

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 4



Translation by John Florio (1603, Public domain) · Last updated on July 26, 2021

HYPERESSAYS is a project to bring a complete hypertext edition of Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* to the web. More information at www.hyperessays.net

FLORIO-1-4-20210726-131512

How the soule dischargeth hir passions upon false objects, when the true faile it

A GENTLEMAN of ours exceedingly subject to the gout, being instantly solicited by his Physitions, to leave all manner of salt-meats, was wont to answer pleasantly, that when the fits or pangs of the disease tooke him, hee would have some body to quarell with; and that crying and cursing, now against *Bolonie*-sausage, and sometimes by railing against salt neats-tongues, and gammons of bakon, he found some ease. But in good earnest even as the arme being lifted up to strike, if the stroke hit not, but fall void, wee feele some paine in it, and many times strike it out of joynt; and that to yeeld our sight pleasant, it must not be lost and dispierced in the vast ayre, but ought rather to have a limited bound to sustaine it by a reasonable distance.

*Ventus ut amittit vires, nisi robore densæ
Occurrant silvæ, spatio diffusus inani.*

*As windes in emptie ayre diffus'd, strength lose,
Unlesse thick-old-growne woods their strength oppose.*

So seemes it that the soule moved and tossed, if she have not some hold to take, loseth it selfe in it selfe, and must ever be stored with some object, on which it light and worke. *Plutarke* saith fitly of those affectionate themselves to Monkies and little Dogges, that the loving part which is in us, for want of a lawful hold, rather than it will be idle, doth forge a false and frivolous hold unto itselfe. And wee see that the soule in her passions doth rather deceive itselfe, by framing a false and fantastick subject unto itselfe, yea against her owne conceit, than not to worke upon something.

So doth their owne rage transport beasts to set upon the stone or weapon that hath hurt them; yea and sometimes with irefull teeth to revenge themselves against themselves, for the hurt or smart they feele.

*Pannonis haud aliter post utum sævior ursa
Cui jaculum parva Lybis amentavit habena,
Se rotat in vulnus, telumque irata receptum
Impetit, et secum fugientem circuit hastam*

*Even so the wound-enraged Austrian beare,
On whom a Moore hath thir'ld his slinged speare,
Wheeles on her wound, and raging bites the dart,
Circling that flies with her, and cannot part.*

What causes doe wee not invent, for the crosses that happen unto us? bee it right, or wrong: what take we not hold of, to have something to strive withall? It is not the golden locks thou tearest, nor the whitenesse of the breast, which thou through vexation so cruelly dost smite, that have by meanes of an unluckie bullet, lost thy deere-beloved brother: on something else shouldest thou wreake thyselfe. *Livius* speaking of the Romane army in Spaine, after the losse of two great Captaines that were brethren. *Flere omnes repente, & offensare capita: They all wept and often beat their heades.* It is an ordinarie custome: And the philosopher *Byon* was very pleasant with the king, that for griefe tore his haire, when he said, *Doth this man thinke, that baldnesse will asswage his griefe?* who hath not seene some to chew and swallow cardes, aw wel-nigh choake themselves with bales of dice, only to be revenged for the losse of some money? *Xerxes* whipped the Sea, and writ a cartell of defiance to the hill *Athos*: And *Cyrus* for many daies together amused his whole armie to be revenged of the river *Gyndus*, for the feare he tooke passing over the same: And *Caligula* caused a verie faire house to be defaced, for the pleasure his mother had received in the same.

When I was young, my countrimen were wont to say, *That one of our neighbour-Kings, having received a blow at Gods hand, sware to be revenged on him, and ordained, that for ten yeares space no man should pray unto him, nor speak of him, nor (so long as he were in authority), beleve in him.* By which report, they doe not so much publish the sottishnesse, as the ambitious glorie, peculiar unto that nation of whom it was spoken. They are vices that ever goe together: But in truth such actions enclime rather unto selfe-conceit, than to fondnes.

Augustus Cæsar having beene beaten by a tempest on the sea, defied the God *Neptune*, and in the celebration of the Circensian games, that so he might be avenged on him, he caused his image to be removed from out the place, where it stood amongst the other Gods; wherein he is also less excusable, than the former, and lesse than hee was afterward, when having lost a battel, under *Quintilius Varus* in *Germanie*, all in a rage and desperate, he went up and downe beating his head against the walls, mainly crying out: *Oh! Varro, restore me my Souldiers againe:* For, those exceed, all follie (forsomuch as impietie is joyned unto it that will wreake themselves against God, or fortune, as if she had eares subject to our batterie: In imitation of the Thracians, who when it lightens or thunders, begin with a Titanian revenge to shoot against heaven, thinking by shooting of arrowes to draw God to some reason. Now, as saith that ancient Poet in *Plutarch*,

*Point ne se faut corroucer aux affaires,
Il ne leur chaut de toutes noz coleres.*

*We ought not angry be at what God dooth,
For he cares not who beares an angry tooth.*

But we shall never rail enough against the disorder and unrulinesse
of our minde.