*Relate Montaigne’s essay “Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions” to the Player King’s speech in 3.2.170-199.*

In his essay “Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions,” Michel de Montaigne writes: “…irresolution appears to me to be the most common and manifest vice of our nature…. I can more hardly believe a man’s constancy than any other virtue…” Here, Montaigne establishes how human beings’ great weakness is that they are nothing but inconsistency, always changing their minds and wanting what they do not have. This ties into 3.2 of *Hamlet*, in which the Player King proclaims to his Player Queen that while she now believes she would never remarry, once he is dead, she may very well reconsider. The Player King expands to speak about how people are consistently inconsistent, prone to influence of emotion and circumstance, just as Montaigne suggests.

Montaigne makes the claim that people’s actions do not always match their character, and vice versa, or else people would react in the same way in all circumstances. He writes: “One gallant action, therefore, ought not to conclude a man valiant; if a man were brave indeed, he would be always so, and upon all occasions.” This quote suggests that a person’s character cannot be defined by singular actions: just because one performs a brave act, that does not mean they are a brave person. Similarly, a generally brave person may not act brave in all situations; Montaigne suggests that a man brave on the battlefield may not be equally brave in the face of illness or death in his home. The Player King offers further analysis of the fallibility of actions at defining character, stating: “I do believe you think what now you speak, / But what we do determine oft we break. / Purpose is but the slave to memory, / Of violent birth, but poor validity… Most necessary ’tis that we forget / To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt. / What to ourselves in passion we propose, / The passion ending, doth the purpose lose” (3.2.170-179). In stating that “purpose is but the slave to memory,” the Player King suggests that intentions serve and depend on memory. Purpose often derives from passion and emotion, but when these emotions fade, the mere memory is not strong enough to maintain the sense of purposeful motivation towards action – “the passion ending, doth the purpose lose.” For instance, the Player Queen might feel overwhelming love and loyalty to the Player King while he lives, but once he passes and the memory of him fades, she may find herself reevaluating her proclamations never to remarry. Her emotion, rather than her character, drives her actions. She proves inconsistent, as all humans are. As both Montaigne and the Player King offer, action and reaction are tied deeply to circumstance, not products of character.

Montaigne claims that a steady character and sense of morals can successfully guide people through their lives, but the combination of constantly changing circumstance and natural human inconsistency makes this a nearly unattainable ideal. “We are all lumps, and of so various and inform a contexture, that every piece plays, every moment, its own game…” he writes. “There is as much difference betwixt us and ourselves as betwixt us and others.” People are constantly shifting and developing, so much so that over time they might seem an entirely different person. The Player King speaks of this inconsistency also, in stating: “The great man down, you mark his favorite flies. / The poor advanced makes friends of enemies. / And hitherto doth love on fortune tend, / For who not needs shall never lack a friend, / And who in want a hollow friend doth try, / Directly seasons him his enemy.” The Player King here describes how people’s circumstances and fortunes are constantly in flux, and they must react to these situations accordingly. For instance, a man who was once poor who comes into money, or a man who was once fortunate who loses his entire livelihood might behave very differently towards his former friends or enemies than he has previously. Life is a constant state of flux. Nothing is eternal. Our loves and hates, characters and morals, shift with our circumstances. Not only are human lives constantly shifting, forcing people to adapt with them, but often, what people want and what is destined to happen are contradictory. “Our wills and fates do so contrary run,” the Player King describes. Because of all of these factors – passions and motivations that come and go, constantly shifting fortunes and circumstances – it is no wonder that people, and their actions in turn, are so spectacularly inconsistent.