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Questioning Authority: An Exploration of Montaigne and Borges

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Questioning Authority: An Exploration of Montaigne and Borges

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Introduction

All writing has a purpose. A letter written home from summer camp as a child informs your parents how much fun water skiing is, and a grocery list reminds you not to forget milk for the fifth time this week. For as many purposes as writing may have, there have been just as many attempts to delineate the various genres and subgenres. One wonders whether a text is fiction or non-fiction, a short story or an epic poem, and when it was written. From this categorization we have denominations such as short story, novel, memoir, biography, ode, epic, etc. Each of these distinctions carries a specific set of criteria that qualify a piece as said genre. These names also carry certain connotations for the reader. Does this system work for all writing? I would postulate that overall these categorizations do justice to the writing they categorize, but with some flaws. Emilio Carilla suggests that there is no such thing as a “purity” of literary genres (75). Claiming that one piece is of a genre implies that it does not demonstrate the traits or characteristics central to another genre. This, however, leads us into the notion of hybrid genres and subgenres. Even with the existence of subgenres, some pieces of writing do elude this system. A classic example of this is the essay.

When considering the essay, the first step is often an attempt to define it. One of the first authors to come to mind when considering the essay is Michel de Montaigne who is considered the father of the modern essay. With his publication of *Les Essais* (1580), he set the groundwork for the modern essay. His exploratory first person narratives wind through classical citations and personal anecdote, guiding his reader on his musings on a plethora of topics. This spirit of exploration is key to the development of the essay throughout time. As Georg Lukács put it: “were one to compare the forms of literature with sunlight refracted in a prism, the writings of the essayists would be the ultra-violet rays” (Lukács 7). Through a poetic image, Lukács highlights a large part of the struggle in dealing with the essay: can one consider it literature?

The essay frequently employs many literary techniques such as metaphor, imagery, and even literary quotes. It also, however, contains an argument or main premise. Thus, it lives in a crossroads between the literary and the academic. For this, some theorists apply the term “literature in potentia” to the essay. Claire de Obaldia borrows this term from Alastair Fowler who defines it roughly as those forms that “round this nucleus [literature] spread [into] a looser plasma” (5). Thus, they have moved into a “looser plasma” or area where the limits are not as easily or polemically defined. That the essay is the potential of literature, but not quite literature itself, speaks to the tension of the genre. It suggests a certain unfinished or underdeveloped quality. Lukács also states that the essay is the “penultimate step” towards a “real” literary form (17).

From even this brief discussion, we can highlight a few key factors of the essay. For one, the rhetoric and tools it employs often mimic that of literature. For example, a notable use of poetic language, metaphor, or imagery is not uncommon. However, the essay also frequently searches to argue a point or explore an idea and is not just pure narration. In these notions, a common theme is that essay is lacking something. That it is not quite a “full” form. Whether it is “literature in potential”, considering the essay as a draft, or a “penultimate step”, many celebrated critics have attempted to wrangle the essay into a particular definition of a genre. After centuries, it appears there is no concise consensus. I would venture that there is perhaps a fatal flaw in attempting to define the essay as a genre: that it should not be considered a genre at all. I propose here an exploration of the essay as a methodology rather than a genre. This I will call the essayistic methodology. I will explore how this methodology was inaugurated by Michel de Montaigne and later renovated by Jorge Luis Borges. In particular, I will focus on their use of the essayistic to question the notions of authorship, authority, and originality.

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) is considered the father of the modern essay. His publication of his collection *Les Essais* revolutionized writing in the 16th century and still continues to affect writers today. He is perhaps best known for this authorial accomplishment, but was also a well-decorated statesman. He served in his local government of Bordeaux, France and also nationally, reporting directly to the King himself. Of course, this is all in addition to running the family estate after the passing of his father. Here we will see the prologue and the first two chapters of *Les Essais*, and how these texts use essayistic to encourage self-introspection and reconsideration of historical examples.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) was a man of many talents. Most known for his writings, he was also a librarian and a professor. Borges lived a diverse life. He was raised in a bilingual English-Spanish speaking household, and also lived in both Paris, France and Geneva, Switzerland for a period of time. This kind of cultural intricacy is present in his works. In particular, we will see this in his two pieces we explore here, “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” (“Pierre Menard, author of the Quijote”) and “Kafka y sus precursores” (“Kafka and his Precursors”). We will also see how Borges inherits the essayistic from Montaigne and implements this methodology to reconsider how we view authority and authorship.

In the first chapter we will discuss how Michel de Montaigne broke the mold of formal writing convention with *Les Essais*. We will see how he inaugurates the essayistic, and how his writing questions how we view historical fact and the classics. We will focus primarily on the first two chapters of the collection, “Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin” (“By Different Means We All Arrive at the Same End”) and “De la tristesse” (“On Sadness”), and will also review how Montaigne presents the collection in his note to his reader. With Montaigne, we will see how the essayistic appears in its first stages.

In the second chapter we will explore how Jorge Luis Borges inherits the methodology of the essayistic. We will see how the essayistic methodology is not limited to the genre of the essay by discussing a piece traditionally considered a short story, “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” (“Pierre Menard, Author of the Quijote”), and a piece traditionally considered an essay, “Kafka y sus precursores” (“Kafka and his Precursors”). We will see how Borges uses the essayistic to affront his reader with novel, challenging notions on authorship and authority. In addition, we will see how he inherits and adapts the features we first saw in Montaigne.

In the third chapter, I will venture a definition of the essayistic as I view it in these three texts. As a word that is traditionally utilized as an adjective, I borrow “essayistic” from Claire de Obaldia to represent the style of exploration, playfulness, and conversation that these two authors utilize. We will see how this methodology permits unique forms of problematizing authorship, how we use and read other voices, and the engagement of the reader in these texts. We will also review the differences between the ways that Borges and Montaigne employ the essayistic. In other terms, we will see how the essayistic methodology permits a space to playfully bring forth the kind of questioning and exploration that is present in these pieces.

These texts are prime examples of what I call the essayistic because they constantly push their reader.. Whether it is reading other texts that are cited or referred to, or consider a new, perhaps absurd, situation, there is an ever present feeling of playfulness. It is a question of playfulness with the reader, other voices, and the conceptions of how this kind of questioning should be taken on. With that, we begin our own playful exploration.

1. Where it all began: Michel de Montaigne

Michel de Montaigne, born Michel de Eyquem, was a statesman, having held elected office both locally in Bordeaux and in higher serving positions to the King of France. He also inherited his family's large terrains and vineyard in 1568, which made him a de-facto nobleman; this is where he gets the name Montaigne (the name of the estate) (Montaigne 12). As a newborn, Montaigne was sent away to live in the countryside with his wet nurse and her family (Bakewell 52). While it was not a rare practice for an upper-class family to hire a wet nurse for their child, to completely separate the child from the family does deviate from tradition. Because of this, Montaigne started his life with a certain degree of disassociation with his family. This was only exacerbated by the fact that his inability to communicate with his parents: "As soon as he was weaned his loving father had arranged for him to hear nothing but pure Classical Latin" (Screech 16). Thus, he went from being separated from his family to barely being able to communicate with them after moving back home at a young age because neither parent spoke any significant Latin. As a result of this upbringing, he developed an almost unparalleled fluency in Latin and a propensity for reading classical texts. In fact, throughout his youth he was a voracious reader. Instead of partaking in the more popular tales of knights and sorcery that were so popular at the time, he spent his time with ancient texts (Screech xvi). Montaigne's *Les Essais* (1580) lays the groundwork for what we today refer to as the essay.

I propose here a reading and analysis of a selection of chapters; to give every chapter the in-depth analysis it deserves would take a lifetime, but would also not suit our purposes. While the *Essais* is a collection of over 100 different chapters, there is no linking factor between them other than their author. All the pieces stand alone, each bearing its own title and unique form. Consequently, the work has a heterogeneous quality. If we were to attempt to project a unifying

force onto the piece, it would perhaps be the apparent lack of a unity. As it will become evident when we consider more chapters, the pieces are free-form and follow no specific path or structure. The topics at hand can range from laziness and drunkenness to friendship and sadness. These themes may seem to have been chosen at random, but they are representative of what one encounters throughout their life. In this way, these themes are more than apt for Montaigne's project.

Much like the trajectory of his life, this monumental work is anything but traditional. The collection is an iconic part of the western canon because of the unique project it presents. No two chapters are alike. While they bear similarities, their inner structures are absolutely original at each reprise. It is not only the refusal of formal structure that makes the work stand out, but also what that represents for writing: a new definition of authority. The word "author" is very clearly present in "authority", and this is no coincidence. Both terms come from the same Latin root "augure", meaning "increase, originate, promote" ("author"). Then, we can say that if the themes of authority and authorship are on the table, then so is the question of originality. With whom does an idea originate? While nor I, nor Montaigne, pretend to have an answer to that question, he does seem to be playing with the notion of originality. By choosing not to structure his writings in such a way that reflects a formal academic convention of the time, he is breaking the mold. This statement is indirectly saying that authors have the independence to refuse to write in a set, rigid formal format, and that communicating one's message in a sophisticated and elegant fashion is more important than set convention. Montaigne also takes this notion one step further, and he does so through his use of examples, quotes, and personal anecdote.

References to classical texts and historical events are embedded throughout the collection. These can be found in the form of historical examples or short quotations from the

classics, playfully inserted into a sentence. This new way of interacting with information and sources is one of the many facets of Montaigne's project in writing the essays, and our interest will center on this as we explore what else is at work here. On a first reading, one may be tempted to problematize these references and citations as a rhetorical strategy to sound more erudite, which could have been Montaigne's motivation. Nonetheless, one cannot forget his background as a child. These books were his source of entertainment, and he found solace in their stories in a world where he was often alone. As such, it is perhaps Montaigne's interesting and eclectic life – of which we have covered only the framework here—that sets the stage for this interesting mix of quotation anecdote, and historical reference that we refer to as *Les Essais*. To begin, we will discuss the denomination of the “essai” that is attributed to this collection.

The term “essai” can be easily translated into English as an attempt or an assay. Assay may be the most closely linked with the term of “essai” in the sense that Montaigne intended. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, the term assay means: “The trying (of a person or thing); trial imposed upon or endured by any object, in order to test its virtue, fitness, etc” (“Assay”). The term “essai” is the noun form of the French verb “essayer”, whose most direct definition translates as being “put to the test”, or, in other words, meaning to try or attempt (“Essayer”). In the English we use today the term ‘assay’ is most frequently encountered in scientific discourse and rarely in spoken English, and even less so in the humanities. In the scientific context, the term is almost interchangeable with ‘experiment’ or ‘test’. Thus, the project of the *Essais* is literally a series of thought experiments. In his meditations on various topics, he searches within himself and his personal experience to find answers.

As Susan Blackwell muses in her book, *How to Live or A Life of Montaigne*, we live in an age where writing about oneself is common practice, especially considering the development

of social media. But that this practice had to start somewhere and that somewhere was with Montaigne (3). While he does not share sketches of his latest meal or just scribble down verses of his favorite poems, as one may expect on social media today, Montaigne did something radically different than other scholars of his time: he wrote about his own life as if it were something to be problematized. Montaigne does these various essays drawing from himself. He writes these pieces to attempt and discover if he can answer his questions through introspection rather than delving into his vast library for an external answer, he considers a few examples and then asks himself: what about me? These questions are sometimes indirectly asked, as is the case with the two chapters we will see here. For example, with the statement that starts the first chapter: “La plus commune façon d’amollir les cœurs de ceux qu’on a offensés, lorsqu’ayant la vengeance en main ils nous tiennent à leur merci, c’est de les émouvoir par soumission à commisération et à pitié” (“The most common way to soften the hearts of those whom we have offended, whom, having vengeance at their will, have us at their mercy, is to move them by submission to commiseration and to mercy”). This implies the question: is this truly the case, and, if so, would that work on me? Which Montaigne later responds to with the personal statement: “L’un et l’autre de ces deux moyens m’emporterait aisément” (“Both of these means would have swayed me easily”) (Montaigne 21, Screech 4). Through this questioning, as we will see, he opens the door for his reader to ask the same questions. He presents his life as an example, frequently using provocative claims to provoke his readers to put themselves in his shoes. This is also a key feature of the essayistic: dialogue. The essay leaves space for the reader to interact with the essay at hand.

It should also be noted that each entry in the work is not called an “essai” but rather a “chapter”. This may seem a rather small, semantic observation, but it serves to remind us that the

essay as a genre that we know today did not yet exist. By naming his piece of work as such, Montaigne sowed the seed for the development to come. As follows, even though today we would refer to each one of these entries or shorter texts as “essays”, for our purposes here we will uphold their original appellation as chapters. Each chapter of *The Essays* is representative of its own essay. Thus, each chapter comprises its own essay on a particular theme or happening. Speckled with quotations and anecdote, they are an intriguing mix of autobiographical detail and other voices who furnish the argumentation. This playful and new style – which we can say is the first iteration of an “essayistic style” – presents its own essay: a refutation not only of formal structure in writing but also a formal relation to authorship and authority. Now that we have framed the piece, let us look at how the author framed it himself.

The first two volumes of the *Essais* were published together in the year 1580 in Bordeaux, France by the publishing house Millanges (Montaigne 13). The work starts out with a note to the reader (“Au lecteur”) in which Montaigne presents his motivations for undertaking the project. In this short text, spanning only 26 lines, Montaigne prepares his reader to engage with what he has written. If we accept this note to the reader as a manifestation of the literary convention of the time – a sort of outward and open false modesty – it is almost an inconsequential addition. However, if one reads these 26 lines with a degree of skepticism, this small note can be read in a new light. In a first reading, it seems that he is trying to create a pact with his reader. The first line reads: “C’est ici un livre de bonne foi, lecteur” (“This here is a book of good faith, reader”).¹ Further along in the note to his reader, he claims that he had no other goal than “domestic and private” in the writing of his text and that he never considered “his glory” as a writer. Additionally, he claims that he would be incapable of writing in such a way as

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations included are my own.

to express his prowess as an author. These moments would still somewhat fit the bill as the aforementioned literary convention of the time, but an alternate reading is that they are a criticism of that same idea. The goal of the *Essais* as stated in “Au lecteur” is for his reader to see him in his own “simple way, natural and ordinary without contention or artifice”(20). I suspect that anyone reading these texts would object to these adjectives being used to describe any of the texts that Montaigne ever produced, but it is interesting to consider why Montaigne claims that his goals in these essays is to portray himself as if he were “very voluntarily and very completely painted nude” (20). Even in these small quotations included here we can tell that Montaigne is framing this work in a peculiar light. One begins to wonder what a “domestic and private” goal may be or what “painting yourself nude” may mean in terms of a work such as this. First, we shall take into consideration the terms “domestic and private.”

To the contemporary reader, the idea of a domestic piece of writing could invoke ideas of a grocery list or perhaps a holiday missive sent to the family. The term domestic bears a fairly simple explanation in that the French word *domestique* refers to matters of *chez soi*, the matters of one’s own house or life. Thus, the “domestic” denomination here is just highlighting that Montaigne is framing this work as a personal project, perhaps a sort of hobby if you will. The idea of the private is also entangled in this notion; how the private manifests itself in the writing is also to be taken into consideration. It is a very nuanced concept. One begins to wonder if the information we are about to receive from the piece is what is private, if the piece itself was meant to be private and he has decided to divulge it, or if he is merely stating that he wrote this piece only for himself. His “domestic and private” goals are to be his own assay, to search within himself and see where that guides his pen. Another example, or perhaps *the* example, of “domestic and private” writing would be the personal diary, a piece of writing just for its author

and his private thoughts. It becomes very evident that this project is not a personal diary but rather an exercise in personal exploration. While reading, one finds it rather hard to believe that Montaigne did not have his readership in mind. On a first reading, the chapters may read as unrefined, or as if they were still in the draft stage. Without diving into the question about whether or not one is ever “done writing”, it is worth noting that Montaigne continued to edit his texts up until not long before his death. Some published versions of *Les Essais* even go as far as to mark these changes in the translation. Taking this into consideration, it becomes clear that these are carefully constructed and worked out pieces here, not as simple musings that Montaigne presents. More close study will show how intricate the pieces really are. Nonetheless, we still have not yet discussed what a “private” or “domestic” means in terms of *Les Essais*. The irony of all of these implications is that they appear in a note to the reader. To claim that a work was only written for your own purposes in a note directed at your potential readership directly contradicts the notions of “private” and “domestic” writing that he introduces. Thus, it is clear that Montaigne had his readership in mind when writing

To express his commitment to the exploration of the self, Montaigne uses the metaphor of painting himself nude: “I assure you that here I very voluntarily painted myself entirely and completely nude” (Montaigne 20). This implies that what is at stake in this text for Montaigne is a complete and total surrender of himself. In other words, painting a complete and total image of oneself. These images all invoke ideas of a pureness or rawness of the information about to be expressed in the project. A full surrender of oneself is most associated with the genre of autobiography. That would be a form where the author is his own subject matter and it is presumed that, to at least some degree, that the image he paints of himself is total and honest. That being said, the *Essais* is not an autobiography or, at the very least, not in the traditional

sense. While Montaigne's corpus or subject matter may in theory be his own personal experience, it becomes clear that he mobilizes just as much outside information (e.g. cultural references, classical quotations, or historical events) that whichever autobiographical facts one may glean from the text are practically insignificant in comparison. Montaigne does divulge a fair number of personal details and accounts of his life, but not nearly a full painted picture. With a fair amount of reading between the lines and in-depth investigative work, one begins to be able to patch together a greater idea of Montaigne the person. My interest with the project, however, is not so much the degree of entirety to which he paints a picture of himself, but rather how he goes about it. Theodor Adorno describes the essay as a form that progresses "methodically, unmethodically"(13). Here this apparent unmethodical appearance signifies the careful construction of the chapters. They may appear "unfinished" or as the "penultimate step", but they are actually carefully constructed and planned.

We have just discussed how Montaigne's project differs from the norm of the time with its characteristic introspection, but there is another facet of these essays that distinguishes the project. Montaigne employs many of classical citations and historical references, this we have already discussed. How he interacts with these sources is what is most interesting about the project. His interaction does not fulfill our expectations for the way one is meant to go about this in writing. In academia today, when one references or quotes another voice, there are strict rules on how to quote properly and give credit to the original author. These rules vary depending on the system of citation the writer subscribes to. Each has its own set of conventions, but the common ground is that each establishes a specific relationship with the other voices in the text. This relationship centers on the idea of originality. To cite another author's voice formally is to recognize and valorize the work that the author put into the piece. In other words, it is

recognizing their originality and also respecting their authority over that knowledge. Given this, one can quote others for many various motives. These include, but are not limited to, agreeing with the point made in the quote, refuting or disproving the quote, commenting on writing style or lack thereof, etc. This conventional of formal citation reinforces the spirit of a formally structured academic dialogue. It could be said that they codify the relationship between author, reader, and cited sources; this relationship being one of respect and authority. We will see how this dialogue manifests itself in the Montaignian essay, where he frequently plays with this notion in order to draw out more meaning from the texts. To discuss this and many other features of the texts, there is perhaps no better place to start than the beginning.

The first chapter in the work starts with a surprising opening. Following the declaration that his only goal was to “paint himself nude” for his reader, he starts his first chapter, entitled “Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin” (“By Different Means We All Arrive at the Same End”) with: “La plus commune façon d’amollir les cœurs de ceux qu’on a offensés, lorsqu’ayant la vengeance en main ils nous tiennent à leur merci, c’est de les émouvoir par soumission à commisération et à pitié” (“The most common way to soften the hearts of those whom we have offended, whom, having vengeance at their will have us at their mercy, is to move them by submission to commiseration and to mercy”) (21). The starting point of this monumental piece is suggesting that if you anger someone, the best way to “soften their hearts” is to make them take pity on you. While perhaps not a false statement, nor erroneous logic, this first statement seems to have little to no tie to his note to his reader or any direct connection to his life. The function of this surprising opening is to interest and provoke the reader. By starting with an outright claim, Montaigne makes his reader have to consider this statement right from the beginning. Do I as the reader accept this as fact, or do I challenge the notion? Either way, the chapter then guides us

through the meandering process of Montaigne and back to himself. This is, if one could say that there is, the Montaignian style.

Starting in this first chapter, it becomes evident that exploration is more privileged here than a traditional, formal structure, such as that of the dissertation or even the dialectic, a form very present in the classics, particularly in Plato (Maybe). There is no real explication or opening, the reader is thrown into this discussion by way of a direct statement. With the next line, however, Montaigne does provide the opening for the rest of his discussion: “Toutefois la braverie et la constance, moyens tout contraires, ont servi à ce même effet.” (“Nevertheless, bravery and steadfastness, two very contrary means, have worked to the same end.”) (21). Consequently, the essay at hand is presented: an exploration of the effects “pitié” versus the effectiveness of “constance” and “braverie” on influencing others. To discuss this, the chapter quickly becomes a list of moments in history, the first of which being “Edouard, prince de Galles.” His account situates him as having reigned for a long time in “Guyenne” and as a nobleman, which tells us about the background of the Prince, but why he is of interest to the essay at hand. Our narrator tells us of a time where he was not moved by the sadness and destruction around him, but rather by “trois gentilshommes français qui, d’une hardiesse incroyable, soutenaient seuls l’effort de son armée victorieuse” (“three French gentlemen who, with an incredible resilience, alone maintained the efforts of their victorious army”). Thus, we have the first example of the “constance” we saw earlier. The effect of this on the prince was that it “reboucha. . . sa colère ; et commença par ces trois à faire miséricorde à tous les autres” (“contained his anger; and [he] started with these three to have compassion with the rest”) (21). This represents a first example in the case that Montaigne is making. The chapter continues with other accounts in history that are similar to this one (“Scanderberg, prince de l’Épire”,

“l’empereur Conrad troisième”, etc). It then turns to a “je”, or personal narrative voice. : “L’un et l’autre de ces deux moyens m'emporterait aisément; car j'ai une merveilleuse lâcheté vers la miséricorde et la mansuétude. Tant y a qu'à mon avis, je serais pour me rendre plus naturellement à la compassion, . . .” (“Both of these means would have swayed me easily, for I have a marvellous weakness towards mercy and clemency – so much so that would be more naturally moved by compassion. . .”) (Montaigne 21 ; Screech 4). The fact that Montaigne places these examples in context with his own conjecture and opinions, mean that he wants the reader to consider them all equally. This choice also represents that to Montaigne these examples are not to be revered as an authoritative example but to be treated as what they are: simple historical fact. Montaigne reminds us that all of these historical figures were mere just other people and, thus, his own thoughts and opinions can only be as valuable if not more so than theirs. What this accomplishes is a certain humanization of the classics. If the examples of ancient or medieval princes and emperors are to be considered in tandem with Montaigne, this highlights their human side. The side-by-side consideration of Montaigne’s own opinion and the examples of these many historical figures also invites the reader to consider his own self. In a way, Montaigne’s personal voice could be seen as an example of the kind of questioning he would like his reader to undertake. Our narrator even alludes to the fact that the actual overarching essay here is not just “pitié” or “braverie” but rather human nature all together: “Certes, c’est un sujet merveilleusement vain, divers et ondoyant que l’homme. Il est malaise d’y fonder un jugement constant et uniforme” (“Truly, man is a marvelously diverse, vain, and temperamental subject. It is difficult to found a constant and uniform judgment about him.”) (22). A potential reading of this quote is that this is the perhaps the overarching essay at practice here: an attempt to define human nature. This is practically refuted within these same lines though, where the difficulty of

the endeavor is mentioned. Nonetheless, we see that in this essay it does not search for an absolute truth, but rather an exploration of this “marvelously diverse, vain, and temperamental subject.” With this in mind, let us now consider the 2nd chapter of the collection.

Entitled “De la tristesse” (“On Sadness”), this chapter continues in the same thematic vein of the first: an exploration of human emotion or human nature. Again, the chapter starts with an opening declaration. However, in this case, the narrative voice makes a direct claim about itself: “Je suis des plus exempts de cette passion; et ne l’aime ni l’estime, quoique le monde ait prise, comme à prix fait, de l’honorer de faveur particulière. Ils en habillent la sagesse, la vertu, la conscience ; sot et monstreux ornament.” (“I am among the most exempt from this passion; and neither like it or think highly of it, even if the world has taken it at face value and honor it with special fervor. They make it out to be wisdom, virtue, and conscience; a foolish and monstrous ornament.”) (Montaigne 22). He chooses to open the chapter with a statement about himself, and it is a rather direct example of “painting himself nude”. He claims to be exempt from sadness, which is a grand and provocative claim. After continuing to claim the Italians named sadness as a sort of “malignancy”— a cultural example of the characterization of human emotion – Montaigne provides various historical instances and gives his commentary on them.

The narration here follows what we have signaled as the Montaignian style: meandering through historical accounts and personal commentary. Similarly as with the first chapter, let us take this essay as an example to see what role these references and quotations used here play. The inclusion of historical examples can be viewed almost as ‘case studies’ for Montaigne’s essay. It starts with the example of “Psamménite, roi d’Égypte” who was unmoved by seeing his daughter turned into a slave or his son being carried to the executioner after his defeat by the Persian king, but who, upon seeing a close friend among the captives, visibly broke down in

grief (22). One wonders what Montaigne is hinting at by including this example. Is he insinuating that this Egyptian King was weak in submitting to his emotion or rather strong for holding out so long? While it may be unclear, what is clear is that the example has very strong pathetic appeal, and this encourages the reader to consider the example. By including examples such as this one, Montaigne makes an appeal to both the emotions and the logic of the reader. This example is followed by another account “which could be paired” with the first, and account of the French prince who after learning of his brother’s death was unmoved until one of his subjects also passed. This represents another appeal to the pathos of his reader. Following this example, we have some exposition by Montaigne. He offers us:

Il s’en pourrait (dis-je), autant juger de notre histoire, n’était qu’elle ajoute que Cambyse, s’enquérant à Psamménite pourquoi, ne s’étant ému au malheur de son fils et de sa fille, il portait si impatiemment celui d’un de ses amis : C’est, répondit-il, que ce seul dernier déplaisir se peut signifier par larmes, les deux premiers surpassant de bien loin tout moyen de se pouvoir exprimer.

From this we could just as easily judge our own history (I say), which adds that ‘Cambyse’, asking “Psamménite” why he was not moved by the poor fortune of his son and daughter, he was bothered so much by one of his friends. It’s that, he responds, only this last displeasure [the friend] can be signified by tears, the first two surpass all means of expression. (22)

This example, much like the others in this chapter, has very strong pathetic appeal. The events that Montaigne chooses to highlight are very powerful, moving examples. In this case, it demonstrates a case where a person felt so much emotion it exceeded the realm of expression. This pathetic appeal, paired with the narrator’s declared “exempt” nature forces the reader to

consider where he fits into the equation. In terms of the essay at hand, this example serves a sort of explanation for the behavior of the first two examples and may serve to make the case for the reader. If one cannot express sadness at the execution of his son but rather the death of a friend, perhaps there isn't necessarily logic to emotion. This discussion is followed by the example of a painter who, instead of painting a face struck with grief or other "violent passions", chose to place a veil over the face one of his subjects; another example of the inability to appropriately express this sadness. After this other example, Montaigne changes the discussion topic to the sort of shock one receives upon having such strong emotion. He mobilizes a variety of examples from "King Ferdinand" to "la femme roumaine" ["the Roma woman"] and their adverse reactions to emotion. In fact, the Roma woman dies of surprise after seeing her son return from a long voyage (23).

Nonetheless, after all of these examples Montaigne returns the discussion to himself to close the text: "Je suis peu prise de ces violentes passions. J'ai l'appréhension naturellement dure, et l'encroûte et épaissis tous les jours par discours" ("I'm barely affected by these violent passions. My sense for this is naturally dull and my shell continually hardens each day by discourse") (23). These are the last lines of the chapter. They represent a return to the "private and domestic" notion of the project at hand and also indirectly encourage the reader to decide where he stands in relation to this declaration. Is he also as exempt for these emotions? Does he associate with any of these other examples? What does he think of the expression of sadness? These are all indirect and implicit questions in the chapter. What we have not yet focused on in this chapter, are the 6 different quotations Montaigne uses in addition to these historical examples.

Montaigne, as we have already discussed, had a very intimate relationship with the classics growing up. Consequently, there are bits and pieces of them scattered all around *Les Essais*. At times he merely borrows their words to finish a sentence and at other times employs their example as yet another stepping stone in his argumentation or discussion of the theme at hand. For example, in this chapter he includes a Latin phrase mid-sentence without any exposition or commentary: “Voilà pourquoi les poètes feignent cette misérable mère Niobé, . . . *Diriguise malis*, pour exprimer cette morne, . . .” [“Voila the reason the poets feign this miserable mother, Niobé, . . . *Diriguise malis*, to express this loss . . .”] (23). In this instance it is very possible that the quote in question is from the piece to which he is referencing regarding the story of “Niobé”. At times, Montaigne employs Latin quotes as if his reader could read the Latin just as smoothly as the French. For example: “Toutes passions qui se laissent goûter et digérer ne sont que médiocres: *Curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent*” [“All passion that allow themselves tasted and digested are but mediocre: *light cares can talk: huge ones are struck dumb* (Montaigne 23)². The sentence reads as if Montaigne were to expect his reader to take the quote in stride. This manner of placing quotes without any sort of introduction would be absolutely unintelligible to today’s modern reader if not for the wondrous collection of footnotes included with most editions. It is unclear whether or not the original publication included such translations. If we postulate that it did not then we can conclude that Montaigne’s intended readership was not only the small portion of the population that was literate at the time but rather only the particularly well-educated and well-versed. Nonetheless, the inclusion of quotes in Latin (and other languages though almost exclusively in Latin) is a fundamental feature of the *Essais*. In this last example, the Latin quote functions as a cultural allusion to Seneca, a continuation of

² Latin translation taken from Screech translation.

his own thought, and a classical example that fit into his argument. Including any quote is choosing to include more than just the specific words of the quotation but also their original context in the piece. Montaigne was very aware of this and actively chose his quotes to play within these parallels. Kirsti Sellevold elaborates on this in her article.

Throughout her study of the over 1,300 quotations in Montaigne's *Les Essais*, she was able to come to various conclusions. One of which is that Montaigne actually edited and changed quotations before he put them in the essays (155). One example she cites is from the chapter "On vanity": "Quam miserum porta vitam muroque tueri / Vixque suæ tutum viribus esse domus" ("How pitiful it is to need gates and walls to protect your life and scarcely be able to trust in the strength of your own home") (151). Sellevold attributes this example to Ovid's *Tristia*, a collection of poems about exile. In this example, Montaigne has changed the last word from "loci" ("place") to "domus" ("house"), thus slightly changing the meaning of the quotation (151). This quotation appears in the context of Montaigne discussing how he feels unsafe in his own home. This occurs during the religious wars of the time. Though the context of the quotation in its original source does not quite match up exactly with Montaigne's current situation, he is most certainly hoping his reader recognizes this context. Let us not forget that Montaigne is actively playing up the intertextuality of his writing by including quotes not only based on what they say but the overall context they demonstrate. I postulate that this is one of the many ways Montaigne emphasizes his authority. On the most basic level, the inclusion of the text in his piece demonstrates a certain authority to borrow and take advantage of the context of the other piece. This inherently means that Montaigne has "re-framed" the text for his own purposes. When we consider that he frequently tailored or changed the quotes, then we can see that he goes even a step further. He does not respect their originality or the original authorship, but rather

manipulates it to fit into his own essay and context. In short, he imposes his own authority on the pieces. This challenges the originality of the quote. It also begs the question why include so many quotes? To include a quote is to include another voice and the context it carries along. Montaigne expected his reader to “work out’ the meaning of the quotation from a joint consideration of linguistic content and context” (Sellevold 148). In other words, consider the quotation word-for-word but to also consider the context of the quotes he uses. Then, in turn, weigh this context in terms of the essay Montaigne is presenting, and, thus, be able to consider how that context informs or deviates from what Montaigne is presenting. All of these references and quotes do signal something about the audience that Montaigne expects for this text. The reader of the *Essays* would have had to be educated enough to recognize or at least be able to appreciate the vast range of the examples in Montaigne’s writing. Not only that, but they also were expected to consider their relevance to the essay at hand. Notwithstanding, the expectation that the reader would recognize and be able to consider the sources of these quotes could just be a product of the historical moment in which he was writing. At the time of the publication of these texts, the printing press had only been around for a little over 100 years, and only the elite had either the literacy or the means to read.

Nonetheless, one could also make a differing argument. One reading may suggest that Montaigne used such a high volume of historic examples in order to surprise his reader. To mobilize such a wide array of historical facts and information so deftly could perhaps lead his reader to believe that Montaigne is some sort of authority in the subject area, thus blindly following his writing as if it were some textual source of truth. It could be true that Montaigne expects his reader to blindly follow his text, to be “along for the ride” in more colloquial terms. Yet another hypothesis is that the inclusion of these references could be viewed as a

manifestation of Montaigne's personal culture and background. He was an avid reader of classical texts as a child, and his education most certainly affirmed the importance of these classics. Thus, their appearance in this chapter and the many others to come, may just be a product of Montaigne the writer and not a particular rhetorical strategy. They do occupy an important role in the chapter though: the response to a question, or, at the very least, steps along the way. For example, “. . . de façon que l'âme, se relâchant après aux larmes et aux plaintes, semble se déprendre, se démêler et se mettre plus au large et à son aise, *et via vix tandem voci laxata dolore est*” (“. . . in such a way that, afterwards, when the soul lets herself go with tears and lamentations, she seems to have struggled loose, disentangled herself and become free to range about as she wishes, *and then, at length, his grief can just force open a channel for his voice*” (Montaigne 22, Screech 8). This quotation appears in relationship to the discussion of the situation in which one can be paralyzed by emotion. Here we see that the Latin fragment that Montaigne includes provides a literary end to his sentence. It expresses what happens when one finally manages to speak and express grief. This is but one of the 6 quotations in the chapter, and each quotation enters into the narration in a slightly different way. For example, there is a moment in the chapter where Montaigne uses two quotations in the span of two sentences:

Chi puo dir com'egli arde, e in picciol fuoco, disent les amoureux qui veulent représenter une passion insupportable.

Misero quod omnes

Eripit sensus mihi : nam, simul te,

Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi

Quod loquar amens :

Lingua sed torpet ; tenuis sub artus

Flamma diamanat ; sonitu suopte

Tinniunt aures : gemina teguntur

Lumina nocte. (23)

He who can describe how his heart is ablaze is burning on a small pyre, that is what lovers say when they want to express unbearable passion. How pitiable I am. Love snatches my senses from me. As soon as I see you, Lesbia, I can say nothing to you; I am out of my mind; my tongue sticks in my mouth; a fiery flame courses through my limbs; my ears are ringing and darkness covers both my eyes. (Screech 9)

These quotations, yet again, play with the notion of emotions that are so strong they cannot be expressed or as strong as a “fiery flame that courses” through one’s body. Thus, in this peculiar arrangement we see that Montaigne is playing with the context of both of these sources. The first quote in Italian is from Petrarch and the second is a stanza of poetry from Catallus. The second quotation here is entered into the narrative in stanzaic structure, with no introduction or explication afterward. In other terms, it is a sort of interjection just included in the narration. This invites the reader to consider both of these quotations, their contexts, and how they play into the piece as well as with each other. Montaigne, here, is taking advantage of the strong pathetic appeal of the quotes themselves and how they function within their original context. These are but a few examples of how Montaigne uses and manipulates quotations in the chapter. Nonetheless, the centerpiece of each essay is Montaigne’s own personal commentary.

In these chapters, Montaigne posits various historical examples and then relates them back to his own personal experience. For example in the first chapter: “Both of these means would have swayed me easily...”³(4)³. This comment is in direct dialogue with the examples and

³ Translated by M.A. Screech

relates the narration back to Montaigne himself. He is opening himself up to the reader and exposing his own opinion and potential vulnerability to the emotions of others at this moment. Given, the examples he is discussing are from various wartime events but he cites his emotional sensibility were he to be encountered with an analogous situation. While perhaps not a very heartwarming or particularly ‘juicy’ secret about himself, this comment is the first example of him accomplishing his goal of “painting himself nude” for his reader. Indirectly, this openness with his reader invites and opens a different line of questioning here. By presenting his own life in some polemic ways (being immune to sadness, or not necessarily swayed to mercy) he is forcing the reader to consider where he stands in relation to these examples. This mode of questioning and meandering format are key features of the Montaignian essay, though, no two chapters are the same in terms of theme, structure, or argument; one could say that this “meandering” quality that is interspersed with personal commentary and abundant dialogue with other voices *is* the Montaignian style.

To recapitulate, I will venture a definition of the this “style.” As we saw in Montaigne’s note to his reader, he claims this is a “domestic and private” piece of writing, and we defined them as a series of thought experiments. From this we can extrapolate that a feature of the Montaignian essay is the first person narrative. Here it is supposed that it is Montaigne himself, but in later iterations of the essay it is not as clear. This first person narrative is also experimenting, by that I mean exploring a topic, sharing its thoughts, and making a case. In Montaigne we saw that these experiments centered on human nature and the pathos of human experience. To do this, he evoked many examples and quotes from the classics and other time period. This is another key feature of the Montaignian essay: interaction with outside voices. As we saw, he employs these outside voices in many different ways. For one, the number of

historical allusions he makes is tremendous. The examples are wound into the personal narrative and typically function as a parallel to Montaigne's own conjecture. For example, the case of Prince Edward in the first chapter demonstrates the impossibility to explain sadness, which we later learn Montaigne may be immune to. We also encounter numerous quotations from the classics. Montaigne is particular in the fact that he chooses to manipulate and change these quotations, but their presence is key to his purposes. These other voices provide parallel contexts from their original sources that enter into play with the frame of mind that Montaigne is attempting to represent. This is, of course, dependent on each example and each essay. Perhaps a final stylistic feature to mention is how the first person narrative functions as a subjective example. Through writing in the first person, he incites his reader to consider what their first person narrative would be like. Now that we have briefly reviewed what the Montaignian style is, how does this style encourage exploration?

There are many ways to answer this question, because there are many ways that this occurs in the text. From the viewpoint of the author, not being restricted to a formal structure, allows one to order examples, thoughts, and conjecture in such a way as to create a unique space for the reader to enter. This lack of formal academic convention also allows the author to interact with sources in new and inventive ways, much like we see with Montaigne who intersperses quotes in the middle of his sentences. From the viewpoint of the reader, the interest in questioning lies in comparing oneself to what Montaigne is presenting. The open and direct nature of the declarations Montaigne makes about himself hold the mirror up to the reader and indirectly asks "what about you?" Additionally, the Montaignian essay invites the reader to consider the classics in new ways. By placing famous historical and classical examples in situation with his own personal life (and indirectly the life of his reader), Montaigne invites the

reader to reconsider his relationship with the classics by relegating them to the realm of human experience and not a source of authority.

All of the features we have just highlighted (first person narrative, free-form organization, interaction with other texts, and taking advantage of the context of other pieces) are all features of what I will define as the essayistic. Montaigne is the first iteration of this methodology, and its implementation reappears throughout history.

2. An invitation to the table: Jorge Luis Borges

Another brilliant mind who chose the essayistic methodology to question our conceptions and worldview is the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges. He was born in 1899 in Buenos Aires, Argentina to a bilingual English and Spanish speaking family (Alazraki 846). After moving to Geneva, Switzerland (where he studied French, German, and Latin) for a period of time after his father began to lose his eyesight, his young adult life lead him back to Buenos Aires, Argentina (Alazraki 846). A man of many talents, he was a poet, essayist, and a librarian, as well as a professor of American literature in Buenos Aires (Rodriguez). Borges' work provides us with an interesting opportunity to discuss a different manifestation of the essayistic. He writes nearly 500 years after Montaigne and yet the parallels we are able to pull from their works are remarkable. Classical citations flow from Montaigne with ease. Borges was just as fluent in the work of both the classics and his own contemporaries. In fact, he was a professor in the Universidad de Buenos Aires for many years, primarily as an English Literature professor but also taught more eccentric subjects such as Anglo-Saxon. In short, his knowledge and his writing ability showed practically no bound. In his works, we find the same kind of assay and playful questioning present in Montaigne. Here we will focus on two examples of the essayistic: "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" ("Pierre Menard, Author of the Quijote") and "Kafka y sus precursores" ("Kafka and his Precursors"). Both are published at different moments and in different collections, but their thematic centers pull them together. The theme of authorship, originality, and authority are the central themes of these essays. Unlike in Montaigne, whose challenging of authority came in a more indirect way, through his use of quotations and the form of his pieces, in Borges this questioning is more outright. Though, we do find many of the same techniques employed in Montaigne. We begin our discussion with "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote."

Originally appearing in the journal *Sur* in Buenos Aires in 1939, this story comes at an extraordinary moment in Borges' life. After falling and injuring his head, Borges spent a period of time in the hospital with severe septicemia, lost the faculty of speech, and was considered to be on the verge of death (Carilla 74). After his recovery, he was haunted by the fear that he would never be able to read or write with the same fluidity and dexterity that he had before. Thus, he decided to try and write something new, something he had not done before. If he failed, it would be less shameful than failing at something he could do before (Alazraki 851). Before "Pierre Menard", Borges had written relatively little narrative. He started his career as a poet, publishing his first piece "Hymn to the Sea" in a journal in Sevilla, Spain (Alazraki 847). Later, Borges published a series of collections of poetry, many of which were inspired by his return to Buenos Aires after approximately 6 years of living in Europe. Although he did publish a collection of essays (*Historia de la eternidad*) and a few short stories, he set out to re-evaluate his writing skills post-accident by writing "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote". This piece is actually considered a short story and was later republished in the well known collection *Ficciones*. It stands out because, in a way, it is a short story that reads as an essay. In other terms, it is a fictional account that employs the essayistic methodology. Consequently, it becomes evident that "Pierre Menard" occupies a very distinct literary space from what we saw in Montaigne.

In both the work of Montaigne and Borges, we see texts that set out to explore particular essays. In Montaigne, his is a journey of self-exploration and attempting to answer questions with anecdote and exploration of the classics. In Borges, as we will see, there is less emphasis on the personal experience and more on challenging previous conceptions on literature and authorship. "Pierre Menard" was written as a sort of re-introduction to literature and published in

a journal (*Sur*), then in a collection (*El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*). In a certain respect, one could say that this is also an essay in self-exploration, in the terms of Borges re-evaluating his acumen as an author. However, that is not the essay that is presented in the text, either implicitly or explicitly. The two authors' works also differ in the way that they were published. Montaigne's *Essais* is a meticulously organized collection whose pieces were published in a set of 3 volumes. Borges' "Pierre Menard" is a stand-alone story that was originally published in a journal, then later in a collection. Thus, we see that each chapter of the *Essais* exists within this network that is the collection. It would be impossible to deny that "Pierre Menard" does exist in a very deep web of intertextuality, in fact it is inherent to the text, but it was not published in concordance with any other text. Another factor to take into consideration was the accessibility of these texts. Borges' was published in a journal, thus easily accessible to his readers, whereas acquiring Montaigne's works would have had a fairly significant price tag. Regardless of the potential socio-political impacts of these differences, we find very strong similarities between the two authors.

As I already mentioned, "Pierre Menard" does have the same notion and feeling of exploration we attributed to the essay in Montaigne. In this instance, the essay centers on the narrative of an invented author, Pierre Menard, and his literary career. In particular, the story is about his exceptional undertaking of re-writing chapters 9 and 38 of the infamous Spanish novel, *El ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*. The main premise is that in having re-written these chapters, Menard has in a way brought new life to them. Our narrator places himself as an old friend of Menard and that what he is about to share with us is the result of a meeting with other old friends as a reaction to an incorrect and incomplete catalog published by Madame Henri Bachelier, and he plans to right this wrong (Borges 47). In a first reading, such a defense

would not draw any suspicion. People do make mistakes. After all, it does seem a formidable challenge to collect and catalog the entirety of an author's works throughout their lifetime. The case at hand, however, is very clear and outright fallacy. It takes nothing more than the title to come to this realization. There are no doubts that Pierre Menard is not the author of "El Quijote", which clearly refers to *El ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes. In effect, even from the title this claim provokes the reader and announces to him that Borges is playing with the notion of authorship. To select a piece of writing that predates himself by centuries and is considered fundamental in literary history –both of Spanish literature and literature worldwide– is a choice that is meant to provoke his potential reader. This declaration is a direct challenge to his reader. It serves as a way to grab the reader's attention and to provoke them into the reading the piece. The selection of *Don Quijote*, instead of any other novel, is not per chance either. In the chapters that Borges signals (9 and 38), there is commentary about authorship made in the chapters in the *Quijote*. In chapter 9, the narrator (who is telling the story of Don Quijote) recounts how he came across accounts of Don Quijote's life written in Arabic by a man named "Cide Hamete Benengeli." He buys a selection of paintings and short texts from a boy selling them on the street, and these texts tell the story of an episode of Don Quijote's life (Cervantes 67). He had a man translate these texts into Spanish so that he may read them, and then continues to recount what he learned from them in the chapter. In fact, he even at one point questions the credibility of these texts: "If any objection can be raised regarding the truth of this one, it can only be that its author was Arabic, since the people of that nation are very prone to telling falsehoods"(Cervantes 68).⁴ Here we have a metanarrative that puts into question the originality of the narrative itself. If the narrator here found these stories authored by someone

⁴ Edith Grossman's Translation

else, who he does not necessarily trust either, then what does that mean for the reader of the piece? While I cannot attempt to answer such a query, it is important to note that Borges selected this chapter where the themes of originality and authorship are present. Interestingly, if one considers the implications that the narrator of the *Quijote* claims that these stories were originally not his (and perhaps by extension Cervantes'), and, thus, authored by someone else; then the Menard version would be a sort of "third-degree" of re-authoring. Of course, that is based in the notion that Don Quijote would have been a real story, which is not the case. Nonetheless, this acts a parallel to what is happening in "Pierre Menard." This is just one example of the deep network of intertextual references this story functions within. This reference functions in almost the same way as the quotations that we saw Montaigne use. By alluding to *Don Quijote*, Borges is including this metanarrative that is so central to *Don Quijote* in his essay. Besides providing a provocative and compelling example, it also provides a literary parallel to the essay at hand. In chapter 38, the other chapter Menard supposedly works with, Don Quijote gives a long speech debating the importance of the "arts" versus the "letters" and the risk of being a "lettered man" (*letrado* in Spanish) or a soldier. Ultimately it boils down to the fact that both are important to society, but that the *letrados* have no risk of imminent death in their profession. The latter seems almost a tongue-in-cheek joke from Borges. It muses: why take this all so seriously? As a result of this, it becomes clear authorship is a prime theme in *Don Quijote*, in which Cervantes appears to be asking many of the same questions Borges searches to pose in "Pierre Menard". Through this re-authoring these particular pieces of the *Quijote*, Menard supposedly renovates and brings new life to these texts (at least as the narrator claims), but it could also be said that Borges himself is reviving these notions for his own essay. Whether in the Cervantes or the Borges, this challenges all of the themes we are interested in: authority, authorship, and originality.

The story starts: “La obra *visible* que ha dejado este novelista es de fácil y breve enumeración” (“The *visible* work that this novelist has left is quickly and easily listed”) (Borges 47). The implicit idea that some of the work is ‘visible’ implies that there is a portion of his collected works that are not visible. One could equate visibility to having been published, but Borges seems to be suggesting something else. If the narrator has access to the ‘invisible’ pieces, perhaps he has a personal relationship with Menard, or, at the minimum, has done more deep and thorough investigation than the other scholars he mentions. Either way, he has poised himself as someone who is very knowledgeable about the subject at hand and is ready to bestow this information on his reader. The idea of a visible ‘works’ implies a certain antithesis, which is revealed to us later in the text where our narrator uncovers the “underground work” of Menard (51). Returning to the idea of the “quick and easy” listing of the catalog of this author, this idea is almost immediately mobilized by our narrator who challenges the catalog of Madame Henri Bachelier (about whom there is no elaboration). With this statement, the narrator establishes certain credibility or authority on Menard and his works. He then fortifies this idea by challenging another and perhaps more reputable catalog. Borges does this purposefully to establish one of the many levels of authority in the narrative here. Interestingly enough, the narrator openly questions his own authority at one point. He states: “Me consta que es muy fácil recusar mi pobre autoridad. Espero, sin embargo, que no me prohibirán mencionar dos altos testimonios.” (“It appears to me that it is easy to reject my feeble authority. I hope, however, that you will not prohibit me from mentioning two high testimonies”) (47). Here the narrator addresses the reader’s concern for his credibility. He is very open and forward with the fact that he may not seem like an authority on the topic, but then he cements his argument with the support of two other voices. This is the first step in the rhetoric employed here that creates the

notion of an argument or thesis. Our narrator is proposing a direct and clear argument (that he can provide a better and more faithful catalog), and providing support and examples to back up this claim. If the reader does not feel compelled with the narrator's own conjecture, he should feel comforted that at least two others have approved or backed the information he is being presented with. These 'authorities' are "La baronesa de Bacourt" and "La condesa de Bagnoregio". Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is no evidence of either of these two noblewomen ever having existed outside of this story. That being said, in terms of our narrative here, they serve the role of peer-reviewers of sorts. In two different moments, our narrator shares how these two notable figures have given him the green light on what follows: the almost entire catalog of the work of Pierre Menard.

This is perhaps a good moment to clarify that there are no records anywhere of a Pierre Menard ever having existed in the real world or having penned a single text. That being said, if you go to a library catalog and enter his name as author of the *El ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, you will find a small edition where he is listed as the author of a selection of chapters. This is a satirical piece conceived by Pierre Huyghe and published in conjunction with the government of the Castilla y Leon province in Spain. Satirical publishing aside, it is important to note that not only did Pierre Menard never author the Quijote; he never authored anything. In fact, there are no records of a Pierre Menard having lived. Emilio Carilla points to the existence of other authors with the last name of Menard and suggests that there is some relation between this fabricated character and the Menard family, but that link does not change our interest here (82). If there was no Pierre Menard, this must only mean that the catalog Borges's narrator proposes is comprised of purposefully and meticulously created fake works. Each and every entry in the catalog, then, represents a specific choice on Borges' part to

influence his reader and create an image of Menard. In fact, he even makes a comment about the catalog in the prologue to his collection *Ficciones* in which the story was later re-published: “La nómina de escritos que le atribuyo [a Pierre Menard] no es demasiado divertida pero no es arbitraria: es un diagrama de su historia mental. . .” [“The list of writings that I attribute [to Pierre Menard] is not very funny but isn’t arbitrary either: it is a diagram of his mental history. . .” (11). Borges has gone very far in depth with the creation of this fictitious author. One can ask, to what end? A potential answer to this question would be that Borges merely thought it were an interesting writing exercise. However this diminishes the piece. The careful construction of this falsified catalog, the claim of the authoring of the Quijote, and the overall tone of the piece serve here as a way to force the reader into considering his own conception of authorship. Thus, the ultimate end here is to make the reader think. In other words, Borges is indirectly inviting his reader to the table to take part in this conversation. He posits the idea that Menard has rewritten the Quijote, and now his reader must either agree or refute the case for himself. This is a part of what is implicitly at stake in the text.

The topics covered by Menard according to his catalog range French poetry (which is his supposed specialty), to discussions of Leibniz and Descartes, and even the symbolic logic of George Boole. One must not forget that none the pieces cited in the catalog exist, though the topics most certainly do. This is true with the exception of one of the publications he cites the “Revue des langues romanes” which was indeed published in Montpellier. I have consulted the issues referenced in the story, and they do not contain any trace of Pierre Menard nor the articles mentioned here. Following the comment in the prologue, the “mental history” this paints of Pierre Menard is certainly an interesting one but it should be noted that there is one fairly important thing missing: there is no previous evidence that he ever wrote about any Spanish

literature or any texts in Spanish before in his life. To that end, there is no evidence that he spoke Spanish previous to this endeavor either. In other terms, that he is certainly not a “cervantista”, regardless of how much he dedicates himself to these few chapters (Carilla 78). This highlights the impossibility of such an undertaking, perhaps even to a humorous extent. Positing these ideas could be read as a playful and open rhetoric used by Borges. He has gone to the extreme to highlight the questions and themes that are at stake here: originality and authorship. In terms of the narration, however, we still do not quite know how Menard could have then authored parts of the *Quijote*? The story tells that he searches to accomplish this by “Conocer bien el español, recuperar la fé católica, guerrear contra los moros o contra el turco. . . ser Miguel de Cervantes” (“Become fluent in Spanish, recover his Catholicism, wage war on the moors or the turks. . . be Miguel de Cervantes”) (52-3). This enumeration of impossible tasks that Menard sets out to do, is only the beginning of the project at hand. His goal is to “No quería componer otro *Quijote* – lo cual es fácil – sino el *Quijote*” (“He did not want to write another *Quijote* – which is easy – but rather write the *Quijote*” (52). Our narrator adds that Menard’s project was not to copy the original but that “Su admirable ambición era producir unas páginas que coincidieran –palabra por palabra y línea por línea – con las de Miguel de Cervantes” (“His admirable ambition was to produce some pages that were to coincide word for word and line for line with those of Miguel de Cervantes” (52). In other words, not copy but re-author.

This is a direct assault on the idea of originality and ownership. It is worth noting that Borges does not come about these questions and notions in quite the same coy fashion we find in Montaigne, whose writing also asks its reader to question his authority. He is much more outright. The provocative nature of the title of the story opens this discussion. Borges then creates this falsified case in which to force the reader to consider the potential re-authoring of the

text. In making this case, he even highlights and addresses speculations the reader himself may have:

¿Por qué precisamente el Quijote? dirá nuestro lector. Esa preferencia, en un español, no hubiera sido inexplicable; pero sin duda lo es en un simbolista de Nîmes, devoto esencialmente de Poe, que engendró a Baudelaire. . . ‘El Quijote,’ aclara Menard, ‘me interesa profundamente, pero no me parece . . . inevitable. . . Why exactly the Quijote?’ our reader would ask. This preference in a Spaniard wouldn’t have be unexplainable; but it most certainly is in a symbolist from Nîmes, especially dedicated to Poe, who conceived Baudelaire. . . ‘The Quijote’ clarifies Menard ‘interests me very deeply, but doesn’t seem to me to be . . . inevitable. . .’ (54)

This is an interesting choice from a rhetorical standpoint. It is commonly considered good academic practice that when one is making an argument that one should address a potential counterargument. In doing so, one is demonstrating the strength and validity of his argument and refuting others. In a way, this is precisely what Borges is doing. He is disarming his reader by anticipating and providing an answer to his question. Given all of this, the answer to this question is not very enlightening. In this direct quote from Menard we learn that he has a deep interest in the piece but that it does not occupy an important enough role in his literary world to be “inevitable”. Perhaps for this it is a more interesting endeavor, but this still is not a fulfilling answer. In fact it only seems to complicate things. What does this mean in terms of Borges’ essay on authorship and originality? It is simultaneously building another layer on the credibility for the narrator, and an attack on the idea of authorship. If an author can rewrite a book (or portions of one) by recreating the state the original author was in, then the original author has no

authority or originality over the texts, for it is his context and situation that allowed him to write. In addressing the choice of the *Quijote*, there is no attention paid to the notion that the narrator highlights: that this is a surprising choice for a French scholar and whose main focus is poetry. One way to read this is that the choice was nothing short of random. Nonetheless, in this moment the narrator again attempts to cement his credibility with the reader. Let us do a brief review of these moments.

First we have the declaration that the work of Menard is “quickly and easily listed”, followed by the immediate challenge to the catalog of “Madame Henri Bachelier”, whose “omissions and additions perpetrated . . . in a fallacious catalog” are unfit and unjust in the eyes of our narrator (47). Then our narrator humbly sheds light on his possible lack of expertise. In fact, he even uses the term “authority”: “Me consta que es. . . mi pobre autoridad” (47-8). He then re-establishes his reader’s faith in him with what he claims to be the approval of two “high testimonies” of the baroness and the countess, who approved the catalog that follows (47-51). Along with this catalog, we have a couple short footnotes that elaborate on the information, citing again Madame Henri Bachelier as a source. After the catalog, the piece then frames the particular undertaking of the *Quijote* citing various comments from Menard himself. Thus, the levels of authority and legitimacy of authorship in the text go from the narrator noting an error in another catalog, conversing and getting the approval of other scholars on Menard, and finishes with personal testimony from the author himself. These are some the ways in which the narrative suggests the authority of the narrator himself, but Borges also takes advantage of certain formal features of the text. In particular, I would like to comment on the use of footnotes.

As we saw in Montaigne, the use of quotations can be seen as a challenge to the original authors of the texts. This is particularly true in the cases where Montaigne changes the quotations

without signaling the change or even the original author. In this story, Borges is very careful to make sure that each “fact” his narrator presents is attributed to someone. As we just saw, the narrator recuses his own authority and cites the information of others. One could even say that the catalog he includes roughly falls within the notion of formal academic acknowledgement by including some of the names of the “publications” in which Menard’s hypothetical pieces would have appeared. Thus, we have the catalog as form of almost academic authority and credibility. Then we also have footnotes. Let us look at one of them. The following footnote is linked to the catalog entry “Una lista manuscrita de versos que deben su eficacia a la puntuación” (“A handwritten list of lines that owe their efficiency to punctuation”). The footnote elaborates:

Madame Henri Bachelier enumera asimismo una versión literal de versión literal que hizo Quevedo de la *Introduction à la vie dévote* de san Francisco de Sales. En la biblioteca de Pierre Menard no hay rastros de tal obra. Debe tratarse de una broma de nuestro amigo, mal escuchada.

Likewise, Madame Henri Bachelier lists a literal version that Quevedo did of the *Introduction à la vie devote* by Saint Francis of Sales. In Pierre Menard’s library, there are no traces of said work. It must be a misunderstood joke by our friend (49-51).

Our narrator uses the footnote to include another fact about Menard, much like one would see in a piece of formal academic writing. It highlights one of the flaws –including a piece that never existed in a catalog– of the work of Madame Henri Bachelier. It also provides an indirect commentary of the story. Is all of this a misunderstood joke? If Madame Bachelier was mistaken about the verisimilitude of the other piece, does that mean the reader here should do the same? The footnote here opens up these questions by highlighting a parallel to what it accomplishes in its own narrative. In short, it is an interesting moment of meta-narrative. If one were to forget

that Pierre Menard never actually existed, this could be a compelling case. On the surface, it appears the case here to be proven is that someone could actually undertake the project of rewriting a piece of medieval literature following the same procedure as Menard. Since we know objectively that Pierre Menard as an author never existed, we can only read into all of these choices and moments as a way to raise questions about what being an author means and how the themes of originality are present in a text. This does beg the question, however, what if the reader does not realize that both Pierre Menard and his authorial career are fabricated?

It is very easy to characterize Borges, and Montaigne as well, as authors who are actively attempting to deceive their readers with complex rhetoric and falsified information. However, that would be an unfair judgment of what is really going on in these texts. A large feature of the essayistic, which is perhaps most prevalent in Borges, is that it absolutely requires an active reader. The essayistic does not necessarily ever state outright the commentary or argument it would like to make. Instead we meander through artfully crafted examples, quotes, and personal conjecture. It is then up to the reader to see what he or she can pull from the text at hand. It would be reductive to attempt to say that each essay has only one goal, but it would be safe to say that one of the primary goals of “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” is for its reader to consider and determine for themselves what originality means in terms of an idea or in literature. Is an author the owner of an idea or specific set of words? Do they believe that someone could in fact complete the project that Menard has set out to do, or do they immediately see through the game Borges is trying to play? That is precisely what is at stake in the text.

Another example of the essayistic at play in the work of Borges is “Kafka y sus precursores” (“Kafka and his Precursors”). This essay was published as an essay in the collection

Otras Inquisiciones in 1952. In a very Montaignian fashion, this piece is written in the first person and opens on a statement in the first person:

Yo premedité alguna vez un examen de los precursores de Kafka. A éste, al principio, lo pensé tan singular como el fénix de las alabanzas retóricas; a poco de frecuentarlo, creí reconocer su voz, o sus hábitos, en textos de diversas literaturas y de diversas épocas.

At one time I considered writing a study of Kafka's precursors. I had thought at first, that he was as unique as the phoenix of rhetorical praise; after spending a little time with him, I felt I could recognize his voice, or his habits in the texts of various literatures and various ages.⁵ (710; 363)

Here note the very present first person. The voice talking here is not a voice of objective reason, it is a singular voice that is going trying to persuade and convince his reader. This harkens back to Montaigne, whose first person free-flowing voice led us through his chapters. Borges' use of examples and literary allusions also remind us of Montaigne. Keeping this in mind as we continue our reading of Borges will only cement our understanding of how Montaigne's project laid the foundation for the essayistic. Returning to the text at hand, the narrator also employs very literary language to characterize Kafka as a unique and important author ("tan singular como el fénix de las alabanzas retóricas"). This is paralleled, though perhaps subliminally, with the entry he cites by Han Yu, an Ancient Chinese author, that tells of the elusive and magical nature of the unicorn. Thus, we have Kafka who appears to be characterized both as a phoenix and a unicorn. We also have the essay proposed here in the piece present in this first few lines: an exploration of the Kafkian in various literatures of various ages. The essay brings the reader

⁵ Weinburger Translation

through a long and very eclectic list of texts. We start with Zeno's paradox, which dates to the 5th century BC, and end with a story by Lord Dunsany, a 20th century British author. The range of topics that Borges includes as some of the precursors of Kafka includes ancient Greek theories on motion, a Chinese author from the 8th-9th century, Kierkegaard, and English poetry. Putting all of these texts together in the essay makes the reader consider what the potential connections between the pieces may be. However, in this case, there is only one link: Borges' perceived reading of the Kafkian in these texts. Considered outside this lens, the examples appear almost chosen at random. Let us look more closely at these examples.

We start with the Paradox of Zenon, which describes the impossibility of arriving at a set location, because before arriving one must first cross half the distance, then half of the half, etc. This is linked to Kafka's novel *The Castle*: "la forma de este ilustre problema es, exactamente, la de *El Castillo*, el móvil y la flecha y Aquiles con los primeros personajes kafkianos de la literatura" ("the form of this distinguished problem is, exactly that of *The Castle*, and the motive, the arrow, and Achilles are the first Kafkian characters of literature") (710). Logic leads one to believe that there is some link between Zeno's paradox and the protagonist of *The Castle*. Perhaps he finds himself in some sort of impossible quest. The claims about the arrow and Achilles seem to appear without any foundation, as they bear no immediate relation to Zenon nor *The Castle*. However, it is a striking declaration: that they represent the first Kafkian characters in literature. Achilles is the protagonist of the *Iliad* by Homer, and his story dates back to Ancient Greece. In short, the narrator is claiming to have read traces of Kafka in these ancient Greek myths. This sort of extreme opinion only continues with a very similar claim but about the work of ancient Chinese writer, Han Yu. Before we consider what the essay says explicitly about the Kafka-Han Yu connection, it is worth highlighting that the narrator here is reading the

Kafkian in texts outside of the Western Canon. Is it possible that Kafka would have read books outside of his own time and culture? I would venture that it is more than possible but rather a certainty. The inclusion of Chinese literature here highlights the apparent diversity of the places where Kafka can be read into the pieces. Thus we have the quote from Han Yu.

Our narrator provides us with a long quote to demonstrate the connection between Han Yu and Kafka, but he highlights that it is not a question of “form but rather tone” (710). He also cites the anthology from which he takes this quote, which reflects modern practices of citation. This was something that we did not have in Montaigne. Unlike the sources from “Pierre Menard”, this anthology is real and can be referenced by any motivated reader of the essay. The paragraph that is provided is characterized as “mysterious and calm” and discusses the unicorn. This quote is accompanied with a footnote directing the reader to the last chapter of a book by Carl Jung in which there are two illustrations of the unicorn. The selection of this section on the unicorn serves more than one purpose. There is the possible reading I have already suggested which is subliminally characterizing Kafka like a unicorn, thus unique and hard to identify. Another purpose this quote may play in the essay is that of representing the impossibility quest of finding a “true author” or the real “original” idea or thought. If we remain within the frame of mind where Borges is making his reader think about what defines an author and how one defines a precursor, perhaps with this quotation he is indirectly saying that we would not be able to define it even if it was in front of us. After all, that is what the quote says about the unicorn: “En tales condiciones, podríamos estar frente al unicornio y no sabríamos con seguridad lo que es.” (“Under such conditions, we could be in right in front of a unicorn and not be sure what it is.”) (710). However, if one goes to the anthology that Borges cites and reads the rest of the aphorism, the text says that “lorsqu’apparaît une licorne, il y a toujours un sage accompli qui s’y trouve;

c'est que pour le sage que la licorne apparaît. Or, un sage accompli est sûr de reconnaître la licorne..." ("as soon as a unicorn appears, there is always an accomplished wise man there; Unicorns only appear for wise men. Because, an accomplished wise man is sure to recognize the unicorn. . .") (Yu 121). Thus, the elusive unicorn only shows up for the intellectual. Perhaps this is also the case for the meditation on Kafka's precursors? Only the "accomplished sage" can appropriately recognize them. This is another example where the active reader has to take the extra step to return to the cited text. This speaks volumes to the attention to detail that Borges has attributed to these texts. Though they may read as conversational and informal, they are actually representative of a very complex web of meanings.

Returning to the essay, the third text that Borges presents us with is from Kierkegaard. This link is seen as the most "foreseeable" of the texts, and the similar "mental affinities" between the authors is cited as the reason. Borges claims that other critics have yet to observe that the work of Kierkegaard "like Kafka, abounds in religious parables with a contemporary and bourgeois theme" (710). Borges then elaborates on the two parables in which he finds this Kafkaian "contemporary and bourgeois" sentiment. The fourth text Borges cites is the poem "Fears and Scruples" by Robert Browning. Just as in the parables of Kierkegaard, Borges provides a brief summary of the poem. He tells of a man who had a friend who he had never seen. He was a "famous friend". The poem ends: "¿Y si este amigo fuera Dios?" ("And if this friend were God?") (711). Having a friend in God seems almost as absurd as the apparition of a unicorn, thus creating an interesting parallel. The long enumeration of examples ends with two stories, one by León Bloy, a French author, and the other by Lord Dunsany, a British author. Borges use of all of these examples harkens back to Montaigne. They are placed in the narration but not necessarily explained. Borges does give his reader either a short summary of each piece

or a quotation, but neglects to fill in the reader with a real explication of the role of the example or quote in the essay. In this case, we do know that they are all texts that relate back to Kafka in some way just as in Montaigne we knew that those examples shared the common thread of interrogation on human emotion. With this framework in mind, the reader does have some guidance within these examples, but it would require years of study to perhaps extrapolate exactly what Borges is suggesting the particular quality of each text is. It is also worth highlighting that all of the texts and examples Borges puts forth here are real texts; they exist for the reader to consult.

In “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote”, the commentary sprouted from the presentation of false information as truth. Alternatively, in “Kafka y sus precursores”, there are very real pieces of information being mobilized to persuade the reader into believing something that may not be true. In both of these instances we can see that the essayistic form allows a specific kind of questioning. Both employ a first person voice trying to persuade his audience into believing something. In “Kafka y sus precursores” it follows through an almost Montaignian enumeration of examples of texts. This is followed by more commentary in the first person, but it is commentary that may put the narrator’s credibility in question. We have: “Si no me equivoco, las heterogéneas piezas que he enumerados se parecen a Kafka; si no me equivoco, no todas se parecen entre sí.” (“If I am not mistaken, the heterogeneous pieces that I have listed seem like Kafka; if I am not mistaken, they do not all seem like each other”) (710). One way to read these parallel “Si no me equivoco” statements is the author putting his own viewpoint into doubt. This could be seen as an opening for the reader to decide whether or not they agree or support the essay being put forth. Another reading of these statements is a coy reminder that Borges is still at the helm of this narrative. Read with a slightly sarcastic tone and in conjunction with the rest of

the sentence, Borges here is highlighting the somewhat obvious: that the pieces do not at bear a resemblance. His claim that they all resemble Kafka is less evident, however. Up until this point in the essay, Borges is making his claim for the Kafkian in all of these various authors. But he does not explicitly ever state what the influence or voice of Kafka actually resembles. Perhaps, this means that there is more at stake here than an essay on the Kafkian in literature.

The most interesting part of this essay is actually found at end “El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores.” (“The fact is that each writer *creates* his precursors.”) (712). This statement begs the obvious question: how can one create ones precursor? The term precursor very clearly signifies “a person or thing that comes before another of the same kind” and has its roots from the Latin “*prae*” and “*currere*”, meaning, respectively, “beforehand” and “to run” (“precursor”). This essay falls within the same line of questioning in we found in “Pierre Menard”. The notion is that a contemporary adaptation or act of writing can somehow have a profound influence on how we view the pieces that come before it. In “Pierre Menard” all the choices of Menard from “choosing” to situate the piece in 16th century Spain to writing it in Spanish, all bore new meaning because of his context as an author and the context of his more modern reader. This was the case regardless of the fact that the hypothetical pieces he wrote coincided word-for-word with Cervantes’ original. In the case of “Kafka y sus precursores”, there is no actual re-writing of any pieces, but rather a renovated notion of reading. After reading Kafka, our narrator cannot help but to see the Kafkian idiosyncrasies in many other authors. A potential reading of this it perhaps not the original author who has the final say on their own piece but rather the reader can interpret whichever sense they would like. Regardless of the reading one does of these different essays on authorship and originality, what is worth highlighting is that they encourage the reader to enter the discussion.

In these two texts, Borges takes the features of the essayistic we say in Montaigne such as the first person narrative voice, innovative use of examples and quotations, and the notion of essay to a new level. He openly challenges the notion of authorship and originality with the narrative about Pierre Menard and his hypothetical authorship, just as much as the claim that one creates his own precursors. In these pieces these claims are pushed almost to the limit of absurdity, because Borges wants to highlight the questions they entail about authorship and how we conceive of it. Consequently, he also wants to compel his reader to consider them as well. It is almost as if Borges has invited the reader to sit down and discuss these themes. Through the essayistic nature of these texts, we see that Borges has opened a discussion in the hopes that his reader will run with it. In other words, he opens a playful conversation.

3. The Final Essay: My Essay

Thus far we have seen two very different authors from two very different time periods. Michel de Montaigne was a 16th Century French statesman and Jorge Luis Borges an Argentine professor of the 20th century. To compare them side-by-side seems like an almost arbitrary choice, but their works that we have seen here have some striking parallels. What precisely could be similar between two authors who wrote 4 centuries apart from one another? It is the spirit of playfulness and exploration that is present in both. Montaigne writes in a time where formal academic writing was king, yet his *Les Essais* defy formal structure and academic convention. His use of the first person narrative in his free form thought experiments broke the mold for writing, and this style and methodology continue in use today. In fact, it is precisely what links these two authors together. Borges employs a very similar tone and approach to this explorative narrative that we find in Montaigne. He inherits this long tradition and uses it to push the open questions the notions of authority, authorship, and originality. While they are not all similar in subject matter, the four pieces we saw here are similar in the ways that they interact with their readers, how they present information, and how they encourage thought. They are all representative of what I call the essayistic.

The term “essayistic” is typically used as an adjective, relating back to the noun essay. This term appears as a noun in Claire de Obaldia’s book *The Essayistic Spirit*, where it is used in a discussion on the various manifestations or tendencies of the essay:

The opposition has, in fact, been interpreted in terms of mode versus genre, with the ‘essayistic’ as an attitude (the open-ended dimension of the form) attributed to Montaigne, and the essay itself as a closed form of art identified with Bacon (37).

This appears in terms of the greater notions of the struggle of categorizing the essay; in particular the opposition between the “meditative” and “argumentative” essay. The essay, in this discussion, exists on the fringe of literature through its use of many elements typically attributed to literature (the poetic, the metaphor, allegory, etc), but the essay also argues and persuades, something typically reserved to writing outside the realm of literature. From this defiance to fit neatly under the umbrella of neither literature nor critical writing, comes the discussion of mode versus “closed form.” Here I have chosen to borrow the term “essayistic” from this discussion, but not with the goal of highlighting the dichotomy de Obaldia presents. Rather, I would like to re-define and expand on this notion of the “open-ended form” as it relates back to the examples we have seen here. An “open-ended form” is a form that has no strict definition, a form that has a different meaning to each author or reader. A common iteration of this phrase in every day life is the infamous “open-ended question” on an exam or evaluation. While that can be terrifying for students, for Montaigne and Borges it meant they had a blank canvas to fill and no rules to follow. This allowed them to explore new and intriguing ways to communicate their message and challenge their reader. Having this discussion in terms of form, though, does not suit our interest here. While the form of each of the pieces we saw here is very important in terms of the piece itself, there is no universal relation between form and content in these four pieces. From this we can conclude that the essayistic does not have or require a set form. Thus, I posit that we should consider the essayistic as a methodology for writing, instead of being preoccupied with generic distinctions such as essay or short story. I also propose that it is this methodology that Montaigne inaugurated and that Borges later inherits and renovates in writing the pieces that we saw here. Now, I will venture a definition of the essayistic.

There are three main pillars of the essayistic: playfulness, exploration, and conversation. In the spirit of exploration, we will start there. The open-ended nature of the essayistic permits one to explore a new topic or idea. The essayistic, as we have seen it here, explores a topic or theme. From this, we have the notion of the essay from our discussion of Montaigne. An essay in terms of the essayistic is the thought experiment at hand. It is the question one looks to explore or answer, and the question the author wants his reader to take into consideration. The explorative part of the essayistic, the essay, can be conceived to have dual nature. There is an essay that is explicit in the text, and there is one that is implicit. Much like the denominations I have given suggest, the explicit essay is what the narrative or the text do on a surface level and the implicit essay is comprised of everything that the explicit leaves unsaid or suggests. In a certain way, the implicit essay can be considered as the “bigger picture” part of the essayistic. Perhaps the clearest example of the dual nature of the essay is “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” by Borges. To read this story without any critical distance from the narrative is to read about this author, Pierre Menard, who re-wrote parts of the novel *Quijote*. In other words, the explicit essay in the text is to make a case for Menard, refute the incorrect catalog proposed by “Madame Bachelier”, and expand on Menard’s motivation for undertaking the endeavor. The implicit essay here is contingent on the reader’s knowledge that that Menard did not actually write the *Quijote*, and furthered once one realizes that every fact in the story is completely invented by Borges. Thus, the implicit essay is a questioning by Borges of how we consider authority and originality in a text. This manifests in various ways in the text. For example, in making the case for Menard the narrator claims that others have verified his information (“La condesa” and “la baronesa”), and he provides a catalog. Borges provides this catalog of works and even includes footnotes in order to mimic formal academic convention. By implementing this same style but with false

information, Borges presents his readers with a contradiction that they must resolve themselves. Thus, the implicit and the explicit essay work hand in hand. The textual features that in the text function explicitly as “textual evidence” in support of Menard also are precisely what encourages the kind of questioning and interrogation that is found in the implicit essay. In this example we have seen that the essayistic does not just search to explore a topic or theme, it also explores new ways to make the reader think about them. This is also the case for Montaigne.

Exploration in Montaigne takes a different form. He essentially created the essayistic and invented the essay through the project of *Les Essais*. Thus, we must recognize the explorative nature of his undertaking. He was exploring a new style of writing. His essays are based in life or lived experience. He presents the project as a “domestic and private” undertaking, but it is clear that the work was prepared and aimed at a readership. If we look at the example of the first chapter of the collection “By Different Means We All Arrive at the Same End”, we see that it opens on a declaration about mercy and pity, which follows through a range of historical examples, arrives at a personal statement from the narrator, and continues with more examples. The explicit essay here is to support the opening statement of the chapter: “La plus commune façon d’amollir les cœurs de ceux qu’on a offensés, lorsqu’ayant la vengeance en main ils nous tiennent à leur merci, c’est de les émouvoir par soumission à commisération et à pitié” (“The most common way to soften the hearts of those whom we have offended, whom, having vengeance at their will have us at their mercy, is to move them by submission to commiseration and to mercy”) (21). This is accomplished via the plethora of historical examples presented by Montaigne and then framed with his own personal commentary that “L’un et l’autre de ces deux moyens m’emporterait aisément . . .” (“Both of these means would have swayed me easily. . .”) (21). The explicit essay in this case is a case study of compassion and how it causes people to

change their actions. The implicit essay has to do with Montaigne's personal statement. He makes very bold claims here, which causes his reader to react. His reader must decide whether or not he agrees with that what Montaigne is posting. Montaigne's *Je* holds the mirror up to the reader and makes him consider what his *Je* would do. Thus, Montaigne is exploring not only human nature and human emotion, but also a new writing form and a new way to interact with his reader. His goal is to enter into a conversation with his reader.

Conversation is at play in the essayistic in many different ways. First, we shall discuss the reader-author-narrator relation. As we saw in the discussion of the implicit and explicit elements of the essay, the reader is engaged in the essayistic. In considering the explicit, he is lead to the implicit questioning or challenge that is posited by the author. It can be said that the essayistic, then, requires an active and engaged reader. This is because of the essayistic's ability and tendency to challenge its reader. By presenting provocative claims and rarely explicating the examples and references used, the essayistic leaves the reader no choice but to enter into the discussion and take an active role. In "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote", this challenge is very direct. The reader is confronted with this parallel universe and must process this information and consider what the implications of the fake case of Pierre Menard means for how he considers authority and originality. Borges takes this notion almost to the realm of the absurd. The inherent irony of employing features such as footnotes – which signify authority and originality by formally acknowledging the source of a text or an idea – to make the case for an invented author using fabricated examples is practically a mockery of the academic notions of authority and originality. Not only that, it also provokes the reader. In a way, one could say that this example forces the reader into conversation with the piece. It is not only the reader, however, who enters into the conversation. The pieces we have seen here each exist within a large web of

intertextuality. In each piece there are references, both indirect and direct to other texts. Montaigne employs over 1,300 Latin quotations from the classics (Sellevold 149). Both of the texts by Borges we have seen are based in this notion of intertextuality. In one, the *Quijote* takes the center stage, and in the other, it is Kafka. All of these cultural and literary references carry their original context with them. Thus, a quotation is more than just words, but rather the inclusion of another context or example. Montaigne employs them as a way to support or develop his argument. In fact, this is one of the ways that Montaigne challenges authority. In just one of the chapters we look at (“De la tristesse”), he uses six different quotations. When Montaigne quotes in this chapter, he does not attribute the quotes to anyone. They typically appear just as a part of his sentence and sometimes follow a colon as an example, but there is rarely any exposition on the quote or its source. This can mean a few different things for our reader. If one considers the cultural moment in which Montaigne was writing, then perhaps his readers would have had enough familiarity with the classics to recognize the quotations. However, today, the modern reader is not as well versed and, were it not for the many footnotes, would be lost. Nonetheless, the way he implements these quotations is anything but ordinary. In “De la tristesse” (“On Sadness”) there is a peculiar moment where, in the span of two sentences, Montaigne employs two different quotes, from two different authors, in two different languages:

Chi puo dir com'egli arde, e in picciol fuoco, disent les amoureux qui veulent représenter une passion insupportable.

Misero quod omnes

Eripit sensus mihi : nam, simul te,

Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi

Quod loquar amens :

Lingua sed torpet ; tenuis sub artus

Flamma diamanat ; sonitu suopte

Tinniunt aures : gemina teguntur

Lumina nocte. (23)

He who can describe how his heart is ablaze is burning on a small pyre, that is what lovers say when they want to express unbearable passion. How pitiable I am. Love snatches my senses from me. As soon as I see you, Lesbia, I can say nothing to you; I am out of my mind; my tongue sticks in my mouth; a fiery flame courses through my limbs; my ears are ringing and darkness covers both my eyes. (Screech 9)

In the chapter, these quotes are preceded by a story about Prince Ferdinand who was so moved upon discovering his son's dead body after a battle that he toppled over dead. These quotes, however, do not share any immediate connection to this account. They can be read as examples or allusions to other moments where emotion has overtaken the person feeling it. In the first quotation, which is from a sonnet by Petrarch, states that if one can accurately explain how one feels, he must be burning to death on a pyre. This suggests the impossibility of expressing human emotion, which we can postulate is also a central theme in the sonnet from whence it came. The second example has the same themes. This time coming from Cattulus, an Ancient Latin poet, it appears to be a stanza of poetry. In this stanza, love overtakes a person like a "fiery flame [that] courses" through the body. This can be read as another example of the power of emotion and the impotence of anyone to stop or corral them. The manner in which these quotes are employed in the narrative is also of interest. Considered in terms of the narrative, these examples can be seen as literary illustrations or parallels to the account of Prince Ferdinand. However, on the page they play a different role. One quotation starts the first sentence we see here which is then finished by

Montaigne's own narrative voice. The next quote directly follows this without any set up or introduction. In fact this second quotation is set aside and presented in stanzaic form. In other words, Montaigne starts one sentence with a quote and follows this sentence with a stanza of poetry. This is representative of the exploratory nature of *Les Essais*. He manipulates these quotes to suit his purposes. As we saw in our previous discussion of Montaigne, he frequently changed the fragments he uses, either by changing the syntax or words used. Consequently, the conversation between all of these voices is tailored and trimmed by our author. In other words, one could say he exercises his own authority in the text instead of respecting the originality or ownership of the pieces the original authors may have had. Clearly all of this manipulation must serve a purpose, after all. When both Montaigne and Borges cite other authors, they are not only borrowing the words of the other author, but they are integrating the context the quote comes from. When Montaigne includes all of these quotations in one essay, he is clearly aware of this plethora of varying contexts and expects his reader to consider them in terms of their relationship back to the topic at hand: sadness and human emotion in a more general sense. At play here, then, are Montaigne's own personal opinions and conjectures, the contexts of the many pieces he quotes from, and the reader's own interpretation. The essayistic is marvelous because it is a methodology that allows a space for each of these voices to take part in the piece. One could even say that this multitude of voices is an inherent part of the essayistic. It is all a question of conversation. Not just any conversation though, it is always a playful one.

What does playfulness mean in terms of the essayistic? There are many different ways that playfulness is present in the pieces we say. In a more general sense, it can be defined as the spirit of challenging the ideas and conceptions of the reader. This is not carried out in a malicious manner, or with the intent of disproving any conception the reader may have. The notion of play

is to highlight some of these conceptions in a new and interesting way. These texts are not “writing for the sake of writing”, but rather they were conceived and crafted in order to challenge the norm, break the mold, and explore uncharted territory. This is true whether we speak of Montaigne who invented the essayistic or Borges who challenged the notion of the author and academic integrity. Playfulness is also present in the explorative and conversational components of the essayistic. The exploration is done in such a way to challenge the reader and the general conception of certain themes. In other words, to play with these notions to make something new and intriguing come forth. For example, in “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” the play with the notion of academic convention and authorship engenders new and intriguing consideration of the same notion. It also results in the very interesting and complex text itself. The conversational component is to enter in play with the voices, thoughts, and ideas of others in order to make the reader consider their own. This is very present in Montaigne who employs a multitude of examples in quotes in “De la tristesse” to illustrate his point. A potential reading of playfulness is also that the essayistic plays with the reader. It leads them through a first person narrative that is sprinkled with various examples, quotations, and, frequently, provocative declarations. For example, Montaigne claiming he is immune to sadness, or Borges saying that Menard wrote the *Quijote*. This kind of narration plays with readers’ previous conceptions of these topics and also how they read. To read passively would be to only read the explicit component of the essay. There are so many layers and levels of commentary in these pieces that there is a practically infinite number of possible readings. For example, in “Kafka y sus precursores” Borges presents his reader with a wide variety of examples. The piece includes references or quotes from Ancient Greek, Ancient Chinese, and 19th century authors, among others. All of these examples are placed in relation to one author and the challenge to the reader that manifests in one statement:

“El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores.” (“The fact is that each writer *creates* his precursors.”) (Borges 712). The reader must take the time to first consider each of the examples presented and their relationship to Kafka, then he arrives at this statement (which is presented near the end of the essay), and finally must reconsider the notion of the precursor. This is Borges playing with his reader. He constructs the text in such a way that perhaps there is no clear link between the examples, and this forces his reader to make his own or not. It is, after all possible, that there are no connections. He also plays with the traditional notion of the author. If after reading one author, you can only read this author’s style in the texts of others, then this author could be said to be the dominant author in each piece. This is but one reading that it possible from the essay. The reader must then decide for himself what this means in terms of his understanding of authorship and originality. This is but one of the many ways that the playful spirit manifests in the essay. It is the playful nature of these texts that first interested me in studying them. As a reader, one must always read with a certain degree of separation and with these two authors, there is so much to read, comment, analyze, consider, and question that there is also play from the reader’s perspective. Thus far I have characterized the essayistic as a methodology that forces the reader into considering notions and topics, which in certain cases may be the truth, but that is not universally true. The playful nature of the essayistic also invites the reader in and gives him agency in the text. It is the reader who refutes or accepts the premise, and it is the reader who must enter into this perpetual conversation. In a few brief words, the essayistic is this playful methodology that invites its reader to consider new topics or themes by employing a first person, persuasive narrator to present a multifaceted argument or narrative. In the examples we saw here, the essayistic is employed to challenge the notions authority,

authorship, and originality in various ways. Let us review the texts we saw and highlight how the essayistic permits this kind of questioning.

Montaigne is considered by many to be the father of the essay. He inaugurated it in 1580 with the publication of the first two volumes of *Les Essais* in Bordeaux, France. In terms of my analysis, however, we will consider him the father of the essayistic. Though in his note to his reader – as we saw in the chapter on Montaigne – he claims that the endeavor was nothing but a “private and domestic” piece of writing, the essayistic nature of his writing suggests otherwise. His implementation of a very present first person narrative has an almost conversational tone and he mobilizes a striking amount of historical reference and classical quotation. A personal narrative voice may not be unheard of in a diary or memoir, perhaps two of the most “domestic and private” writing forms, but here it is not a question of autobiography or simple recounting of facts. Montaigne is problematizing human nature and his own emotions and tendencies. In the collection as a whole, he takes on themes such as drunkenness, death, cannibals, and laziness. This wide range of themes is representative of emotions, feelings, or experiences one encounters throughout life. The examples we have seen here are more explicitly about human emotion, and, in particular, mercy, pity, and sadness.

In the first chapter of *Les Essais* “Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin” (“By Different Means We All Arrive at the Same End”), Montaigne presents us with an example of how the essayistic can be used to challenge authority. First we will examine is the exploration of historical references. In this short chapter, there are 5 different historical events taken into consideration. There are the accounts of “Édouard, prince de Galles”, “Scanderberg, prince de l’Épire”, “l’empereur Conrad troisième”, “Denys le Vieil”, and “Alexandre”. Each of these examples is accompanied with a short account about how each person was either moved, or not,

to be merciful by the actions of others. Let us take for example the account of Conrad troisième. The emperor had taken siege of the land of the Duke of “Bavière” and let the women escape on only one condition: “de sortir, leur honneur sauf, à pied, avec ce qu’elles pourraient emporter sur elles” (“to come out honourably on foot, together with whatever they could carry on their persons” (Montaigne 21; Screech 4). Their response to this was to “charger sur leurs épaules leurs maris, leurs enfants, et le duc même” (“to carry out on their shoulders their husbands, their children, and the Duke himself”) (21; 4). The Emperor was so moved by this fact that he started to treat both the Duke and his followers humanely. This example is an appeal to the pathos of the reader. While reading this example, the reader must take into account the considerable emotional stress that these people were put under, and the notable ferocity of the Emperor. Then the reader sees how the Emperor was moved by the fortitude of the women. This indirectly causes the reader to also consider how he would react in these situations. Montaigne weighs in later in the chapter: “L'un et l'autre de ces deux moyens m'emporterait aisément; car j'ai une merveilleuse lâcheté vers la miséricorde et la mansuétude. Tant y a qu'à mon avis, je serais pour me rendre plus naturellement à la compassion, . . .” (“Both of these means would have swayed me easily, for I have a marvellous weakness towards mercy and clemency – so much so that would be more naturally moved by compassion, . . .”) (Montaigne 21, Screech 4). Montaigne weighs in with how he would have been effected in the situations he presents. Here we see that he inserts his own personal opinion on the same rhetorical level as the historical accounts of princes and emperors. In a way, this can be seen as reconsidering the authority of these facts. They no longer exist in the realm of historical fact that but are now considered as accounts of human interaction. These are then placed in contrast with a contemporary viewpoint and comparison with the narrative voice. This comparison between Montaigne’s *je* and the historical examples makes the

reader consider his own opinion and potential reaction. Consequently, here we have the conversational aspect of the essayistic engaging both the reader and historical events. Through this engagement, Montaigne is also challenging the authority of these examples that previously existed in the realm of pure historical fact. It is this spirit of questioning that Borges inherits and adapts in his works. For example, “Kafka y sus precursores” also mobilizes a large number of examples throughout history for its essay.

Though the subject matter is very different in “Kafka y sus precursores,” it employs a Montaigne-like tone and spirit. It opens on a statement in the first person:

Yo premedité alguna vez un examen de los precursores de Kafka. A éste, al principio, lo pensé tan singular como el fénix de las alabanzas retóricas; a poco de frecuentarlo, creí reconocer su voz, o sus hábitos, en textos de diversas literaturas y de diversas épocas.

At one time I considered writing a study of Kafka’s precursors. I had thought at first, that he was as unique as the phoenix of rhetorical praise; after spending a little time with him, I felt I could recognize his voice, or his habits in the texts of various literatures and various ages.⁶ (710; 363)

Borges opens the piece by declaring what the explicit subject of the essay will be. In this statement we can almost hear an echo of the opening of the chapter “On Sadness” *Je suis des plus exempts de cette passion. . .* (“I am among the most exempt from this passion. . .”) (22). The presence of the first person here opens a conversation with the reader. Thus, engaging them from the beginning much like the Montaignian declarations did. The essay then launches into a list of examples where our narrator claims to recognize the “voice” or “habits” of Kafka. There are authors included on this list from strikingly different time periods and geographic areas. There

⁶ Weinburger Translation

are Ancient Chinese texts and 19th century English poems that bear resemblance to Kafka, according to our narrator. In fact, this seemingly strange conglomerate is addressed by the narrator himself: “Si no me equivoco, las heterogéneas piezas que he enumerados se parecen a Kafka; si no me equivoco, no todas se parecen entre sí.” (“If I am not mistaken, the heterogenous pieces that I have listed seem like Kafka; if I am not mistaken, they do not all seem like each other”) (710). He then claims it is the latter that is the “most important.” Here we have a variation from Montaigne, who never quite addresses the almost haphazard selection of his examples. Borges takes this very clear stance (that the most important part of all of these pieces is that they do not seem alike) because it is provocative to his reader. Not as provocative, however, as the conclusion he comes to: “El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores.” (“The fact is that each writer *creates* his precursors.”) (712). Here we are not as much interested in considering the statement this may make for literature, but rather how it works into the piece. Borges includes this in the last paragraph of the short text, practically bookending the piece with two sections in which the first person narrator expresses his own opinion. This structure is almost parallel to that of Montaigne, but presents a more present and provocative argument. The theme here puts authorship and originality in the forefront, as the reader must grapple with Borges’ claims. He opens the door to their consideration by framing this experiment in a first person voice. Unlike the objective third person typically found in formal academic writing, the first person represents a single, subjective viewpoint. This could be seen to be more easily contended because it only represents one voice. Thus, the essayistic use of the first person, interaction with other examples, and the “open-ended” nature of the essay present a challenge to the reader. One could even say it invites the reader to challenge and reconsider the claims it makes. The same can be said about Montaigne’s “On Sadness.”

The opening line of the chapter is very provocative: “Je suis des plus exempts de cette passion; et ne l’aime ni l’estime, quoique le monde ait prise, comme à prix fait, de l’honorer de faveur particulière.” (“I am among the most exempt from this passion; and neither like it or think highly of it, even if the world has taken it at face value and honor it with special fervor.” (Montaigne 22). Our narrator starts by declaring that he is exempt from sadness. Now, this is practically unthinkable. How can one control his emotions in such a way? These are the kinds of the questions the reader has upon reading these statements. Yet again, the engaged reader is intrigued and invested in the chapter. The exemplarity of this first person narrative suggests that the reader replace the narrator’s voice with his own. In short, within the first line Montaigne has his reader hooked. The chapter contains historical examples much like the other chapter we saw, but here Montaigne also employs many quotations. As Kirsti Sellevold elaborates on, he also edited and changed these quotations to suit his uses. The lack of formal citation in the pieces we saw here practically permits these kinds of edits and changes. However, if Montaigne edited some of the quotations, then perhaps he edited all of them. If that is the case, then he is simultaneously taking advantage of the context of the original quote while also editing it to take advantage of a slightly different reading. What does this mean in terms of authority and originality? It means that Montaigne did not view these texts as absolute authorities, much like one considers a dictionary or encyclopedia, but rather that he saw these quotes as something to manipulate. This is also the case with the historical examples that he uses. They no longer exist solely in the realm of fact. They have been removed from their original context and reshaped into Montaigne’s essay. This sort of editing and tailoring of examples is pushed the extreme in “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” by Borges.

If Montaigne is experimenting with slight changes in quotations and re-framing history without recognizing the original source or original situation, Borges is doing practically the opposite in “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote.” He presents a completely fabricated case of an author, Pierre Menard, but he presents it as if it were a truth. He employs the three pillars of the essayistic: conversation, exploration, and playfulness in this piece. First, he is clearly playing with his reader by presenting this case for consideration. It is no secret that Pierre Menard was not the author of the *Quijote*, thus making this case seem absurd. Borges makes an almost “academic” case for Menard as an author. As we saw in our discussion on Borges, the authority his narrator builds for himself in the text is comprised of various features. The text itself also presents itself with what are typically markers of credibility. For example, there are footnotes that elaborate on the narrator’s viewpoint or the hypothetical source of the information. The narrator here also claims to have the support of two others (“La baronesa de Bacourt” and “La condesa de Bagnoregio”), in addition to personal commentary by the one and only Menard himself. Borges is very clearly playing with the notions of authorship, originality, and authority in these texts. He mocks, almost to the point of absurdity, the academic conventions of citing one’s sources by using footnotes. This suggests that if he can claim that Menard wrote the *Quijote*, and, if he has these “sources”, should it not be the case that Menard actually wrote a portion of the *Quijote*? That is perhaps for the reader to decide, but it is the essayistic style that allows Borges to make these claims. Besides the commentary on authority that Borges makes in the writing of this story, the proposal he makes in the text raises questions about originality.

The premise of the story is that Menard re-authored certain parts of the *Quijote* and “rejuvenated” the text. This suggests that this is a possibility in the real world. By making the case for Menard, Borges invites the reader to enter into this world where Menard authored

parts of the *Quijote* of Menard and consider the possibility of this situation occurring. If someone were to “rewrite” a piece that coincided word for word, would that change its meaning? This is the kind of questioning that Borges would like to offer. It makes one think about originality. Does an idea have an origin? Does a text? In academia, one recognizes the point of origin of an idea by citing its source, but that does not apply to literature such as the *Quijote*. In fact, the discussion of origin is especially pertinent to the *Quijote*. In the novel, there is a constant meta-narrative that puts the originality of the story into question. As we saw in our review of Chapter 9, the narrator presents the account that he had translated from the Arabic. This is just one example of the rich intertextual nature of these texts.

The essayistic in these texts exists at the crossroad of the reader’s conception of an idea, the author’s, and what is presented explicitly in the text. As we saw in our discussion on quotation, these authors use many different examples to illustrate their argument and highlight their own personal viewpoint. We have not however, discusses to which extent the pieces are dependent on this fact. Both of the texts we saw by Borges are based in the notion that the reader be familiar with at least one author. In “Pierre Menard” one was expected to at least recognize the *Quijote* and Miguel de Cervantes by extension. The other piece, “Kafka y sus precursores” carries Kafka in the title. Both of these pieces were born from the intertextual relationships both between the examples that are mobilized within them and the relationship they place themselves in the literary world. By writing on these two topics, Borges creates an inherent intertextuality between these two pieces, Kafka, and Cervantes. In Montaigne, we see that the intertextuality provides a more rich reading of his pieces due to the sheer number of quotations he presents. Montaigne’s writings, however, are not necesarrily born from this intertextual nature. They muse on human emotion and human existence, something that is shared between the reader and

Montaigne himself, but his essays are not rooted in intertextuality the same way Borges' are. Nonetheless, intertextual reference and consideration is key to how Montaigne goes about these essays. This leads us to the conclusion that intertextuality must be an inherent part of the essayistic. None of the pieces we see presented here are representative of a hermetic, self-contained argument. Each is dependent to at least a certain extent of intertextual reference or allusion.

In conclusion, though these two authors wrote in very different time periods and very different places, we can see that their works provide an interesting comparison. Their implementation of the essayistic is representative of new ways of understanding authorship, how we read, and how one interacts with information and other sources. In certain examples, as in Montaigne, this methodology is used to hold a mirror up to the reader and invite the reader to consider his own thoughts or emotions. The essayistic can be also used to demonstrate potential limits to our reasoning or understanding, much like Borges muses with this mimicry of formal academic structure. In all of these examples, we can see that the essayistic "open-ended form" permits this new mode of interrogation and exploration that is both problematic and intriguing for the reader. The playful nature of these texts draws in the reader and also the critic to delve into the richness of the examples and questions posed. In short, the essayistic is representative of a playful space where the author, narrator, and reader are all engaged.

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