

Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Day. William M. Hamlin.

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The lengthy introduction (“Edited in the Margin”) announces a rich feast indeed: “a large-scale case study of Florio’s Montaigne during the first hundred years of its existence” (2–3), based on the author’s collection and analysis of some “seven thousand early annotations” (3). Hamlin then offers a first taxonomy: expressions of displeasure, retranslation, propositions of alternative chapter titles, reader-created apparatus (18), reader-created indexes (20), readers who address Montaigne in the second person, misreadings, etc. The book’s organization does not, however, follow this taxonomy — the structure is, rather, broadly thematic. Chapter 1 hypothesizes that Florio’s Montaigne is “attuned to contemporary interest in stage-plays [and] spectacle” (36) and that it brings out Montaigne’s “latent theatricality” (38), first by studying specific instances of translation, not all of which are convincing — this reviewer wonders just how significant it is that Florio renders “faire dignement le Roy” as “to act and play the king” (38). The chapter also ventures connections between Florio’s *Essays* and English antitheatricalism. Chapter 2 asks how Florio’s translation and its reception perform (or not) a form of censorship regarding Montaigne’s often-frank discussions of sexuality. In contrast to Florio’s prudishness are his readers who do not hesitate retitling 3.5 “Of love & women” as simply “Copulation” (61). It is a shame that some of the most important scholarship on 3.5 is not referenced (Conley, Krause, Weismann, etc.). Chapter 3 takes up a key Montaignean topic: custom. Although “the majority of manuscript annotations on custom fall within the categories of exclamation or neutral summary,” there are exceptions; some readers even “register a sense of cultural relativism that suggests deeper engagement” (79).

Hamlin also weaves through the printed responses to Montaignean custom. The emphasis in chapter 4 is decidedly not on reader annotations (mentioned only on 105–06), but rather on John Marston’s reliance on Montaigne in *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605), which indeed borrows forty-five times from the *Essays*. Chapter 5 similarly turns away from reader annotations, developing instead the idea of a “synchronic affinity” (110) existing between Montaigne and Shakespeare in terms of the question of (moral) conscience. Chapter 6, the book’s longest, most labyrinthine, and perhaps most compelling, defends the idea that “the ‘maximizing’ of Montaigne began in England with the 1603 publication of Florio’s

translation" (143), by which Hamlin means that Florio's translation — and the latter's choice to italicize "hundreds of sentences" to make them "visually conspicuous" (143) — are at the origin of many seventeenth-century responses to Montaigne. The chapter discusses inter alia the *Abstract of the Most Curious and Excellent Thoughts in Montaigne's Essays* (1701), some of the 297 aphorisms that make up "Montaignes Moral Maxims," a partial translation of the first eleven chapters of book 2 (whose author is judged "careless" and "often lazy" [136], but also at times faithful to Montaigne's "honest, probing, unconventional self" [138]), and the manuscripts of William Drake. Certain key trends are identified, such as "minimizing [Montaigne's authorial] presence, eliminating contexts," and "depersonalizing" (157), in opposition to the tendency of certain individual readers who rather "do not seek to make Montaigne's book more manageable" because "they are content to let it grow" (160), i.e., by annotating. The book concludes with an afterword, "English Readership in the Wake of the *Essays*." The publisher deserves hearty thanks for allowing inclusion of four long and invaluable appendixes (174–239). Appendix A is a transcription of BL Egerton MS 2982, fols. 22^r–29^v (a set of summaries of *Essai* chapters). Appendix B transcribes Folger MS V. a.281, fols. 15^r–34^v (a set of aphorisms drawn from the *Essays*). Appendix C makes available BL Sloane MS 2903, fols. 1^r–12^r ("Montaignes Moral Maxims"). The final appendix offers a census of extant seventeenth-century copies of Florio's Montaigne.

In summary, *Montaigne's English Journey* is built on extensive exploration of the English Montaigne archive, especially the thousands of handwritten annotations left by early modern readers. For this, Hamlin is to be saluted. Each encounter with a handwritten annotation (many of which are featured in photographic reproduction) generates (for this reader) a veritable frisson, as one amateur of Montaigne encounters another. Had the book been organized according to types of reader intervention (one chapter on manuscript indexes, one on *manicules*, one on retranslations, etc.), this work would necessarily have relied more directly on various predecessors in book history and might have drawn a clearer picture. But it is churlish to reimagine another's book. As it stands, *Montaigne's English Journey* is a richly researched and valuable appraisal of Florio's role as Montaigne's intermediary in England and of how Florio's readers reacted to, excerpted, amplified, and sometimes corrected his version. A fine book, recommended to students and scholars of the French and English Renaissances.

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