau des astres.
<b>Collin</b> <b>2010</b> (p. 34)	[LE ROI.] Mais à présent, mon cher neveu Hamlet, et mon fils... HAMLET. Un peu plus que ton cher, mais bien moins que ta chair. LE ROI. Comment fait-il que de sombres nuages vous obscurcissent encore ? HAMLET. Pas tant que ça, monseigneur, tout est pour moi lumineux.
<b>Mesguich</b> <b>2012</b> (p. 50-51)	[CLAUDIUS.] Et maintenant, à nous, Hamlet, mon neveu, et mon fils ! HAMLET. Un peu plus neveu que jeune fils, et bien plus fils que je ne veux. CLAUDIUS. D'où vient ce maléfice, que des nuages, toujours, Semblent accrochés au-dessus de vous ? HAMLET. Que non pas, Monseigneur, je suis déjà trop au soleil. Duquel vous ne sauriez dire "le mal est fils".
<b>Gillibert</b> <b>2013</b> (p. 147)	[Le Roi.] Mais nous, Hamlet, mon neveu... mon fils... Hamlet. Un peu plus que neveu... un peu moins que fils. Le Roi. Comment cela ? Toujours des nuages suspendus au-dessus de votre tête ? Hamlet. Mais non, Monseigneur, la tête près du soleil !

**Appendix 4. Table of translations for ‘hebona’ / ‘hebenon’ *Hamlet* 1.5.62**

hyperonyme		hyponyme		« francisation » du signifiant
<i>poison</i>	<i>suc</i>	<i>jusquiame</i>	<i>ciguë</i>	(h)ébénon
1779 Le Tourneur		1821 Guizot (Le Tourneur) 1837 Fouinet et al. 1847 Dumas et Meurice 1849 Laroche 1859 F-V. Hugo 1860 Guizot 1864 Châtelain 1868 Garal 1869 Guillemot 1876 Cayrou 1880 Reinach 1899 Schwob et Morand		
1929 Guibillon	1924 Derocquigny	1941 Messiaen 1945 Gide  1947 Castelain, 1947 Pagnol	1946 Guyot	1957 Bonnefoy * 1964 Brousse
1995 Grivelet *		1983 Déprats 1986 Vittoz  1990 Roux 1991 Malaplate  2013 Gillibert	1965 Becker	1978 Vercors 1983 Lepoutre  1988 Lorant  1994 Bournet 1995 Maguin * 1996 Markowicz 2010 Collin 2012 Mesguich

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## NOTES

- 1 This spelling, with the final pun marked by inverted commas, is the one preferred in the current Arden Edition. (Shakespeare 2016, 200). It seems a little too much like ‘line reading’ for my taste.
- 2 The propensity for British schoolteachers to get teenagers to produce summaries of Shakespeare plays as mock tabloid newspaper articles means that, these days, *Hamlet* is too much in *The Sun*. This might seem like a frivolous and tendentious bit of deconstruction, but I would contend that the constant punning of the subeditors at Britain’s bestselling daily is a perfect example of the ubiquity of wordplay in postmodern culture, upon which the influence of this play is not negligible, and which in turn has an inevitable influence on contemporary readings of *Hamlet*. Also, one of the character’s intended meanings is that he feels uncomfortable thrown into the public eye (the ‘limelight’, in a strictly metaphorical sense) by the occasion, and by the play itself, considering the tawdry nature of the (front-page) royal incest story in which he finds himself entangled. Appendix 1. provides a few examples of the kind of paronomastic tabloid headlines the schoolteachers are probably after.
- 3 By 1877, the New Variorum edition had already managed to fill the best part of 4 pages with footnotes discussing whether or not this is an aside and summarizing the glosses of Hamlet’s first two lines provided up to that point by the main commentators and editors (Shakespeare 1877, 32-35), including a staggering array of possibilities attributed to Coleridge. If this were brought up to date one would need a much larger format to fit even one line of the original on each page.
- 4 “Fathruncler” recalls the fool’s “nuncle” in *King Lear*. It is a portmanteau, rather than a pun, of course. Derek Attridge interestingly treats the pun as a rather watered-down subset of the portmanteau, see Derek Attridge “Unpacking the Portmanteau; or, Who’s Afraid of *Finnegans Wake*?” (Attridge 2004, 188-209 and Culler ed., 1988, 140-155). In particular he stresses the greater ‘perversity’ of the portmanteau, claiming that a remark by Tony Tanner in *Adultery in the Novel* (Tanner 1979) identifying the pun as ‘an adulterous bed’ (a phrase that might have been plucked out of *Hamlet*) is “more appropriate to the promiscuous liaisons of words and meanings in the portmanteau.” (Attridge 2004, 197). Perhaps the most ‘deviant’ portmanteau in *Hamlet* is the name of the ‘leperous distilment’ which the ghost tells Hamlet was poured ‘in the porches of my ears’ by Claudius: ‘hebona’ (Q2) or ‘hebenon’ (Folio) (1.5.62-64). Most editors understand this word to be a kind of deformation of either ‘heben’ (ebony, this is how Spenser spells it in the *Faerie Queene*, for example) or (by metathesis) ‘henbane’ (*hyoscamus niger*, possibly cribbed from Marlow’s *The Jew of Malta* [1589; 3.4.101]). Much ink has been dripped in our ears regarding this unidentifiable substance – see, for example, Shakespeare 1877, 101-102; Ellacombe 1884, 118-119; Macht 1949 [1918]; Bonnefoy 2003, 108-109; Cixous 2011, 177; and for the most comprehensive summary to date, Tigner 2012, 92-97 – but personally I understand it as a deliberate portmanteau whose concoction of distilled botanical signifiers renders it all the more poisonous to the ear.
- 5 Felix Pryor, writing in the *Spectator* in 1991 (21 December) (Pryor 1991, 77-78), was the first to suggest a link between the odd hawk/handsaw dichotomy and the so-called ‘War of the Theatres’, pointing out that the players’ complaint in the Folio edition of the play about the unwanted competition of an “eyrie of children, little eyases” (*hawk chicks*) (Folio 2.2.316) occurs just prior to Hamlet’s puzzling line, and that in his later exchange with the players, Hamlet advises them not to saw the air with their hands (3.2.5). Pryor concludes by pointing out that St Paul’s Theatre was north-north-west of the Globe... “as the hawk flies”. It remains a somewhat marginal theory, but has been lent some credence by being included in *The Routledge Guide to William Shakespeare*, by Robert Shaughnessy (Shaughnessy 2011, 52-53). It is yet another potential example of Hamlet’s quibbling metatheatricality.
- 6 The key texts are: Lacan’s *Séminaire VI* (Lacan 1977 and 2013), Derrida’s *Spectres de Marx* (Derrida 1993), Cixous’s preface to *Hamlet : le livre*, (Shakespeare 1986), her play *La Fiancée aux yeux bandés* (Cixous 2010), and her essay “Shakespeare Ghosting Derrida” (Cixous 2012). The subtitle of Cixous’s play, *Amelait* (*âme-lait*: ‘soul-milk’) speaks volumes about the inextricability of *Hamlet* from this generation’s obsession with wordplay.

- 7 My own plays on *poor, pour, pore... aporia, a poor ear, pour in the ear* in this paper are pretty symptomatic.
- 8 i.e. *jouissance, jouis-sens, j'ouïs-sens ...*
- 9 See, for example, Steiner's discussion of Schlegel's supposed embodiment of Shakespeare's *Seelenstoff* (his 'soul-substance'). (Steiner 1975, 382)
- 10 All italics in this table are my emphases. See the table in Appendix 2. for page numbers and the bibliography for publication details.
- 11 A curious example from the present corpus is Bonnefoy's footnote to his last (1988) translation, which for some reason remains unaltered from his first edition: "Jeu de mots intraduisible sur *kin*, la parenté, et *kind*, adj., qui signifie ici : « dont les sentiments sont ceux d'un fils »", despite the fact that he had actually updated the translation with a version of the *neveu / ne veux* pun, first seen in Derocquigny's version (1924). Perhaps this was just an oversight, or perhaps Bonnefoy thought that finding a PUN > PUN solution did not ultimately make the pun in the ST any less untranslatable.
- 12 See, for example, Antoine Vitez, *Le Théâtre des idées*. Paris: Gallimard, 1991. p. 586.
- 13 Presumably, given that Lepoutre's translation is a perfect example of *Wörtlichkeit*, Meschonnic means this remark to complement, rather than to contradict, Walter Benjamin's statement: *Die wahre Übersetzung ist durchscheinend, sie verdeckt nicht das Original, steht ihm nicht im Licht* (Benjamin 1923, xv). However, this is complicated by Gandillac's extremely well-known French translation of the slogan: "la vraie traduction est transparente, elle ne cache pas l'original, **ne l'éclipse pas**" (my emphasis) (Benjamin 2000, 257). In any case, Hamlet appears to be quite intentionally introducing instability into the question of who exactly is the 'sun/son' in this lopsided equation, and who is standing in whose light. So the confusion is apt.
- 14 "Le *Hamlet* de Shakespeare". Grenoble: Maison de la Culture, 04-03-1977. Centre Dramatique National des Alpes. Directed by Daniel Mesguich. Translated by Michel Vittoz. See *Hamlet : le livre* (Shakespeare 1986).
- 15 Yves Bonnefoy, interview with Fabienne Darge, *Le Monde* 05/07/2016. My emphases.