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Dream and Doubt: Scepticism in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Calderón's La vida es sueño

One of the striking phenomena of the early modern period was the highly influential revival of ancient Scepticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When the first Latin translation of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, written by the Greek physician and philosopher Sextus Empiricus (2nd century CE), was published in 1562, the ideas of the ancient Sceptics began to rapidly spread across Europe. In my paper, which draws on DramaNet's theoretical conceptualisation of culture as a net, I will consider this specific example of the withdrawal and usage of floating cultural material available in the cultural net of early modern Europe in relation to contemporary drama: I hope to demonstrate how, among the plays' other similarities, both Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as well as Calderón's 'comedia' *La vida es sueño*, written about thirty-five years after Shakespeare's famous tragedy came into being, have incorporated elements deriving from Scepticism. Considering the cultural-ideological background of the two dramas, I will investigate the different ways in which they respond to the challenges of Scepticism. Further emphasis of my analysis will be on aspects of the topic of dream present in both plays, a nearly ubiquitous topic in early modern literature, particularly in drama, which I will consider in connection with the elements of Scepticism thematized in the texts.