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6. Ethical Issues in Montaigne and Shakespeare

Montaigne's *Essais* and Shakespeare's characters express a wide range of views on ethical questions; in both cases the reader is called upon to compare the statements of several different voices before being able to determine the case. Both writers present their audiences with divergent opinions to think about and with.

Revenge

A section of *Couardise mere de la cruauté* (II, 27) asks why so many present-day quarrels end in death and mounts an impressive argument that revenge-killing is a form of cowardice, something which Montaigne knows his audience would reject.

[A] Là où nos peres avoient quelque degré de vengeance, nous commençons à cette heure par le dernier, et ne se parle d'arrivée que de tuer? Qu'est-ce, si ce n'est couardise? Chacun sent bien qu'il y a plus de braverie et desdain à battre son ennemy qu'à l'achever, et de le faire bouquer que de le faire mourir. D'avantage que l'appetit de vengeance s'en assouvit et contente mieux, car elle ne vise qu'à donner ressentiment de soy ... [C] C'est une action plus de crainte que de braverie, de precaution que de courage, de defense que d'entreprinse. [A] Il est apparent que nous quittons par là et la vraye fin de la vengeance, et le soing de nostre reputation; nous craignons, s'il demeure en vie, qu'il nous recharge d'une pareille. [C] Ce n'est pas contre luy, c'est pour toy, que tu t'en deffais. (V694–5, P729–30)

[A] Whereas our fathers knew degrees of vengeance we now begin at the end and straightway talk of nothing but killing. What causes that if not cowardice? Everyone knows that there is more bravery in beating an enemy than in finishing him off: more contempt in making him bow his head than in making him die; that, moreover, the thirst for vengeance is better slaked and satisfied by doing so, since the only intention is to make it felt ... Killing is good for preventing a future offence, but not for avenging one already done. [C] It is a deed more of fear than of bravery; it is an act of caution rather than of courage; of defence rather than of attack. [A] It is clear that by acting thus we give up both the true end of

vengeance and all care for our reputation: we show we are afraid that if we let the man live he will do it again. (S787–8)

Since the idea of revenge depends on making the person who has wronged us feel our power over him, killing our opponent is against the true nature of revenge. Montaigne's rare amplification of a single viewpoint without subjecting it to questioning indicates that he here expresses a view which is important to him and which he knows his aristocratic audience will find it hard to accept. He condemns revenge-killing in terms which are calculated to make it unattractive to his contemporaries. Some modern critics have wanted Hamlet to condemn the whole idea of revenge rather than to regret that he had been given the obligation to set right the wrong (I.5.196–7).¹ The ghost is quite certain that Hamlet's new knowledge obliges him to seek revenge (I.5.7) and, once he has convinced himself of the ghost's truthfulness, Hamlet seems to agree.

Montaigne's *De la gloire* (II, 16) investigates the conception of honour which underlies revenge-killing and which Martin Dodsworth has presented as the source of unity in the play and a key concern of Hamlet.² Montaigne begins with a religious perspective. God cannot be made greater but his praises can. Therefore all glory should belong to God. Humans, on the other hand, are so lacking in beauty, health, wisdom and virtue that they need to be filled with more substantial goods than mere air. Then he draws on the traditional ethical topos of the danger of flattery. He praises the Senecan and Plutarchan injunction to conceal oneself and attacks Epicurus's, Cicero's and Horace's preoccupation with glory. Virtue is vain and frivolous if it inspires us only on account of glory, for reputation depends on fortune.

[C] C'est le sort qui nous applique la gloire, selon sa temerité. Je l'ay veue fort souvent marcher avant le merite; et souvent outrepasser le merite d'une longue mesure. Celuy qui premier s'advisa de la ressemblance de l'ombre à la gloire fit mieux qu'il ne vouloit. Ce sont choses excellemment vaines. (V621–2, P659)³

[C]Chance it is which bestows glory on us according to her fickle will: I have often seen it marching ahead of merit, and often outstripping merit by a long chalk. The man who first recognized the resemblance between shadow and glory did better than he intended. Both are things exceedingly vain. (S706)

Even the great deeds of Caesar and Alexander depended in great part on good fortune. Often the most dangerous parts of a battle occur in trivial and hidden situations. It is no use acting bravely only when there are witnesses; we need to behave properly when we are alone (V623–4, P660–1, S707–9). Montaigne insists that our own knowledge of our virtuous actions provides the only satisfaction we can take from them, even as he recognizes the limitations of that knowledge (V626, P664, S712). Montaigne agrees with Falstaff on the uselessness of honour to the dead, but he draws a different final inference.

[C] Toute personne d'honneur choisit de perdre plus tost son honneur, que de perdre sa conscience. (V630, P669)

[C] Any honourable person prefers to sully his honour than his conscience. (S717)

While some critics have tried to defend Hamlet's delay by arguing that the assumed honourable duty of revenge was barbaric and unsuited to Hamlet's better self, Montaigne actually argues for this position.

Death

Death is a major subject both in Montaigne's *Essais* and in *Hamlet*.⁴ Broadly Montaigne maintains three positions in relation to death.⁵ In *Que philosophe c'est apprendre à mourir* (I, 20), which we have already come across as one of the chapters in which Latin poetry plays a very significant part, he accepts that death is the defining moment of a life and that thoughts of death may torment any moment of life. He urges serious-minded people to prepare themselves for death, arguing that the mind can learn not to fear death. He suggests that the gradual decay of our faculties makes death more acceptable to us. The chapter concludes with a long speech by Nature, constructed from excerpts from Nature's speech in Lucretius III.933–62 and from Seneca.⁶ Nature prepares us for death by showing that death is part of the world and part of our life. She points out the advantages of death and the disadvantages of a long life. All these views were widely accepted ethical principles shared by the Stoics and the Epicureans. The chapter ends with recollection of the calm deaths of ordinary people, to complement the stories of the defiant attitude to death exhibited by ordinary people, whether protestant martyrs or common criminals, which were related in I, 14.⁷

In *Coustume de l'isle de Cea* (II, 3) Montaigne first collects examples, sayings and arguments in favour of suicide and then matches them with arguments and examples against, including the arguments from God's will and from the greater heroism of enduring suffering. Contempt of life is ridiculous because life is all we have.⁸ Then he tells a few stories at greater length, trying to establish the circumstances in which suicide might be acceptable. These stories feature religiously motivated suicides and suicides in order to avoid sin. Some of the stories treat fighting in such a way that one is bound to be killed as equivalent to suicide. The force of the chapter rests on the more fully told stories. On the whole Montaigne leaves the reader to respond to them without adding explicit conclusions but the chapter ends on the judgement that suicides to avoid unbearable pain or a worse death are the most acceptable. The chapter begins with an apparent disclaimer that the question being explored is a matter of philosophy and doubt and that we must be ruled by the word of God. Behind the self-censorship the attitude of this chapter is unusually positive towards suicide.

At the end of the book Montaigne argues against philosophical preparation for death, insisting that living (rather than death) is the aim of life and that nature will provide the resources for dying at the moment they are needed. *De la phisionomie* (III, 12), the crucial discussion of death in the later chapters, focuses on the figure of Socrates. Towards the middle of the chapter Montaigne relates Socrates's speech anticipating death from Plato's *Apology*, calling it 'crisp and sensible, yet naive and lowly, unimaginably sublime, true, frank and incomparably right'.⁹ Because it pleases him so much he does not consider doubting its historical accuracy. From the beginning of the chapter Montaigne sought to connect the sublime Socrates with the speech and principles of thought of ordinary people ('thus speaks a peasant, thus speaks a woman').¹⁰

[B] Il ne la represente ny eslevée ny riche; il ne la represente que saine, mais certes d'une bien allegre et nette santé. Par ces vulgaires ressorts et naturels, par ces fantasies ordinaires et communes, sans s'esmouvoir et sans se piquer, il dressa non seulement les plus réglées, mais les plus hautes et vigoreuses creances, actions et moeurs qui furent onques. (V1038, P1083–4)

[B] He portrays [the soul] as neither as high soaring nor abundantly endowed; he portrays it simply as sane, though with a pure and lively

sanity. From such commonplace natural principles, from such ordinary everyday ideas, without being carried away and without goading himself on, he formed beliefs, actions and morals which were not simply the best regulated but also the most sublime and forceful that have ever been. (S1174, V1038)

The chapter abounds with examples of the steadfastness and heroism of ordinary people victimized by the destructiveness and corruption caused by the wars of religion. Their example convinces him that nature (rather than education or philosophy) will provide the surest guide of how to act in any circumstances. As in I, 20 Nature is seen as the surest guide but this time she provides help from inside at the time it is needed rather than speaking arguments and precepts to learn in advance and hoard up against calamity. Since death is part of life, nature will provide us with the resources to meet it. Looking back to *De la conscience* Montaigne now retells at length two experiences from the civil wars in which his honest and open appearance saved him from death. Thinking about the moral of these stories leads him, with a little comparison, to an explanation of his distaste for revenge.

[B] Si mon visage ne respondoit pour moy, si on ne lisoit en mes yeux et en ma voix la simplicité de mon intention, je n'eusse pas duré sans querelle et sans offence si long temps, avec cette indiscrete liberté de dire à tort et à droict ce qui me vient en fantasie, et juger temerairement des choses ... Aussi ne hay-je personne; et suis si lâche à offencer que, pour le service de la raison mesme, je ne le puis faire. Et lors que l'occasion m'a convié aux condamnations criminelles, j'ay plustost manqué à la justice ... [C] Les jugements ordinaires s'exasperent à la punition [vengeance: EB] par l'horreur du meffaict. Cela mesme refroidit le mien: l'horreur du premier meurtre m'en faict craindre un second, et la haine de la premiere cruauté m'en faict hayr toute imitation. (V1062–3, P1110, 1830)

[B] If my countenance did not vouch for me, if people did not read in my eyes the innocence of my intentions, I would never have endured so long without feud or offence, given my indiscriminate frankness in saying, rightly or wrongly, whatever comes into my head and in making casual judgements ... Besides I do not hate anybody; and am such a coward

about hurting people that I cannot do it even to serve a rational end: when circumstances have required me to pass sentences on criminals I have preferred not to enforce justice ... [C] Judgements normally inflame themselves towards revenge out of horror for the crime. That is precisely what tempers mine: my horror for the first murder makes me frightened of committing a second, and my loathing for the original act of cruelty makes me loathe to imitate it. (S1205)

In his first soliloquy Hamlet strongly desires the oblivion of death; in III.1 his fear of the unknown aspects of death persuades him not to seek it (*e.g.*, by suicide or by open rebellion against Claudius). After killing Polonius he tries to shock the King with his savagely humorous evocation of the worms eating the rotting body. When the flesh of an emperor is seen to pass through a beggar's belly via a worm and a fish, the carbon-cycle has eliminated all human pretensions to glory. In his final soliloquy Hamlet apparently reverses this position, approving the honourable deaths of thousands of men to gain a piece of land not worth tilling (IV.4.53–66; Q2 only). So far Hamlet, prompted by his feelings and his experiences, has explored a range of sometimes opposed positions. But in the final act he seems to reach a conclusion, regretfully accepting the levelling effect of death (V.1.178–209) and finding himself (rather like the later Montaigne) ready to meet it whenever it should come.

There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows aught, what is't to leave betimes? (V.2.215–20)

Besides the deliberate reference to Matthew 10:29 ('Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father') the speech seems to recall the ideas of *Que philosophe c'est apprendre mourir*,¹¹ where Montaigne draws most heavily on the Stoicism of Seneca's *Epistolae morales*. Shakespeare uses the Biblical allusion to indicate that Hamlet's anguished self-questioning is now over, that he has reached the point of accepting God's plans and of abandoning his fear of death.¹² While Hamlet's attitude to death seems to develop over the play, other characters express ideas which enable the audience to compare and reconsider. At the beginning of the play Claudius and Gertrude urge Hamlet to accept his father's death, in a way which allows us to see them as mature

and considerate in contrast to Hamlet's peevishness. Later Claudius's confession of guilt and his contradictory encouragement of Laertes's revenge enable us to see his words as self-interested without forcing us to deny their wisdom. Ophelia vividly demonstrates that the death (or estrangement) of a loved one can undo happiness and connected reason. Her sense of the meaninglessness of life makes her reckless of death, if not actually suicidal.¹³

Montaigne is much more learned than Shakespeare and his response to the philosophical and poetic tradition allows him to reach firmly grounded conclusions. Shakespeare can use both poetic narrative and enactment to inspire in his audience pity and shock at Ophelia's death. The contrasted language and viewpoint of the gravedigger place death's ubiquitousness in vivid contrast and prepares for Hamlet's uneasy jokes. Montaigne and Shakespeare agree on emphasizing the experience of ordinary people and a final improvisational acceptance of death but in comparison with the grandeur and eloquence of *De la phisionomie*, Hamlet's acceptance is sketchy and conventional, perhaps intentionally so.

Repentance

In *Du repentir* (III, 2), against orthodox Catholic doctrine, Montaigne justifies the fact that he rarely repents, and explains his difficulty in understanding what true repentance would involve.

[B] Excusons icy ce que je dy souvent que je me repens rarement, [C] et que ma conscience se contente de soy: non comme de la conscience d'un Ange ou d'un cheval, mais comme de la conscience d'un homme. (V806, P846)

[B] Let me justify here what I often say: that I rarely repent [C] and that my conscience is happy with itself – not as the conscience of an angel is nor of a horse, but as behoves the conscience of a man. (S909)

He believes that vices are abhorrent and are condemned by all sound judgements (V806, P846, S909).

[B] Mais ce qu'on dit, que la repentance suit de pres le peché, ne semble pas regarder le peché qui est en son haut appareil, qui loge en nous comme en son propre domicile. On peut desavouer et desdire les vices qui nous surprennent et vers lesquels les passions nous emportent; mais

ceux qui par longue habitude sont enracinez et ancrez en une volonté forte et vigoureuse, ne sont subjects à contradiction. Le repentir n'est qu'une desdicte de nostre volonté et opposition de nos fantasies, qui nous pourmene à tout sens. (V8o8, P848)

[B] Yet the saying that 'repentance follows hard upon sin' does not seem to me to concern sin in its full apparel, when lodged in us as in its own home. We can disown such vices as take us by surprise and towards which we are carried away by our passions; but such vices as are rooted and anchored in a will which is strong and vigorous brook no denial. To repent is but to gainsay our will and to contradict our ideas; it can lead us in any direction. (S911)

Incidental sins can easily be disowned, but there are some characteristics which we know to be wrong and which are ingrained in our character (here he may be thinking of his illicit love affairs) and which we would have to become different people in order to change.

[B] Quant à moy, je puis desirer en general estre autre; je puis condamner et me desplaire de ma forme universelle, et supplier Dieu pour mon entiere reformation et pour l'excuse de ma foiblesse naturelle. Mais cela, je ne le dois nommer repentir, ce me semble, non plus que le desplaisir de n'estre ny Ange ny Caton. Mes actions sont réglées, et conformes à ce que je suis, et à ma condition. Je ne puis faire mieux. Et le repentir ne touche pas proprement les choses qui ne sont pas en nostre force, ouy bien le regret. J'imagine infinies natures plus hautes et plus réglées que la mienne ... Lors que je consulte des deportemens de ma jeunesse avec ma vieillesse, je trouve que je les ay communement conduits avec ordre, selon moy; c'est tout ce que peut ma resistance. Je ne me flatte pas: à circonstances pareilles, je seroy tousjours tel. Ce n'est pas macheure, c'est plustost une teinture universelle qui me tache. Je ne cognoy pas de repentance superficielle, moyenne et de ceremonie. Il faut qu'elle me touche de toutes parts avant que je la nomme ainsin, et qu'elle pinse mes entrailles, et les afflige autant profondement, que Dieu me voit, et autant universellement. (V813, P854)

[B] As for me I can desire to be entirely different, I can condemn my universal form and grieve at it and beg God to form me again entirely

and to pardon my natural frailty. But it seems to me that that should not be called repenting any more than grieving at not being an angel or Cato. My actions are regulated and suit what I am and my condition. I cannot do better. And the act of repenting is not really concerned with the things which are not in our power, though they are certainly regretted. I can imagine countless natures more elevated and better regulated than mine ... When I compare my behaviour in youth and age, I find that I have usually conducted my affairs in an orderly fashion, according to my own lights; my resistance is capable of no more. I do not flatter myself. In like circumstances I would still be thus. It is not a small discolouring but a universal stain which tarnishes me. I do not know any superficial, moderate or purely formal repentance. Something must touch all parts of me before I will call it repentance. That must pinch my entrails and afflict them as deeply and universally as if God should search me. (S916–17)

As a contrast to his acceptance of his own behaviour (while waiting for God's intervention), he relates the story of a man he met in Armagnac, whom everyone calls *le larron* (the thief). He was born a beggar, and finding that by working he could not earn enough to live, he decided to become a thief. By stealing a little from the fields of many different people at considerable distances from each other he succeeded in avoiding discovery and becoming rich. In his old age in order to come to terms with God he has begun making gifts to the heirs of those he robbed as a sort of compensation. Since he will not be able to complete this task himself (as he cannot afford to give to everyone at once) he has instructed his heirs to continue this process.

[B] Par cette description, soit vraie ou fauce, cettuy-cy regarde le larrecin comme action des-honneste et le hayt, mais moins que l'indigence; s'en repent bien simplement, mais, en tant qu'elle estoit ainsi contrebalancée et compencée, il ne s'en repent pas. (V812, P853)

[B] From this description, whether it is true or false, this man regards theft as dishonest and hates it, but hates it less than poverty. He repents of the simple theft but in so far as it has been counterbalanced and compensated for he does not repent it. (S915, V812)

Montaigne agrees that all vice is repulsive and carries its own penalty, yet he acknowledges that there are some vices he cannot truthfully reject.

Nevertheless he believes that within the limits of the human he conducts his life in accordance with reason and with a clear conscience. He does not wish to reject the moral laws of his society or to avoid moral judgements of himself or others but at the same time he acknowledges the likelihood of human failing without being excessively disgusted with humanity. And he is suspicious of forms of repentance which are on the one hand too easy and self-serving and on the other too sweeping a rejection of one's own past and nature. His attempt to reconcile the truths of morality with his own experience opens up the possibility of a morality which is more understanding of the limitations of individuals.

The predicament of being unable to repent is also the subject of Claudius's soliloquy in *Hamlet* (III.3.36–72), discussed at the end of Chapter 1 above.¹⁴ Because of the unquestionably vicious way in which he obtained the throne and because he is unable to contemplate giving up what he has gained, Claudius might be thought of as closer to *le larron*, whom Montaigne criticizes, than to Montaigne himself. Both Montaigne and Claudius ask for a divine resolution of their dilemma, and neither really believes that it will come. In comparison Claudius seems more anguished and more impressed by the power of grace.

What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence? (III.3.43–7)

Shakespeare's interest in the meaning of repentance and the power of forgiveness is also evident in *Measure for Measure*, when Isabella joins Mariana in begging the Duke to spare Angelo's life (V.1.433–57). Within *Hamlet*, Claudius's anguished attempt to repent makes a telling contrast with Hamlet's lack of concern for the deaths of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and to his inability to conceive of his responsibility for the madness and death of Ophelia. Claudius is inescapably the villain of the play, but comparisons suggest that parts of his moral judgement are more finely tuned than Hamlet's. Montaigne accepted that for the common good princes would sometimes have to carry out immoral acts, but he required them to feel remorse when they did so (V799, P840, S902).

Sex and Marriage

Montaigne is self-consciously frank about sex, especially in the chapter *Sur des vers de Virgile* (III, 5).¹⁵ He defends himself by asserting that he dares to write whatever he dares to do or think and by wishing that others would be more reluctant to do what they are ashamed to speak of (V845, P886–7, S953). He recognizes that women have sexual desires, which he believes to be greater than men's, even though they are hidden where men's are physically overt.

[B] Les femmes n'ont pas tort du tout, quand elles refusent les reigles de vie, qui sont introduites au monde: d'autant que ce sont les hommes qui les ont faictes sans elles ... Après que nous avons cogneu, qu'elles sont sans comparaison plus capables et ardentes aux effects de l'amour que nous ... Après avoir creu (dis-je) et presché cela, nous sommes allez leur donner la continence peculierement en partage: et sur peines dernieres et extremes. Il n'est passion plus pressante que cette cy, à laquelle nous voulons qu'elles resistent seules ... et nous nous y rendons ce pendant sans coulpe et reproche. (V854–5, P896–7)

[B] Women are not entirely wrong when they reject the moral rules proclaimed in society, since it is we men alone who have made them ... We realize that women have an incomparably greater capacity for the act of love than men do and desire it more ardently ... We believe all that and teach all that. And then we go and assign sexual restraint to women as something peculiarly theirs, under pain of punishments of utmost severity. No passion is more urgent than this one, yet our will is that they alone should resist it ... Meanwhile we men can give way to it without blame or reproach. (S964–5)

Men's expectations of women's preservation of honour and resistance to sexual temptation should not be so high when they fall so easily themselves. Montaigne's criticism of men's double standards and his condemnation of their injustice to women (V885, P928, S1001) conclude by asserting the similarity between men and women.

[B] Je dis que les masles et femelles sont jettez en mesme moule, sauf l'institution et l'usage, la difference n'y est pas grande. (V897, P941)

[B] I say that male and female are cast in the same mould: save for education and custom the difference between them is not great. (S1016)

Montaigne finds that, in the verses which give the chapter its title, Virgil portrays the married Venus as too passionate. He finds an opposition between marriage, which is devoted to social usefulness, and love, which requires passionate desire.

[B] En ce sage marché les appetits ne se trouvent pas si follastres: ils sont sombres et plus mousses. L'amour hait qu'on se tienne par ailleurs que par luy, et se mesle laschement aux accointances qui sont dressées et entretenues sous autre titre, comme est le mariage. (V849, P891)

[B] Within that wise contract our sexual desires are not so madcap; they are darkened and have lost their edge. Cupid hates that couples should be held together except by himself, and only slackly comes into partnerships such as marriage which are drawn up and sustained by different title-deeds. (S958–9)

He finds strong sexual desire both incompatible with marital obligations and demeaning to the status of marriage (V853–4, 850, P895–6, 891–2, S963–4, 959). A good marriage is closer to friendship and fellowship than to love (V851, P893, S961).

[B] Ce sont deux desseins, qui ont des routes distinguées, et non confondues. Une femme se peut rendre à tel personnage, que nullement elle ne voudroit avoir espousé: je ne dy pas pour les conditions de la fortune, mais pour celles mesmes de la personne. Peu de gens ont espousé des amies qui ne s'en soyent repentis. (V853, P895)

[B] We are dealing with two projects which each go their own distinct separate ways. A wife may give herself to another man whom – not because of the state of his finances but because of his very personality – she would never wish to marry. Few men have married their mistresses without repenting of it. (S963)

Even outside marriage, in spite of the comments quoted above, he assigns different roles to the two sexes. He relates women's greater capacity for

love and their smaller likelihood of failing to satisfy, to their passive sexual role.

[B] Et si l'inconstance leur est à l'aventure aucunement plus pardonnable qu'à nous. Elles peuvent alleguer comme nous l'inclination qui nous est commune à la varieté et à la nouvelleté; et alleguer secondement sans nous qu'elles achètent chat en sac ... Que l'action a plus d'effort que n'a la souffrance; ainsi que de leur part tousjours aumoins il est pourveu à la nécessité; de nostre part il peut avenir autrement. (V885–6, P929)

[B] And fickleness is perhaps somewhat more excusable in them than in us. Like us they can cite in their defence the penchant we both have for variety and novelty; secondly they can cite, what we cannot, that they buy a pig in a poke [illustrated in C by a story of Queen Joanna of Naples murdering a husband whose sexual performance failed to match her expectations]; they can also cite the fact that since the active partner is required to make more effort than the passive one, they at least can always provide for this necessity while we cannot. (S1002)

He criticizes women who try to enhance their sexual enjoyment by moving their thighs instead of remaining still (V470, P494, S525). His separation of love from marriage encourages him to develop a strongly physiological view of love.

[B] Je trouve après tout que l'amour n'est autre chose que la soif de cette jouissance [C] en un subject désiré; ny Venus autre chose que le plaisir à descharger ses vases, comme le plaisir que nature nous donne à descharger d'autres parties, qui devient vicieux ou par l'immoderation ou par indiscretion ... [B] Et que c'est par moquerie que nature nous a laissé la plus trouble de nos actions, la plus commune, pour nous esgaller par là, et apparier les fols et les sages, et nous et les bestes. (V877, P920)

[B] I find that love is nothing but the thirst for enjoyment [C] within the object of our desire and that Venus is nothing other than the pleasure of discharging our vessels, a pleasure which becomes vicious through lack of moderation or discretion ... [B] and that it was in mockery that nature gave us this most awkward and common of our activities, to make us all equal, the fools and the wise, we humans and the animals. (S991–2)

As a matter of sexual economy Montaigne advises women to dispense their favours gradually, taking time before they yield fully. This would have benefits for men too.

[B] Cette dispensation reviendrait à nostre commodité; nous y arresterions, et nous y aymerions plus long temps; sans esperance et sans desir nous n'allons plus rien qui vaille. Nostre maistrise et entiere possession leur est infiniment à craindre. Depuis qu'elles sont du tout rendues à la mercy de nostre foy et constance, elles sont un peu bien hasardées; ce sont vertus rares et difficiles. Soudain qu'elles sont à nous, nous ne sommes plus à elles. (V881, P924)

[B] Such stewardship would turn to our advantage; there we would linger and love longer; without hope and desire we no longer achieve anything worthwhile. Women should infinitely fear our overmastery and entire possession. Their position is pretty perilous once they have totally thrown themselves on the mercy of our faith and constancy; those virtues are rare and exacting; as for the women, as soon as we have them, they no longer have us. (S996)

Thinking about sex persuades Montaigne to reverse his usual view on the importance of speaking the truth. He prefers women to pretend a greater innocence and reluctance than they feel. Lying has an honourable place in love, bringing us to truth by the back door, whereas frankness comes too close to shamelessness (V867, P910, S980). Lying is not just a matter of prudence but also of pleasure. Although Montaigne rejects sexual jealousy, he still seems to be reassured by a fantasy of male forcefulness and female exclusivity.

Montaigne devotes a substantial section of the chapter to the stupidity and self-destructiveness of sexual jealousy (V863–72, P906–15, S975–86). He points out that most of the most famous men of antiquity knew of their wives' infidelity and never made a fuss about it (V864, P906, S975–6). He writes of the irrational ferocity of jealousy (especially female jealousy).

[C] C'est des maladies d'esprit celle, à qui plus des choses servent d'aliment, et moins de choses de remede. (V865, P907)

[C] Of all the spiritual illnesses, jealousy is the one which has more things which feed it and fewer things which cure it. (S977)

He tries to make men understand what they are up against in demanding female chastity. The will is too flighty to be restrained. No one can control what they think or dream of (V865–6, P908, S978). Even actions can have different meanings. Unless a man wishes to make women invisible or insensible he can never feel absolutely secure (V868, P910, S981). Intention is the crucial point here and many dubious actions can be carried out with spotless intentions. Since such things are unknowable and since knowledge can only be painful it is better not to inquire too closely.

[B] La curiosité est vicieuse par tout, mais elle est pernicieuse icy. C'est folie de vouloir s'esclaircir d'un mal, auquel il n'y a point de medecine, qui ne l'empire et le rengrege; duquel la honte s'augmente et se publie principalement par la jalousie; duquel la vengeance blesse plus nos enfants qu'elle ne nous guerit. Vous assechez et mourez à la queste d'une si obscure verification ... Si l'advertisseur n'y presente quand et quand le remede et son secours, c'est un advertissement injurieux, et qui merite mieux un coup de poignard, que ne faict un dementir. (V869, P912)

[B] Curiosity is always a fault; here it is baleful. It is madness to want to find out about an ill for which there is no treatment except one which makes it worse and exacerbates it; one the shame of which is spread abroad and augmented chiefly by our jealousy; one which to avenge means hurting our children rather than curing ourselves. You wither and die while hunting for such hidden truth ... If the man who warns you of it does not also at once supply a remedy and his help, his warning is noxious, deserving your dagger more than if he called you a liar. (S982)

Being a cuckold is not simply ridiculous, it is also in a sense just.

[C] Chacun de vous a fait quelqu'un coqu; or nature est toute en pareilles, en compensation et vicissitude. [B] La frequence de cet accident en doit mes-huy avoir moderé l'aigreur. (V870, P913)

[C] Each one of you has cuckolded somebody; and Nature is ever like, alternating and balancing accounts. [B] The frequency of this misfortune ought by now to have limited its bitter taste. (S983, V870)

Montaigne finds that men by placing difficult demands on women may increase the likelihood that they will succumb.

[B] Regardons aussi que cette grande et violente aspreté d'obligation, que nous leur enjoignons, ne produise deux effects contraires à nostre fin: à sçavoir, qu'elle aiguise les poursuyvants, et face les femmes plus faciles à se rendre. Car quant au premier point, montant le prix de la place, nous montons le prix et le desir de la conqueste. Seroit-ce pas Venus mesme, qui eust ainsi finement haussé le chevet à sa marchandise par le maquerelage des loix, cognoissant combien c'est un sot desduit, qui ne le feroit valoir par fantasie et par cherté? (V871, P914)

[B] We also need to ensure that the great and intense harshness of the obligations which we lay on women should not produce two results hostile to our ends: namely, that it does not whet the appetites of their suitors nor make the wives more ready to surrender. As for the first point, by raising the value of a redoubt we raise the value of conquering it and the desire to do so. May not Venus herself cunningly have raised the cost of her merchandise by making the laws pimp for her, realizing that it is a silly pleasure for anyone who does not enhance it by imagination and by buying it dear? (S984–5)

At the same time Montaigne appreciates the connection between sexual desire and liveliness of body and mind. As a doctor he would prescribe love to keep men lively (V891–2, P935, S1008–9). Philosophy teaches us to moderate such pleasures, not to avoid them (V892, P936, S1009). For himself, he only has love to keep him going in old age (V893, P937, S1011). But this is tempered with an awareness that love really belongs to the young; that he would not expect to be attracted by women of his own age (V894–5, P938–9, S1012–13) and that young women would have no reason for loving older men (V896, P940, S1015).

Shakespeare resembles Montaigne in his portrayal of the strength of women's sexual desires, which he can treat both comically, as in *Venus and Adonis*, and with admiration, for example in Juliet and Rosalind. These two cases show us that, in line with the conventions of comedy, Shakespeare does not accept Montaigne's strong separation of the pleasures of love from the obligations of marriage. His presentation of Cressida in the second scene combines passionate commitment with an appreciation of the advantages

of managing male desire.¹⁶ Troilus's comments on his imagination of the sweetness of love (III.2.16–27), contrasted with the apparent ease of his intended departure the morning after (IV.2.1–18), tend to confirm Montaigne's view and her tactics, but there are also voices in the play which condemn her conduct as whorish rather than prudent. Sonnet 138 agrees with Montaigne about the commerce between lying and love.

Like the sonnets, *Troilus and Cressida* (1601–2) and *Measure for Measure* (1604) present an idea of the powerlessness of individuals to resist the demands of desire, even against the claims of reason and the grain of their own character. Where Montaigne prudentially presents the power of love as something to be lamented, resisted and moderated, Shakespeare understands that the exposure of its destructive effect, even on the unwilling, is more gripping theatrically. That Angelo in seeking to extort Isabella's consent is victim as well as tyrant and hypocrite excitingly twists an audience's responses.

When Iago declares that love is 'merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will',¹⁷ or when Paris defines it as 'hot blood, hot thoughts and hot deeds',¹⁸ the audience understands this Montaigne-ish, physiological view of love as an expression of one character's views, contested by others and to be judged in the light of the meaning of the whole play. That Desdemona's more self-sacrificing love can be destroyed by Iago may tell the audience more about the world in which the tragedy of *Othello* takes place than about the nature of love. But Desdemona's love, like Juliet's, demands a bodily expression. Thersites's perception of the Trojan War as 'lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery' (V.2.193) must be weighed by the audience in relation to its speaker, in comparison with other views and in the context of the story presented, before they can determine how much truth it conveys.

Montaigne's comments on the destructiveness and folly of jealousy, and on the ease with which it can be fuelled, have an obvious resonance for Shakespeare's two great tragic representations of jealousy, in *Othello* (1604) and *The Winter's Tale* (1611). As with revenge, the way in which Montaigne argues against jealousy without attending to any counter-arguments may suggest that here he knew he was opposing something which many of his readers would have found acceptable. Shakespeare shows us very clearly how jealousy destroys even experienced rulers once they give way to it and how easy it is for someone to find (or to be given) evidence which they find compelling. When the audience is shown that even Othello's battle-tested calmness, even his understanding of jealousy's power to infect the mind

(III.3.18–95) cannot inoculate him against cunningly placed suspicion, the spectacle of his fall is gripping and appalling. When even Desdemona's kind and charitable actions can be turned into motives for suspecting her, the audience is compelled to face up to the fragility of our understanding of the impact of our deeds on the minds of others.

Young or old Shakespeare's romantic leads (*e.g.*, Romeo, Orlando, Orsino, Antony) have a tendency to appear ridiculous, partly in their self-indulgence, but especially in comparison with the superior understanding of the women they court. This fits in well enough with Montaigne's comments on the role of sex in human life. But Shakespeare is not unsympathetic to Montaigne's idea that thoughts of love enhance the liveliness of the old. Doll Tearsheet's tenderness towards Falstaff gives a sentimental gloss to his determination to live, while Justice Shallow's recollections of Jane Nightwork portray the small spark of life remaining as more vivid than his youth as others saw it.

However much or little Montaigne's comments on sex help us in understanding Shakespeare's plays, none of them could be regarded as a source. With Montaigne there is always a suspicion that apparent assertions of the rights of women may have been intended mainly as criticisms of male behaviour (though against this we need to remember that he hoped that *Sur des vers* would win him a special place in women's intimate reading);¹⁹ in characters like Cleopatra and Rosalind there is more sense of an attempt to portray a woman's view, especially a certain playfulness towards men's aspirations. When we turn from Shakespeare to Montaigne we are amazed by the directness with which he describes in his own voice what he has learned about sex. By contrast when Rosalind, for example, declares that 'I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more new-fangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey' (*As You Like It*, IV.1.141–5), we cannot easily tell whether it is Ganymede, Rosalind or Shakespeare who is making these assertions about female sexuality.

Fathers and Children

De l'affection des peres aux enfans (II, 8) discusses the idea of older men giving their wealth to their heirs which is one of the main plot issues of *King Lear* (1605–6).²⁰ Some of the arguments of the chapter may have provided Shakespeare with material for his characters to develop. Although the love of one's children is a law of nature, Montaigne finds that parents have different

ways of treating their children and trying to win their love. He is particularly preoccupied with questions of property and inheritance.

If we were to feare that since the order of things beareth, that they [*i.e.*, children] cannot indeed, neither be, nor live, but by our being and life, we should not meddle to be fathers. As for mee, I deeme it a kind of cruelty and injustice, not to receive them into the share and society of our goods, and to admit them as Partners in the understanding of our domestical affaires (if they be once capable of it) and not to cut off and shut-up our commodities to provide for theirs, since we have engendred them to that purpose. It is meere injustice to see an old, crazed, sinnow-shronken, and nigh dead father sitting alone in a Chimny-corner, to enjoy so many goods as would suffice for the preferment and entertainment of many children, and in the meane while, for want of meanes, to suffer them to lose their best dayes and yeares, without thrusting them into publike service and knowledge of men.²¹

Montaigne rejects the idea of using financial control to obtain honour and respect from one's children.

That father may truly be said miserable, that holdeth the affection of his children tied unto him by no other meanes than by the need they have of his helpe, or want of his assistance, if that may be termed affection.²²

He repeats that it is better to be loved than feared.²³ Perhaps naively he asserts that a man who has behaved honourably and generously will always be respected by his children.²⁴ Montaigne commends Charles V for his wisdom in resigning his property and kingdom to his son at the point when he felt his own powers had begin to decay.²⁵

This fault, for a man not to be able to know himselfe betimes, and not to feele the impuissance and extreme alteration, that age doth naturally bring, both to the body and the minde (which in my opinion is equall, if the minde have but one halfe) hath lost the reputation of the most part of the greatest men in the world.²⁶

Montaigne tells of advising one of his friends who had grown up children.

I chanced one day to tell him somewhat boldly (as my custome is) that it would better besee me him to give us place, and resigne his chiefe house to his sonne (for he had no other mannor-house conveniently well furnished) and quietly retire himselfe to some farm of his, where no man might trouble him, or disturbe his rest ... who afterward followed my counsell, and found great ease by it. It is not to be said, that they have any thing given them by such a way of obligation, which a man may not recall againe; I, that am ready to play such a part, would give over unto them the full possession of my house, and enjoying of my goods, but with such libertie and limited condition, as if they should give me occasion, I might repent my selfe of my gift and revoke my deed. I would leave the use and fruition of all unto them, the rather because it were no longer fit for me to weald the same. And touching the disposing of all matters in grosse, I would reserve what I pleased unto my selfe.²⁷

Against this optimistic narrative and personal recommendation of retirement Montaigne tells at greater length a negative exemplum of a formerly very able man who believed himself to be in full control of his household when in fact his children and servants colluded to manage all his affairs behind his back. Montaigne amplifies the old man's boasts about his control of the household before asking whether perhaps it was not preferable for him to be deceived in this way.²⁸ In a further counter example he expresses his pity for the former Marshal of France, M. de Monluc, who regrets that, in maintaining the stern demeanour he thought appropriate to a father, he never conveyed to his son the deep affection he felt for him.²⁹ The untypically one-sided manner in which Montaigne presents the argument for abdication of power may itself indicate how unusual the suggestion was and the degree of opposition he could expect it to encounter.

While there are no precise verbal repetitions it is easy to see how passages from this essay could have suggested the argument which Edmund gives Edgar in his forged letter and which Gloucester rejects so vehemently (I.2.44–78). Edmund even suggests that the argument may have been intended as 'an essay or taste of my virtue' (45). The issues raised in this chapter of the dangers of clinging on to power for too long, the difficult relationship between love and property, the impossibility of trying to force love and even the idea of keeping back a certain portion for oneself are all germane to the plot of *King Lear*. In a way the double plot investigates each of the two alternatives which Montaigne poses. Lear abdicates power while Gloucester

holds on to it. But in *King Lear* both alternatives lead to dispossession and suffering. Both old men seek to dominate, yet are outmanoeuvred by, their children.³⁰ Not only are they unable to extort love, they fail to recognize love when it exists. In comparison with the depths of inter-generational hatred revealed by *King Lear*,³¹ Montaigne's confidence in balancing considerations and reservations of rights appears naïve. Montaigne's rather cosy idea of benevolent self-deception is not an option in *King Lear*, where the fathers' destined suffering, consequent on their own use of their power as well as their blindness, offers only a limited insight as a recompense for madness. Reading *De l'affection des peres aux enfans* one is reminded of the premisses of the plot of *King Lear*, but turning back to it after reading the play the atmosphere of the chapter seems quite different. Through the stories he tells, Montaigne faces up to the melancholy and incomprehension of parent–child relationships. He understands that money causes conflicts between parents and children and he proposes the conditional advance gift of the inheritance as a practical solution. This sort of prudential advice seems somehow beside the point in relation to Lear's denunciation of his daughters, Gloucester's unknowing reliance on the wronged Edgar and both men's attempts to win a realistic understanding of the world they had previously misrecognized.

Human Sufficiency and the Animals

In the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* (II, 12) Montaigne presents many arguments for the wretchedness of human life in the absence of God. A long section argues that mankind's pretended superiority over animals is false by retelling stories from Plutarch about the superior intelligence, loyalty and bravery of animals (V452–86, P474–512, S506–41). Montaigne makes it clear that his aim in telling these stories is to demolish human pretensions of superiority.

We are neither above nor under the rest [of the animals]: whatever is under the coape of heaven runneth one law, and followeth one fortune ... Miserable man with all his wit cannot in effect goe beyond it: he is embraced, and engaged, and as other creatures of his ranke are, he is subjected in like bondes, and without any prerogative or essentiall pre-excellencie, what ever Privilege he assume unto himselfe, he is of very meane condition.³²

Jonathan Bate argues that the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* provides the philosophical basis for *King Lear* while Henderson suggests that both works

share the project of undermining the pretensions of human pride.³³ When Montaigne reviews the number of things that human beings can desire he concludes that most of them are ‘neither necessary nor naturall’.

They are all superfluous and artificiall. It is wonderfull to see with how little nature will be satisfied, and how little she hath left for us to be desired. The preparations in our kitchins, doe nothing at all concerne her lawes.³⁴

It is striking that many aspects of the view of mankind depicted in *King Lear* can be paralleled from the *Apologie*. Montaigne insists on man’s emptiness, vanity and self-deception.

The meanes I use to supresse this frenzy ... is to crush, and trample this humane pride and fiercenesse underfoot, to make them feeble the emptinesse, vacuitie, and no worth of man ... all our wisdom is but folly before God; that of all vanities, man is the greatest.³⁵

Montaigne contrasts man’s low place in the world with his great presumption.

Of all creatures man is the most miserable and fraile, and therewithall the proudest and disdainfullest. Who perceiveth and seeth himselfe placed here, amidst the filth and mire of the world, fast tied and nailed to the worst, most senselesse and drooping part of the world, in the vilest corner of the house, and farthest from heavens coape.³⁶

When his daughters attempt to reduce the number of his followers to one (‘What need one?’), Lear enlarges the question of his needs as a king to the more general issue of the relationship between necessity and human identity.

O reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man’s life is cheap as beast’s. Thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear’st
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. (II.4.261–7)

Montaigne had made a similar point in *De mesnager sa volonté* (III, 10, V1009–10, P1055, S1141–2), arguing that human nature should be thought of as including more than the small amount physically needed for survival. Both Montaigne and Shakespeare may well have taken this idea from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (III.56, V.97). There is no verbal similarity to suggest that Shakespeare took it from Florio's translation (III, 260–1) of Montaigne.

[B] Si ce que nature exactement et originelement nous demande pour la conservation de nostre estre est trop peu (comme de vray combien ce l'est et combien à bon comte nostre vie se peut maintenir, il ne se doit exprimer mieux que par cette consideration, que c'est si peu qu'il eschappe la prise et le choc de la fortune par sa petitesse), dispensons nous de quelque chose plus outre: appellons encore nature l'usage et condition de chacun de nous; taxons nous, traitons nous à cette mesure, estendons nos appartenances et nos comtes jusques là. (V1009, P1055)

[B] If what Nature precisely and basically requires for the preservation of our being is too little (and how little it is and how cheaply life can be sustained cannot be better expressed than by the following consideration: that it is so little that it escapes the grasp and blows of Fortune) then let us allow ourselves a little more: let us call 'nature' the habits and endowments of each one of us; let us appraise ourselves and treat ourselves by that measure: let us stretch out our appurtenances and our calculations as far as that. (S1141–2)

A little later, once the storm has begun, Lear modifies this view when he finds that under pressure from the weather things which he would earlier have regarded as vile now seem valuable.

The art of our necessities is strange,
And can make vile things precious. Come; your hovel. (III.2.70–1)

Foakes connects this idea with the proverbial need to 'make a virtue of necessity' but it could also be seen as related to Montaigne's argument in *Que le goust des biens ...* (I, 14), that the mind can prepare itself to accept poverty, pain and death, without regarding them as evils. Later still, in the storm, with the appearance of Mad Tom, Lear revises his view that superfluity defines

the human. Once he has seen Tom he feels compelled to acknowledge that in essence man really is no different from the animals.

Why, thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha? Here's three on's us are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! (III.4.104–7)

Both in this speech and in the previous one some of Lear's anger is fuelled by commonplaces of anti-female satire: the silks and perfumes or the gorgeous clothes cut so as to reveal rather than warm the wearer's body. Curiously this speech has something in common with a passage in which Montaigne makes the opposite point.

Truly, when I consider man all naked (yea, be it in that sex, which seemeth to have and challenge the greatest share of eye-pleasing beautie) and view his defects, his naturall subjection, and manifold imperfections; I finde we have had much more reason to hide and cover our nakedness, than any creature else. We may be excused for borrowing those which nature had therein favored more than us, with their beauties to adorne us, and under their spoiles of wooll, of haire, of feathers, and of silke to shroud us.³⁷

If Shakespeare in fact used this passage (and it is far from certain, since the verbal parallels are rather slight) it might have amused him to twist its purpose. The *Apologie* also contrasts madness and blindness in ways that are relevant to *King Lear*.

[1582] Quel sault vient de prendre de sa propre agitation et allegresse, l'un des plus judicieux, ingenieux et plus formés à l'air de cette antique et pure poësie, qu'autre poëte Italien n'aye de long temps esté? N'a-il pas dequoy sçavoir gré à cette sienne vivacité meurtriere? à cette clarté qui l'a aveuglé? à cette exacte et tendue apprehension de la raison, qui l'a mis sans raison? ... Voulez vous un homme sain, le voulez vous réglé, et en ferme et seure posture? Affublez le de tenebres d'oisiveté et de pesanteur. [C] Il nous faut abestir pour nous assagir; et nous esblouir, pour nous guider. (V492, P518)

[1582] What a leap has just been taken, because of the restlessness and liveliness of his mind by an Italian poet, fashioned in the atmosphere of the pure poetry of Antiquity, who showed more judgement and genius than any other Italian for many a long year; yet his agile and lively mind has overthrown him; the light has made him blind; his reason's grasp was so precise and so intense that it has left him quite irrational ... Do you want a man who is sane, moderate, firmly based and reliable? Then array him in darkness, sluggishness and heaviness. [C] To teach us to be wise, make us stupid like beasts; to guide us you must blind us. (S548)

Towards the end of the chapter, after mockingly describing the attempts of those who are blind from birth to adapt themselves to a world and a language dominated by the sighted Montaigne asks,

[A] Que sçait-on si le genre humain fait une sottise pareille, à faute de quelque sens, et que par ce defect la plus part du visage des choses nous soit caché? (V589, P626)

[A] How do we know that the whole human race is not doing something just as silly? We may all lack some sense or other; because of that defect, most of the features of objects may be concealed from us. (S666)

Just as Montaigne reversed Lucretius's arguments intended to assert the primacy of knowledge through the senses to argue against the possibility of knowledge so Shakespeare could have used Montaigne's depiction of the wretchedness of man without God to portray the suffering inherent in the human lot. But he might equally have found his way to these ideas with the same independence as he showed in shaping the central scenes of the play.

Justice

Montaigne's final chapter, *De l'expérience* (III, 13), begins with a strong critique of the law. There are too many laws and their interpretation and enforcement are astonishingly capricious (V1065–8, P1112–14, S1208–10). He supports this idea with a story about some peasants who have just found a severely wounded man who was still alive. They were afraid to help him in case they should be accused of having harmed the man.

[B] Que leur eussé-je dict? Il est certain que cet office d'humanité les eust mis en peine. (V1070, P1117)

[B] What ought I to have said to them? It is certain that such an act of humanity would have got them into difficulties. (S1214)

Fear of the workings of the law led the peasants to decline a clear moral obligation which they would otherwise have fulfilled. Montaigne partly defends them by describing innocent parties being executed for the sake of judicial procedures, even when the court knew they were innocent (V1070–1, P1117–18, S1214–15).

Thinking about man's vanity in proposing rules which he has no intention of obeying prompts Montaigne to describe an incident in which a judge used part of a sheet of paper on which he has condemned an adulterer to write a love letter to a colleague's wife, and to recall one of his own lovers loudly condemning the adulteries of her female friend (III, 9, V989, P1035, S1118–19). The figure of the adulterous judge also turns up in Lear's denunciation of human justice.

LEAR What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes.
Look with thine ears. See how yon justice rails upon yon simple thief.
Hark in thine ear: change places and handy-dandy, which is the justice,
which is the thief? Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

GLOS Ay, sir.

LEAR And the creature run from the cur – there thou mightst behold the
great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office.

Thou, rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand;

Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back,

Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind

For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.

Through tattered clothes great vices do appear:

Robes and furred gowns hide all. ^FPlate sin with gold,

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;

Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.

None, does offend, none, I say none. I'll able 'em; ^F(IV.6.146–64)³⁸

Lear argues that hearing without seeing is actually an advantage in that it enables you to understand from their words that the thief and the judge are the same without being distracted by the difference in their costumes.

Shakespeare may here draw on the proverb Great thieves hang the little ones (T119).³⁹ Hearing, which Lear still insists on associating with seeing, leads him to the barking of dogs. He explains that authority, far from being an effect of some innate superhuman quality like charisma, is a product of mere force, an attribute of the dog rather than the beggar. After evoking this picture from Gloucester's memory he uses personification to create a scene in which a beadle beats a whore before linking through genus and species to hypocritical judgements over money. This in turn leads him, in a move Montaigne as an aristocrat and judge never makes, to the causal relationship between power, wealth and impunity. He sets up a contrast (topic of contraries) between judgments of those who are poor ('tattered clothes') and the rich, or the judges ('Robes and furred gowns'). Amplifying this point with descriptions of gorgeous clothes and gold-plated armour (with an overtone of the wealthy eating from golden plates) leads him back to the poor, whose poverty justice can punish on the weakest grounds ('a pigmy's straw'). This leads to his most general and devastating conclusion. In such circumstances there can be no justice and his duty as king is to enfranchise prisoners and silence prosecutors. The speed and lack of differentiation with which Lear moves from one topic to the next make his uncontrolled perceptiveness express itself as madness. The conclusion Lear here draws as a counsel of disgust can be compared with Goneril's tyrannical taunt later ('Say if I do, the laws are mine, not thine./ Who can arraign me for't?', V.3.156–7) which Albany strongly deplores. In III.4 Lear articulates a different kind of justice, based on compassion and sufficiency.

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
 Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
 From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
 Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
 And show the heavens more just. (28–36)

Considering the voices and needs of others prompts a different response to Lear's own situation. The outer storm and the concern for others (first of all Kent and the Fool) which it evokes becomes a means of avoiding self-destructive thoughts. Then he extends his compassion to imagine the experience of all

the impoverished people who lack proper shelter and sustenance to protect them from the extremes of the weather. After amplifying his depictions of the storm and the unpreparedness of the poor, he connects this with his own political role, acknowledging his responsibility in not meeting this need. And then he generalizes his recent experience into a wider political lesson. The medicine to cure the ills of the proud and powerful is to share homeless people's conditions of life in order to experience the human feelings which will prompt them to make proper provision for the poor.⁴⁰ Instead of using superfluous wealth to procure luxuries, they should provide housing, clothing and food for the needy. In this way human action will create a social justice which avoids the disproportionate effect of the heavens' anger on the poor. So human beings through their emotions will create a world which is more just than the one heaven has provided. Shakespeare's language here makes use of Christian ideas about the conditions on the obligation to charity (you are enjoined to give superfluous wealth, money which goes beyond your local needs, for relief, but not to impoverish yourself)⁴¹ but with the idea that humans can make the world more just than the gods have.

Utopia

In *Des cannibales* (I, 31) Montaigne attacks the European view that the people of the new world are barbaric.

[A] Or je trouve ... qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté; sinon que chacun appelle barbarie, ce qui n'est pas de son usage. Comme de vray nous n'avons autre mire de la verité, et de la raison, que l'exemple et idée des opinions et usances du païs où nous sommes ... Ils sont sauvages de mesmes, que nous appellons sauvages les fruits, que nature de soy et de son progrez ordinaire a produits; là où à la verité ce sont ceux que nous avons alterez par nostre artifice, et destournez de l'ordre commun, que nous devrions appeller plustost sauvages. (V205, P211)

[A] I find (from what has been told me) nothing savage or barbarous about these peoples but that every man calls barbarous anything that he is not accustomed to; it is indeed the case that we have no other criterion of truth or right reason than the example and form of the opinions and customs of our own country ... These 'savages' are only wild in the sense that we call fruits wild when they are produced by Nature in her ordinary

course; whereas it is fruit which we have artificially perverted and misled from the common order which we ought to call savage. (S231)

He points out that the ancient world knew nothing of this part of the world (V203–5, P209–11, S229–31) and wishes that Plato could have known of their simple and pure nature (V206–7, P212–13, S232–3) so far superior to his *Republic*.

It is a nation, would I answer Plato, that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superiority; no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kinred, but common, no apparell but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corne, or mettle.⁴²

After describing their customs, especially their bravery in war and their polygamy, he relates two comments which the Indians who he met at Rouen made about the French. First they were surprised that the strong soldiers were willing to obey a boy king rather than choosing one of themselves as commander.

[A] Secondement (ils ont une façon de leur langage telle qu'ils nomment les hommes, moitié les uns des autres) qu'ils avoyent apperceu qu'il y avoit parmy nous des hommes pleins et gorgez de toutes sortes de commoditez, et que leurs moitez estoient mendiants à leurs portes, décharnez de faim et de pauvreté; et trouvoient estrange comme ces moitez icy necessiteuses pouvoient souffrir une telle injustice, qu'ils ne prisent les autres à la gorge, ou missent le feu à leurs maisons. (V213–14, P221)

[A] Secondly – since they have an idiom in their language which calls all men 'halves' of the other – that they had noticed that there were among us men fully bloated with all sorts of comforts while their halves were begging at doors, emaciated with poverty and hunger: they found it odd that those destitute halves should put up with such injustice and did not take the others by the throat or set fire to their houses. (S240–1)

Reading and thinking about the new world prompt some of Montaigne's strongest criticisms of the wrongs of his own society.

When Shakespeare was reading voyages and accounts of the new world in preparation for writing *The Tempest* (1611) he was struck by the passage in which Montaigne listed the characteristics of the new world as a reproach to Plato.⁴³ He deliberately converted the description from an account of new world customs to Gonzalo's project for founding an ideal colony. Since it is highly probable that the people who wrote the accounts which Montaigne worked from were themselves influenced by More's *Utopia*, Shakespeare's handling of the passage could be considered as returning it to its origins.

I'th' commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
Would I admit, no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all;
And women too – but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty – (II.1.147–56)

In framing the speech as Gonzalo's legislative proposal Shakespeare introduces the contradiction ('Had I plantation of this isle ... and were the king on't' (143–5); 'No sovereignty' (156)) which Sebastian and Antonio mock. By pointing out that the men and women are all idle (Montaigne had not mentioned the women), Shakespeare draws attention to the impracticality of the proposal, underlining it even as Gonzalo tries to anticipate the problem ('but innocent and pure'). As it happens Montaigne took a similar view of the impracticality of ideal commonwealths.

[B] Et certes toutes ces descriptions de police feintes par art se trouvent ridicules et ineptes à mettre en pratique. Ces grandes et longues altercations de la meilleure forme de société, et des reigles plus commodes à nous attacher, sont altercations propres seulement à l'exercice de nostre esprit ... Telle peinture de police seroit de mise en un nouveau monde, mais nous prenons un monde desjà faict et formé à certaines coustumes. (III, 9, V957, P1001)

[B] Such descriptions of fictional and artificial polities are ridiculous and silly when it comes to putting them into practice. All those solemn long debates about the best form of society and the laws most suitable for bonding us together are appropriate only for exercising our minds ... Such political theories might be applied in some new-made world, but we have to take men already fashioned and bound to particular customs. (S1083)

Since Gonzalo's well-meaning conversational diversions are deliberately mocked, it is quite possible that the close repetition of Florio's words here is an intentional signal to the audience that Montaigne is here being joked with. On the other hand Gonzalo is seen as well-meaning and (in the past) strong in defeating tyranny, so the reference (if the audience were able to pick it up) could also be thought of as an affectionate tribute.⁴⁴ Shakespeare is as concerned to point out the tyranny of Alonso and Prospero as Montaigne is to show the shortcomings of European views of the Amerindians. Reading Montaigne may well have prompted Shakespeare to develop positive aspects of his portrait of Caliban, but he reacted against the idea of idealizing the new world in order to chastise the old. Reading provided resources for thinking with. In this case Shakespeare's reaction of mocking part of what Montaigne wrote in *Des cannibales* helped him articulate a view of utopian writing which resembled the opinion Montaigne had expressed in *De la vanité*.