SHAKESPEARE SURVEY

63

Shakespeare's English Histories and their Afterlives

EDITED BY
PETER HOLLAND

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
This article discusses the presentation of reflective retreat in Shakespeare and Montaigne, noting that for both of them reflection frequently follows an experience of shame. Moreover, for both reflection offers no path out of embodiment. That is, neither embraces a hallowed Platonic (and an imminent Cartesian) idea that a focus on mental life extricates one from the difficulties of embodiment.

Being seen in a bad light, gazed at with a critical, superior eye, promotes shame. As Silvan Tomkins comments,

The shame response is an act which reduces facial communication. It stands in the same relation to looking and smiling as silence stands to speech and as disgust, nausea and vomiting stand to hunger and eating. By dropping his eyes, his eyelids, his head and sometimes the whole upper part of his body, the individual calls a halt to looking at another person, particularly the other person's face, and to the other person's looking at him, particularly at his face.¹

Closing eyes or bowing the head to break eye contact with the shamer, covering the face or the exposed body parts, are, in effect, an attempt to enlarge or barricade the space between the shamed body and the shaming, gazing body of the other. Flushing (more involuntarily than the first two, but not much more involuntary) may in some physical or residually animal way be an attempt to accomplish the same thing by changing colour, radiating heat, producing a warning sweat, stoking the metabolism for conflict or flight. These are potential first steps towards reflective isolation, just as shame is an internally isolating affect, as Tomkins says with his characteristic combination of technical and literary intensity:

In contrast to all other affects, shame is an experience of the self by the self. At that moment when the self feels ashamed, it is felt as a sickness within the self. Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object of shame is lost. Why is shame so close to the experienced self? It is because the self lives in the face, and within the face the self burns brightest in the eyes. Shame turns the attention of the self and others away from other objects to this most visible residence of self, increases its visibility and thereby generates the torment of self-consciousness. (Affect, p. 133)

Shame plants the mind's eye. The shamed person breaks contact, retreats, licks wounds in private and (if at all reflective) has a strong reason to think about what has happened and possibly replay it in an inner theatre. As Shakespeare puts it in a sonnet on reflection I will discuss below, 'in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, / I all alone beweep my outcast state' (29:1–2).²

Shakespeare, as these lines and this article will suggest, has a relatively normal sensitive person's relation to shame. Montaigne, however, at least in

² Shakespeare's Sonnets, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven, 1977), p. 27. I cite this edition parenthetically by sonnet and line number in what follows.
his literary self-presentations, finds shame in somewhat unusual places or situations. Montaigne suggests in the early essay ‘Of Idleness’ that he writes essays after an unsatisfactory, shaming experience of solitary reflection. That is, he turns to reflective writing because in disgrace with his own eyes. The essay writing serves in turn as his attempt to shame himself into a better mode of reflection:

Dernièrement que je me retiray chez moy, délibéré autant que je pourroy, ne me meslant d'autre chose que de passer en repos, et à part, ce peu qui me reste de vie; il me semloit ne pouvoir faire plus grande faveur à mon esprit, que de le laisser en pleine oysiveté... Mais je trouve... que au rebours, faisant le cheval échappé, il se donne cent fois plus d'affaire à soy mesmes, qu'il n'en prenoit pour autrui; et m'enfante tant de chimères et monstres fantasques les uns sur les autres, sans ordre, et sans propos, que pour en contempler à mon aise l'inéptie et l'estrangeté, jay commencé de les mettre en rolle, esparant avec le prompt luy en faire honne à luy mesmes.

It is not long since I retired myself unto mine own house, with full purpose, as much as may lie in me, not to trouble my selfe with any businesse, but solitarily and quietly to weary out the remainder of my well-nigh-spent life; where me thought I could doe my spirit no greater favour, than to give him the full scope of idleness... but I finde... [that contrariwise playing the skittish and loose-broken jade, he takes a hundred times more carriere and libertinage unto himselfe, than lee did for others; and begets in me so many extravagant Chimeneses, and fantastical monsters, so orderlesse, and without any reason, one hudding upon an other, that at leisure to view the foolishnesse and monstrous strangenesse of them, I have begun to keepe a register of them, hoping, if I live, one day to make him ashamed, and blush at himself.]

The act of making thought visible by writing might cause thought to feel shame and thus reform itself, Montaigne suggests, perhaps somewhat facetiously. Nonetheless, it is clear that Montaigne found his mental state during the initial, non-writing period of retirement disturbing. But the shame he feels at his own undisciplined mental processes differs from what Tomkins considers the root affect, which requires the presence of another’s gazing eye; if Montaigne has internalized shame as a gazer within himself, he has managed to make shame almost entirely nonsocial, a part of a process of interior reflection. Clearly Montaigne did not tame his galloping thoughts, which continue to bolt off like runaway horses throughout the Essays – though he may have cured himself of the discomfort caused by his mental errancy by turning it into a writing programme. Indeed, if Montaigne’s essay-writing is curative, it cures him not of mental bolting but of being ashamed of it, and the Essays are delightful partly by being so persistently unencumbered by shame. Using both Roy Leake’s Concordance des essais and machine-searchable etexts, one finds about 90 instances of honte in the Essays, and a surprising number of them, like the one just cited, are either repudiations of shame, prescriptions for curing it or proposals to use shame productively in a corrective programme aimed at Montaigne himself or at his culture. The first mention of shame in the Essays describes both shame’s power over a reflective person humiliated in public and Montaigne’s relative freedom from that power:

[Il a esté remarqué par les anciens que Diodorus le Dialecticien mourut sur le champ, espris d’une extreme passion de honte, pour en son escholc et en public ne

---


6. By my count, 23 describe how potential shame marks helpful moral boundaries (in general or in specific historical situations), 12 describe the shamefulness of the age Montaigne inhabits, 11 describe shame as immediately productive of its own cure (often through self-violence or some other violent reversal of past behaviour), 8 describe shame as attaching to relations between custom and embodiment, 5 offer remedies for shame (e.g., ways to overcome sexual impotence), 5 documents Montaigne’s own shameless or shame-free attitudes and 5 register surprise at shame’s power over others.
SHAME AND REFLECTION IN MONTAIGNE AND SHAKESPEARE

se pouvoir desvelopper d’un argument qu’on lui avoit fait.
Je suis peu en prise de ces violentes passions. J’ay
l’appréhension naturellement dure; et l’encrouce et
espressi tous les jours par discours. (L.2.14)

[It is noted by our Ancients, that Diadoms the Logician,
being surprizd with an extreme passion or apprehen-
sion of shame, fell downe starke dead, because neither
in his Schoole, nor in publique, he had beene able to
resolve an argument propounded unto him. I am little
subject to these violent passions. I have naturally a hard
apprehension, which by discourse I daily harden more
and more. (Florio, 9)

Diodorus died of shame on-stage. Before his
death, he felt, presumably, 'As an unperfect actor on
the stage, / Who with his fear is put besides his part'
(Sonnet 23: 1–2). This is a reminder that while the
stage may be represented by its critics as shameless,
the imminent possibility of extreme shame ener-
gizes theatrical performance. According to con-
temporary psychologists, fear of being shamed by
failure in public performance features widely in
contemporary anxiety dreams, and Shakespeare's
sonnet suggests that it was a prevalent fear in the
Renaissance as well.

Given this, the sequence of exposure to others,
shame, isolation, reflection, release from shame, re-
emergence into social life, is in its very shape a
comforting and therapeutic one. It is a way of han-
dling the dangers and fears that lurk in social life
by asserting partial control of them in imagination.
As Ewan Fernie remarks, 'shame in Shakespeare
works as an ethical wake-up call, the dissolution of
the anxious subject's phantasmal self automatically
revealing the world beyond it.' Moreover, shame,
reflection and return in this sequence seem linked,
as though inner reflective life were shame's product
and as though further communication with others,
on altered terms, were reflection's product.

Several recent books about Shakespeare as a
reflective author place a remarkable emphasis on
Montaigne. Millicent Bell's Shakespeare's Tragic
Skepticism and Colin McGinn's Shakespeare's
Philosophy illustrate the connection I want to
draw. Let me focus briefly on McGinn, noting
that Bell offers a parallel case. McGinn blandly
assumes that Shakespeare's reading of Montaigne
was deep and life-long (he sees influential par-
allels between passages about dreaming in An Apo-
logy for Raymond Sebond and A Midsummer Night's
Dream, for instance), and he grounds a claim for
Shakespeare's sceptical naturalism on his view of
Montaigne's sceptical naturalism. Montaigne is
magnificently sceptical and naturalistic, and Mon-
taigne's essays provide passages that richly antici-
pate a variety of later philosophical positions from
Descartes to Hume to Wittgenstein to Thomas
Kuhn and Peter Singer. Thus, by assuming that
cognate passages (not actual borrowings, but similar
thoughts) in Shakespeare participate in an intellec-
tual context supplied by insightful reading of Mon-
taigne, McGinn can plausibly treat Shakespeare as
in implicit dialogue with a subsequent philosophic
tradition. Montaigne supplies the reflective stance

7 Joanne Davis, Patrick Newman, personal communications. The recurrent I-can't-find-the-classroom dream experienced by many academics before the first day of the new semester is a related phenomenon, perhaps not untouched by wish-fulfilment. For a census of dream themes, see http://
psych.ucsc.edu/dreams/Norms/main.html.
8 Ewan Fernie, Shame in Shakespeare (London, 2002), p. 6
9 For a discussion of Bernard Williams's and Richard Woll-
heim's accounts of how shame may be more morally produc-
tive than guilt (and, concurrently, of how it is wrong to claim
that moderns inhabit a guilt-culture that can be opposed to
the shame-culture of the ancients), see Lars Engle, "I am that I am": Shakespeare's Sonnets and the Economy of
Shame, in James Schiffer, ed., Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical
Essays (New York, 1999), pp. 185–97. On guilt as a species
of shame, see Toril Moi, Affect, pp. 118 and 138–9.
10 Millicent Bell, Shakespeare's Tragic Skepticism (New Haven, 2002). For Bell's reliance on Montaigne, see her introduc-
tion, pp. 12–25; for an instance of her use of Montaigne in
locating Hamlet, see p. 31.
11 Colin McGinn, Shakespeare's Philosophy: Discovering the
Meaning Behind the Plays (New York, 2009).
12 I should probably add here that A. D. Nuttall's Shakespeare
the Thinker (New Haven, 2007) and Tzachi Zamir's Double
Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama (Princeton,
2006) do not use Montaigne in this way.
13 McGinn, Philosophy, p. 22. Though McGinn's note refers
one to p. 67 in Screech's Montaigne, the reference is in
fact to p. 674. For the centrality of Montaigne to McGinn's
claims, see his introduction, pp. 6 and 15–16.
and the philosophical claims; Shakespeare has characters who make speeches that are strikingly reminiscent of provocative moments in Montaigne; et voilà! Shakespeare emerges as a thinker remarkably prescient with respect to modernity, though also a thinker located at a pre-Cartesian pre-scientific historical moment that more or less guarantees a broad humanism rather than a rigorous search for certainty.

It is easy for me to track this argument, because in a way I have been making it myself for some time. Hugh Grady has also made it, and in Grady’s case it is implicitly part of a broadly presentist agenda for the interpretation of Shakespeare’s thought that sees Montaigne as a sixteenth-century stand-in for contemporary theorists of resistant consciousness like Habermas and Machiavelli as a sixteenth-century stand-in for recent theorists of interpretative power-knowledge networks like Foucault.¹⁴

My own tack on this argument differs from McGinn’s and also from Grady’s in that I see a Shakespeare who resists at least some of the aspects of Montaigne that make twenty-first-century readers so comfortable reading Montaigne. Montaigne anticipates, perhaps not consistently but strikingly, a number of modern or post-modern enlightened attitudes: anti-ethnocentrism, anti-dogmatism, categorical opposition to cruelty, distaste for and amusement at sexual repression and adherence to the idea that many different kinds of lives should be livable in a state of self-approval. All of these, especially the last three, are related to Montaigne’s generally liberatory attitude towards shame: Montaigne thinks much shame is unnecessary.

Now, we do not know for sure that Shakespeare did read Montaigne deeply. But the comparison I am making is helpful whether or not it describes a relation of influence, since it points to general ways of framing both Montaigne and Shakespeare that clearly distinguish their relations to shame and reflection. That distinction will turn out to be important when we look critically at efforts to see Shakespeare as modern in the ways we see Montaigne as modern. Moreover, I myself think Shakespeare did read Montaigne deeply, and I will thus present contrasts between Shakespeare and Montaigne on shame and reflection as Shakespeare’s responses to Montaigne. I see a Shakespeare impressed with and provoked by Montaigne, but deeply suspicious of the very possibility of a sustained Montaignean stance towards the world — a stance of free reflection largely uninterrupted by the continual pressure of negotiation and thereby largely freed from shame imposed by others from without. It is this resistance, a resistance that I connect with Shakespeare’s commitment to the necessity of encountering and feeling shame in relation to others, that I explore in what follows.

Montaigne discusses his process of reflection in the late essay ‘Of Three Kinds of Commerce’ in ways that at least somewhat recall the dialectic of shame and discursive reflection introduced in ‘Of Idleness’ and discussed above:

Ce n’est pas estre amy de soy, et moins encore maistre, c’est en estre esclave, de se suivre incessamment, et estre si pris à ses inclinations qu’on n’en puisse fouroyer, qu’on ne les puisse tordre. Je le dis à cette heure, pour ne me pouvoir facilement despérer de l’importunité de mon ame, en ce qu’elle ne sçait communément s’amuser sinon où elle s’empeche... La plus part des esprits ont besoing de matière estrangere pour se desgouder et exercer; le mien en a besoing pour se rassois plusost et sejournent, << vita esti negotio disatienda sunt, >> car son plus laborieux et principal estude, c’est estudier à soy. (iii.3.819)

It is not to bee the friend (lesse the master) but the slave of one’s selfe to follow uncessantly, and bee so addicted to his inclinations, as hee cannot stray from them, nor wrest them. This I say now, as being extremly pestered with

the importunity of my minde, forsomuch as she cannot ammuse her selfe, but whereon it is busied... Most wits have neede of extravagant stuffe, to un-benamme and exercise themselves: mine hath neede of it, rather to settle and continue it selfe: Vita oti negocio dissipatenda sunt (Sen. Ep. lvi.), The vices of idleness should bee shaken off with business: For, the most laborious care and principall studie of it, is, to studie it selfe. (Florio, 737)

Like many of Montaigne’s reflections on his own reflective habits, this one is both self-deprecating and uncompromisingly self-absorbed. The self-absorption is potentially unwelcoming to readers, and Montaigne gives fair warning of this. His readers, unlike readers of normal books that strive to please or promise benefits, must be odd enough to want to know Montaigne himself:

Ainsi, lector, je suis moy-mesmes la matiere de mon livre: ce n’est pas raison que tu emploies ton loisir en un subject si frivole et si vain. A Dieu donq, de Montaigne, ce premier de Mars mille cinq cens quatre vingts. (‘Au Lecteur’, 1)

Thus gentle Reader my selfe am the groundworke of ny booke: It is thene no reason thou shoudst employ thy time about so frivolous and vaine a Subject. Therefore Farewell. From Montaigne, the first of March, 1580. (Florio, xxvii)

We must go without guarantees or inducements to where he lives. The identification of his name with his place of residence hints at the strong gravity-field of self-preoccupation we enter in reading the Essais and at a fairly complete absence of shame at the self-exposure involved. The precatory valediction (‘Therefore Farewell’) as a whole signals Montaigne’s take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards what we might find. But if Montaigne takes our reading the essays lightly, as our whimsical participation in his discursive selfishness, he honours the processes of reflective thought that go into attempts at self-understanding: Montaigne continually asserts the value of self-examination, of a process of productive reflection on what locates him (and thus us) in what and where he is. And it is in this process, rather than the gaze of the other, that shame finds its productive locus for Montaigne, even if the shame attaches to a social act:

Mon ame, de sa complexion, refuit la menterie et hait mesmes a la penser.

J’ay une interne vergogne et un remors piquant, si par fois elle m’eschappe, comme par fois elle m’eschappe, les occasions me surprenant et agitant imprudemement.

(II.17.648; Villey-Saulnier glosses ‘vergogne’ as ‘honte’).

My minde of her own complexion detesteth falsehood, and hateth to think on it. I feele an inward bashfulness, and a stinging remorse, if at any time it scape me; as sometimes it doth, if unpremeditated occasions surprise me. (Florio, 587)

By comparison to the textual self-location insisted on by Montaigne of Montaigne, Shakespeare of New Place might well seem Shakespeare of no place. Shakespeare’s alleged return to Stratford, in some ways like Montaigne’s retirement to Montaigne, is also deeply different: Shakespeare’s retirement seems rather the culmination of a process of socially mobile self-transformation that on the whole Shakespeare seeks not to make visible. The same could be said of Shakespeare’s treatment of his personal heritage. Montaigne writes essays praising his father’s temperament (which he himself in part inherits), physiqe, athleticism, discretion in conducting love affairs, mode of life and care for Montaigne’s early education. Shakespeare buys his shiftless father a coat of arms so that he himself can become at 35 a gentleman born. And so on: it is easy to draw out a systematic contrast between the two, which in the end must involve a contrast not only between two temperaments but also between two genres, essay vs. commercial drama, and two modes of life, leisureed self-revealing reflective Montaigneann otium vs. busy reticent active Shakespearian negotiation. (Obviously this down-plays Montaigne’s political activity and his estate management, but it is equally obvious that by contrast to Shakespeare’s life, Montaigne’s is leisureed.)

One aspect of this contrast may well be a keener

---

15 On the very substantial non-written activity in Montaigne’s life, including the parts of his life in which he writes the essays, see George Hoffmann, Montaigne’s Career (Oxford, 1998).
sensitivity on Shakespeare's part to shame, and thus a gravitation towards arts of self-displacement or self-concealment rather than self-exposure.

Given this contrast, it makes sense to examine Shakespeare's representations of leisured detached reflection, using Montaigne as a backdrop, and seeing the two also as having something important in common. Literary history is surely right to see both as pioneers in the literary representation of deep inner selfhood. Both remain huge resources for the self-enhancement of readers and auditors. Clearly their means of exploration, and the kinds of resource they provide, differ. We have no essays by Shakespeare himself, indeed no unequivocally autobiographical documents. His will boldly shapes his daughters' future lives, but does not reflect on his own. His prologues and epilogues on the whole speak for the players' will to please and fear of giving offence, not for the author's literary aspirations (unlike Ben Jonson's, the obvious contrastive case). The dedications of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* direct attention away from the unworthy dedicatory to the noble dedicatee, fairly ardently in the second case, without offering any grounding details of relationship. It is a faute-de-mieux necessity, then, in thinking about Shakespeare on reflection, to do what also seems sensible: that is, to assume that, as a theatre poet, Shakespeare investigated human activities by creating characters and situations that exemplify those activities. That is, Shakespeare reflects on reflection by embodying it.

Shakespearian reflective personae, often satiric, include the speaker of the Sonnets, the courtiers of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the exiles, especially Jacques, in *As You Like It*, the stoics in *Julius Caesar*, Hamlet and Horatio and perhaps Polonius in *Hamlet*, several reflective figures in *All's Well* and Prospero and Gonzalo in *The Tempest*. The two of these who have sometimes been thought to embody autobiographical reflection on Shakespeare's part are Prospero and the speaker of the Sonnets. The scanty concordance entries for 'reflection', 'philosophy' and 'meditation' and their cognates demonstrate that fancy words for introspective thinking are not heavily used by Shakespeare. The name 'Plato' does not appear in Shakespeare's works, and the name 'Socrates' appears only in a reference to Xantippe's shrewishness, which may suggest how little interest he takes in the reflective tradition that is so important to Montaigne. The courtiers of Navarre, Shakespeare's first and in some ways his only avowed reflective philosophers, sustain their plan to make themselves into an ascetic academy, 'Still and contemplative in living art' (1.1.14), for about five minutes, until 1.1.131. The reflective passages in *Hamlet* explore obsessively the poor fit between a contemplative temperament and the task of the revenger. We might put this slight comic example and this central tragic one together to say that Shakespeare's dramatic treatments of reflection often illustrate the poor fit between reflection and the task of being enmeshed in the action of a play. They also illustrate an intimate connection between reflection and shame: all of Hamlet's soliloquies are full of shame, and, as Fernie comments, 'the prince is ashamed from the very beginning, but he comes to terms with this only at the end'; Berowne and the other courtiers of Navarre are ashamed repeatedly out of reflective postures in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

We think that one factor in the increased gravity of reflection in *Hamlet* might be Shakespeare's reading of Montaigne. Jacques in *As You Like It*, written about the same time, offers an interesting case, though one that continues to support the idea that Shakespeare regards detached reflection as somewhat ludicrous. Jacques is not only reflective, but he is resistant or impervious to shame, partly because he has no purposes beyond self-interested

---


17 Fernie, *Shame*, p. 112.

18 See James Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*: 1599 (New York, 2009), pp. 293–4. Shapiro points out, citing William Corwallis (who read Montaigne in English in the 1590s), that not only was Florio circulating parts of his translation in manuscript but that Florio himself says that 'seven or eight of great wit' had attempted an English translation already and failed to complete one. Florio's comment is on p. xxiii.
reflection. Hazlitt calls him 'the only purely contemplative character in Shakespeare... the prince of philosophical idlers; his only passion is thought; he sets no value upon anything but as it serves as food for reflection.' Jacques is first described moralizing over a weeping, dying deer by a lord attending the banished Duke Senior:

[H]e lay along
Under an oak, whose antic root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood,
To which place a poor sequestered stag
That from the hunter’s aim had na’en a hurt
Did come to languish. And indeed, my lord,
The wretched animal heaved forth such groans
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat
Almost to bursting, and the big round tears
Coursed one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chase.\textsuperscript{20}

Jacques ‘moralize[s] this spectacle’, as the Duke puts it, in terms of inhumanity and cruelty (though he is not reported to use the word ‘cruel’); the lord reports that Jacques

most invectively... pierceth through
The body of the country, city, court,
Yea, and of this our life, swearing that we
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what’s worse,
To fright the animals and to kill them up
In their assigned and native dwelling place.

\textit{AVLI, 2.1.58–63}

Duke Senior asks if they ‘left him in this contemplation’ (one of Shakespeare’s 14 uses of the word, many of them like this one evidently somewhat satiric) and the lord replies ‘We did, my lord, weeping and commenting / Upon the sobbing deer’ (\textit{AVLI, 2.1.64–6}).

As a number of scholars have noted, this scene is reminiscent of a passage in Montaigne’s ‘Of Cruelty’:\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{quote}
De moy, je n’ay pas sceau voir seulement sans despiaillar pursuivre et tuer une best innocence, qui est sans defence et de qui nous ne recevons aucune offence. Et, comme il advient communement que le cerf, se sentant hors d’alaine et de force, n’ayant plus autre remedie, se rejette et tend à nous mesmes qui le poursuvons, nous demandant mercy par ses larmes,
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
questuque, cruentus
Atque implorantis similis,

ce m’a toujours semblé un spectacle tres-desplaisant.

\textit{(II. 11.432–3)}
\end{quote}

As for me, I could never so much as endure, without remorse and grief, to see a poor, silly, and innocent beast pursued and killed, which is harmless and void of defence, and of whom we receive no offence at all. And as it commonly happeneth, that when the Stag begins to be embost, and finds his strength to fail him, having no other remedie left him, doth yeeld and begnath himself unto us that pursue him, with tears stuing to us for merce,

\begin{quote}
Questuque cruentus
Atque implorantis similis—\textit{VIRG. AEn. vii. 521}
With blood from throat, and tears from eyes,
It seems that he for pitty cryes.

Was ever a grievous spectacle unto me. \textit{(Florio, 382)}
\end{quote}

What has not, I think, been noticed, is that Jacques’s own tears over the dying deer might also remind a reader of Florio’s version of Montaigne’s self-reported susceptibility to tears a few pages earlier in ‘Of Cruelty’:

\begin{quote}
Il n’est rien qui tente mes larmes que les larmes, non vrayes seulement, mais comment que ce soit, ou feintes ou peintes. Les morts, je ne les plains guierre, et les envierois plutost; mais je plains bien fort les mourans... Les executions mesme de la justice, pour raisonnables qu’elles soyent, je ne les puis voir d’une veue ferme.

\textit{(II. 11.430)}
\end{quote}

There is nothing sooner moveth tears in me, than to see others weep, not only fainely, but howsoever, whether truly or forcedly. I do not greatly waile for the dead, but rather envie them. Yet doe I much waile and moane the dying... Let any man be executed by law, how deservedly soever, I cannot endure to behold the execution with an unrelenting eye.

\begin{quote}
Florio, 380
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{21} See Knowles, ed., \textit{As You Like It}, p. 74, citing Gervais (1901).
This makes Montaigne sound weepy. But Florio’s translation is in fact misleading about Montaigne here. He mistranslates ‘il n’est rien qui tente mes larmes’ (there is nothing that tempts my tears) as ‘there is nothing that moveth teares in me’ – making an inclination sound like an habitual action. (He also does not appear to understand ‘ou feintes ou peintes’, ‘whether feigned or painted’). In the previous sentence, Montaigne has made clear that, when others weep, he would cry if he knew how to cry.

...je me compassionne fort tendrement des afflictions d’autrui, et pleureois asement par compaignie, si, pour occasion que ce soit, je scavoris pleurer. (ii.1.1.430)

(I feel very tender compassion for the afflictions of others, and would readily weep to keep others company, if, whatever the occasion, I knew how to weep at all.)

Florio, partly because of the way he punctuates, makes it far less clear that Montaigne is by his own account habitually dry-eyed: ‘I have a verie feeling and tender compassion of other mens afflictions, and should more easily weep for companie sake, if possible for any occasion whatsoever, I could shed teares’ (Florio, 380). Though he does more or less translate the final clause, the following sentence shows that he has not really understood it, since Florio’s version implies that Montaigne is often moved to tears and gives a strong account of how Montaigne wails and moans for the dying (again a mistranslation of ‘je plains bien fort’, ‘I very strongly pity’ or ‘I lament strongly’). From Florio’s vagueness and misdirection, Shakespeare might well have constructed a Montaigne who was a weeping moralizer like Jacques.

To do this Shakespeare would have to read Florio’s version of ‘Of Cruelty’ by around 1600. We know he read this essay in Florio’s version at some point, since it is closely paraphrased in The Tempest. We have rare-word evidence that Florio’s translation influenced Hamlet, written around 1599, and Lear. Florio’s translation was not published until 1603, but Florio’s preface shows that it had been in preparation for some time – following, he says, upon Lucy Countess of Bedford’s reading of a translation of one of the essays commissioned

from Florio by Sir Edward Wotton (Florio, xvii). A poem encouraging Florio by one of his helpers, Matthew Gwine, is dated 1599 (xxv), and the book was entered for publication in 1600. Valentine Sims, who printed a number of Shakespeare’s quartos, was Florio’s printer, and Edward Blount, who twenty years later would help publish the 1623 Shakespeare folio, was the publisher. In his own preface to the translation, Florio dramatizes his own desperation over the length and macaronic difficulty of the Essais by referring to the description of the dying deer in ‘Of Cruelty’:

‘As for mee, I onely say, as this man [Montaigne’s] embossed Hart out of hart (Lib. ii. c. 11), I sweate, I wept, and I went-on, til now I stand at bay’ (Florio, xvii). This suggests that the passage, and perhaps the essay as a whole, were well known. (In the previous sentence Florio also compares himself to a cannibal captive being fattened for a feast, alluding thus to the other essay that we know Shakespeare to have read, ‘Of the Cannibals’ [Florio, xvii].)

Given that Florio had been writing with Southampton’s support at roughly the time of Venus and Adonis and Lucrece, when Shakespeare seems also to have been close to the young earl, it is quite possible that Shakespeare knew Florio and could have seen some of Florio’s translation prior to publication; it is also possible, though it seems less likely, that Shakespeare was one of those like Lucy Countess of Bedford and Lady Anne Harrington to whom Florio will ‘repeate in true English what you reade in fine French’ (xv).

These possibilities – and they are only that – may seem more persuasive when one notes that


the last line of Jacques’s most famous speech, ‘Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing,’ resembles a line from Florio’s translation of the essay that follows ‘Of Cruelty,’ the ‘Apologie for Raymond Sebond’: ‘as the soules of the gods, sans tongue, sans eyes and sans ear, have each one in themselves a feeling of that which the other feel.’

Another reflective philosophizing character in As You Like It is the clown Touchstone: William Lloyd long ago invoked Montaigne in comparing Touchstone’s mode of reflection to that of Jacques: ‘Perhaps Jacques, in his parody of Amiens’s song, approaches the critical vein of Touchstone pretty closely, but he is inferior in that mixed vein of self-observation and self-knowledge, which approximates Touchstone at one time to Mr Pepys, and at another to Michel de Montaigne.’

Both the character Touchstone and the name ‘Touchstone’ are invented by Shakespeare. It has not, I think, been noticed before that the name and perhaps some of the character might plausibly be connected to an odd capitalization in Florio’s translation of the Apologie. It comes at the climax of a characteristic Montaignean avowal of inconstancy and the limitations of reason:

How often change we our phantasies? What I hold and believe this day, I believe and hold with all my beleefe... I am wholly and absolutely given to it: but hath it not been my fortune, not one, but a hundred, nay a thousand times, nay daily, to have embraced some other thing... which upon better advise I have afterward judged false? A man should at the least become wise, at his owne cost, and learne by others harms. If under this colour I have often found my selfe deceived, if my Touch-stone be commonly found false and my balance un-even and unjust; What assurance may I more take of it at this time, then at others? (Florio, 507)

Of course, it is likely enough that the capital T is supplied by Valentine Sims’s compositor rather than Florio’s manuscript, and thus even possible that influence is working backward, from Shakespeare’s stage to a momentary hand-to-upper-case impulse in the printing house that came from remembering ‘Touchstone’ as a name.

Either Jacques or Touchstone, if seen as an actual version of Montaigne, would be a parodic one—the first sentimental and self-isolating, the second earthy, sceptical and (in his marriage to Audrey) embracing embodiment. When Shakespeare creates reflective figures that seem Montaignean, they often appear in complementary pairs, like Lafeu and Paroles in All’s Well That Ends Well or Prospero and Gonzalo in The Tempest. Paroles, in All’s Well, offers an extraordinary instance of the relations between shame and reflection.

Paroles throughout the play has presented himself as an exemplar of military virtue and has been accepted as a tutor in honour by Bertram (even though wiser observers, starting with Helena, have seen through him throughout). To expose him, Bertram’s friends arrange his capture, bring him blindfolded before Bertram and have his alleged Muscovite captors demand that he describe the Florentine forces and especially the French who fight for them. After Paroles has traduced by name Bertram and the other nobles of the French camp, his blindfold is removed and he finds himself looked at by them.

Interpreter. Come, headman, off with his head.

Paroles. O Lord, sir!—Let me live, or let me see my death!

Interpreter. That shall you, and take your leave of all your friends.

[He unmuffles Paroles]

So, look about you. Know you any here?

(4.3.286–90)

Gazing scornfully at him are Bertram and the Lords Dumesne, whom Paroles has just slandered and betrayed. Paroles, after they have reviled him and left, comments ‘Who cannot be crushed by a plot?’ (4.3.302), and the soldier who has pretended to interpret Russian responds rather oddly in his attempt to express how thoroughly Paroles is disgraced:

Interpreter. If you could find out a country where but women were that had received so much shame, you

---

24 Quoted in Knowles, ed., As You Like It, p. 137.
25 Knowles, As You Like It, p. 585.
might begin an impudent nation. Fare ye well sir. I am for France too. We shall speak of you there.

Exit (4.3.303–6)

He casts Paroles as a kind of Founder, in Machiavellian terms, of a new world of shamelessness, an 'impudent nation'. Such a view of the shame of the parodied Paroles as a potential impious Aeneas might, along the lines of argument I lay out here, count as a recognition of the difference Montaigne's attitudes toward shame and the desirability of repudiating or accepting it could make. Setting aside a variety of kinds of shame could create a new world, though not in this case a very savoury one. A number of critics have felt that All's Well That Ends Well and Othello register the way Montaigne's essays, and especially 'On Some Verses of Virgil', challenge attitudes towards chastity and other shame-related forms of honour. Paroles, having been shamed and then left alone, of course reflects:

Paroles.

Captain I'll be no more,
But I will eat and drink and sleep as soft
As captain shall. Simply the thing I am
Shall make me live...
Rust, sword; cool, blushes; and Paroles live
Safer in shame; being fooled, by fool'sry thrive.
There's place and means for every man alive.

(4.3.308–16)

Paroles recovers from shame by adopting shame as a mode of life, with an evident relief that seems close to the recovery of a true self after being entrapped in a false performance for others (this being one of the standard therapeutic goals of shame-induced reflection). From this viewpoint, Paroles's shame has allowed him to become 'simply the thing I am', an achievement of a Montaignean kind. Two passages from 'On Some Verses of Virgil' illustrate this:

Au reste, je me suis ordonné d'oser dire tout ce que j'ose faire, et me desplais des pensées mesmes imputables.
La pire de mes actions et conditions ne me semble pas si faillible comme je trouve latid et lâche de ne l'oser avouer.

(III.5.845)

For my part I am resolved to dare speake whatsoever I dare do. And am displeased with thoughts not to be published. The worst of my actions or condicions seeme not so ugly unto me, as I finde it both ugly and base not to dare to avoweth them. (Florio, 760)

This resolution on Montaigne's part involves a willingness to embrace what others might find utterly shameful, such as his apparent admission that he has been, or at least in old age is being, scanted by nature in penis size. This avowal comes after Montaigne points out that human beings are so foolish that we may be reasonable in calling both the act and the parts involved in making more human beings 'shameful': 'd'appeller l'action honteuse, et honteuses les parties qui y servent' (III.5.878). Montaigne adds a parenthesis: '(astreure sont les miennes proprement honteuses et pences)' '(mine are properly so at this moment)' (III.5.878; Florio, 792). Montaigne says more along these lines a few pages later, though the key passages are in Latin. Speaking of women who look at him reproachfully because he has disappointed them sexually, he writes:

Quand j'en ay eu quelqu'une s'ennuyer de moy, je n'en ay point incontinent accusé sa legereté; j'ai mis en doute si je n'avoyss pas raison de m'en prendre à nature plustost. Certes, elle m'a traité illegitime et incivillement,

Si non longe saisi, si non bené mentala cassa:

Nimium captiunt, videncent parvam

Matronae quoque mentula illibenter.

Et d'une lesion enormissime.

Chacune de mes pieces me fait esgalemoy moy que toute autre. Et nulle autre ne me fait plus proprement homme que cette cy. Je dois au publiq universellement mon pourtrait.

(III.5.887)


27 For a contrasting view of this outcome as non-reflexive and thus disgusting, see Fermie, Shame, pp. 88–9; he views Paroles's shamelessness as 'the nemesis of the human, as gross and unredeemed animality' (p. 99).
SHAME AND REFLECTION IN MONTaigne AND SHAKESPEARE

When I have perceived any [female sexual partner] weary of me, I have not presently accused her lightness: but made question whether I had not more reason to quarrel with nature, for handling me so unlawfully and uncivilly.

Si non longa satis, si non bené mentula crassa:
Neminem sapient videntque parvam
Matronae quoque mentulam illibenter, —I.Us. PRiAP. penul.
1. ibid. viii. 4.

and to my exceeding hurt. Each of my pieces are equally mine, one as another: and no other doth more properly make me a man then this. My whole portraiture I universally owe unto the world. (Florio, 801)

Florio leaves the Latin untranslated, contrary to his normal practice, though for the same reasons he leaves a number of other Latin passages in 'On some verses' untranslated as well. Villey-Saulnier annotates 'Si non longa satis ... crassa' euphemistically: 'L'idée est: “si elle m'a mal pourvu”.' It glosses the next two Latin lines with similar caution: 'L'idée est: “Les matrones elles-mêmes voient sans plaisir de maigres apparences”.' (III.5.887n.) M. A. Screech translates the Latin non-euphemistically (translating rather than alluding to mentula) but also renders Montaigne's comment on his own member an entirely conditional or subjunctive one:

I have asked myself, rather, whether I would be right to rail against Nature.

Si non longa satis, si non bene mentula crassa,
[Should my cock be not long enough nor good and thick,]
then Nature has indeed treated me unlawfully and unjustly —
Neminem sapient, videntique parvam
Matronae quoque mentulam illibenter
[Even good matrons know all too well and do not gladly see a tiny cock]
— and inflicted the most enormous injury.28

Admittedly the macaronic passage is hard to sort out, and it all comes in the course of a meditation on the way ageing inflicts sexual life that is partly a contrast between Montaigne now and Montaigne then, but I find Donald Frame's version truer to the French:

I have wondered whether I did not have reason rather to blame Nature. Certainly she has treated me unfairly and unkindly —

But if the penis be not long or stout enough ... 
Even the matrons — all too well they know —
Look dimly on a man whose member's small — and done me the most enormous damage.29

Read a bit unsympathetically, by someone more sensitive to exposure and less resigned to the erotic embarrassments of age than Montaigne, this passage could easily be seen as the declaration of someone content to cool his blushing and let his sword rust while he lives safest in shame. Moreover, given that Paroles embraces shame obviously, rather than somehow accommodating himself to shame or in some other less totalizing way revaluing shame, Paroles seems aware that the exposure he has endured might destroy others: 'If my heart were great / 'Twould burst at this', he says, perhaps thinking of victims of shame like Demodocus (4.3.307–8). He also seems unfazed at the threat of being spoken of badly — that is, having endured the shame of exposure, he seems impervious to being discussed in ways that emphasize his guilt (shame seen here as an affect of the eye, guilt of the ear, sensitive to what is spoken to and about one). Thus Paroles counts as among Shakespeare's most Montaignean characters, though in a refracted or parodic way, perhaps to be twinned (like Jacques and Touchstone) with the sceptical, warm-hearted Lafeu. Whether or not Shakespeare is thinking about Montaigne, he creates in Paroles a brilliant exemplar of the full consequences of two essential Montaignean positions: 'C'est une absolue perfection, et comme divine, de scavoyer jouyr loiallement de son estre' (III.13.1115); 'It is an absolute perfection, and as it were divine for a man to know how to enjoy his being loyalty' (Florio, 1013); and 'Nostre vie est partie en folie, partie en prudence' (III.5.888); 'Our life consisteth partly in folly, and partly in wisedome' (Florio, 801–2). 'Simply the thing I am / Shall make me live' (4.3.310–11).


This brings me to my final case of Shakespearean reflection, the Sonnets and their relations to Montaigne, shame and embodiment. Peter Holbrook comments that 'there is at least one Shakespearean text - the Sonnets - that truly deserves the honorific “Montaignesque”'. This is because 'they are committed to individual authenticity'.

They present a Shakespeare undefended and resolutely committed to his own peculiar experiences and passions: for Holbrook, the key claim in the Sonnets is 'No, I am that I am' in 121, a claim he links explicitly to Parolles' 'Simply the thing I am / Shall make me live'. I find this view of the Sonnets attractive, and I feel the same way about Holbrook's general claim that Shakespeare and Montaigne are, like Emerson and Nietzsche, teachers of how to live as oneself instead of someone else. Holbrook follows an appealing variant of the strategy for assimilating Shakespeare to later intellectual traditions by way of Montaigne that I sketched above. But once again, in my view, the Shakespearean texts in question register a quite different attitude towards reflective mental life from Montaigne's. Assuming the Sonnets to be (a) genuinely autobiographical and (b) intentionally made public by Shakespeare (both currently respectable scholarly opinions, though based upon uncertainties), the Sonnets count as a form of authorial self-revelation. This self-revelation, like Montaigne's, asserts the validity and complexity of the private self and opens up areas of selfhood that past traditions of both sonnet-writing and autobiography had left largely unvisited. Holbrook strives to make Shakespeare's Sonnets share, with Montaigne and Emerson and Nietzsche, a commitment to 'cheerfulness' in self-acceptance: 'there is a vital unbudgeable root of self-love under the Sonnets, which are the product of an author who, like Montaigne, “hunger[s] to make [him]self known”.'

Here I want to pause. I have argued throughout that Shakespeare casts doubt on Montaignean reflection as a self-sustaining activity, and that Montaigne's personal capacity to transform and cast off shame does not seem easy for Shakespeare to emulate in what little he leaves us as autobiographical writing. The Sonnets are intense registers of self-examination, but not of leisurely reflection. Much of what they examine is the painful inescapability of social life and specifically the pain of being 'vile esteemed' (121) either by an imagined social audience or by a beloved other or by a judging part of the self. When they treat reflection as an activity, it turns out to be either a rehearsal of the speaker's enmeshment in a mimaetically competitive unnoirishing social environment, or to be a quasi-comic dead-end. Consider two great reflective sonnets that are alternative versions of one another and appear together.

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heav'n with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.

---

31 Holbrook, 'Introduction', p. 12. For a similar claim about the importance of Sonnet 121, see Engle, "'I am that I am'".
32 For the prevailing state of scholarly opinion on these matters, and registration of the uncertainties involved, see Burrow, ed., Complete Sonnets and Poems, pp. 94–7; for a discussion of how many unexamined assumptions are involved in standard readings of the Sonnets as a sequence, see Heather Dubrow, "Uncertainties now crown themselves assur'd": The Politics of Plotting Shakespeare's Sonnets", in Schiffer, ed., Shakespeare's Sonnets, pp. 111–33, first published in Shakespeare Quarterly, 47 (1996), 291–305.
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,
And moan th' expense of many a vanished sight.
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored, and sorrows end.

Most readers would agree that the first of these two sonnets registers a more urgent intellectual and emotional process, imposed by an unspecified condition of 'disgrace', the second something like an intellectual and emotional habit. Colin Burrow notes wryly that the 'When' at the beginning of 30 in effect 'cancel[s] the joyous leap of the lark at break of day arising' in that its 'repetition of the first word of the previous sonnet takes us back to the gloomy isolation evoked at its opening'. This accounts, perhaps, for the slightly self-mocking quality of 30, beautiful and moving as many of its much-quoted phrases are: it has a 'here I go again' quality, and its subdued imagery of a judicial audit becomes an explicit account of waste or imbalance in the final quatrain, with its 'sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan, / Which I new pay as if not paid before'. Neither sonnet presents self-examination as dignified or in itself rewarding; the inner turmoil must be stilled, the inner debit cancelled, by thoughts of the friend. And the sequence as a whole registers the relationship with the friend as not only enriching and compensatory but also destabilizing and productive of vicissitudes of self-regard (as is the relationship in the last sonnets with the dark lady): the friend is often reproached for leading the speaker to let down his defences against the world, as in 33-35, which offer a key instance of the sonnet-speaker and the sonnet-addressee traversing the space between them by shaming one another consecutively. To speak very generally, moving inward in the Sonnets always involves reaching outward for help in a kind of panic at what one finds inside, or, as in 121, pushing back at the world in ringing assertion that one is, at any rate, no worse than everyone else. This is far from both the prevailing mood and the prevailing method in Montaigne's form of reflection. It demonstrates that, while shame may push Shakespeare into reflection, he does not easily emerge from reflection with a new sense of his relation to the world, or with a consistently Emersonian self-acceptance.

I conclude, then, that Montaigne needs to be treated with caution as an analogue or model for Shakespeare's treatment of embodied mental life. The relation between the two thinkers is, I suggest, as rich and complex as are the works of both, and Shakespeare's response to Montaigne needs to be recognized as ambivalent rather than assumed to be celebratory and directly appropriative. Shakespeare seems particularly exercised both by Montaigne's general retreat into contented reflection and by his specific willingness to cast off shame in the process of self-examination and self-exposure. This does not mean that one should not use Montaigne as a way of connecting Shakespeare with later intellectual traditions, or with our own moral and intellectual habits. In fact, as I have suggested above, it means that we can see Shakespeare's reactions to Montaigne as hints—sometimes chastening hints—towards how he might regard our own Montaignean attitudes.

---