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# MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

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## THE CASE OF SOMAIZE

Antoine Baudeau or Beaudeau, sieur de Somaize, began the second period of his existence in 1856. He had been born presumably in the year 1630.<sup>1</sup> With the publication of Ch.-L. Livet's edition of his *Dictionnaire des Précieuses* Somaize dead became privileged to enjoy a vogue totally unknown to Somaize living. Slighted during his lifetime, ignored for the space of more than two hundred years, he is at last occupying an exalted posthumous rank. Five years of Livet's life were devoted to the preparation of his works on Somaize.<sup>2</sup> Paul Lacroix reprinted *Les Véritables Précieuses*, accompanying it with an introduction.<sup>3</sup> The late M. Larroumet gave Somaize the place of honor in his *Études de littérature et d'art*.<sup>4</sup> M. Emile Magne has relied chiefly on Somaize for the facts presented in his *Madame de la Suze et la société précieuse*.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Herr Fritz Schwarz has made Somaize the subject of a doctor's thesis.<sup>6</sup> It is hardly an exaggeration to say that few studies on seventeenth-century literature and society in France have, since the appearance of Livet's book, failed to cite Somaize as an authority.

A brief summary of the opinions concerning Somaize's contributions to literary and social knowledge will serve to indicate the high esteem in which he is held. M. Bourciez considers his name "inséparable de cette période de notre littérature, et c'est dans son *Grand Dictionnaire* qu'il faut chercher les renseignements les plus circonstanciés sur l'étrange épidémie qui sévissait alors."<sup>7</sup> In the words of Larroumet, Somaize has left a name, and his works will have

to be consulted as long as his models remain of interest.<sup>8</sup> M. Delaporte regards Somaize as a faithful collector of *précieus* mannerisms.<sup>9</sup> Professor Crane quotes Somaize at length concerning the use of emphatic adverbs in the age of Boileau.<sup>10</sup> M. Magne has as much confidence in Somaize as in Tallemant des Réaux. Livet believes it quite within the realm of possibility that Molière had Somaize's dictionary in front of him when he composed the *Précieuses ridicules*.<sup>11</sup>

Testimony of this character—of which the foregoing constitutes merely a suggestion—would seem to be sufficient to assure Somaize of a permanent and honorable position among the sources utilized by students of the seventeenth century. There are, however, such peculiar deficiencies in Somaize's personal record, and such doubtful phases in his work, that evidence obtained from him and discussion centering on him may well be subjected to scrutiny.

One of the first essentials required of any historical witness is that he establish his own identity with the period in which his testimony is accepted. He must do this through direct evidence of some sort. If he has not done it for himself, those who make use of him must do it for him. In so far as Somaize is concerned, it would be legitimate to doubt that he ever lived. Larroumet, Livet, and the rest freely admit that we have no information either as to Somaize's birth or as to his death; either as to his birthplace or as to his family. "Sorti de l'obscurité en 1657, il y est rentré en 1661."<sup>12</sup> If it were not for the trustworthiness of the scholars who have been his sponsors, we might suspect Somaize of being an eigh-

<sup>1</sup> Larousse, *Grand Dict. universel*, xiv, 1875.

<sup>2</sup> Livet, *Dict. des Préc.*, préface, p. xxxvi.

<sup>3</sup> Genève, J. Gay et fils, 1868.

<sup>4</sup> Paris, Hachette, 1893, pp. 1-54.

<sup>5</sup> Paris, *Mercure de France*, 1908.

<sup>6</sup> Fritz Schwarz, *Somaize und seine Précieuses rid.*, Königsberg, 1903.

<sup>7</sup> In Petit de Julleville, *Litt. fr.*, iv, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Larroumet, *Études de litt.*, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> P. V. Delaporte, *Du merveilleux dans la litt. fr. sous le règne de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1891, pp. 200 and 224-225.

<sup>10</sup> T. F. Crane, *Les Héros de roman*, 1902, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup> *Précieus et Précieuses*, Paris, 1895, Intr., pp. xxx-xxxi.

<sup>12</sup> Larroumet, *Études*, etc., p. 4.

teenth or nineteenth century hoax, the more convincing in that he cannot be traced to any modern writer through a revealing cleverness of expression or through peculiarities of style. His very mediocrity has saved him from critical inspection. But, granted that he played some rôle in the seventeenth century, how are we to account for the absolute dearth of mention of him by his contemporaries? Nobody appears to have heard of him. The preface to his *Dictionnaire*, ostensibly written by a friend, though in all probability due to the author's own pen, states magniloquently that "jamais homme n'a tant fait de bruit que luy dans un âge si peu avancé. Il a eu l'honneur de faire assembler deux ou trois fois l'Académie française; il a fait parler de luy par toute la France; il s'est fait craindre, il s'est fait aimer."<sup>13</sup>

Yet this prodigy has never been made the subject of a paragraph, a sentence, a line even in the discursive pages of the *Ménagiana*, the *Segraisiana*, the *Huetiana*, the *Furetériana*, or in the wide-ranging notes of Bayle. That the *Académie* should have foregathered on account of any one man and left no record of what must have been momentous meetings seems hard to believe. No accounts of such reunions, however, exist.<sup>14</sup> The reader has almost no escape from the conviction that the friend's assertion is false. Two recent writers have attempted to provide Somaize with distinguished acquaintances in his own day: but they have both made almost inexcusable blunders, though nobody has as yet, I believe, called attention to them. Herr Schwarz declares that Livet was mistaken in affirming that no trace of Somaize can be found among his contemporaries. "Boileau, den er in seiner *Pompe funèbre de M. Scarron* lächerlich machte, widmet ihm den schmeichelhaften Vers:

Aux Somaizes futurs préparer des tortures  
(Sat. IX)."<sup>15</sup>

The name used by Boileau, and slightly altered by Herr Schwarz, happens to be that of

Claude de Saumaise, the erudite commentator who died in 1653,<sup>16</sup> as the note to the Fournier edition of Boileau clearly proves.<sup>16</sup> M. Magne, who is certain that Somaize is a *bourguignon*, though Larroumet makes him out to be a *gascon*, and Herr Schwarz judges him a *normand*, deposes that Boisrobert definitely mentions our Somaize. "Boisrobert. *Les Epistres*, 1647, p. 154, A. M. Gineste, dit en effet, qu'il lui communique, étant en Bourgogne, les épîtres qu'il regoit de son ami Gineste. Il le nomme Somaize, mais l'orthographe du nom n'a, à ce moment, aucune importance et nous avons la certitude qu'il ne s'agit pas, en cet endroit, de Claude de Saumaise qui habitait Leyde."<sup>17</sup> If, as Somaize's friend stated, he was a young man in 1660, and if we assume thirty years of age to be a fair guess, thus placing the date of Somaize's birth in 1630, it is clear that he must have been seventeen years old on the occasion referred to by M. Magne. It is scarcely likely that Boisrobert submitted to a school-boy the *épîtres* sent him by Gineste. The critic, Claude de Saumaise, is undoubtedly the person in question. Moreover, Boisrobert could not have obtained from this juvenile Somaize the latest news concerning the *Académie*, the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*, and the *Marais*.<sup>18</sup>

The latest efforts, then, to furnish witnesses of the existence of Somaize have been fruitless. We are no wiser than before. In an era of portrait-writing, when insignificant characters were honored by one or more notices in the collections of portraits, the novels, the satires, the farces, Somaize was neglected. The only picture of him handed down to us is that written by Somaize himself, under the name of Suzarion.<sup>19</sup> It is needless to remark that he does not err on the side of injustice in evaluating his qualities either as a man or as an author. He may readily have ascribed to himself many virtues that he did not possess, just

<sup>16</sup> *Œuvres complètes de M. Boileau*, par Edouard Fournier, Paris, 1873, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Magne, *Le plaisant abbé de Boisrobert*, Paris, 1909, p. 365.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>19</sup> *Dict. des Préc.*, ed. Livet, p. 226.

<sup>13</sup> *Dict. des Préc.*, ed. Livet, préf., p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Larroumet, *Études*, etc., p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Schwarz, *Somaize*, etc., p. 2.

as he borrowed a title of nobility which, Larroumet conjectures, did not belong to him.<sup>20</sup>

Though nobody appears to have known him personally, we have one document tending to show that notice was taken of his works by the great writers. This is the *Songe du Rêveur*, an answer to Somaize's *Pompe funèbre de M. Scarron*. It is supposed to have been constructed by Molière and other poets in collaboration, whom the *Pompe* had attacked. Written in prose and verse, it is even more platitudinous and execrable than Somaize's own works. That neither Molière nor the other worthies could have stooped to put hand to this pamphlet is the conclusion of MM. Despois and Mesnard.<sup>21</sup> Whoever the author was, he was aware that Somaize's satire had been rewarded with one of those beatings not uncommon in the refined society of the age of Louis XIV. Curiously enough, Somaize himself in his *Remarques sur la Théodore* of Boisrobert (1657) acknowledges, not without pride, that Boisrobert had previously threatened him with corporal chastisement. It is barely possible that Somaize wrote the attack on himself. The *Songe* appeared anonymously—as did most of the books attributed to Somaize—and it is more in his style than in that of anybody else of whom we have knowledge. We may find it difficult to understand the attitude of a man who could attack himself in public print; but if we remember that cases have occurred in which a literary critic and dramatist has praised his own plays, it may not strike us as incongruous that a most peculiar and mysterious scribe like Somaize may have degraded himself for purposes of advertisement. Anybody who reads his works in a spirit free from prejudice realizes that Somaize was seeking notoriety at any cost. To be fulminated against by the popular playwrights and poets would have been glory to many a man.

Not content with providing himself in rather an unconventional fashion with a character and, as is thought, with a title, Somaize has taken pains to present himself under powerful patron-

age. The four personages to whom he has dedicated various of his undertakings are Marie Mancini—the connétable Colonna and niece of Mazarin,—Henri Louis Habert, the Academician, the Marquise de Monloy or Monlouet, and the Duc de Guise, who figures in Paul de Musset's *Extravagants et Originaux du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. This array of dignitaries would ordinarily suffice to lend weight to the words of any aspirant in arts. Yet, as in most things connected with Somaize, there is something suspicious in the persons he has chosen as his literary god-parents. The Duc de Guise, brilliant, foolhardy, baffled in most of his plans, is thus addressed by Somaize: "Après avoir dit tant de belles et d'illustres veritez, ne puis-je pas, Monseigneur, m'écrier avec justice que vous estes le plus genereux, le plus galand, le plus civil, le plus vaillant, le plus adroit, le mieux fait, et pour renfermer dans un mot toutes ces nobles qualitez, le plus accomply de tous les princes de la terre?"<sup>22</sup> The death of the Duc occurred four years after the publication of the *Dictionnaire*. Of the Marquise de Monloy, whose virtue appears to have been her least failing, he exclaims: "Dans ce lieu où vostre naissance vous avait appelée, dans ce lieu, dis-je, où la médisance n'épargne personne, vostre vertu lui a si bien fermé la bouche que les plus médisans ne l'ont jamais ouverte que pour publier que vous estiez la plus sage et la plus vertueuse personne de la cour."<sup>23</sup> Habert was noted as a Maecenas. As for Marie Mancini, her tempestuous character and her sentiments toward Louis XIV are well-known. Married by proxy to Colonna, she arrived in Rome in June, 1661. Somaize claims to have followed in her retinue as her secretary, and the title-page of the second part of the *Dictionnaire* bears the legend, "Par le Sieur De Somaize secretaire de Madame la Conestable Colonna." According to Lacroix, the cessation of Somaize's labors was due to his absence from France, to which he never returned.<sup>24</sup> One might suppose that here, at last, direct

<sup>20</sup> Larroumet, *Études*, etc., p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Œuvres de Molière*, ed. Despois et Mesnard, Paris, tome Ix, 1886, pp. 569-571.

<sup>22</sup> *Dict. des Préc.*, ed. Livet, pp. 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> *Dict. des Préc.*, II, p. 52: preface to the *Proces des Pretieuses*.

<sup>24</sup> *Les Vérit. Prét.*, ed. Lacroix, notice, p. xii.

evidence about Somaize would be met, especially since Marie Mancini published, or caused to be published, in 1678 the *Apologie, ou les Véritables Mémoires de Madame M. Mancini*. Though she mentions several servants and retainers, she has not once spoken of Somaize.<sup>25</sup> Neither Amédée Renée nor Lucien Perey, who have investigated carefully Marie Mancini's life, has a word to say about Somaize.<sup>26</sup> Until genuine proof is offered, the presumption, it seems to me, is against Somaize's having held the position of which he boasts. Why, then, has he selected her for his benefactress? That problem must remain in as much doubt as his reasons for sending his other writings out under the wing of a discredited soldier, a discredited coquette, and an Academician accessible to everybody. It is probable that none of them paid much attention to him, and that they were convenient figure-heads whom almost any writer could utilize in time of need. The mere fact that dedications were addressed to the nobility does not imply that the nobility sanctioned them or acquiesced in the opinions of the authors. It does not mean, as some critics have imagined, that they lent their moral support to Somaize, or that they knew him, or that they ever heard of his works or of his dedications.

The mystery that envelops Somaize is in no way dissipated by an examination of his title-pages or of the list of works ascribed to him. Somaize's friend declared that our author had published nine or ten books. Larroumet credits him with only seven.<sup>27</sup> Herr Schwarz grants that he wrote eight, among which is an elegy in 112 Alexandrines dedicated to Marie Mancini.<sup>28</sup> In reality, the number of Somaize's writings, as attributed to him in the different accounts which I have thus far been able to examine, amounts to twelve. On seven of them the principal authorities are agreed. They are:

1. *Le Grand Dictionnaire des Précieuses*, I;

2. *Le Grand Dictionnaire des Précieuses*, II;
3. *Les Précieuses ridicules*, in verse;
4. *Le Procez des Précieuses*;
5. *Les Véritables Précieuses*;
6. *Les Remarques sur la Théodore*;
7. *La Pompe funèbre de M. Scarron*.

A *Pompe funèbre d'une précieuse*, advertised by Somaize and thought by some to have appeared, is regarded by Livet as never having seen the light.<sup>29</sup> Lacroix mentions a *Dialogue de deux Précieuses sur les affaires de leur communauté*, contained in the second edition of the *Véritables Précieuses*,<sup>30</sup> and *La Cocue imaginaire*, in verse.<sup>31</sup> The writer of the biography of Somaize in Larousse's *Dictionnaire* adds *le Secret d'être toujours belle*.<sup>32</sup> If the present tendency to enlarge the scope of Somaize's activities is persisted in, it may soon be necessary to open a special section for his *apocrypha*, as has been done in the case of a few great writers, notably Shakespeare.

Eight of these works were written in one year, 1660, namely, *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *La Pompe funèbre de M. Scarron*, the *Dialogue*, *Les Véritables Précieuses*, *Le Grand Dictionnaire*, I, *La Cocue imaginaire*, *La Pompe funèbre d'une Précieuse*, *Le Procez des Précieuses*. They are all short pamphlets and might easily have been produced in that space by one man. The majority of the total collection lacks the name of Somaize. With the exception of the *Cocue*, printed under the name of François Donneau, this larger portion came forth anonymously. One person, however, is nearly omnipresent—Jean Ribou, the book dealer.<sup>33</sup> In some instances, the *privilege* granted Somaize is immediately transferred to Jean Ribou; thus, the *Grand Dictionnaire*, I; in others, the imprint of Jean Ribou is the only mark of identification, as in the *Pompe funèbre de M. Scarron* and the *Véritables Précieuses*: in one—the *Remarques sur la Théodore*—, the authorship of Somaize is stated together with the addendum: "imprimées à ses dépens."

<sup>25</sup> Schwarz, *Somaize*, etc., p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Amédée Renée, *Les Nièces de Mazarin*, Paris, 1858; Lucien Perey, *Marie Mancini Colonna*, Paris, 1896.

<sup>27</sup> Larroumet, *Études*, etc., pp. 25–26.

<sup>28</sup> Schwarz, *Somaize*, etc., p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Dict. des Préc.*, II, ed. Livet, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> *Vérit. Préc.*, ed. Lacroix, notice, p. vii.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, notice, p. x.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, tome xiv.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Schwarz, *Somaize*, etc., p. 6.

Why so much mystification where everything should have been open and above-board? The following hypotheses may be entertained: Somaize feared the wrath of Molière, Boisrobert, the *précieuses*, and the poets manhandled by him in the *Pompe funèbre de M. Scarron*; he was a person of importance and not an individual named Somaize, and wished to preserve an *incognito*; he was an author pillaged by Molière and timid about charging the favorite comedian with bare-faced plagiarism, as Charles Sorel might have done; he was a publisher who was desirous of making money out of the popular theme of *préciosité* rendered famous overnight by Molière. That he had no very great fear of Molière and the rest is evidenced by the fact that he presented himself in his own person in dealing with Boisrobert and later claimed the responsibility for the *Pompe funèbre de M. Scarron*. In addition, he seems to have enjoyed the protection of the *chancelier*, if his words can be accepted at their face value,<sup>34</sup> and succeeded in having inserted in the authorization of his *Procez des Précieuses* the most preposterous prohibition ever made use of by any author, directing that nobody should take it upon himself "ni même de se servir des mots contenus en icelui."<sup>35</sup> Any of the other suppositions may be argued with a show of reason. That Somaize was desperately hostile to Molière seems clear through his burlesques in verse of some of the dramatist's plays; and Larroumet specifically designates his attacks as the first made against Molière.<sup>36</sup> Several incidents demonstrate that he knew Molière well, or at least was in touch with what the latter was doing. The most conspicuous is in the *Véritables Précieuses*, where the as yet unpublished *Don Garcie de Navarre* is mentioned.<sup>37</sup> Whatever his feeling toward Molière was, he did not disdain to steal unconscionably from him, as Büchmann, with his four and a quarter pages of the deadly parallel, has proved.<sup>38</sup> Of course, if the exact dates of publication of the genuine

*Précieuses ridicules* and the *Grand Dictionnaire des Précieuses* were not available, the question as to who copied whom might be impossible of solution. We know, however, that Molière's play appeared Jan. 29, 1660, and Somaize's *Dictionnaire*, April 12 of that year.<sup>39</sup> How Livet was persuaded to believe that Molière borrowed from his enemy is hard to understand. If he had mentioned, besides the Abbé de Pure's *Précieuse*, Sorel's voluminous compositions on the *précieuses* and the Abbé d'Aubignac's disquisitions as Molière's sources, he would undoubtedly have been much nearer the truth.

The identity of Somaize, accordingly, appears to be obscure. It is not the intention of the present writer to try to clear up this particular puzzle. It is his desire, indeed, to open that subject for discussion, but more especially, to raise the question concerning Somaize's value as a witness in behalf of *préciosité*. Whoever he was—whether a hoax as to name or a real living person—, his testimony might still be valid, provided it were shown to be original. If he did nothing more than pilfer existing material, then we must discard him in whole or in part as an independent contributor to our knowledge of the seventeenth century. If he was of the caliber of Charles Sorel—who probably knew more than Molière about *préciosité*—, we should be justified in admitting his statements where they do not conflict with Molière's and where they would not be likely to be colored by feelings of personal spite. For, as may not be generally known, Molière's unacknowledged debt to Charles Sorel was almost incredibly large,<sup>40</sup> and it would be wrong to blame Sorel severely for whatever reprisals he might indulge in.

In general, Somaize is esteemed a friend of the *précieuses*. Larroumet is convinced that he seriously meant to defend them, and quotes: "Je n'ai pas prétendu par ce titre parler de ces personnes illustres qui sont trop audessus de la satire pour faire soupçonner que l'on ait dessein de les y insérer."<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, few men and women who ever used metaphorical

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Larroumet, *Études*, etc., p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Larroumet, *Études*, etc., p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Lacroix, *Vérit. Prét.*, notice, p. ix.

<sup>38</sup> Büchmann, *Somaize*, in *ASNS.*, 1861, pp. 51 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Larroumet, *Études*, etc., p. 29.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Emile Roy, *Charles Sorel*, Paris, 1891.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Larroumet, *Études*, etc., p. 37.

and affected language about the year 1660 and, in some instances, before, have been omitted from his catalog of *précieux* and *précieuses*. Malherbe occupies a place in it (p. 64): Queen Christine of Sweden is not forgotten (p. 49): Corneille is treated at some length (pp. 85-92).<sup>42</sup> Obviously, Somaize has in mind an extremely elastic definition of *préciosité* which should put us on our guard against over-confidence in his decisions. His books have not in any real sense added to the population of the kingdom of *préciosité*. The inhabitants discussed by him we have already learned about, for the most part, in Mlle de Scudéry's novels, in Voiture's letters, in Molière's comedies. He has supplied us with few additional details. The Greek names borne by his personages—Quirinus by Quinault, Gadarie by Mlle de Gournay—are of his own coinage, and do not perpetuate the pseudonyms actually used in designating them. Outside of this, the suspicion that the author furnished only a meager handful of facts from his own personal store grows strong, especially when we read in the *privilege du roy* the extract given below, to which none of the students of Somaize has called attention:

Ce Dictionnaire historique des pretieuses est un *extraict fidelle* de toutes les galanteries qui regardent cette matiere *dans les meilleurs romans du temps*, et mérite d'estre imprimé, afin qu'on connoisse les habitants et la langue du pais des alcoves et des ruelles.—Balleadens.<sup>43</sup>

In the face of this declaration, we should scarcely feel willing to credit Somaize with much originality or to rank his dictionary among important contemporary witnesses of the essence and the propagation of the mannerism termed *préciosité*.

A last doubt may be ventured concerning Somaize's sincerity in retailing his information to the public. To believe that he has done it for commendable motives or in a frame of mind which should secure for his words serious consideration by historians is, it seems to me, completely to ignore the tenor of his own affirma-

tions. The very title of his *Grand Dictionnaire* is a burlesque and reminds one forcibly of Rabelais:

"Le Grand Dictionnaire des Pretieuses, Historique, Poetique, Geographique, Cosmographique, Cronologique et Armoirique Où l'on verra leur antiquité, costumes, devises, eloges, etudes, guerres, heresies, jeux, loix, langage, mœurs, mariages, morale, noblesse; avec leur politique, prédictions, questions, richesses, reduits et victoires; comme aussi les noms de ceux et de celles qui ont jusques icy inventé des mots pretieux."

Somaize evidently thought himself a good deal of a wag. In the preface to the *Précieuses ridicules* he confesses to lengthening out his introduction simply because he has some unwritten paper still left.<sup>44</sup> In the "autre apostille" to his *Dictionnaire* he observes that he is besieged by persons bringing him *mémoires* for use in his book, and that if he had attempted to content them all the reader would not have received his work for six months longer.<sup>45</sup> The preface by a friend, adopting a suitably grave tone, dilates on the importance to posterity of the *Dictionnaire*, "histoire veritable et dont les siècles futurs doivent s'entretenir,"<sup>46</sup> and curiously enough, in a way which cannot have been foreseen by him, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have busied themselves with it, though the seventeenth and eighteenth ignored it. In the note addressed by the bookseller to the reader,—manifestly the concoction of Somaize, also,—those eager to purchase the book are begged to have patience and to remember that "il faut non seulement du temps pour le faire, mais encore pour imprimer un ouvrage si grand et si mysterieux."<sup>47</sup> In another passage, the author promises that in the second part, shortly forthcoming, will be seen "toutes les predications astrologiques qui concernent leurs estats et empires (which is reminiscent of *Cyrano de Bergerac*); l'on y connoistra aussi ce que c'est que les Pretieuses et leurs mœurs. Il y aura, de plus, un sommaire de leur origine, progrès, guerres, conquestes et victoires."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Dict. des Préc.*, II, pp. 46-47.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, *préf.* by *un ami*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. lxi.

<sup>46</sup> *Dict. des Préc.*, p. xl.

<sup>42</sup> The pages refer to the *Grand Dict.*, *ii*.

<sup>43</sup> *Dict. des Préc.*, ed. Livet, p. 18. The italics are mine.

The above is probably sufficient to convince the reader that a better knowledge of Somaize would be desirable and that a cautious, discriminating attitude, unbiased by what has thus far been written about Somaize's revelations on seventeenth century literature and society, would be advisable in the perusal of his works.

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## SOME NOTES ON *HAMLET*

### I

Rowe is our authority for the statement that Shakespeare acted "the ghost in his own Hamlet." Yet Shakespeare, as we know from several sources, was an actor of ability; consequently it seems hardly likely that his share in the performance of the play would consist of only a minor part requiring the utterance of less than a hundred lines. Since it was common for players to assume more than one rôle, we may conclude that Shakespeare acted some other character in addition to the Ghost. An examination of the text shows that this character would be limited to (1) Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, or Osric; (2) Claudius, Laertes or Fortinbras; (3) the First Player.

It is highly unlikely that he assumed the comic part of Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, or Osric. This would not be in keeping with the statement by John Davies (*The Scourge of Folly*, 1610), that he played "some kingly parts," with the statement of his brother that he performed the dignified part of Adam in *As You Like It*, or with his assumption of the part of the Ghost in *Hamlet*.

Again, it seems unlikely that he took the part of Claudius, for the rôle of Claudius would be in itself quite enough for one actor—say Heminge, or Condell; and for him to assume this in addition to the rôle of the Ghost would put too heavy a burden of acting upon his shoulders. Furthermore, in Act I, scene 2,

Claudius enters thirty-three lines after the exit of the Ghost. This would hardly allow time for the necessary changes in costume.

And since, in the scene just referred to, Laertes enters with Claudius, he seems also to be excluded from consideration; for surely it would be impossible for Shakespeare during the quick utterance of thirty-three lines to change himself from a ghost "so majestic" into a young gallant ready for "the primrose path of dalliance"—if, indeed, Shakespeare's qualities as an actor fitted him for such a rôle.

The character of Fortinbras, who speaks only twenty-six lines, is histrionically too insignificant for a "sharer." Any "hireling" properly costumed might perform his part satisfactorily.

This process of elimination leaves for our consideration the First Player. No objection, I believe, can be raised to him. The rôle is sufficiently important to justify Shakespeare in assuming it; at no time does it interfere with the rôle of the Ghost; and its lines throughout are in keeping with what we know of Shakespeare's quality as an actor. The same voice that uttered the solemn conjurations of the Ghost could have spoken well the story "of Priam's slaughter," and equally well, too, the lines of the Player King in "The Murder of Gonzago." Furthermore, if Shakespeare acted the part of the Ghost, and then of the Player King, this fact could be used to heighten greatly the effect of the "Mouse Trap"; for the Player King could be made to resemble closely in features the elder Hamlet.

### II

*Laertes*. . . . Hold off the earth awhile  
Till I have caught her once more in mine arms:

[*Leaps into the grave.*]

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead. . .

*Hamlet* [*Advancing*]. . . . This is I,  
Hamlet the Dane. [*Leaps into the grave.*<sup>1</sup>]

The leaping of Laertes and of Hamlet into the grave of Ophelia has always seemed to me both startling and unpleasing. Surely the dead body of the unfortunate Ophelia might be

<sup>1</sup> V, i, 272-81.