

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte  
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke  
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving  
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse  
Doré Dante Pushkin Alcott  
Swift Chekhov Newton



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# Montaigne and Shakspere

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MONTAIGNE AND SHAKSPERE

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## MONTAIGNE AND SHAKSPERE

For a good many years past the anatomic study of Shakspere, of which a revival seems now on foot, has been somewhat out of fashion, as compared with its vogue in the palmy days of the New Shakspere Society in England, and the years of the battle between the iconoclasts and the worshippers in Germany. When Mr. Fleay and Mr. Spedding were hard at work on the metrical tests; when Mr. Spedding was subtly undoing the chronological psychology of Dr. Furnivall; when the latter student was on his part undoing in quite another style some of the judgments of Mr. Swinburne; and when Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps was with natural wrath calling on Mr. Browning, as President of the Society, to keep Dr. Furnivall in order, we (then) younger onlookers felt that literary history was verily being made. Our sensations, it seemed, might be as those of our elders had been over Mr. Collier's emendated folio, and the tragical end thereof. Then came a period of lull in things Shaksperean, partly to be accounted for by the protrusion of the Browning Society and kindred undertakings. It seemed as if once more men had come to the attitude of 1850, when Mr. Phillipps had written: "An opinion has been gaining ground, and has been encouraged by writers whose judgment is entitled to respectful consideration, that almost if not all the commentary on the works of Shakspere of a necessary and desirable kind has already been given to the world." 1 And, indeed, so much need was there for time to digest the new criticism that it may be doubted whether among the general cultured public the process is even now accomplished.

To this literary phase in particular, and to our occupation with other studies in general, may be attributed the opportunity which still exists for the discussion of one of the most interesting of all problems concerning Shakspere. Mr. Browning, Mr. Meredith, Ibsen, Tolstoi—a host of peculiarly modern problem-makers 3 have been exorcising our not inexhaustible taste for the problematic, so that there was no very violent excitement over even the series of new "Keys" to the sonnets which came forth in the lull of the analysis of the plays; and yet, even with all the problems of modernity in view, it seems as if it must be rather by accident of oversight than for lack of interest in new developments of Shakspere-study that so

little attention has been given among us to a question which, once raised, has a very peculiar literary and psychological attraction of its own—the subject, namely, of the influence which the plays show their author to have undergone from the *Essays* of Montaigne.

As to the bare fact of the influence, there can be little question. That Shakspeare in one scene in the *Tempest* versifies a passage from the prose of Florio's translation of Montaigne's chapter *Of the Cannibals* has been recognised by all the commentators since Capell (1767), who detected the transcript from a reading of the French only, not having compared the translation. The first thought of students was to connect the passage with Ben Johnson's allusion 4 in *Volpone* 2 to frequent "stealings from Montaigne" by contemporary writers; and though *Volpone* dates from 1605, and the *Tempest* from 1610-1613, there has been no systematic attempt to apply the clue chronologically. Still, it has been recognised or surmised by a series of writers that the influence of the essayist on the dramatist went further than the passage in question. John Sterling, writing on Montaigne in 1838 (when Sir Frederick Madden's pamphlet on the autograph of Shakspeare in a copy of Florio had called special attention to the *Essays*), remarked that "on the whole, the celebrated soliloquy in *Hamlet* presents a more characteristic and expressive resemblance to much of Montaigne's writings than any other portion of the plays of the great dramatist which we at present remember"; and further threw out the germ of a thesis which has since been disastrously developed, to the effect that "the Prince of Denmark is very nearly a Montaigne, lifted to a higher eminence, and agitated by 5 more striking circumstances and a severer destiny, and altogether a somewhat more passionate structure of man." 3 In 1846, again, Philard Chasles, an acute and original critic, citing the passage in the *Tempest*, went on to declare that "once on the track of the studies and tastes of Shakspeare, we find Montaigne at every corner, in *Hamlet*, in *Othello*, in *Coriolanus*. Even the composite style of Shakspeare, so animated, so vivid, so new, so incisive, so coloured, so hardy, offers a multitude of striking analogies to the admirable and free manner of Montaigne." 4 The suggestion as to the "To be or not to be" soliloquy has been taken up by some critics, but rejected by others; and the propositions of M. Chasles, so far as I am aware, have never been supported by evidence. Nevertheless,

the general fact of a frequent reproduction or manipulation of Montaigne's ideas in some of Shakspeare's later plays has, I think, since been established.

Twelve years ago I incidentally cited, in an essay on the composition of Hamlet, some dozen 6 of the Essays of Montaigne from which Shakspeare had apparently received suggestions, and instanced one or two cases in which actual peculiarities of phrase in Florio's translation of the Essays are adopted by him, in addition to a peculiar coincidence which has been pointed out by Mr. Jacob Feis in his work entitled Shakspeare and Montaigne; and since then the late Mr. Henry Morley, in his edition of the Florio translation, has pointed to a still more remarkable coincidence of phrase, in a passage of Hamlet which I had traced to Montaigne without noticing the decisive verbal agreement in question. Yet so far as I have seen, the matter has passed for little more than a literary curiosity, arousing no new ideas as to Shakspeare's mental development. The notable suggestion of Chasles on that head has been ignored more completely than the theory of Mr. Feis, which in comparison is merely fantastic. Either, then, there is an unwillingness in England to conceive of Shakspeare as owing much to foreign influences, or as a case of intelligible mental growth, or else the whole critical problem which Shakspeare represents—and he may be regarded as the 7 greatest of critical problems—comes within the general disregard for serious criticism, noticeable among us of late years. And the work of Mr. Feis, unfortunately, is as a whole so extravagant that it could hardly fail to bring a special suspicion on every form of the theory of an intellectual tie between Shakspeare and Montaigne. Not only does he undertake to show in dead earnest what Sterling had vaguely suggested as conceivable, that Shakspeare meant Hamlet to represent Montaigne, but he strenuously argues that the poet framed the play in order to discredit Montaigne's opinions—a thesis which almost makes the Bacon theory specious by comparison. Naturally it has made no converts, even in Germany, where, as it happens, it had been anticipated.

In France, however, the neglect of the special problem of Montaigne's influence on Shakspeare is less easily to be explained, seeing how much intelligent study has been given of late by French critics to both Shakspeare and Montaigne. The influence is recognised; but

here again it is only cursorily traced. The latest study of Montaigne is that of M. Paul Stapfer, 8 a vigilant critic, whose services to Shakspeare-study have been recognised in both countries. But all that M. Stapfer claims for the influence of the French essayist on the English dramatist is thus put:—

"Montaigne is perhaps too purely French to have exercised much influence abroad. Nevertheless his influence on England is not to be disdained. Shakspeare appreciated him (*le goûtait*); he has inserted in the *Tempest* a passage of the chapter *Des Cannibales*; and the strong expressions of the *Essays on man*, the inconstant, irresolute being, contrary to himself, marvellously vain, various and changeful, were perhaps not unconnected with (*peut être pas 驚慌失措 的*) the conception of *Hamlet*. The author of the scene of the grave-diggers must have felt the savour and retained the impression of this thought, humid and cold as the grave: 'The heart and the life of a great and triumphant emperor are but the repast of a little worm.' The translation of *Plutarch*, or rather of *Amyot*, by *Thomas North*, and that of *Montaigne* by *Florio*, had together a great and long vogue in the English society of the seventeenth century." 5

So modest a claim, coming from the French side, can hardly be blamed on the score of that very modesty. It is the fact, however, that, though M. Stapfer has in another work 6 com 9 pared Shakspeare with a French classic critically enough, he has here understated his case. He was led to such an attitude in his earlier study of Shakspeare by the slightness of the evidence offered for the claim of M. Chasles, of which he wrote that it is "a gratuitous supposition, quite unjustified by the few traces in his writings of his having read the *Essays*." 7 But that verdict was passed without due scrutiny. The influence of Montaigne on Shakspeare was both wider and deeper than M. Stapfer has suggested; and it is perhaps more fitting, after all, that the proof should be undertaken by some of us who, speaking Shakspeare's tongue, cannot well be suspected of seeking to belittle him when we trace the sources for his thought, whether in his life or in his culture. There is still, indeed, a tendency among the more primitively patriotic to look jealously at such inquiries, as tending to diminish the glory of the worshipped name; but for anyone who is capable of appreciating Shakspeare's greatness, there can be no question of iconoclasm in the matter. Shakspeare ignorantly adored is a mere dubious mystery; Shakspeare followed up and comprehended, step by step, albeit never wholly revealed, becomes more remarkable, more profoundly interesting, as he becomes more intelligible. We are

*embarked, not on a quest for plagiarisms, but on a study of the growth of a wonderful mind. And in the idea that much of the growth is traceable to the fertilising contact of a foreign intelligence there can be nothing but interest and attraction for those who have mastered the primary sociological truth that such contacts of cultures are the very life of civilisation.*

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## II.

*The first requirement in the study, obviously, is an exact statement of the coincidences of phrase and thought in Shakspeare and Montaigne. Not that such coincidences are the main or the only results to be looked for; rather we may reasonably expect to find Shakspeare's thought often diverging at a tangent from that of the writer he is reading, or even directly gain-saying it. But there can be no solid argument as to such indirect influence until we have fully established the direct influence, and this can only be done by exhibiting a considerable number of coincidences. M. Chasles, while avowing that "the comparison of texts is indispensable – we must undergo this fatigue in order to know to what extent Shakspeare, between 1603 and 1615, became familiar with Montaigne" – strangely enough made no comparison of texts whatever beyond reproducing the familiar paraphrase in the *Tempest*, from the essay *Of Cannibals*; and left absolutely unsupported his 12 assertion as to *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Coriolanus*. It is necessary to produce proofs, and to look narrowly to dates. Florio's translation, though licensed in 1601, was not published till 1603, the year of the piratical publication of the First Quarto of *Hamlet*, in which the play lacks much of its present matter, and shows in many parts so little trace of Shakspeare's spirit and versification that, even if we hold the text to have been imperfectly taken down in shorthand, as it no doubt was, we cannot suppose him to have at this stage completed his refashioning of the older play, which is undoubtedly the substratum of his. 8 We must therefore keep closely in view the divergencies between this text and that of the Second Quarto, printed in 1604, in which the transmuting touch of Shakspeare is broadly evident. It is quite possible that Shakspeare may have seen parts of Florio's translation before 1603, or heard passages from it read; or even that he might have read Montaigne in the original. But as his possession of the translation is made certain by the preservation 13 tion of the copy bearing his autograph, and as it is from Florio that he is seen to have copied in the*

passages where his copying is beyond dispute, it is on Florio's translation that we must proceed.

I. In order to keep all the evidence in view, we may first of all collate once more the passage in the *Tempest* with that in the *Essays* which it unquestionably follows. In Florio's translation, Montaigne's words run:

"They [Lycurgus and Plato] could not imagine a genuity so pure and simple, as we see it by experience, nor ever believe our society might be maintained with so little art and human combination. It is a nation (would I answer Plato) that hath no kind of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politic superiority; no use of service, of riches, or of poverty; no contracts, no successions, no dividences, no occupations, but idle; no respect of kindred, but common; no apparel, but natural; no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corn, or metal. The very words that import lying, falsehood, treason, dissimulation, covetousness, envy, detraction, and passion, were never heard of amongst them. How dissonant would he find his imaginary commonwealth from this perfection?"

Compare the speech in which the kind old Gonzalo seeks to divert the troubled mind of the shipwrecked King Alonso: 14

"I' the 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; no use of service, Of riches, or of poverty; no contracts, Succession; bound of land, 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...."

There can be no dispute as to the direct transcription here, where the dramatist is but incidentally playing with Montaigne's idea, proceeding to put some gibes at it in the mouths of Gonzalo's rascally comrades; and it follows that Gonzalo's further phrase, "to excel the golden age," proceeds from Montaigne's previous words: "exceed all the pictures wherewith licentious poesy hath proudly embellished the golden age." The play was in all probability written in or before 1610. It remains to show that on his first reading of Florio's Montaigne, in 1603-4, Shakspeare was more deeply and widely influenced, though the specific proofs are in the nature of the case less palpable.

II. Let us take first the more decisive coincidences of phrase. Correspondences of thought 15 which in themselves do not establish their direct connection, have a new significance when it is seen that other coincidences amount to manifest reproduction. And such a coincidence we have, to begin with, in the familiar lines:

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will." 9

I pointed out in 1885 that this expression, which does not occur in the First Quarto Hamlet, corresponds very closely with the theme of Montaigne's essay, THAT FORTUNE IS OFTENTIMES MET WITHALL IN PURSUIT OF REASON, 10 in which occurs the phrase, "Fortune has more judgment 11 than we," a translation from Menander. But Professor Morley, having had his attention called to the subject by the work of Mr. Feis, who had suggested another passage as the source of Shakspeare's, made a more perfect identification. Reading the proofs of the Florio translation for his reprint, he found, what I had not observed in my occasional access to the old folio, not then reprinted, that the very metaphor of "rough-hewing" occurs in Florio's rendering of a pas 16 sage in the Essays:— 12 "My consultation doth somewhat roughly hew the matter, and by its first shew lightly consider the same: the main and chief point of the work I am wont to resign to Heaven." This is a much more exact coincidence than is presented in the passage cited by Mr. Feis from the essay Of Physiognomy:— 13 "Therefore do our designs so often miscarry.... The heavens are angry, and I may say envious of the extension and large privilege we ascribe to human wisdom, to the prejudice of theirs, and abridge them so much more unto us by so much more we endeavour to amplify them." If there were no closer parallel than that in Montaigne, we should be bound to take it as an expansion of a phrase in Seneca's Agamemnon, 14 which was likely to have become proverbial. I may add that the thought is often repeated in the Essays, and that in several passages it compares notably with Shakspeare's lines. These begin:

"Rashly, — And praised be rashness for it — Let us know Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well 17 When our deep plots do pall; and that should learn us There's a divinity" etc.

Compare the following extracts from Florio's translation:—

"The *Dæmon* of Socrates were peradventure a certain impulsion or will which without the advice of his discourse presented itself unto him. In a mind so well purified, and by continual exercise of wisdom and virtue so well prepared as his was, it is likely his inclinations (though rash and inconsiderate) were ever of great moment, and worthy to be followed. Every man feeleth in himself some image of such agitations, of a prompt, vehement, and casual opinion. It is in me to give them some authority, that afford so little to our wisdom. And I have had some (equally weak in reason and violent in persuasion and dissuasion, which was more ordinary to Socrates) by which I have so happily and so profitably suffered myself to be transported, as they might perhaps be thought to contain some matter of divine inspiration." 15

"Even in our counsels and deliberations, some chance or good luck must needs be joined to them; for whatsoever our wisdom can effect is no great matter." 16

"When I consider the most glorious exploits of war, methinks I see that those who have had the conduct of them employ neither counsel nor deliberation about them, but for fashion sake, and leave the best part of 18 the enterprise to fortune; and on the confidence they have in her aid, they still go beyond the limits of all discourse. Casual rejoicings and strange furies ensue among their deliberations." 17 etc.

Compare finally Florio's translation of the lines of Manilius cited by Montaigne at the end of the 47th Essay of the First Book:

"'Tis best for ill-advis'd, wisdom may fail, 18 Fortune proves not the cause that should prevail, But here and there without respect doth sail: A higher power forsooth us overdraws, And mortal states guides with immortal laws."

It is to be remembered, indeed, that the idea expressed in Hamlet's words to Horatio is partly anticipated in the rhymed speech of the Player-King in the play-scene in Act III., which occurs in the First Quarto:

"Our wills, our fates do so contrary run That our devices still are overthrown; Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own."

Such a passage, reiterating a familiar commonplace, might seem at first sight to tell against the view that Hamlet's later speech to Horatio is an

echo of Montaigne. But that view being 19 found justified by the evidence, and the idea in that passage being exactly coincident with Montaigne's, while the above lines are only partially parallel in meaning, we are forced to admit that Shakspeare may have been influenced by Montaigne even where a partial precedent might be found in his own or other English work.

III. The phrase "discourse of reason," which is spoken by Hamlet in his first soliloquy, 19 and which first appears in the Second Quarto, is not used by Shakspeare in any play before Hamlet; and he uses it again in *Troilus and Cressida*; 20 while "discourse of thought" appears in *Othello*; 21 and "discourse," in the sense of reasoning faculty, is used in Hamlet's last soliloquy. 22 In English literature this use of the word seems to be special in Shakspeare's period, 23 and it has been noted by an admirer as a finely Shakspearean expression. But the expression "discourse of reason" occurs at least four times in Montaigne's *Essays*, and in Florio's translation 20 of them: in the essay 24 *That to philosophise is to learn how to die*; again at the close of the essay 25 *A demain les affaires*; again in the first paragraph of the *Apology of Raimond Sebonde* 26; and yet again in the chapter on *The History of Spurina*; 27 and though it seems to be scholastic in origin, and occurs once or twice before 1600 in English books, it is difficult to doubt that, like the other phrase above cited, it came to Shakspeare through Florio's Montaigne. The word *discours* is a hundred times used singly by Montaigne, as by Shakspeare in the phrase "of such large discourse," for the process of ratiocination.

IV. Then again there is the clue of Shakspeare's use of the word "consummation" in the revised form of the "To be" soliloquy. This, as Mr. Feis pointed out, 28 is the word used by Florio as a rendering of an *accomplissement* in the speech of Socrates as given by Montaigne in the essay 29 *Of Physionomy*. Shakspeare makes Hamlet speak of annihilation as "a consummation devoutly to be wished." Florio has: "If it (death) be a consummation of one's being, it is also an amendment and entrance into a long and quiet night. We find nothing so sweet in life as a quiet and gentle sleep, and without dreams." Here not only do the words coincide in a peculiar way, but the idea in the two phrases is the same; the theme of sleep and dreams being further common to the two writings.

Beyond these, I have not noted any correspondences of phrase so precise as to prove reminiscence beyond possibility of dispute; but it is not difficult to trace striking correspondences which, though falling short of explicit reproduction, inevitably suggest a relation; and these it now behoves us to

consider. The remarkable thing is, as regards Hamlet, that they almost all occur in passages not present in the First Quarto.

V. When we compare part of the speech of Rosencrantz on sedition 30 with a passage in Montaigne's essay, *Of Custom*, 31 we find a somewhat close coincidence. In the play Rosencrantz says:

22

*"The cease of Majesty, Dies not alone; but like a gulf doth draw  
What's near with it: it is a massy wheel Fix'd on the summit of the  
highest mount, To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things  
Are mortised and adjoined; which, when it falls, Each small annexment, petty consequence, Attends the boisterous ruin."*

Florio has:

*"Those who attempt to shake an Estate are commonly the first overthrown by the fall of it.... The contexture and combining of this monarchy and great building having been dismissed and dissolved by it, namely, in her old years, giveth as much overture and entrance as a man will to like injuries. Royal majesty doth more hardly fall from the top to the middle, than it tumbleth down from the middle to the bottom."*

The verbal correspondence here is only less decisive – as regards the use of the word "majesty" – than in the passages collated by Mr. Morley; while the thought corresponds as closely.

VI. The speech of Hamlet, 32 *"There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so";* and Iago's *"'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus,"* 33 are expressions of a favourite thesis of Montaigne's, to which he devotes an entire essay. 34 The Shakspearean phrases echo closely such sentences as: –

*"If that which we call evil and torment be neither torment nor evil, but that our fancy only gives it that quality, it is in us to change it.... That which we term evil is not so of itself."... "Every man is either well or ill according as he finds himself."*

And in the essay 35 *Of Democritus and Heraclitus* there is another close parallel: –

"Therefore let us take no more excuses from external qualities of things. To us it belongeth to give ourselves account of it. Our good and our evil hath no dependency but from ourselves."

VII. Hamlet's apostrophe to his mother on the power of custom – a passage which, like the others above cited, first appears in the Second Quarto – is similarly an echo of a favourite proposition of Montaigne, who devotes to it the essay 36 *Of Custom*, and not to change readily a received law. In that there occur the typical passages: –

"Custom doth so blear us that we cannot distinguish the usage of things.... Certes, chastity is an excellent virtue, the commodity whereof is very well known; but to use it, and according to nature to prevail with it, is as hard as it is easy to endeavor it and to prevail with it according to custom, to laws and precepts." "The laws of conscience, which we say are born of nature, are born of custom."

Again, in the essay *Of Controlling one's Will* 37 we have: "Custom is a second nature, and not less potent."

Hamlet's words are: –

"That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat  
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this  
That to the use of actions fair and good  
He likewise gives a frock or livery  
That aptly is put on....  
For use can almost change the stamp of nature."

No doubt the idea is a classic commonplace; and in the early *Two Gentlemen of Verona* 38 we actually have the line, "How use doth breed a habit in a man;" but here again there seems reason to regard Montaigne as having suggested Shakspeare's vivid and many-coloured wording of the idea in the tragedy. Indeed, even the line cited from the early comedy may have been one of the poet's many later additions to his text.

25

VIII. A less close but still a noteworthy resemblance is that between the passage in which Hamlet expresses to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the veering of his mood from joy in things to disgust with them, and the paragraph in the *Apology of Raimond Sebonde* in which Montaigne sets against each other the splendour of the universe and the littleness of man. Here the thought diverges, Shakspeare making it his own as he always does, and altering its aim; but the language is curiously similar. Hamlet says:

"It goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory: this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a God! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me."

Montaigne, as translated by Florio, has:

"Let us see what hold-fast or free-hold he (man) hath in this gorgeous and goodly equipage.... Who hath persuaded him, that this admirable moving of 26 heaven's vaults, that the eternal light of these lamps so fiercely rolling over his head ... were established ... for his commodity and service? Is it possible to imagine anything so ridiculous as this miserable and wretched creature, which is not so much as master of himself, exposed and subject to offences of all things, and yet dareth call himself Master and Emperor of this universe?... [To consider ... the power and domination these (celestial) bodies have, not only upon our lives and conditions of our fortune ... but also over our dispositions and inclinations, our discourses and wills, which they rule, provoke, and move at the pleasure of their influences.]... Of all creatures man is the most miserable and frail, and therewithal the proudest and disdainfullest. Who perceiveth himself placed here, amidst the filth and mire of the world ... and yet dareth imaginarily place himself above the circle of the Moon, and reduce heaven under his feet. It is through the vanity of the same imagination that he dare equal himself to God."

The passage in brackets is left here in its place, not as suggesting anything in Hamlet's speech, but as paralleling a line in *Measure for Measure*, to be dealt with immediately. But it will be seen that the rest of the passage, though turned to quite another purpose than Hamlet's, brings together in the same way a set of contrasted ideas of human greatness and smallness, and of the splendour of the midnight firmament. 39

27 IX. The nervous protest of Hamlet to Horatio on the point of the national vice of drunkenness, 40 of which all save the beginning is added in the Second Quarto just before the entrance of the Ghost, has several curious points of coincidence with Montaigne's essay 41 on *The History of Spuria*, which discusses at great length a matter of special interest to

Shakspeare – the character of Julius Cæſar. In the course of the examination Montaigne takes trouble to show that Cato's use of the epithet "drunkard" to Cæſar could not have been meant literally; that the same Cato admitted Cæſar's sobriety in the matter of drinking. It is after making light of Cæſar's faults in other matters of personal conduct that the essayist comes to this decision:

"But all these noble inclinations, rich gifts, worthy qualities, were altered, smothered, and eclipsed by this furious passion of ambition.... To conclude, this 28 only vice (in mine opinion) lost and overthrew in him the fairest natural and richest ingenuity that ever was, and hath made his memory abominable to all honest minds."

Compare the exquisitely high-strung lines, so congruous in their excited rapidity with Hamlet's intensity of expectation, which follow on his notable outburst on the subject of drunkenness:

"So oft it chances in particular men, That for some vicious mode of nature in them, As in their birth (wherein they are not guilty, Since nature cannot choose its origin), By the o'ergrowth of some complexion, Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason; Or by some habit that too much o'er-leavens The form of plausible manners; that these men, – Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect; Being nature's livery, or fortune's star, – Their virtues else (be they as pure as grace, As infinite as man may undergo) Shall in the general censure take corruption From that particular fault...."

Even the idea that "nature cannot choose its origin" is suggested by the context in Montaigne. 42 Shakspeare's estimate of Cæſar, of course, diverged from that of the essay.

29 X. I find a certain singularity of coincidence between the words of King Claudius on kingship:

"There's such divinity doth hedge a king, That treason can but peep to what it would, Acts little of his will,"

and a passage in the essay 43 *Of the Incommodity of Greatness*:

"To be a king, is a matter of that consequence, that only by it he is so. That strange glimmering and eye-dazzling light, which round about envi-

*roneth, over-casteth and hideth from us: our weak sight is thereby bleared and dissipated, as being filled and obscured by that greater and further-spreading brightness."*

*The working out of the metaphor here gives at once to Shakspeare's terms "divinity" and "can but peep" a point not otherwise easily seen; but the idea of a dazzling light may be really what was meant in the play; and one is tempted to pronounce the passage a reminiscence of Montaigne. Here, 30 however, it has to be noted that in the First Quarto we have the lines:*

*"There's such divinity doth wall a king That treason dares not look on."*

*And if Shakspeare had not seen or heard the passage in Montaigne before the publication of Florio's folio – which, however, he may very well have done – the theory of reminiscence here cannot stand.*

*XI. In Hamlet's soliloquy on the passage of the army of Fortinbras – one of the many passages added in the Second Quarto – there is a strong general resemblance to a passage in the essay Of Diversion. 44 Hamlet first remarks to the Captain:*

*"Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats Will not debate the question of this straw: This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace;"*

*and afterwards soliloquises:*

*"Examples gross as earth exhort me: Witness, this army of such mass and charge, Led by a delicate and tender prince, Whose spirit, by divine ambition puff'd, Makes mouths at the invisible event; Exposing what is mortal and unsure 31 To all that fortune, death, and danger dare, Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great, Is not to stir without great argument, But greatly to find quarrel in a straw. When honour is at stake....*

*....to my shame I see The imminent death of twenty thousand men, That for a fantasy and trick of fame, Go to their graves like beds; fight for a plot Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause...."*

*Montaigne has the same general idea in the essay Of Diversion:*