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Montaigne 1592-1992

En cette année du quatrième centenaire de la mort de Michel de Montaigne, et alors que les festivités montaignistes touchent à leur fin, on remarquera que la critique n'a jamais baissé les bras. La table des matières de ce numéro de *Montaigne Studies* témoigne de l'intérêt que l'on porte au texte des *Essais*. Hellénistes, classicistes, anglicistes et «critiques de la critique» se côtoient dans les pages qui suivent; chacun abordant à sa façon — et avec les préoccupations propres à sa discipline — le texte de Montaigne qui affirme plus que jamais son universalité. Au moment où l'on se pose des questions sur l'Europe, il est toujours bon de relire ce voyageur sans frontière qui fit du monde son champ de réflexion. Montaigne est d'actualité et il aurait certainement voté «oui» à l'Europe! Qui en douterait? Mais ne faisons pas de récupération.

Peut-être parce qu'il fut à l'écoute de problèmes qui se répètent dans l'histoire, Montaigne attire toujours autant d'intellectuels, universitaires et érudits de tous domaines qui ne peuvent éviter la tentation de s'essayer eux-mêmes, à leur tour, à la lecture et au déchiffrement des *Essais*. Tout cela est pour le mieux! La diversité des approches et des opinions est toujours bénéfique. La force des *Essais* réside précisément dans la diversité des lectures possibles.

Montaigne est bien plus qu'un auteur, il représente un champ de recherche à lui seul. Il suffit par exemple de compter les livres qui lui furent dédiés cette année pour se rendre compte à quel point il est au centre d'une véritable industrie. Le château de Montaigne vend maintenant des «pins» en l'honneur du quatrième centenaire de sa mort; le journal Sud Ouest a publié un numéro spécial consacré au «plus moderne des classiques»; et récemment la ville de Bordeaux affichait sur ses murs un poster représentant un Montaigne à cheval,

le regard gaillard et sûr de lui. La légende de cette affiche résume assez bien l'état présent des études montaigniennes: «quatre cent ans et pas une ride». L'auteur des *Essais* est résolument tourné vers l'avenir. Bref, Montaigne est passé dans la culture populaire. Réjouissons-nous donc! A quand la première bande dessinée ou dessin animé avec pour héros un Montaigne pourfendeur de préjugés et porte-parole de l'«humaine condition»?

Philippe Desan
Editor-in-Chief

**Montaigne and Heraclitus:
Pattern and Flux, Continuity and Change in
"Du repentir"**

Patrick Henry

Montaigne names Heraclitus fourteen times in the *Essais*—nine times in the "Apologie," three times in "De Democritus et Heraclitus," once each in "Du pedantisme," and "De l'experience." Nine of these references occur for the first time in 1580, one in 1588, and four in 1595. He also refers to him without naming him in "De l'art de conferer" in 1588. When we consider that Seneca is named 44 times in the *Essais*, Plutarch 89 times, and Socrates 113 times, the references to Heraclitus seem minimal at best.

More troubling still, if one wishes to ascertain whether the author of the *Essais* had an intimate knowledge of Heraclitus' work, is the fact that many of the references concern the life of the author and not his oracular epigrams. Thus, for example, in "Du pedantisme," Montaigne praises him for resigning his kingdom to his brother and refusing to govern with unscrupulous men.¹ Other references pertain to Renaissance banalities: twice, for example, the essayist refers to Heraclitus' obscurity (II, 12, 508; III, 13, 1068) and four times to "the weeping philosopher" (I, 50, 301, 303; III, 8, 929). There are, in addition, two general references to Heraclitus' fire (II, 12, 540, 572) and one to the Stoic claim that if Heraclitus could have

¹ Montaigne, *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Pierre Villey (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), I, 25, 135. All future references will be to this edition and henceforth parenthetically inserted in the text.

exchanged wisdom for health, he would have done well to have done so.

For our concerns, only two of Montaigne's references to Heraclitus bear upon flux and change. Both of them appear at the very end of the "Apologie" within an eighty-six line passage drawn from Plutarch. This concluding passage—from "Nous n'avons aucune communication à l'estre" to "Il a esté, ou: Il sera; sans commencement et sans fin" (II, 12, 601-603)—is almost a word for word translation of a passage from "The E at Delphi," a chapter in Plutarch's *Moralia*. The first reference lists Heraclitus with the philosophers of flux and cites the fragment "jamais homme n'estoit deux fois entré en mesme riviere" (ibid.); the second, in the context of the series of deaths that all matter passes through, reads "comme disoit Heraclitus, la mort du feu est generation de l'air, et la mort de l'air generation de l'eau" (II, 12, 602). In sum, via Plutarch, Montaigne cites Heraclitus twice in the "Apologie" to support the idea of constant flux in man and nature that ultimately eliminates both the subject and the object of knowledge and leads to an epistemological dead end. The judge and the judged being in a state of constant change, we can have no communication with being, unless, Montaigne asserts, "Dieu [nous] preste extraordinairement la main" (II, 12, 604).

At the end of her recent richly documented and informative study, *Le Feu et le Fleuve. Héraclite et la Renaissance française*, Françoise Joukovsky marks two important moments in the history of Heraclitus in the sixteenth century.² Although Heraclitus and the other presocratic philosophers were read to some extent during the entire Renaissance in France, Joukovsky shows persuasively that these two moments led to a significant increase in the number of detailed discussions of the Heraclitean fragments during the final quarter of the sixteenth century. The most important moment was the publication in 1573 of Henri Estienne's *Poesis philosophica*, the first anthology of presocratic thought. While the Heraclitean fragments were previously known mainly in the great texts of Plato and Aristotle where they were presented in other philosophical contexts,

² Françoise Joukovsky, *Le Feu et le Fleuve. Héraclite et la Renaissance française* (Geneva: Droz, 1991), p. 131. Future references will appear parenthetically in the text.

Etienne presents them on their own in the original Greek, with no Latin translations. The collection contained roughly forty-three fragments from Heraclitus and gave Renaissance readers of Greek their first chance to view Heraclitus' work "comme un ensemble, même s'il [était] fait de morceaux, et si le texte [était] bien incertain" (12). The second important moment is that of the famous translation of Plutarch's *Moralia* into French by Jacques Amyot in 1572 which, according to Joukovsky, "transmet [à Montaigne] l'expérience de la mobilité" (131) found at the end of the "Apologie." "Montaigne est sans doute," she writes, "l'auteur de la Renaissance qui s'abandonne le plus à cette mobilité universelle" (137); and, she adds, "Héraclite n'entre en littérature que chez Montaigne, parce que dans l'*Apologie de Raymond Sebond* sa pensée modèle les phrases, rythme le texte, impose une syntaxe" (143-44).

Although the sixteenth century did not entirely reduce Heraclitus' dogma to "une intuition de la mobilité" (143)—the two major themes in his doctrine during the Renaissance were *le feu* ("le principe originel," [135]) and *le fleuve* ("l'écoulement incessant,"[135])—Joukovsky argues that:

L'image centrale de l'héraclitisme, au XVI^e siècle, c'est l'individu immergé dans le fleuve, qui sent ces courants autour de lui. L'expérience philosophique n'est plus celle de l'être, dans l'*Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, mais le contact avec la vie qui bouge. (142)

Let me stress again that, as Joukovsky's book repeatedly manifests, the image of the river connoted "l'écoulement incessant" and, as she says, a philosophy which "n'est plus celle de l'être."

* * *

Today's reader of Heraclitus has 129 fragments to peruse, three times the number contained in Estienne's anthology. The issue of flux now seems far more complex than it must have appeared to Renaissance readers. Although there is serious debate concerning not only what Heraclitus meant but, perhaps above all, what he actually said, the general consensus is that from the three famous river-fragments there emerges a deep concern with both permanence and

flux. As we shall see, even the minority of scholars who most stress flux insist that one cannot exclude all permanence from Heraclitus' teaching. The following three fragments are taken from the T.M. Robinson edition but I will refer to several other commentators as I attempt to explain them.³

Fragment 12: As they step into the same rivers, different and <still> different waters flow upon them. (17)

Fragment 49A: We step and do not step into the same rivers; we are and are not. (35)

Fragment 91A: For, according to Heraclitus, it is not possible to step twice into the same river, nor is it possible to touch a mortal substance twice in so far as its state (hexis) is concerned. (55)

Fragment 12

This fragment—"As they step into the same rivers, different and <still> different waters flow upon them"—captures both the permanence and flux inherent in the Heraclitean vision, the unity that comes about through change. It also stands in contrast to Plato's statement: "Heraclitus says somewhere that all things are in movement and nothing stays put, and likening the real to the flowing of a river he says that one could not step twice into the same river" (*Cratylus*, 402A). Here, in fragment 12, the bathers do step into the *same* rivers while *different* waters flow upon them. As Robinson notes: "The river is a striking example of precisely that which preserves structural identity and unity while undergoing constant and predictable change of content" (84). Kahn also suggests that, syntactically, Heraclitus is referring to the structure and identity of

³ T. M. Robinson, *Heraclitus: Fragments; A Text and Translation With a Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). All references will be inserted parenthetically in the text. I will also refer parenthetically to the commentaries of Geoffrey S. Kirk and John E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus. An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); William K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy. Volume One: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962); and Gregory Vlastos, "On Heraclitus," *American Journal of Philology* 76 (1955): pp. 337-368.

the individual bathers as well as that of the river (167). Considered by the great majority of commentators as the most Heraclitean in expression, it is rejected only by Vlastos who, oddly enough, sees it as "the flattest of the three" (343).

Fragment 49A

Although most commentators see the thought here—"We step and do not step into the same rivers; we are and are not"—as perfectly Heraclitean, containing both identity and difference, permanence and change, the fragment is often rejected as an inauthentic quotation. Kirk and Raven, for example, see it as a later development of fragment 12 (198) and Kahn "as a thinly disguised paraphrase of the river fragments 12 and 91A, modelled on the contradictory form of fragment 32 ["One thing, the only wise thing, is unwilling and willing to be called by the name Zeus" (Robinson, 27)] and influenced by the thought of fragment 62 ["we are and are not alive" (288)]. Robinson unconditionally accepts the first half, for it explains the universe as both a unity and a diversity and, compared to fragment 91A, stresses the static nature of the river and the fluid nature of those who enter into it (112), while Vlastos lauds the second half as a true application of the notion of the identity of opposites.

Fragment 91A

We can immediately see that fragment 91A, the central Heraclitean fragment for the French sixteenth century—"it is not possible to step twice into the same river (etc.)"—, contains at best a half-truth and, as an independent statement, fails to encompass both the unity and diversity contained in the other two river-fragments. Given that it denies the continuing identity of the rivers and by that fact unity amidst diversity, it is more often than not refused authenticity by the commentators. Thus Robinson deems it misleading and of "questionable" validity (141). Kahn claims that Plato is obviously paraphrasing and that the fragment is not a quotation (165). Like most editors, Kirk and Raven prefer fragment 12 to fragment 91A: "...the former has every appearance of belonging to Heraclitus, being in natural and unforced Ionic and having the characteristic rhythm of archaic prose while the latter

looks Platonic, and could more easily be a misunderstanding of fragment 12 than *vice versa*" (198).

Fragment 91A has its supporters nonetheless, including Vlastos (338-343) and W.K.C. Guthrie who, alone in my research, has the highest respect for Plato's testimony of Heraclitus (437). Writing against Kirk, Guthrie claims that Heraclitus' "main purpose seems to be to show that all stability in the world is merely apparent, since if observed with understanding as well as with the senses it proves to be only a resultant of unremitting strife and tension" (466). He therefore accepts fragment 91A and claims that the evidence for its authenticity—Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, among others—is perhaps greater than that for any other fragment (488). For Guthrie, however, even this is not tantamount to negating permanence in Heraclitus: "Changing phenomena *become* according to [the] laws [of the *logos*] and because of these laws the order and balance of the world are also constant and everlasting though no particle of its internal components—earth, sea, or visible flame—is the same for two instants together" (468).

The complexity of modern readings of these fragments brings out the extent to which the usual Renaissance reading constitutes, like fragment 91A upon which it is buttressed, a serious diminishment of the Heraclitean doctrine of permanence and change, diversity and unity. Fragment 91A is highly contested today and even its most ardent supporter admits that "To exclude all permanence from [Heraclitus'] scheme of things is clearly wrong" (Guthrie, 479). Although he expressed the universality of change more clearly than his predecessors, it was, as Kirk and Raven point out, "the obverse idea of the *measure* inhering in change, the stability that persists through it, that was of vital importance" (187). "Heraclitus did not deny stability to the natural world," Kirk asserts, "on the contrary, his main purpose seems to be to assert such a stability, which according to him underlies all change, and most notably change between opposites."⁴

* * *

⁴ Geoffrey S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 370.

For the modern reader of Heraclitus and Montaigne, then, the highlight of the Heraclitean renaissance in the French sixteenth century cannot take place in Montaigne's "Apologie" where we find that dubious fragment 91A cited by the essayist, but rather in "Du repentir," where Montaigne offers us his most striking pages on flux *and* permanence that, in fact, anticipate the complex modern readings of Heraclitus' fragments. And, oddly enough, just as commentators have traditionally found only flux in the fragments of Heraclitus, they tend to find only constant change in Montaigne's "Du repentir" (III, 2).⁵

To be sure, the essayist's most impressive demonstration of the world's perennial movement appears at the beginning of the essay:

Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse: la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d'Ægypte, et du branle public et du leur. La constance mesme n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant. Je ne puis asseurer mon object. Il va trouble et chancelant, d'une yvresse naturelle. Je le prens en ce point, comme il est, en l'instant que je m'amuse à luy. Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage: non un passage d'aage en autre, ou, comme dict le peuple, de sept en sept ans, mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute. Il faut accommoder mon histoire à l'heure. (III, 2, 804-805)

Similarly present, however, is the equally important notion of permanence. The essayist claims in the very first sentence that he is "mal formé," therefore *formé*, and that he would make himself quite different had he to do it over again. But it is already accomplished: "Meshuy c'est fait" (804). Throughout the entire essay natural inclinations and habit are shown to fix an individual in a given pattern: "Les inclinations naturelles s'aident et fortifient par institution; mais elles ne se changent guiere et surmontent" (810). They remain below the surface. "On les couvre, on les cache" but "on n'extirpe pas ces qualités originelles" (810). As Heraclitus worded it in Fragment 123: "<A thing's? (the world's?)> real constitution...has a tendency to conceal itself" (Robinson, 71).

⁵ A rare exception is Jules Brody's brilliant philological analysis: "Du repentir" (III, 2): A Philological Reading," *Yale French Studies* 64 (1983): pp. 238-272.

These natural inclinations are nourished by years of habit. Montaigne refers to sins "enracinés et ancrez" in individuals "par longue habitude" (808) and individuals "colléz au vice d'une attache naturelle ou par longue accoustumance" (811). In addition, domestic imagery proliferates to underscore the fact that we have all built a natural moral home where we normally live: "loge" (808), "assiette" (810), "estat rassis" (810), "chez elles" (810), "leur naïfve assiette" (810), "chez moy" (811), and "ma place" (811). It goes without saying too that words used throughout the essay, such as "conformément" (806) and "uniformément" (816) make no sense unless there is something stable to which they refer. The essayist also marks his text with weighty images, such as "les corps lourds et poisons" (811), that suggest the heaviness of being and parallel the "yvresse naturelle" (805) in the central passage on flux and becoming.

Finally, midway through the essay, we find the key passage dealing with permanence:

Regardez un peu comment s'en porte nostre experience: il n'est personne, s'il s'escoute, qui ne descouvre en soy une forme sienne, une forme maistresse, qui luicte contre l'institution, et contre la tempeste des passions qui luy sont contraires. (811)

Here Montaigne postulates an individual ruling pattern that resists flux and even struggles to maintain unity in the midst of a continuing diversity. No longer in the epistemological dead end of the "Apologie," for now the self, at least, can be known, the essayist continues his meditation on repentance and speaks openly of his own "forme universelle" (813).

Montaigne could not have been expected to cite Heraclitus as he propounded his own theory of continuity and change. He had no reason to believe that what he was doing had, *in toto*, anything to do with Heraclitus who, as Joukovsky's book makes clear, remained the philosopher of "l'écoulement incessant" for the French sixteenth century, just, we might add, as Montaigne himself had painted him at the end of the "Apologie." Although he had Henri Estienne's *L'Apologie pour Hérodote* in his library, he did not have his *Poesis philosophica* and, in any event, did not read Greek. We can only conclude that the essayist never read Heraclitus and had to rely on

the testimony of others. That testimony came mainly from Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch and it was unanimously on the side of flux. All of these authors cite a variant of fragment 91A, Plato in the *Cratylus* (402A), Aristotle in *Metaphysics* (1010A 13) and, as we saw, Plutarch in "The E at Delphi". Plato also pokes fun at Heraclitus in the *Cratylus* (440C) and Aristotle cites Cratylus' critique of Heraclitus for saying that it is impossible to step into the same river twice, holding that you could not even do so once (*Metaphysics*, 1010A 13). Aristotle accepted Plato's view of Heraclitus and remarked interestingly that Cratylus had originally introduced Heraclitean flux to the young Plato who was thereby persuaded to deny knowability and reality to particulars. In any event, neither Plato nor Aristotle made any serious attempt to assess Heraclitus objectively, and we find few *verbatim* quotations from him in their work. In this vein, Joukovsky notes that Aristotle served in the Renaissance as "un guide, une sorte de vulgarisateur des philosophies précédentes, et un formidable écran" (64).

Montaigne chose to unveil his theory of flux and permanence in "Du repentir," for it allowed him to explicate his ambivalent feelings on repentance. Unlike most modern readers of this essay, I do not believe that the essayist negates all repentance. Rather, he distinguishes between valid repentance and hypocrisy and that distinction is predicated upon his notion of flux and permanence. On three different occasions, he singles out sudden sins, sins of flux, sins that have nothing in common with our habitual behavior and implies that we can in good conscience repent for them:

On peut desavouër et desdire les vices qui nous surprennent et vers lesquels les passions nous emportent (808); Comme les ames vicieuses sont incitées souvent à bien faire par quelque impulsion estrangere, aussi sont les vertueuses à faire mal (810); Il y a des pechez impetueux, prompts et subits: laissons les à part. (812)

When the essayist writes that "Le repentir n'est qu'une desditte de nostre volonté et opposition de nos fantasies, qui nous pourmene à tous sens" (808), he is not speaking about those sins of impetuosity but rather of "ceux qui par longue habitude sont enracinés et ancrez" in us (808). For these sins "qui loge[nt] en nous comme en [leur] propre domicile" (808)... "tant de fois reprins...pechez de

complexion...de profession et de vacation...plantez si long temps" (812)... "Il faut que Dieu nous touche le courage" (816).

In "Du repentir," Montaigne formulates a philosophy of flux and permanence that resembles what the modern reader finds in the fragments of Heraclitus, a deep unity that coexists with continuous change. Here the essayist tells us that "Il faut accommoder mon histoire à l'heure" (805) and he does, in fact, use the present tense to record change and describe his immediate experiences and present condition.⁶ Thus, in "Du repentir," he notes that he *has* seen "l'herbe et les fleurs et le fruit" and now "en voi[t] la secheresse" (816). Also, writing about old age and its effects on him, he claims that: "Elle nous attache plus de rides en l'esprit qu'au visage" (817), and that now at his age his "tentations sont si cassées et mortifiées qu'elles ne valent pas qu'elle [his reason] s'y oppose" (815). This attempt to adapt his history to the present moment of narration is what is implied in the famous passage from "De la vanité" and what allows our author to maintain that he paints *le passage*: "Qui ne voit que j'ai pris une route par laquelle, sans cesse et sans travail, j'iray autant qu'il y aura d'ancre et de papier au monde" (III, 9, 945).

Far more common in the *Essais* and in "Du repentir," however, is the use of the present tense not to record change but to describe habitual behavior over long periods of time. This is what is often called "le présent permanent."⁷ Thus in "Du repentir" we find: "je le recite" (804); "je ne puis assurer mon objet" (805); "Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage" (805); "Je n'enseigne point, je raconte" (806); "je me repens rarement" (806); "Je tiens pour vices..."(806); and "J'ay mes lois et ma court pour juger de moy" (807). The essayist is intent upon demonstrating not only the conformity between his extratextual life and its textual depiction—"Icy, nous allons conformément et tout d'un train, mon livre et moi" (806)—but, far more importantly, the harmony between his life and his personal set of ethical principles—"Mes actions sont réglées et conformes à ce que je suis et à ma condition" (813). Within a framework of mutability and flux, Montaigne insists upon the

⁶ On the topic of tense and autobiography and other related matters, see Steven Rendall's probing "The Rhetoric of Montaigne's Self-Portrait: Speaker and Subject," *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976): pp. 285-301.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

coherence and integrity of his character ("Je fay coustumierement entier ce que je fay, et marche tout d'une piece" [812]; "Si je ne suis chez moy, j'en suis tousjours bien pres" [811]), the uniformity of its textual representation ("Je me veux presenter et faire veoir par tout uniformément" [816]), and the permanence of character and actions over time ("Et en matiere d'opinions universelles, dés l'enfance je me logeay au point où j'avois à me tenir" [812]; "Je le disois estant jeune; lors on me donnoit de mon menton par le nez. Je le dis encores à cette heure que mon poil gris m'en donne le credit" [816-17]).

Throughout "Du repentir," it is also the word "forme" and its multiple cognates (*conformément, uniformément, réformer* etc.) that serve periodically to remind the reader that of the utmost importance in this chapter on flux and change is the concomitantly expressed idea of permanence.⁸ As mentioned earlier, Montaigne begins the essay by noting that he is already formed. He goes on to speak of "la forme entiere de l'humaine condition" (805) suggesting that all human beings, whatever their particular status, share a collective commonality by virtue of being human, a certain unity amidst diversity. This allows him, while discoursing on his own humble and inglorious life, to speak meaningfully to all human beings about the human condition. This is so precisely because he does not write as a grammarian, poet, or jurist, but rather communicates at the human level by his "estre universel" (805), his entire being. It also suggests a much more vast implied readership than previously discerned in the pre-1588 editions of the *Essais*.

The essayist speaks too of his "forme universelle" (813) that Villey renders in a footnote as "ma manière d'être en général" (813N7) and Donald Frame translates as "my nature as a whole".⁹ This is who he is, the being for whom he cannot repent. If we now again stress the centrality of this "forme maistresse", we will realize that painting "le passage" is exactly what Montaigne is *not* doing most of the time. This "forme" is not a Platonic form, not a

⁸ On the idea of form and reform in "Du repentir," see once more Jules Brody, "Du repentir" (III, 2): A Philological Reading" and Ian Winter, "Form, Reform, and Difformity in Montaigne's 'Du repentir'," *Montaigne Studies* 3 (1991): pp. 200-207.

⁹ Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 617.

transcendent form, but an individual's distinct, coherent, ruling pattern, composed of natural inclinations and habits. It is precisely his *forme maistresse*, his own particular acquired stability, the coherence that has persisted over time in the world of flux, that the essayist is most set on communicating. As he remarks in "De l'exercitation": "Je m'estalle entier: c'est un *skeletos*...chaque piece en son siege....Ce ne sont mes gestes que j'escris, c'est moy, c'est mon essence" (II, 6, 379).

We are left with no other conclusion but the following: just like that old dubious fragment 91A, Montaigne's catchy dictum: "Je ne peints pas l'estre, je peints le passage" (805) is but another half-truth. The complete portrait that he painted of himself contained both permanence and change of being. *Montaigne peint l'estre et il peint le passage*; we step and do not step into the same rivers; we are and are not.

Whitman College

Sur le grec de Montaigne

Kyriaki Christodoulou

«C'est un bel agencement sans doute que le Grec et Latin, mais on l'achète trop cher» (*Essais*, I, 26, 173 A)¹.

«Je n'entens rien au grec» (II, 4, 363 A), écrit Montaigne dans un chapitre des *Essais* où il s'empresse de donner «la palme» à Jacques Amyot pour sa traduction de Plutarque. Il s'agit d'une déclaration qu'il reprendra beaucoup plus tard², dans l'essai sur l'«Institution des enfans», où il soulignera, parlant de cette même langue, qu'il n'en a «quasi du tout point d'intelligence» (I, 26, 174 A). Ce genre d'aveu serait susceptible d'être remis en question par celui qui parcourrait les *Essais* d'un bout à l'autre, ou qui visiterait la «librairie» de Montaigne. En effet, dans les deux cas, il se trouverait devant un nombre de citations grecques dispersées dans le livre de l'auteur, ou gravées sur les poutres de sa librairie, ce qui donne à penser que le gentilhomme de Montaigne n'est pas aussi ignorant de la langue de Plutarque qu'il le dit. A commencer par ce qu'il raconte dans l'essai I, 26 sur son apprentissage du grec, on voit bien que son père fut soucieux de le lui faire apprendre «par art» et «d'une voie nouvelle, par forme d'ébat et d'exercice». «Nous pelotions³ nos déclinaisons»,

¹ Nos références aux *Essais* renvoient à l'édition de Pierre Villey reprise par Verdun Louis Saulnier, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965.

² La date de composition des différents chapitres des *Essais* est celle proposée par Villey.

³ Nous nous renvoyions comme si c'était des pelotes.

note Montaigne, «à la maniere de ceux qui, par certains jeux de tablier⁴, apprennent l'Arithmetique et la Geometrie» (I, 26, 174 A). Après avoir suggéré que son père prit soin, sur le conseil de son entourage, d'éviter toute sorte de rigueur et de contrainte dans l'éducation de son fils, l'auteur insiste sur «le champ sterile et incommode» que ce même père eut à labourer, à savoir le caractère «pesant, mol et endormi» de son enfant. Il conclut qu'«il n'est pas merveille» si son père «n'a recueilly aucuns fruits» de cette excellente méthode et s'il ne sut «rien tirer qui vaille» (ibid., 174-175 A). Si l'intérêt du père de Montaigne à l'égard du grec se justifie par l'enthousiasme manifesté, au cours de la jeune Renaissance, pour l'apprentissage de cette langue, témoins les cas de Budé, de Rabelais ou de Ronsard, il faut dire qu'à l'heure où les *Essais* voient le jour ce zèle pour la forme cède la place au souci pour le fond: *Quanto eris melior grammaticus, tanto pejor dialecticus*, dira-t-on. Montaigne est parmi les premiers à faire la guerre à ce formalisme pédantesque et à proclamer la nécessité pour l'humanisme⁵ de concentrer son intérêt sur la vertu et sur la sagesse antiques. «Sçavoir par cœur n'est pas sçavoir» (ibid., 152 C), déclare-t-il dans son souci de tracer un idéal pédagogique qui vise non seulement à former le jugement mais, qui plus est, à tirer profit des modèles offerts par l'antiquité gréco-latine. Faut-il dire combien la Renaissance sur son déclin va à l'encontre des acrobaties pédagogiques et du gigantisme de Rabelais désireux de ressusciter chez son élève, à la suite de son propre exemple, tout le savoir antique quitte à faire de lui un «abîme de science»?

Donnant l'exemple de son éducation dans le chapitre qu'il a consacré à Diane de Foix, comtesse de Gurson⁶, le gentilhomme de Montaigne se présente comme «l'homme qui n'a gousté des sciences que la crouste premiere...et [qui] n'en a retenu qu'un general et informe visage»; «un peu de chaque chose, et rien du tout, à la

⁴ Comme dans le cas du jeu de dames ou du jeu d'échecs où l'on pousse les pièces sur une sorte de table.

⁵ Voir à ce sujet l'ouvrage du père François Dainville, *La Naissance de l'humanisme moderne*, Paris, 1940. Cf. *Essais*, I, 25, 136 A: «Nous nous enquerons volontiers: sçait-il du Grec ou du Latin? [...] Mais s'il est devenu meilleur ou plus avisé, c'estoit le principal, et c'est ce qui demeure derriere. Il falloit s'enquerir qui est mieux sçavant, non qui est plus sçavant». Cf. ibid., p. 138.

⁶ Il s'agit de l'essai I, 26: «De l'institution des enfans».

Française» (I, 26, 146 A), insinue-t-il voulant éloigner de lui toute pédanterie incompatible avec ses titres de noblesse⁷. C'est sous cette optique qu'il faudrait envisager les déclarations de Montaigne relatives à l'intelligence du grec, laquelle, bien loin d'être chez lui au-dessus de la moyenne⁸, le rendait quand même capable de contrôler le sens des citations grecques qu'à maintes reprises il a insérées dans ses *Essais*. Il va sans dire que ce genre de travail fut facilité par les traductions, en latin ou en français, qui accompagnaient les textes grecs que Montaigne avait sous les yeux. Mais, en dehors des citations en question, il y a lieu de voir dans les *Essais* des remarques de Montaigne visant le grec qui plaident malgré tout en faveur d'une connaissance relative chez lui de cette langue dont il dit, dans l'essai «Des livres», que son «jugement ne sçait pas faire ses besoignes⁹ [que] d'une puerile et apprentisse intelligence» (II, 10, 410 A). Langue chère aux adeptes de l'évangélisme, le grec ne tarda pas à être mal vu par les ennemis de la Réforme: *Qui graecizabant, lutheranizabant*, lit-on à ce propos. Le nom de «lucianistes» fut au même titre attribué à l'époque aux personnes suspectes d'hérésie du fait que Lucien, un des représentants de la décadence grecque largement étudié au début de la Renaissance, fut considéré, en raison de son enseignement paganisant, comme un écrivain peu sûr pour les mœurs chrétiennes. Ce fut sur l'exemple d'Alde Manuce qu'on pensa à publier en France les Pères de l'Eglise orthodoxe, qui plus tard firent partie du programme des études grecques. Il est hors de doute que la fondation du Collège des lecteurs royaux par François I^{er} en

⁷ «L'Avis au lecteur» qui précède les *Essais* trahit ce souci nobiliaire de la part de Montaigne nous rappelant, dans un essai où la peinture du moi se fait jour, qu'il est «moins faiseur de livres que de nulle autre besogne» (II, 37, 784 A). Sur ce genre d'idées chez Montaigne, voir Jean-Pierre Boon, *Montaigne gentilhomme et essayiste*, Paris, Editions Universitaires, 1971; James J. Supple, *Arms versus Letters. The Military and Literary Ideals in the «Essais» of Montaigne*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984.

⁸ Dans son article sur les citations grecques dans les *Essais* (*Eranos*, t. 44, 1946, p. 469), Börje Knös note que Montaigne a substitué, dans l'édition de 1588, «une moyenne intelligence» à ce passage du chapitre «Des livres» où il affichait, au départ, «une puerile et apprentisse intelligence» de la langue grecque (II, 10, 410 A). L'édition Villey dont je dispose passe sous silence ce changement révélateur.

⁹ Faire ses affaires, se satisfaire. Montaigne semble avoir modifié par la suite le passage dans son souci d'être plus près de la réalité. Voir ci-dessus, note 9.

1530 contribua au développement des études grecques assuré par le recrutement de professeurs de grande envergure, tels Lambin, Turnèbe ou Dorat. Montaigne cite Turnèbe avec beaucoup de déférence dans les *Essais*, c'est pourquoi on pense qu'il n'est pas impossible qu'il ait profité des cours de ce grand helléniste soit à Toulouse, soit à Paris où ce dernier enseigna et où notre auteur poursuivit ses études de droit¹⁰. A l'heure où les *Essais* commencent à germer, la culture classique est l'apanage d'une élite bourgeoise enrichie dans les affaires, qui compte en son sein des gens de robe, magistrats ou conseillers au Parlement, grandement préoccupés de faire revivre la sagesse antique. Etienne de La Boétie, le collègue de Montaigne au Parlement de Bordeaux, en est un exemple caractéristique immortalisé par l'amitié qui le liait au futur auteur des *Essais*. C'est lui qui par sa vie, et par sa mort, initia Montaigne au culte de l'antiquité. Cet engouement pour l'antiquité fit diversement l'objet d'une vaste littérature de vulgarisation. Celle-ci consista, en dehors de l'effort de traduction des textes grecs, dans le choix d'une série de maximes et de réflexions tirées des auteurs anciens qu'on présentait sous forme de recueils semblables aux *Adages* d'Erasmus. A ce genre d'anthologies réunissant souvent des cas singuliers ou de nature analogue, et qui offrait aux compilateurs l'occasion d'intervenir par quelques remarques personnelles, on donna le nom de *Leçons*. Le Montaigne des premiers essais en est longuement inspiré; il nous en donne un exemple par la manière dont il a composé les premiers chapitres de son livre.

A l'époque qui nous préoccupe la mode des inscriptions était très répandue et les poètes de la Pléiade furent parmi les premiers à y adhérer. Montaigne en profita pour faire preuve de son savoir d'humaniste, ce qui l'amena à garnir les poutres de sa librairie d'un nombre de sentences provenant de l'antiquité greco-latine et de l'Écriture. Formulée en grec ou en latin, cette sagesse diversement exprimée incite le lecteur à réfléchir sur la brièveté et sur la fragilité de la vie, sur l'inanité du savoir, sur la nécessité de tenir compte de sa condition d'homme. De toutes ces réflexions sur l'humain jaillit une attitude philosophique qui marque l'évolution de la pensée de

¹⁰ Voir à ce sujet Roger Trinquet, *La Jeunesse de Montaigne*, Paris, Nizet, 1975, pp. 509 et suiv. En général, sur les études grecques en France, voir Emile Egger, *L'Hellénisme en France*, 2 vol., Paris, Didier, 1869.

l'auteur, et qu'on situe autour des années 1575-1576, années de la crise sceptique qu'il a traversée, après la lecture des *Hypotyposes pyrrhoniennes* de Sextus Empiricus. Les sentences grecques de la librairie de Montaigne ont fait l'objet d'une de nos études antérieures¹¹, c'est pourquoi nous n'y insisterons pas. A présent, nous nous limiterons à celles qui figurent dans les *Essais* ainsi qu'à toutes les remarques de Montaigne susceptibles d'éclaircir le problème de sa connaissance du grec. Pour ce qui est des sources¹² de ces sentences et citations, Stobée compte parmi les compilateurs qui ont été largement mis à contribution par notre humaniste, notamment dans la première couche des inscriptions de sa librairie. Celles-ci datent du début de sa retraite, aux environs de 1572. Certaines parmi elles ont cédé plus tard la place à d'autres plus récentes d'inspiration pyrrhonienne. Un deuxième recueil, celui de Crispin¹³, est encore un ouvrage que Montaigne eut entre les mains. Des auteurs tels Sextus Empiricus, Diogène Laërce, Cicéron, Erasme et Juste Lipse, et des recueils plus ou moins sûrs, comme ceux de Hertelius, de Gambarà, ou de Breslay, sont parmi les sources qui ont fourni à Montaigne la matière des citations grecques. Nous y reviendrons au fur et à mesure que nous aborderont les citations en question, les unes après les autres.

* * *

Bien des sentences grecques utilisées par Montaigne dans les *Essais* forment un ensemble d'idées issues des doctrines philosophiques de l'antiquité dont elles reproduisent la conception de la vie et la vision du monde. Parmi celles-ci on peut en isoler quelques-unes d'origine stoïcienne. Montaigne utilise à plusieurs

¹¹ Voir Kyriaki Christodoulou, «Les sentences grecques de la librairie de Montaigne», in *Considérations sur les «Essais» de Montaigne*, Athènes, 1984, pp. 9 et suiv.

¹² Sur les sources de Montaigne, voir Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et l'évolution des «Essais» de Montaigne*, 2 vol., 2e éd., Paris, Hachette, 1933. C'est à cet ouvrage de Villey et à son édition des *Essais* que nous renvoyons toutes les fois que nous citons son nom.

¹³ Voir «Τὰ sfzÒmena t«n palaiotãtvn poiht«n, gevgikã, boukolikã ka: gnmikã». *Vetustissimorum authorum, georgica, bucolica et gnomica poemata quae supersunt* [...] Edidit T. Crispinus, Genevae, 1569.

reprises et par divers moyens les idées du Portique dans son livre. Epictète, par exemple, qu'il cite une seule fois et à une autre occasion, lui procure la formule très connue « $\xi\phi\ \leq\mu\ \nu$, $\omicron\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \xi\phi\ \leq\mu\ \nu$ »¹⁴ dans l'essai I, 14 dont le titre en constitue l'analyse: «Que le goust des biens et des maux depend en bonne partie de l'opinion que nous en avons». Au début de ce même essai Montaigne traduit une thèse d'Epictète analogue figurant parmi les sentences de sa librairie: «Tarāssei toÁw ényr≈pouw oÈ tā prāgmata, éllā tā per t«n pragmātvn dÒgmata»¹⁵. On sent une attitude stoïcienne avant la lettre dans ces trois vers grecs du court essai I, 33, qui sont pris dans le recueil de Crispin et qui exhortent à la mort ceux qui ont plus de mal à vivre que de bien:

áH z∞n élÊpvw, μ yane»n eÈdaimÒnvw¹⁶.
 KalÚn ynτskein oÁw İbrin tÚ z∞n f°rei¹⁷.
 Kre»sson tÚ mØ z∞n §st€n μ z∞n éyl€vw¹⁸.

Montaigne semble prêt à souscrire, pour ce qui précède, à «la plupart des anciennes opinions» (I, 33, 218 A). Cela ne l'empêche pas toutefois de s'en prendre à Sénèque, Sénèque qu'il fréquente beaucoup avant 1580 et après 1588 et qui conseille à Lucilius de se donner la mort au cas où il lui serait difficile de rompre avec la vie voluptueuse qu'il menait. Bien que très proche, durant cette première

¹⁴ *Essais*, II, 12, 489 A: «C'est ce que dit Epictete: que l'homme n'a rien proprement sien que l'usage de ses opinions». C'est l'idée centrale de la formule « $\xi\phi\ \leq\mu\ \nu$, $\omicron\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \xi\phi\ \leq\mu\ \nu$ » (*Manuel*, I), qui signifie ce qui est en notre pouvoir ou non.

¹⁵ Voir Epictète, *Manuel*, V. Montaigne traduit: «[A] Les hommes (dit une sentence grecque ancienne) sont tourmentez par les opinions qu'ils ont des choses, non par les choses memes». La sentence ci-dessus se trouve dans Stobée. Voir «K°raw ÉAmalya€aw ÉIvānnou toÈ Stoba€ou. ÉEkloga€ épofyegmātvn ka€ ŃUpoyhk«n». *Johannis Stobaei sententiae ex thesauris Graecorum delectae ... a Conrado Gesnero ... in latinum sermonem tractatae ...*, Tiguri, 1559, serm. 117, p. 600.

¹⁶ Ou une vie sans peine, ou une mort heureuse.

¹⁷ A qui vit dans l'opprobre, il est bon de mourir.

¹⁸ Mieux vaut ne pas vivre que de vivre dans l'inconfort. Voir Crispin, op. cit., p. 213. Le recueil de Crispin est le seul des recueils du temps qui présente ces trois vers réunis, c'est pourquoi Villey pense qu'il sert de source à Montaigne. Ce genre d'idées est fréquent chez les tragiques grecs.

période de sa méditation, de certaines thèses stoïciennes préconisant le règne de la raison et de la volonté, Montaigne n'hésite pas à dénoncer, dès cette époque, les excès du Portique. Ce qui étonne le plus l'auteur des *Essais*, à propos de l'enseignement sur le suicide, c'est que Sénèque ne fait que reprendre dans ce cas précis le conseil d'Epicure à Idoménee¹⁹, ce qui sonne faux avec l'idée qu'on se fait de l'épicurisme. Le thème du suicide revient dans le chapitre «Coustume de l'isle de Cea». Montaigne y évoque une série d'anecdotes prises dans l'antiquité. A l'heure de discuter la validité des raisons susceptibles de justifier le suicide, il se demande: «Quelles occasions sont assez justes pour faire entrer un homme en ce party de se tuer?». Par la suite il ajoute à l'endroit des stoïciens: «Ils appellent cela eîlogon §jagvgØn»²⁰ (II, 3, 354 A). Dans l'essai «De l'yvrongnerie», dont la matière lui est pour la plupart fournie par Sénèque, l'auteur s'en prend une fois de plus aux excès du stoïcisme et de l'épicurisme. Il se souvient à cette occasion d'une formule d'Antisthène, chef de l'Ecole cynique, qu'il attribue au Portique: «Quand nous arrivons à ces saillies Stoïques: j'ayme mieux estre furieux que voluptueux [...]. Mane€hn mçllon μ ≤syef€hn²¹» (II, 2, 347 A), ajoute-t-il en grec. A propos de cette dernière citation on ne doit pas dissimuler que Montaigne se trompe sur l'orthographe de la forme correcte «mane€hn» et «≤syef€hn» qu'il transcrit «mane€ein» et «≤syef€ein» assimilant la dernière syllabe de la terminaison de l'optatif «-e€hn» à la dipthongue «-ei» qui la précède.

Un autre groupe de sentences trahit chez Montaigne une disposition sceptique. En effet, bien avant la crise sceptique qui engendra le long essai sur l'apologie de Raimond Sebond, Montaigne conçut, vers 1572, le chapitre «De l'incertitude de nostre jugement». C'est ce chapitre qu'il introduit par un vers d'Homère que Diogène

¹⁹ *Essais*, I, 33, 218 A. Cf. Sénèque, *Ep.*, XXII, 5-6 éd. Loeb (Epicure, fr. 133 éd. Usener). Sur la critique du stoïcisme chez Montaigne, voir Kyriaki Christodoulou, «Montaigne et la vertu stoïque», in *Le Parcours des «Essais», Montaigne 1588-1988*, Actes du Colloque de Duke et de Chapel Hill, 7-9 avril 1988, Paris, Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1989, pp. 175 et suiv.

²⁰ Sortie raisonnable. L'expression figure dans Diogène Laërce (*Vie de Zénon*, VII, 130) comme suit: «eËlØgvw t° fasin §jãjein •autUn toË b€ou tÚn sofØn». Villey pense que Montaigne l'aurait prise dans l'*Anthologie* de Pierre Breslay, I, XX (1574). Voir *Les Essais...*, p. 1267 (sur la p. 354, ligne 13).

²¹ On trouve cette phrase d'Antisthène dans Diogène Laërce (VI, 3).

Laërce cite dans la vie de Pyrrhon (IX, 73): «Ép°vn δέ πολᾶω nomÚw ¶nya ka¶ nya». Montaigne écrit «nÒmow» (loi) au lieu de «nomÚw»²² et traduit: «Il y a prou loy de parler par tout, et pour et contre» (I, 47, 281 A), ce qu'il faut comprendre que tout discours peut être envisagé de diverses façons. Assumant dans l'essai II, 12 la défense de Sebond contre les détracteurs de sa *Théologie Naturelle*, l'auteur entreprend une rude campagne anti-rationaliste qu'il peint à sa façon habituelle par des métaphores frappantes. Il se propose, à ce qu'il dit, de «leur arracher des poingts les chetives armes de leur raison; leur faire baisser la teste et mordre la terre sous l'autorité et reverance de la majesté divine». «Cest à elle seule», ajoute-t-il, «qu'appartient (*sic*) la science et la sapience; elle seule qui peut estimer de soy quelque chose, et à qui nous desrobons ce que nous nous contons²³ et ce que nous nous prisons» (II, 12, 448 A). Montaigne illustre par la suite l'idée que Dieu seul détient le savoir et la sagesse, par une formule due à Hérodote (VII, 10 e): «oÈ gâr §ò frone»n i yeÚw m°ga êllon μ •vutÒn»²⁴. C'est dans le même esprit qu'il produit plus loin cette phrase de Socrate reprise par Stobée²⁵: «ÑH deisidaimonfa kayãper patr< t“ tÊff peÿyetai», phrase qu'il traduit ainsi avant de la citer: «la superstition suit l'orgueil et lui obeit comme à son pere» (II, 12, 498 A). Deux autres citations issues des tragiques grecs que Montaigne transcrit dans le même essai II, 12, exhalent, elles aussi, un air sceptique. La première, tirée de

²² Lieu où les bêtes broutent, pâturage (cf. verbe «n°mv» = distribuer, partager, paître). «Ép°vn polᾶω nomÚw» signifie un vaste champ de paroles telle une vaste prairie où les bêtes peuvent brouter «¶nya ka¶ nya», de part et d'autre, en maints endroits. Cf. Hésiode, *Trav. et Jours*, 403 (éd. Loeb) : «§p°vn nomÒw».

²³ Le compte, l'idée que nous nous faisons.

²⁴ Car Dieu ne permet à personne d'autre que Lui de s'enorgueillir. La phrase d'Hérodote se trouve dans Stobée (éd. cit., serm. 22, p. 190) mais le verbe «frone»n chez Stobée est à la forme non contractée «fron°ein». On y lit de même «êllvn» au lieu de «êllon», cas qu'exclut la syntaxe du verbe «§ò» — qui appelle l'accusatif — ainsi que le deuxième terme de la comparaison «•vutÒn». La graphie «•vutÒn», au lieu de «•autÒn», est un éolisme. Le fait que Montaigne transcrit correctement le passage d'Hérodote donne à penser qu'il ne l'a pas puisé dans l'édition de Stobée citée plus haut.

²⁵ Serm. 22, p. 189.

Sophocle²⁶, exalte le bonheur de l'homme qui vit dans l'ignorance, dans la déraison: «ÉEn t“ frone»n gâr mhdçn ¥distow bÇow». L'auteur traduit d'abord le vers grec²⁷ qu'il insère à la fin d'une anecdote où il est question de deux malades mentaux. Ceux-ci semblent regretter, une fois guéris, le bonheur de leur vie de fou. La deuxième citation provient d'Euripide. Ainsi que dans les deux cas précédents, l'auteur la traduit avant de la reproduire en grec: «Comme Euripides est en doute si la vie que nous vivons est vie, ou si c'est ce que nous appelons (*sic*) mort, qui soit vie»: «TÈw d' o%øden efi zoon toËy' ~ k°klhtai yane»n, tÚ zoon dç ynπskein §stç;», (ibid., 526 A)²⁸.

* * *

Au lendemain de la mort de La Boétie, survenue le 18 août 1563, Montaigne écrit une longue lettre à son père pour le mettre au courant de ce qui s'était passé. Dans les fragments de dialogue entre lui et le défunt dont l'auteur fait part au destinataire de sa lettre, on voit bien à quel point le grec jaillit spontanément chez l'humaniste qui a le premier initié Montaigne à la sagesse antique. En effet, à l'heure de lui léguer sa bibliothèque, La Boétie prie son ami de l'accepter comme «un présent bien petit, mais qui part de bon cœur: et qui vous est convenable», ajouta-t-il, «pour l'affection que vous avez aux lettres. Ce vous sera mnh mÕsunon *tui sodalis*»²⁹, un souvenir de ton ami. A une autre occasion l'helléniste mourant fit remarquer à Montaigne, à propos du vin que celui-ci lui avait donné à boire, qu'il était sa boisson préférée, sa meilleure eau, son «İdvr êriston»³⁰.

Au cours de la rédaction de ses premiers essais Montaigne a butiné des tournures grecques dans ses lectures humanistes en vue d'en illustrer son discours. C'est ce qui lui fit dire plus tard, dans le troisième livre où il semble sûr de sa plume, que de ses «premiers

²⁶ *Ajax*, 553.

²⁷ «Il y a beaucoup de commodité à n'estre pas si advisé» (II, 12, 496 A).

²⁸ Euripide, fragment 830 éd. Nauck. Cf. Stobée. serm. 119, p. 602.

²⁹ Voir Montaigne, *Œuvres complètes*, texte établi par Albert Thibaudet et Maurice Rat, Paris, NRF, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1962, fragment d'une lettre, p. 1352.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 1357.

essays, aucuns puent un peu à l'estranger» (III, 5, 875 B). Dans le chapitre I, 23, il est question de la coutume et de l'observation des lois propres à chaque pays. Sans passer sous silence le droit du sage à la liberté intérieure, ce qu'il proclame ailleurs par l'idée de l'«arrière-boutique» (I, 39, 241 A), Montaigne n'oublie pas malgré tout le respect dont l'homme de société est redevable vis-à-vis des règles qui régissent la vie en commun. Après avoir cité le cas de Socrate qui refusa de désobéir à «un magistrat tres-injuste et très inique» (I, 23, 118 A), il paraphrase une sentence tirée du recueil de Crispin³¹, qu'il donne par la suite en grec: «Car c'est la regle des regles, et generale loy des loix, que chacun observe celles du lieu où il est: «ΝΟμοιω βpesyai to>sin §gx≈roiw kalÚn» (ibid., 119). L'essai I, 25 contre le pédantisme est une nouvelle occasion pour Montaigne de faire preuve de son érudition, ce qui incita Malebranche à le qualifier de «pédant à la cavalière»³². Dans la première des deux citations grecques figurant dans l'essai en question, l'auteur exprime son hostilité à l'égard des pédants incapables de se suffire à eux-mêmes, inaptes à mettre à profit le savoir dont ils disposent: «Mis« sofistÆn, ~stiw oÈx ált“ sofÒw»³³, déclare-t-il, après avoir remarqué qu'on ne peut pas être savant du savoir d'autrui car, qui veut être sage, fait appel à sa propre sagesse. L'auteur ne tarit pas de railleries contre ces pédants ridicules que, dit-il, on appelle fort plaisamment en périgourdin «lettreferits», ce qui l'incite à ajouter par la suite: «comme si vous disiez «lettreferus», ausquels les lettres ont donné un coup de marteau» (I, 25, 139 A). La deuxième citation grecque porte sur le même rapport très souvent inexistant entre le savoir et la capacité de s'en servir: «ÑVw oÈdçñ ≤ mãyhsiw, µn mØ noÈw par^a». Montaigne traduit ce vers après l'avoir cité: «à quoy faire la science, si l'entendement n'y est?» (ibid., 140 A). Le terme «noÈw», équivalent d'«entendement»

³¹ p. 219.

³² Voir *Recherche de la Vérité*, 2 vol., Paris, Flammarion, s.d., t. 1, livre II, 3e partie, chap. V, p. 321.

³³ Dans les éditions antérieures l'auteur traduit: «Je hai le sage qui n'est pas sage pour soy-mesmes» (*Essais*, p. 138, note 1). Ce vers attribué à Euripide (fragment 897 éd. Nauck), se rencontre chez Plutarque (*Vie d'Alexandre*, 53-695 C), ainsi que dans les anthologies de Stobée (serm. 3, p. 37), de Crispin (p. 233 de l'éd. de 1584) et de Hertelius (pp. 14 et 144) qui l'adjuge à Ménandre.

dans la traduction de Montaigne, recouvre un champ sémantique des plus divers. Dans le cas présent il serait mieux assorti avec le sens d'«esprit d'à propos», de «jugement», sens que l'auteur semble d'ailleurs avoir saisi étant donné qu'il oppose le «sçavoir» au «jugement» dans la phrase qui précède le vers grec invité à illustrer cette opposition. C'est dans le même esprit que Montaigne utilise une formule d'Anacréon dans l'essai «De l'Institution des enfans» pour insister sur la nécessité d'apprendre à ceux-ci à se connaître et à bien vivre avant de leur procurer des connaissances de moindre importance pour la vie. Voici le contexte dans lequel s'inscrivent les vers d'Anacréon que Montaigne évite de traduire littéralement:

T€ pleiãdessi kómo€³⁴;
T€ d' éstrãsi bo≈tev³⁵; (I, 26, 159 A).

Bien des fois les citations grecques ont un aspect proverbial et Montaigne s'en sert dans un contexte anecdotique. Dans l'essai «La fortune se rencontre au train de la raison», composé sous forme de «leçon», on voit Montaigne rassembler une série d'anecdotes puisées dans l'antiquité et dans l'histoire moderne, anecdotes qu'il commente au fur et à mesure. Parmi celles-ci il évoque un vers de Ménandre figurant dans le recueil de Crispin, qu'il traduit par la suite, après avoir noté dans quelles conditions il fut prononcé: «TaÈtÒmaton ≤m«n kallÈv bouleÈtai»³⁶. Dans le paragraphe qui précède cette citation grecque l'auteur affirme par une tournure interrogative que la fortune dirige et redresse quelquefois nos projets; après quoi il évoque l'histoire de la reine d'Angleterre Isabelle dont l'armée fut sauvée par une tempête qui l'éloigna du port qu'elle comptait aborder: c'était l'endroit où ses ennemis l'attendaient. L'anecdote de l'ancien qui tua sa marâtre par la pierre qu'il avait lancée contre un chien vient se greffer sur l'aventure de la reine Isabelle. Le vers de

³⁴ Le signe «;» représente ici le point d'interrogation grec.

³⁵ Anacréon, *Odes* XVII, 10-11: «Que m'importent à moi les Pléiades? / Que m'importe la constellation du Bouvier?». Les vers grecs ne figurent ni chez Stobée, ni chez Crispin. Le recueil de Gambara (*Carmina novem illustrium feminarum...*, Antverpiae, 1568, p. 131) les donne sans traduction latine correspondante mais il est peu probable que Montaigne les ait pris dans Gambara.

³⁶ «La fortune a meilleur avis que nous» (*Essais*, I, 34, 222 A).

Ménandre qui suit les deux anecdotes couronne en quelque sorte le paragraphe qui se termine par une phrase interrogative — la traduction du vers de Ménandre — laquelle reprend, du point de vue de la forme et du contenu, la première proposition énonciatrice du même paragraphe. On voit que la formule grecque se présente sous forme de corollaire à l'intérieur d'une écriture³⁷ «circulaire» qui s'insère de manière autonome dans le chapitre précité composé d'anecdotes analogues. Pour ce qui est du substantif «αὐτὸματον», il signifie ce qui s'accomplit automatiquement, sans la participation de la volonté et, dans la mesure où celle-ci collabore avec la raison, sans l'intervention du facteur rationnel. Pascal dira «nous sommes automate, autant qu'esprit»³⁸. Partant de l'opposition établie par Montaigne entre les notions d'art et de nature³⁹, on serait tenté de rapprocher le mot grec «αὐτὸματον» du registre de la nature. Dans le vers de Ménandre passé en proverbe l'idée de fortune (cf. latin *casus*) est latente. La traduction du vers grec que Montaigne ajoute après l'avoir cité est à ce titre la vraie. En effet, la rubrique de Crispin «*Diversorum gn*«mai efw tÊxhn», «Sentences de divers auteurs sur la fortune», sous laquelle est classé le vers de Ménandre emprunté par Montaigne ne laisse aucun doute sur le sens du terme «αὐτὸματον».

L'humour ne manque pas aux anecdotes rapportées par Montaigne, ainsi qu'on le voit dans la réponse que la reine des Amazones donna à celui qui l'invitait à l'amour: «êrista xvlÚw ofife», le boiteux le (l'amour) fait le mieux (III, 11, 1033 B). L'anecdote en question est donnée par Erasme dans ses *Adages*⁴⁰. Montaigne insinue que les Amazones passaient pour estropier les

³⁷ Sur la façon dont Montaigne utilise dans chaque cas les citations grecques, voir John O'Brien, «Montaigne devant la poésie grecque: sentence, citation, traduction», in *Montaigne et la Grèce*, Actes du Colloque de Calamata et de Messène, 23-26 sept. 1988, Paris, Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1990, pp. 17 et suiv., en particulier p. 19, note 4, où l'on trouve une riche bibliographie sur le sujet.

³⁸ *Pensées*, fragment 821 éd. Lafuma (252 éd. Brunschvicg).

³⁹ Voir à ce sujet Kyriaki Christodoulou, «Art et nature chez Montaigne», in *Considérations sur les «Essais» de Montaigne*, op. cit., pp. 75 et suiv.

⁴⁰ II, 9, 49 d'après Villey, *Essais*, p. 1033, note 20. On peut émettre des réserves sur l'exactitude des références de l'édition Villey reprise par Saulnier, c'est pourquoi toutes les fois que je ne peux pas les vérifier, je précise que je les donne d'après Villey.

membres des enfants mâles non seulement pour garder l'avantage sur eux une fois ceux-ci devenus grands, mais encore pour faire d'eux de parfaits amants à l'âge viril. L'auteur cite et traduit cette réponse piquante de l'Amazone dans l'essai «Des boyteux». C'est là où entre autres thèmes il aborde celui des miracles et de la sorcellerie non sans faire preuve de tout le bon sens dont il est capable. Le chapitre «Des cochés», un des plus avancés des *Essais*, est une nouvelle occasion pour l'auteur de se servir d'un vers de Corinne, de seconde main à n'en pas douter. Montaigne l'enregistre au moment de parler de la libéralité des souverains. Faut-il dire, à ce propos, combien ces occasions sont rares dans le troisième livre des *Essais* par rapport aux deux premiers? Toujours est-il que Montaigne cite ce vers grec sous forme de proverbe qu'il traduit par la suite prenant soin de le commenter après l'avoir traduit: «T^a xeir< de> spe€rein, éllâ mØ ~lf t^a yulâk f»⁴¹, «il faut, à qui veut retirer fruit, semer de la main, non pas verser du sac» (III, 6, 903 B). Après 1588 l'auteur revient sur le passage pour ajouter une formule en français dont l'aspect proverbial reproduit en gros le sens du vers de Corinne: «il faut espandre le grain, non pas le respandre». Et le moraliste de conclure, sur le conseil du laboureur grec, à sa façon sentencieuse: « si la liberalité d'un prince est sans discretion [modération] et sans mesure, je l'aime mieux avare» (ibid., B). On comprend bien, d'après ce qui précède, l'importance du sens de la mesure se résumant dans l'art de doser les contraires, dans le souci de ne pas excéder les limites. Montaigne connaît bien cet art passé en proverbe chez les Grecs. En effet, dans le chapitre «De l'expérience» considéré comme la quintessence des *Essais*, il écrit à propos de la mort et de la vieillesse: «Moy, qui ay tant adoré, et si universellement, cet «êriston m^otron» du temps passé et ay pris pour la plus parfaite la *moyenne mesure*⁴², pretendray-je une desmesurée et monstrueuse vieillesse?» (III, 13, 1102 C). «M^otron êriston» est, selon Diogène Laërce, un

⁴¹ On rencontre ce vers de Corinne (voir Crönert, *Corinnae quae supersunt*, Rhein. Mus. 1908, p. 163) dans le traité de Plutarque *Si les Athéniens ont été plus excellents en armes qu'en lettres*, mais dans la traduction d'Amyot il ne figure pas en grec. Dans le recueil de Gambarà (p. 48) il n'est pas suivi de traduction latine. Villey pense que Montaigne l'a pris dans Juste Lipse (*De Amphitheatro*, VII). Voir Börje Knös, op. cit., p. 475.

⁴² C'est nous qui soulignons.

apophtegme dû à Cléobule, l'un des sept sages grecs⁴³. Aristote en donne l'idée correspondante dans l'*Ethique à Nicomaque*⁴⁴ par la notion de «mesōthw», juste mesure. L'expression «moyenne mesure» que Montaigne utilise dans le passage précité pour rendre l'idée de «m°tron êriston» s'avère de ce fait être plus près de la réalité que la traduction «excellente médiocrité» proposée par Villey⁴⁵.

Les souvenirs du grec offrent à maintes reprises à Montaigne l'occasion d'apporter de l'eau à son moulin lors de la discussion des problèmes touchant la langue ou le vocabulaire. Au moment de peindre pour son élève, dans le chapitre sur l'«Institution des enfants», le visage vivant et réjoui de la philosophie que la scolastique avait rendu hideux et inaccessible, l'auteur fait appel à Plutarque. Ce dernier raconte, dans son traité *Sur la disparition des oracles* (6-412 D-E), l'anecdote de Demetrius le Grammairien surpris, devant un groupe de philosophes paisibles et gais, de leur voir oublier leurs disputes habituelles. Montaigne rapporte, apparemment très content, les termes dans lesquels un d'entre eux, Héracléon de Mégare, riposta du tac au tac au grammairien:

«C'est à faire à ceux qui cherchent si le futur du verbe βάλλω⁴⁶ a double l, ou qui cherchent la derivation des comparatifs xe>ron⁴⁷ et b°ltion⁴⁸, et des superlatifs xeÊriston⁴⁹ et b°ltiston⁵⁰, qu'il faut rider le front, s'entretenant de leur science. Mais quant aux discours de la philosophie, ils ont accoustumé d'esgayer et resjouir ceux qui les traictent, non les renfroigner et contrister» (I, 26, 160-161 A).

⁴³ *Vie de Cléobule*, I, 93: «ÉΑπεfy°gjato: m°tron êriston».

⁴⁴ B 2, 1104 a 26 (éd. Bekker).

⁴⁵ *Essais*, p. 1102, note 4. Cf. Kyriaki Christodoulou, «La critique d'Aristote dans les *Essais*», in *Considérations sur les «Essais» de Montaigne*, op. cit., pp. 55 et suiv., en particulier p. 60, note 28.

⁴⁶ Je lance.

⁴⁷ Pis.

⁴⁸ Mieux.

⁴⁹ Le pis.

⁵⁰ Le mieux.

Amyot donne, dans sa traduction de Plutarque, les termes grecs en caractères latins mais Montaigne, qui se plaît à ce genre de travail et qui vise à l'effet, les rétablit en grec. C'est à propos des subtilités du langage et de la différence entre le dire et le faire — différence illustrée dans les *Essais* par les conceptions pédagogiques d'Athènes et de Sparte⁵¹ — que Montaigne évoque dans le même essai I, 26 l'exemple de Zénon plus soucieux de l'essence des choses que des arguties inopérantes: «Zénon disoit qu'il avoit deux sortes de disciples: les uns, qu'il nommoit filològouw, curieux d'apprendre les choses, qui estoient ses mignons; les autres, logoflouw, qui n'avoient soing que du langage» (ibid., 173 A). Le jeu de mots de Zénon livré par Stobée⁵² n'est pas sans plaire à l'inventeur de calembours qu'est Montaigne. Sans dissimuler la beauté du bien dire, notre auteur la juge indigne d'«embesogner notre vie». C'est dans ce contexte qu'il renchérit un peu plus loin dans le même paragraphe: «C'est un bel et grand agencement [parure] sans doubte que le Grec et Latin, mais on l'achepte trop cher» (ibid.). Si le latin ne coûta pas trop cher au petit Michel qui l'apprit en guise de langue maternelle grâce aux soins pris par son père, il n'en fut pas de même pour le grec à l'égard duquel notre humaniste affiche un manque d'empressement. De vrai, n'est-ce pas dans le chapitre «Toutes choses ont leur saison» qu'on le voit se moquer de Caton le Censeur qui s'avisait d'apprendre la langue de Platon à un âge fort avancé? Contrairement à l'avis des humanistes de son temps, qui voyaient dans cette rétractation du contempteur des lettres grecques un acte louable, l'auteur des *Essais* trouve cet «ardent appetit» fort déplacé. «C'est proprement ce que nous disons retomber en enfantillage», déclare-t-il; «Toutes choses ont leur saison, les bonnes et tout» (II, 28, 702 A).

* * *

⁵¹ *Essais*, I, 25, 143 A: «A Athenes on aprenoit à bien dire, et icy (=en Lacédémone) à bien faire [...]; ceux-là s'emboisongnoient apres les parolles; ceux-cy, apres les choses». Cf. le traité de Plutarque *Si les Athéniens ont été plus excellents en armes qu'en lettres* dont Montaigne s'inspire sans doute.

⁵² Traduction latine de Gesner, serm. XXXVI, d'après Villey, *Essais*, p. 1246 sur la p. 173, ligne 2.

Bien que la saison des sentences grecques dans les *Essais* remonte à une période antérieure à la date de leur première édition de 1580, Montaigne ne laisse pas d'être friand de ce témoignage ostentatoire d'érudition à un âge avancé pour la jeunesse de son livre. En effet, bien après 1588, la lecture d'une épître de Cicéron lui donne envie d'insérer dans la couche C du chapitre «De la cruauté» une citation de l'auteur latin où figure ce jeu de mots grec: «*et ii qui filÆdonoi vocantur, sunt filÒkaloi et filodÉkaioi, omnes virtutes et colunt et retinent*» (II, 11, 422-423 C)⁵³. Montaigne ajoute après 1588 cette citation latine à la fin d'une période extraordinairement longue qu'il met entre parenthèses et où il plaide en faveur de la vertu épicurienne qu'il égale à celle des Stoïciens. La citation rythmée prise dans Cicéron — on dirait trois vers blancs — sert de clausule, d'ornement d'appui à la longue phrase insérée entre parenthèses. A une autre occasion, au cours de sa crise sceptique, l'auteur n'a pas manqué d'incriminer les philosophes qui ont affecté la difficulté dans leurs écrits afin de dissimuler la vanité du sujet traité. C'est à ce propos qu'il note qu'Epicure a évité la facilité alors qu'Héraclite «en a esté surnommé skoteinÚw» (II, 12, 508 B). L'adjectif «skoteinÒw», ténébreux, semble être procuré à Montaigne par une note de Lambin dans son édition de Lucrèce (I, 640)⁵⁴. Dans l'essai «Des pouces», l'auteur recourt au mot grec «éntÉxeir» (pouce), dont il donne l'explication étymologique suivante: «comme qui diroit une autre main» (II, 26, 691 A)⁵⁵. Soucieux de justifier l'entreprise de la composition des *Essais* se résumant, dans les chapitres avancés, en la peinture du moi, Montaigne écrit: «Je peins principalement mes cogitations [pensées], subject informe, qui ne peut tomber en production ouvrager⁵⁶... Je m'estalle (*sic*) entier: c'est un SKELETOS où, d'une veuë, les veines, les muscles, les tendons paroissent, chaque piece en son siege [à sa place]» (II, 6, 379 C).

⁵³ «Et ceux qu'on appelle amoureux du plaisir sont amoureux de l'honneur et de la justice et aiment et pratiquent toutes les vertus»: Cicéron, *Epîtres familières*, XV, XIX. Dans le texte de Cicéron on lit: «*et ii qui a vobis filÆdonoi vocantur ...*». Montaigne a omis le complément d'agent «*a vobis*».

⁵⁴ D'après Villey, *Essais*, p. 124, note sur la p. 508, ligne 6.

⁵⁵ Cf. Béroalde, *Commentaire de Suétone, Vie d'Auguste*, XXIV: «*unde apud Graecos éntÉxeir vocatur, quasi manus altera*».

⁵⁶ Qui ne peut pas prendre forme par des actes.

Skéléto, c'est la forme grecque du mot squelette, forme que certains écrivains avant Montaigne, tels Paré et Ronsard, avaient voulu franciser. Montaigne veut souligner par l'emploi de ce mot qu'il s'offre, tel un homme nu⁵⁷, tout entier à la peinture du moi et que cette peinture générale de l'homme est le fruit de l'attention prêtée à chacune des parties constituant son être. Le passage en question est extrait d'une longue addition effectuée après 1588, c'est pourquoi on y voit tout l'intérêt suscité chez l'auteur mûr par la peinture du moi: «Ce ne sont mes gestes [actions] que j'escris», nous dit-il, «c'est moy, c'est mon essence» (ibid.).

Dans le chapitre «De l'amitié», Montaigne se rappelle la formule d'Aristote citée par Diogène Laërce (V, 21): «/ fēloi oēde w fēlow». Il y a des amitiés ordinaires, observe-t-il, «et coutumieres, à l'endroit desquelles il faut employer le mot qu'Aristote avoit tres familier: «O mes amis, il n'y a nul ami» (I, 28, 190 C). S'étant mis, après 1588, à lire attentivement les vies des philosophes dans Diogène Laërce, Montaigne traduit «/ fēloi», à qui il y a⁵⁸ des amis, par «O mes amis», comme si le vocatif «Œ» figurait à la place de «/», pronom relatif au datif. Le sens de la phrase grecque citée ci-dessus est le suivant: «A qui il y a des amis, il n'y a nul ami», en d'autres termes celui qui a beaucoup d'amis n'en a aucun. L'idée d'Aristote et de Plutarque d'après lesquels la vraie amitié est l'affaire de deux personnes, Montaigne l'a réalisée par sa relation avec Etienne de La Boétie⁵⁹. Quant à l'erreur signalée dans sa traduction de la formule d'Aristote, il est très probable qu'il s'agit d'une erreur de seconde main⁶⁰ due à la traduction latine du texte de Diogène Laërce que

⁵⁷ Cf. «L'Avis au lecteur».

⁵⁸ Le verbe «ēfis(n)» est sousentendu dans la proposition elliptique «/ fēloi». Michel Stassinopoulos, ancien Président du Gouvernement Grec, dans une communication prononcée à l'Académie d'Athènes (voir *Actes de l'Académie d'Athènes*, t. 4a (1974), pp. 139-148), a à son tour signalé ce genre d'erreur dans la traduction de la formule d'Aristote de la part de Montaigne.

⁵⁹ Sur ce sujet, voir Lambros Couloubaritsis, «L'amitié selon Montaigne et les philosophes grecs», in *Montaigne et la Grèce*, op. cit., pp. 164 et suiv.

⁶⁰ Villey ne précise pas dans les *Sources* (t. I, pp. 126-127) quelle est la traduction latine de Diogène Laërce dont Montaigne se servait. Cependant, dans le Catalogue des livres de notre auteur qui précède son édition des *Essais* (p. XLVII), il cite l'édition de Lyon (1556) à laquelle il renvoie souvent de manière sûre (voir, par exemple, p. 1329, note relative à la p. 1058, ligne 6) dans l'aperçu sommaire des

notre auteur avait sous les yeux. C'est autour de la même période qu'on voit Montaigne tomber sans s'en apercevoir une fois de plus victime des sources et des traductions dont il se sert pour lire les auteurs grecs. Cette fois-ci c'est à l'endroit de Platon qu'il se trompe, Platon qu'il pratique beaucoup après 1588⁶¹. Dans le *Second Alcibiade* (147 b) on lit : «§st€ te fÊsei poihtikØ ≤ jÊmpasa afinigmat~dhw», toute la poésie en bloc est, de par sa nature, énigmatique. Marcile Ficin traduit: «*est enim ipsa natura universa poesis aenigmatum plena*». Montaigne qui n'a pas sous les yeux le texte grec pour réaliser que «*ipsa natura*» chez Ficin est l'équivalent du grec «fÊsei», prend cet ablatif de qualité pour un nominatif sujet, d'où sa traduction: «nature n'est rien qu'une poésie œnigmatique» (II, 12, 536 C). Cette inadvertance est révélatrice de la façon dont Montaigne travaillait. Il semble, en effet, qu'il prenait des notes sur les passages qui l'intéressaient dans les sources dont il disposait. A l'heure de les utiliser, et dans la mesure où les passages en question étaient éloignés de leur contexte, il était naturel pour lui de se tromper sur leur sens originel. C'est la seule hypothèse valable qui puisse expliquer ce genre d'erreur chez quelqu'un qui apprit le latin comme sa langue maternelle. Dans l'«Apologie de Raimond Sebond» l'auteur passe en revue les thèses des philosophes sur l'âme humaine dans son souci de montrer leur dissension. Son dessein est de conclure sur l'incapacité de la raison à atteindre la vérité. Voilà dans quel esprit il s'en prend au stoïcien Chrysippe qui situait l'âme autour du cœur: «C'est par ce, dit-il», écrit Montaigne, «que, quand nous voulons assurer quelque chose, nous mettons la main sur l'estomac; et quand nous voulons prononcer §g~, qui signifie moy, nous baissons vers l'estomac la machouere [machoire] d'embas» (II, 12, 543 A). Et Montaigne de déduire: «Ce lieu [extrait] ne se doit passer sans remarquer la vanité d'un si grand personnage» (ibid., 543-544 A). L'occasion de parler de la beauté physique dans le chapitre «De

sources des *Essais*, pp. 1223 et suiv. Je n'ai pu consulter aucune des traductions latines de Diogène Laërce contemporaines de Montaigne, toutes semblables entre elles selon le témoignage de Villey (*Sources*, t. I, p. 127), l'édition de Lyon non plus. J'incline à penser qu'elles doivent être la cause originelle de l'erreur de Montaigne.

⁶¹ Sur la présence de Platon dans les *Essais*, voir entre autres ouvrages, Kyriaki Christodoulou, «De quelques aspects du "platonisme" de Montaigne», *Platonisme et néoplatonisme. Antiquité et temps modernes*, Athènes, Cahiers de la Villa Kérylos, no. 1, 1991, pp. 90-99.

la phisionomie» évoque chez Montaigne un mot courant du vocabulaire grec, «kalÒw», beau, qui marque aussi, dans sa deuxième acception, la beauté morale et, partant, la bonté, l'honnêteté du caractère: «Un mesme mot», nous dit-il, «embrasse en grec le bel et le bon» (III, 12, 1058 C). Montaigne ne cite pas le mot grec dont il s'agit et Villey, qui propose à tort «kalokāgayow»⁶², mot composé ultérieurement à partir de «kalÚw kaĉ égayÒw», ne pense pas rechercher la source éventuelle du passage. Compte tenu de la date de composition de cet ajout de Montaigne, j'incline à penser qu'il est de son cru. Si l'auteur évite au cours de cette période de faire étalage du grec, c'est qu'il vise plus à l'essence des choses qu'à l'effet. Addition apportée après 1588, la petite remarque de Montaigne inviterait à penser combien le grec naît chez lui à cette époque de façon plus spontanée, plus personnelle, issu d'un bagage apparemment modeste mais en aucun cas négligeable ou inopérant.

* * *

A maintes reprises Montaigne défigure dans les *Essais* des mots ou des noms propres grecs, ce dont il est extrêmement conscient⁶³. C'est ainsi qu'il écrit «metonómie» au lieu de métonymie (I, 51, 307 B)⁶⁴, «Hermodius» au lieu de Harmodius (I, 28, 188 C). Ses lacunes dans le domaine de l'Histoire grecque sont encore plus graves⁶⁵. Dans l'essai «Du jeune Caton» l'auteur parle de la bataille de Potidée au lieu de la bataille de Platées, malgré le fait qu'il cite le nom du vainqueur des Mèdes, Pausanias (I, 37, 230 C), chef de Sparte, dont il n'ignore pas la fin tragique⁶⁶. De même, dans le chapitre II, 12, il

⁶² *Essais*, p. 1058, note 6.

⁶³ Ayant confondu, dans l'édition de 1580, le nom de Philopœmen avec celui de Phocion, Montaigne ajoute: «Je puis aysement me mesconter aux noms, mais non pas en la substance» (*Essais*, II, 17, 641, note 3).

⁶⁴ Et pourtant Montaigne est très près de la réalité lorsqu'il écrit: «metonomie» puisque le mot est composé de la préposition «me tâ» et du substantif «ĉnoma».

⁶⁵ Sur ce sujet voir Kyriaki Christodoulou, «Montaigne et l'histoire grecque: Des «quatre victoires sœurs, les plus belles que le soleil aye onques veu...», in *Considérations sur les «Essais» de Montaigne*, op. cit., pp. 28 et suiv.

⁶⁶ Accusé de collusion avec les Perses, Pausanias fut emmuré dans un temple de Sparte où il s'était réfugié. Sa mère passe pour avoir posé la première pierre. Montaigne en parle dans l'essai «De la moderation» (I, 30, 197 C).

situé à tort Amphipolis, ville de Macédoine, en Thrace (462 B). Nous n'allons pas insister sur ce genre de lacunes impossibles chez un Rabelais — et pour cause —, et qui plaident en faveur d'une connaissance occasionnelle et peu systématique de la langue et de l'Histoire grecques de la part de Montaigne. Ces mêmes lacunes témoignent également d'un défaut de mémoire très souvent avoué par notre auteur⁶⁷. Bien des fois, il est vrai, les fautes de ce genre sont dues à une source de seconde main et Montaigne n'en est qu'indirectement responsable⁶⁸. La question qui se pose, à l'issue de cette étude, c'est de savoir dans quelle mesure le Montaigne qui déclare n'entendre rien du grec était capable de maîtriser cette langue à l'aide des traductions, latines ou françaises, ou des dictionnaires. A propos de ces derniers, il est à se demander si parmi les livres de sa bibliothèque figurait le *Thesaurus graecae linguae* d'Henri II Estienne qui vit le jour en 1572, date où Montaigne se met à rédiger les premiers chapitres de son livre. Villey ne mentionne ce dictionnaire ni dans les *Sources* ni dans le Catalogue des livres de Montaigne qui précède son édition des *Essais*. Pour ce qui est des citations grecques dont il vient d'être question, elles sont plus nombreuses dans les deux premiers livres, en particulier dans le long essai sur l'«Apologie de Raimond Sebond», plus rares dans le troisième. Leur présence témoigne, suivant le cas, non seulement de l'évolution de la pensée de l'auteur mais aussi de la méthode qu'il a suivie au fur et à mesure qu'il rédigeait son ouvrage: plus fréquentes dans les premiers essais dits impersonnels, les formules grecques finissent par être réduites dans les chapitres mûrs où la peinture du moi tient lieu de matière première dans l'écriture de l'essai⁶⁹. Riche de l'expérience personnelle de son auteur, l'essai défini par celui-ci comme l'épreuve de ses propres «facultez naturelles» (I, 26, 146 A),

⁶⁷ Voir, entre autres, l'essai II, 17, 651 B: «Et suis si excellent en l'oubliance que mes escrits mesmes et compositions, je ne les oublie pas moins que le reste ... Qui voudroit sçavoir d'où sont les vers et exemples que j'ay icy entassez, me mettroit en peine de le luy dire».

⁶⁸ Voir à ce sujet Kyriaki Christodoulou, «Montaigne et l'histoire grecque...», in *Considérations sur les «Essais» de Montaigne*, op. cit., pp. 29 et suiv.

⁶⁹ Sur ce sujet, voir Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, *Montaigne et l'écriture de l'essai*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, coll. Ecrivains, 1988.

n'a que faire désormais des «farcissures»⁷⁰ et des ornements extérieurs. Si Stobée, Crispin et les diverses anthologies du temps fournissent à Montaigne l'occasion de faire étalage d'une culture humaniste due à une seconde main, nombreux sont les chapitres dans le troisième livre où celui-ci puise directement dans les auteurs mêmes les passages ou les mots grecs qu'il incorpore dans son propos de manière plus naturelle. Loin de jouer un rôle décoratif, comme dans les premiers essais, ces éléments étrangers font désormais partie intégrante du discours qu'ils sont invités à animer. Bien que visibles dans «l'Avis au lecteur» et tout au long des *Essais*, les préjugés de la noblesse et la coquetterie de Montaigne n'ont pu étouffer chez lui cette soif d'aller plus loin dans la connaissance de l'antiquité. Ils n'ont pu, à plus forte raison, réprimer le désir d'illustrer son livre de vestiges d'une langue révolue dont il jugeait parmi les premiers l'apprentissage difficile. Pédantisme «à la cavalière» ou volonté de mieux se connaître à l'aide des modèles antiques⁷¹, l'exemple de Montaigne, comme l'exemple de Caton l'ancien, nous dit tout l'attrait exercé sur les esprits à travers les siècles par la langue et par la culture grecque.

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⁷⁰ *Essais*, I, 20, 90 C et III, 9, 994 B.

⁷¹ Voir à ce propos Jean-Louis Vieillard Baron, «La quête de soi chez Montaigne, lecteur des anciens», in *Montaigne et la Grèce*, op. cit., pp. 197 et suiv.

**Montaigne and Plato's *Laws*:
Unlocking the Tradition of Borrowing in the "Apologie de
Raymond Sebond"**

Ellen Sugg

As Richard Sayce noted in *The Essays of Montaigne. A Critical Exploration*, the extensive classical background of the *Essais* is no where more evident than in the "Apologie de Raymond Sebond" (II, 12). While claiming that Montaigne's large number of borrowings from his Ancient predecessors in the "Apologie" "detracts from its originality," Sayce nevertheless maintained that the contrast between Greek thought and Church dogma which ensued had a liberating effect.¹ Contrary to what Sayce maintained, I shall demonstrate that Montaigne's reliance on Plato's *Laws* in the "Apologie de Raymond Sebond" attests to the essayist's originality as a humanist writer, and that it is precisely this originality which contributes in great part to the liberating spirit of the "Apologie." While scholars have traditionally chosen to study the "Apologie de Raymond Sebond" as a statement of Montaigne's theological and philosophical views, I shall look instead at the "Apologie" as a work which invites us to

¹ Richard Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne. A Critical Exploration* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), p. 215. On the question of "borrowings" and the influence of his Ancient predecessors on Montaigne's writings, see also Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, trans. Robert Rovini (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 42-104 and Richard L. Regosin, "Sources and Resources: the 'Pretexes' of Originality in Montaigne's *Essais*," in *Sub-stance* 21 (1978). For more recent scholarship on the influence of Ancient Greece on the political and literary aspects of the *Essais* see "Montaigne et la Grece, 1588-1988," in *Actes du Colloques de Calamata et de Messene*, 23-26 September 1988, (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1990).

examine the highly intertextual weave of Montaigne's writings as he reinvents passages from the *Laws* in ways which affect the form, style, and vocabulary of his longest essay.

Villey counts forty-six times where Montaigne alludes either directly or indirectly to Plato's *Laws* in the *Essais*. The next most frequently cited Platonic dialogue is the *Republic* (thirty-seven times) followed by the *Timaeus* (twenty-one times).² It is fitting, then, that our study of Montaigne's borrowings from the Platonic corpus in the "Apologie" should focus on these three dialogues with greatest emphasis on the *Laws*.³ Montaigne refers directly to Books VII, VIII, IX and X of Plato's *Laws* and does so in four distinct sections of the "Apologie." In order to deal with the lengthy and unwieldy composition of the essay, I have listed these four sections below, indicating their pagination in the Thibaudet et Rat (Pleiade) edition of the *Essais* along with the relevant book and numbered passage from the *Laws* (Loeb edition). Where Montaigne owes a debt to Plato's *Republic* or *Timaeus*, I have indicated, as well, the relevant book and passage numbers of these two dialogues.⁴

1. *Essais*, (II, 12, 417-424)
Laws, Loeb Classical Library, X
Republic, I. 330d-e
Timaeus, 92c

2. *Essais*, (II, 12, 429-465)

² Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Pierre Villey, Strowski et Gebelin, 5 vols. (Bordeaux: Imprimerie Nouvelle F. Pech et Cie., 1920), vol. 4, pp. lvi-lvii.

³ For a history of the composition of the *Laws* see Trevor J. Saunders' translation, *The Laws* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970), pp. 37-41. See also Saunders' *Bibliography on Plato's Laws*, 1920-70 (New York: Arno Press, 1976).

⁴ Michel de Montaigne, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Albert Thibaudet et Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962). All quotations from and references to the text of the *Essais* will be to this edition unless otherwise indicated. References to and quotations from Plato's *Laws* are to the Loeb Library edition, Plato, *The Laws*, 2 vols. trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968). Where a quotation from or reference to Plato's *Republic* appears, it will be to *Plato's Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1974). Any reference to the *Timaeus* will be to Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series 71 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Laws VIII. 840D-E

3. *Essais*, (II, 12, 465-540)
 particularly: *Essais*, 479 C
Laws, VII. 821A-822D
Essais, (II, 12, 492 C-493 A)
Laws, VII. 817A-E
Republic, II. 382c-d

Essais, (II, 12, 495 C)
Laws, VII. 821A-822D
Laws, X. 899B

Essais, (II, 12, 534 A)
Laws, X.907 and IX. 870D-E

4. *Essais*, (II, 12, 540-542)
Laws, IX. 874E-875D

A common practice among Montaigne scholars has been to divide the "Apologie de Raymond Sebond" into two parts: the first part in which Montaigne asserts and supports his fideistic belief and the second in which he advances the philosophy of Pyrrhonism.⁵ Let us look at the first section of the "Apologie" where Montaigne has recourse to the *Laws*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus* as he seeks to establish

⁵ Jean Plattard distinguished between the two kinds of opponents Montaigne faced when writing the "Apologie," referring to the fideists as "les croyants" and the intellectuals as "les esprits forts," in his work, *Montaigne et son temps* (Paris: Boivin et Cie., 1933), p. 186. For a history of the scholarship concerning Montaigne's fideism, see Donald M. Frame, "Did Montaigne Betray Sebond?" in *Romanic Review* (1947), pp. 297-329. For discussions of Montaigne's fideism and Pyrrhonism see again Sayce, pp. 173-223 and Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 42-65. Others have written on the contradictory nature of Montaigne's stance in the "Apologie." For example, see Floyd Gray, "The 'Nouveaux Docteurs' and the Problem of Montaigne's Consistency in the 'Apologie de Raymond Sebond,'" in *Symposium* 18 (1964), pp. 22-34 and Marcel Gutwirth, "Montaigne pour et contre Sebond," in *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 34 (1969), pp. 175-188. More recently David Lewis Schaefer has analyzed the multi-level composition of the "Apologie" and the political implications of Montaigne's religious and philosophical views in his work, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 39-152.

his own fideistic views (II, 12, 417-424). In this opening section Montaigne claims that faith can never be based on reason and that Sebond has clearly gone awry when he tries to prove the existence of God in the *Liber Creaturarum* by reasoning about God's creatures. But Montaigne also confronts those who would use the same human reason to shake Sebond's thesis about God, offering his counter-argument that man is no better than the animals and that human reason is an inadequate tool for interpreting the mysteries of the universe. "C'est la foy seule qui embrasse vivement et certainement les hauts mysteres de nostre Religion," (417-418 A). Montaigne does not discount human reason as an instrument for enhancing belief, as long as we do not depend on our rational faculties to supply the initial impetus for this belief. If human means were up to this task, asserts Montaigne, the great thinkers of Ancient times would have succeeded in defining their belief in rational terms, but they have not.

Toutefois je juge ainsi, qu'à une chose si divine et si hautaine, et surpassant de si loing l'humaine intelligence, comme est cette verité de laquelle il a pleu à la bonté de Dieu nous esclairer, il est bien besoin qu'il nous preste encore son secours, d'une faveur extraordinaire et privilégiée, pour la pouvoir concevoir et loger en nous; et ne croy pas que les moyens purement humains en soyent aucunement capables; et, s'ils l'estoient, tant d'ames rares et excellentes, et si abondamment garnies de forces naturelles ès siecles anciens, n'eussent pas failly par leur discours d'arriver à cette connaissance. (II, 12, 417 A)

We can assume that Montaigne counts Plato among these "rare and excellent souls of ancient times" who have failed to determine the existence of God by human reason alone. This does not, however, preclude Montaigne from turning to the Platonic texts, especially the *Laws*, *Republic* and *Timaeus*, to support his fideistic views in the "Apologie." Before we look closely at those passages where Montaigne relies on the wisdom of the *Laws*, however, it would be helpful to establish Plato's view of atheism in Book X of the *Laws*.

While Montaigne ostensibly eschews any attempt to demonstrate the existence of God through human reason, such arguments represent the basis for all belief in Plato's *Laws*. For the Athenian, Plato's spokesman in the *Laws*, human reason becomes the proper means by which we acquire belief in the gods. The pragmatic value

of establishing such a belief is evident to the lawmaker who is responsible for creating an orderly society. Belief in the gods gained through rational thinking, declares the Athenian, will produce citizens ready to obey the laws of the state (*Laws*. X. 887B-C).

Plato's primary antagonists in Book X are those who espouse the teachings of Archelaus concerning the origins of the universe. Contrary to Plato's belief, the disciples of Archelaus maintain that the universe and all its elements are products of nature and chance. This includes art and human reason which are later products of the initial material creations and thus possess only a mortal existence. In order to counter these teachings, the Athenian embarks on a lengthy discussion of primary causes and the "superlatively 'natural' existence of soul," exploring the realm of the metaphysical in a way that Montaigne never does, at least in the early pages of the "Apologie." The Athenian convinces both Clinias and Megillus that soul is prior to body and can be considered a primary cause because it both moves itself and effects motion in others (X. 891E-895E). Working in conjunction with reason, soul directs the motion of all entities in a happy and ordered fashion. Reason, akin to circular motion around a fixed center, orders and directs whatever motion soul sets into place (X. 898A-B). The Athenian concludes that the "best soul" which regulates the movement of the cosmos must be a god, as must all the souls "which are good also with all goodness...whether it be that they order the whole heaven by residing in bodies, as living creatures, or whatever the mode and method" (X. 899B).

While the teachings of Archelaus are manifestly antithetical to those of Plato, they are very close to what Montaigne himself claims about art and nature in the *Essais*. Laws are nothing more than conventions created by human reason, participating more of art than of nature. Even gods are the man-made creations of art and possess no true existence. As Richard Sayce explains, much of Montaigne's own work is based on a consideration of the basic conflict between art and nature, and like the disciples of Archelaus, Montaigne always comes out on the side of nature (188-189).

While the choice between faith and reason provides the central dilemma for the early part of the "Apologie" (417-424), such a choice is not as central to Book X of the *Laws*. Nevertheless, both Montaigne and Plato are embroiled in metaphysical quandaries and

both are concerned with the social, political and moral dimensions of these questions.⁶ Plato attempts to prove that the gods do in fact exist in the form of all-perfect reason and that this reason is superior to nature. Montaigne asserts the existence of God, but eschews any attempt to define God's essence, placing faith in God well above human reason. Plato views art and reason as preeminent over Nature. At least he wants to prove that they are part of Divine Reason. Montaigne's view is just the opposite.

* * *

While the metaphysical questions the two philosophers raise in their respective works are not identical, there are several parallels which can be drawn between the views which Montaigne expresses in the opening pages of his essay and those which Plato propounds in Book X of the *Laws*. Montaigne expresses the idea that Christians, if truly moved by their faith, would be readily identified by their virtuous actions. Unfortunately, he adds, this most often is not the case.

Si ce rayon de la divinité nous touchoit aucunement, il y paroistroit par tout; non seulement nos parolles, mais encore nos operations en porteroient la lueur et le lustre. Tout ce qui partiroit de nous, on le verroit illuminé de cette noble clarté. Nous devrions avoir honte qu'ès sectes humaines il ne fust jamais partisan, quelque difficulté et estrangete que maintint sa doctrine, qui n'y conformast aucunement ses deportemens et sa vie; et une si divine et celeste

⁶ For an instructive view of Montaigne's "critique of theology," see Schaefer, pp. 73-113. Schaefer comments, "Thus it seems evident that the true intent underlying Montaigne's critique of theology is not to humble human beings before God, but to liberate us from the belief in gods to whose will we must subordinate ourselves. Montaigne's conclusion concerning our relation to God is simply that all the gods are a human creation--that is to say, the notion of God is a product of our imagination. It must be emphasized that he does not limit the application of this conclusion to the pagan deities, or to the philosophers' arguments concerning them. Rather, he denies that anyone can truly conceive a divine being, and consequently that there can be a meaningful theology," pp. 99-100. For a particularly enlightening analysis of the dynamic between language and theology and their eventual estrangement from one another in the "Apologie," see Mary B. McKinley, "L'Accomplissement de 'L'Apologie de Raimond Sebond': Esthétique et Théologie," in *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, VII ser., 13-16 (July 1988-January 1989), pp. 55-65.

institution ne marque les Chrestiens que par la langue. (II, 12, 418-419 A)

Likewise, in the opening speech of Book X, the Athenian comments on the nature of belief and the consequences of this belief on the social virtue of the believer. His statement functions, in effect, as a preamble to those laws which will define not only a correct belief in the gods, but also penalties for those who oppose them.

ATH. No one who believes, as the laws prescribe, in the existence of the gods has ever yet done an impious deed voluntarily, or uttered a lawless word: he that acts so is in one or other of these three conditions of mind—either he does not believe in what I have said; or, secondly, he believes that the gods exist, but have no care for men; or, thirdly, he believes that they are easy to win over when bribed by offerings and prayers. (X. 885B)

The absolute nature of the Athenian's statement that "No one who believes, as the laws prescribe, in the existence of the gods has ever yet done an impious deed voluntarily, or uttered a lawless word," contrasts with Montaigne's hypothetical statement that if we were at all touched by divine belief, our actions as well as our words would betray this fact. It is significant that both writers mention actions and words in their descriptions of the believer. Plato places an "impious deed" as well as a "lawless word" outside the realm of the believer. Montaigne, on the other hand, condemns Christians for their words "parolles" and their language "langue" which are void of meaning since they attest to a faith which does not manifest itself in the believer's conduct.

* * *

Montaigne's first direct reference to Plato and his thoughts on atheism, however, occurs in the passage which begins with the words, "Et ce que dit Platon..." and ends with the sentence, "Hommes bien miserable et escervellez, qui taschent d'estre pires qu'ils ne peuvent!" (422-423 A-C). For our purposes we shall divide this longer passage into three parts, the first part an [A] passage with the addition of one sentence from the post-1588 [C] material:

Et ce que dit Platon, qu'il est peu d'hommes si fermes en l'atheisme, qu'un dangier pressant ne ramene à la recognoissance de la divine puissance, ce rolle ne touche point un vray Chrestien. C'est à faire aux religions mortelles et humaines d'estre receues par une humaine conduite. Quelle foy doit ce estre, que la lâcheté et la foiblesse de cœur plantent en nous et establissent? [C] Plaisante foy qui ne croit ce qu'elle croit que pour n'avoir le courage de le descroire! [A] Une vitieuse passion, comme celle de l'inconstance et de l'estonnement, peut elle faire en nostre ame aucune production réglée? (422 A-423 C-A)

Montaigne's opening sentence, "Et ce que dit Platon, qu'il est peu d'hommes si fermes en l'atheisme, qu'un dangier pressant ne ramene à la recognoissance de la divine puissance, ce rolle ne touche point un vray Chrestien," (422 A) immediately sets forth the distinction between the pagan world of Plato and the Christian world to which Montaigne, himself, belongs. This distinction, however, does not stop Montaigne from drawing upon examples in the polytheistic world of the Ancients to demonstrate that atheism is, at best, a weak position for men to espouse. Villey considers Montaigne's reference in the above passage to be a somewhat imprecise allusion to Plato, based on his belief that Montaigne had not seriously studied Plato before 1588 (Villey et al., 4: 215). He suggests, though without much conviction, that Montaigne's allusion may be a reference to Book X of the *Laws* where Plato states that no one remains an atheist in his old age. If we look at what Montaigne himself has to say about atheism in the entire passage, however, we can argue that his allusion to Book X of the *Laws* is actually more precise than Villey initially maintained. In the relevant passage from Book X, the Athenian addresses the question of how to convince non-believers that their view is unsatisfactory. "But I, who have met with many of these people would declare this to you, that not a single man who from his youth has adopted this opinion, that the gods have no existence, has ever yet continued till old age constant in the same view" (X. 888C). Montaigne's interpretation of Platonic thought, then, with which he begins the passage in 422A is an accurate paraphrasing of the Athenian's words in Book X of the *Laws*. But the essayist develops the idea that it is a pressing danger, "un dangier pressant," which leads the atheist back to a belief in God in the longer [C] additions which follow. If we look at the second part of Montaigne's

discussion, we see that he turns again to Book X of the *Laws* as well as Book I of the *Republic* to elaborate on this phenomenon:

Ils établissent, dict-il [Platon], par la raison de leur jugement, que ce qui se recite des enfers et des peines futures est feint. Mais, l'occasion de l'experimenter s'offrant lors que la vieillesse ou les maladies les approchent de leur mort, la terreur d'icelle les remplit d'une nouvelle creance par l'horreur de leur condition à venir. Et par ce que telles impressions rendent les courages craintifs, il defend en ses loix toute instruction de telles menaces, et la persuasion que des Dieux il puisse venir à l'homme aucun mal, sinon pour son plus grand bien, quand il y eschoit, et pour un medecinal effect. Ils recitent de Bion qu'infect des atheismes de Théodorus, il avoit esté longtemps se moquant des hommes religieux; mais, la mort le surprenant, qu'il se rendit aux plus extremes superstitions, comme si les dieux s'ostoyent et se remettoyent selon l'affaire de Bion. (II, 12, 423 C)

Villey attributes the first two sentences of this passage, "Ils établissent, dict-il, par la raison de leur jugement..." and "Mais l'occasion de l'experimenter...la terreur de leur condition à venir..." (423 C) to a passage from Book I of the *Republic* where Socrates and Cephalus are discussing the fears that accompany old age (4: 215-16).

I would probably not convince many people in saying this, Socrates, he said, but you must realize that when a man approaches the time when he thinks he will die, he becomes fearful and concerned about things which he did not fear before. It is then that the stories we are told about the underworld, which he ridiculed before—that the man who has sinned here will pay the penalty there—torture his mind lest they be true. Whether because of the weakness of old age, or because he is now closer to what happens there and has a clearer view, the man himself is filled with suspicion and fear, and he now takes account and examines whether he has wronged anyone. (*Republic* I.330d-e)

Montaigne's version of Plato's words, that that which is told of hell and final punishments is often spurned by men, "ce qui se recite des enfers et des peines futures est feint," until old age is upon them, "lors que la vieillesse ou les maladies les approchent de leur mort, la terreur de leur condition à venir," (423 C) is not only an accurate

interpretation of the above passage from the *Republic*, but echoes the essayist's earlier and more succinct reference to Book X of the *Laws*, "Et ce que dit Platon, qu'il est peu d'hommes si fermes...." in 422A. What Montaigne has done in this [C] addition to the passage is to expand and elaborate on his initial idea in 422A by incorporating the more detailed description of an Atheist in his old age from Book I of the *Republic*. Perhaps a re-reading of his earlier text spurred Montaigne to refer again to the Platonic corpus and to insert the more explicit description from the *Republic* in his writings. The rhetorical question which he posed in the earlier passage, "Quelle foy doit ce estre, que la lâcheté et la foiblesse de cœur plantent en nous et establissent?" (422 A) finds expression in Cephalus' description of a man in his old age who "because of the weakness of old age," or because he is "filled with suspicion and fear" seeks to rectify his own thinking on certain matters.

The assertion that Montaigne is referring to Book X of the *Laws*, as well as to the first book of the *Republic* in the above passage (423 C) is further supported by the fact that in the next sentence Montaigne makes an explicit reference to Plato's "laws":

Et par ce que telles impressions rendent les courages craintifs, il defend en ses loix toute instruction de telles menaces et la persuasion que des Dieux il puisse venir à l'homme aucun mal, sinon pour son plus grand bien, quand il y eschoit, et pour un medecinal effect. (II, 12, 423 C)

Montaigne's judgment of Plato's thought here is well-founded and bespeaks more than a passing familiarity with the Platonic works. Plato's main concern, that man's image of the gods be a beneficent one, bringing no harm but only good, is clearly substantiated by at least three passages in Book X of the *Laws* as well as another passage in the *Republic*. The first instance occurs in the opening pages of Book X where the Athenian and Clinias are discussing the methods by which one should convince non-believers of the existence of the gods.

CLIN. What, then, shall we do or say to such people:

ATH. Let us listen first, my good sir, to what they, as I imagine, say mockingly, in their contempt for us.

CLIN. What is it?

ATH. In derision they would probably say this: "O Strangers of Athens, Lacedaemon and Crete, what you say is true. Some of us do not believe in gods at all; others of us believe in gods of the kinds you mention. So we claim now, as you claimed in the matter of laws, that before threatening us harshly, you should first try to convince and teach us, by producing adequate proofs, that gods exist, and that they are too good to be wheedled by gifts and turned aside from justice. (X. 885C-D)

Presumably the non-believers of whom the Athenian speaks in this passage will be among the most difficult opponents that he and Clinias encounter. Imagining the atheist's objections, the Athenian states that the believer must first convince him of the existence of the gods based upon reasoned proofs; and secondly, he must convince him that the gods are all good and cannot be seduced or bribed by gifts. The Athenian is intent here on demonstrating that the gods of the poets and orators never inspire good conduct in their believers, and that in order to distinguish themselves (and thus their beliefs) from the poets and storytellers, the law-givers must use persuasion and reasoned arguments to convince those who do not believe.

For as it is, this and such as this is the account of them we hear from those who are reputed the best of poets, orators, seers, priests, and thousands upon thousands of others; and consequently most of us, instead of seeking to avoid wrong-doing, do the wrong and then try to make it good. Now from law-givers like you, who assert that you are gentle rather than severe, we claim that you should deal with us first by way of persuasion; and if what you say about the existence of the gods is superior to the arguments of others in point of truth, even though it be but little superior in eloquence, then probably you would succeed in convincing us. Try then, if you think this reasonable, to meet our challenge. (X. 885D-E)

The distinction which the Athenian makes between the gods of the orators and poets and those of the law-givers is one which Plato makes elsewhere, specifically in Book III of the *Republic*. Because we have already established a connection between Book X of the *Laws* and the *Republic* in this passage of the "Apologie" (422 A-423

C), it behooves us to look at yet another connection between the two Platonic works. The passage from the *Republic* which reinforces the sense of the Athenian's speech from the *Laws* (X. 885C-E) is a discussion of the role of the poet in society and the need for censorship:

We will certainly not believe these things, nor allow it to be said that Theseus, the son of Poseidon, and Peirithous, the son of Zeus, engaged in dreadful kidnappings, or that any other hero, son of a god, ventured upon dreadful and impious deeds as they now untruthfully tell against them. We shall compel the poets to deny that these deeds were theirs or to deny that they were children of the gods; they must not say both or attempt to persuade our young men that the gods beget evil and that heroes are not better than ordinary men. As we said earlier, these things are both impious and untrue, for we have shown that evils cannot originate with the gods. (*Republic* III. 391d-e)

Yet another passage from Book X of the *Laws* which recapitulates the message of the two passages we have just examined occurs when Clinias asserts that only by showing that the gods are beneficent will the lawmakers be able to convince their people that their laws also have value.

CLIN. And it is of the highest importance that our arguments, showing that the gods exist and that they are good and honour justice more than do men, should by all means possess some degree of persuasiveness; for such a prelude is the best we could have in defence, as one may say, of all our laws. (X. 887B-C)

In a third and final passage from the *Laws* Plato attempts to prove by reasoned arguments that the gods are careful guardians of man who cannot be bribed by wrongdoers or seduced by material goods to affect the course of human events. While the entire argument put forth by the Athenian (X. 899D-907B) is too lengthy to reproduce here, we shall look at the end of this argument where the Athenian summarizes his main points.

ATH. Are not all gods the greatest of all guardians, and over the greatest things?

CLIN. Yes, by far.

ATH. Shall we say that those who watch over the fairest things, and who are themselves eminently good at keeping watch, are inferior to dogs and ordinary men, who would never betray justice for the sake of gifts impiously offered by unjust men?

CLIN. By no means; it is an intolerable thing to say, and whoever embraces such an opinion would most justly be adjudged the worst and most impious of all the impious men who practise impiety in all its forms.

ATH. May we now say that we have fully proved our three propositions,—namely, that the gods exist, and that they are careful, and that they are wholly incapable of being seduced to transgress justice?

CLIN. Certainly we may; and in these statements you have our support. (X. 906D-907B)

Thus we have three examples from Book X of the *Laws* and another from Book III of the *Republic* where Plato discusses both the existence and nature of the gods. We learn from these passages that the gods of the orators and poets are threatening and capable of evil, while the gods of the law-givers are beneficent and perform capable only of good. Certainly all four of these examples support Montaigne's interpretation of Platonic thought as he expresses it in 423C. But in the final sentence of this passage, lest Montaigne's discussion become too theoretical, he recounts a fact from the life of Bion which returns us not only to the conversation between Socrates and Cephalus in Book I of the *Republic*, but also to Montaigne's succinct reference to Book X of the *Laws* at the beginning of his passage in the "Apologie" (422 A). His reference to Bion's atheism, correctly reported from Diogenes Laertius' "Life of Bion," offers yet another example of a man who having scoffed at religious men, "...il avoit este longtemps se moquant des hommes religieux," (423 C) is brought back to his senses at the moment of death, "mais, la mort le surprenant, qu'il se rendit aux plus extremes superstitions comme si les dieux s'ostoyent et se remettoyent selon l'affaire de Bion" (423 C). Along with the more general "dangier pressant" of passage 422A and the "terreur" of old age and approaching death in passage 423C,

this anecdote from Bion's life imparts a certain realism to Montaigne's metaphysical considerations.

The third and final part of the passage we are considering in the "Apologie" (423 C-424 B) is actually a summation of the points which Montaigne has made in the preceding paragraphs. Montaigne's statement, "Platon et ces exemples veulent conclurre que nous sommes ramenez à la creance de Dieu, ou par amour, ou par force," (423 C) unlike his earlier interpretations of the Platonic text, is not wholly accurate with regard to Plato's thought in the *Laws*.⁷ Plato speaks neither of love nor force, but of persuasion when leading men to a belief in the gods. Since the Plato of the *Republic* and the *Laws* is above all a social pragmatist, his main concern is to find the best way to affect social behaviour with the most lasting results. In each of the above examples from the Platonic works, persuasion through reasoned dialogue is indicated as the ideal way to teach men about the gods. Perhaps here, above all else, is where Plato and Montaigne diverge in their thinking. For Montaigne's view in this part of the "Apologie" is that man cannot reason about God. Just as reason fails us in our attempt to establish belief in God, so does it fail those who profess to disbelieve: "L'atheisme estant une proposition comme desnaturée et monstrueuse, difficile aussi et malaisée d'establir en l'esprit humain," (423 C). It is yet again, Montaigne reminds us, fear of death or sickness which brings man back to a belief in God. "Et, quand la crainte ou la maladie aura abatu cette licentieuse ferveur d'humeur volage, ils ne lairront de se revenir et se laisser tout discrettement manier aux creances et exemples publiques," (423 C). It is important to note that all of Montaigne's own examples in this part of the "Apologie" demonstrate that it is by fear, not by love or persuasion, that men are brought back to God. Thus he speaks in his

⁷ In fact, the synthesis which Montaigne achieves with his allusions to the *Laws* and the *Republic* and his example of Bion in this part of the "Apologie" demonstrates a point well made by Regosin, "Montaigne's text could be said to be generated both by example and from examples," in "Le mirouer vague: Reflections of the example in Montaigne's *Essais*" in *Œuvres & Critiques* VIII, 1-2 (1983), p. 77. Certainly it is left to the reader to decide if the anecdote about Bion from Diogenes Laertius generated Montaigne's return to the Platonic corpus or vice versa. For a comprehensive discussion of the richness and intricacy of structure in Montaigne's examples, see John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 118-153.

first example of "un dangier pressant" (422 A), in his second of "la terreur" of death (423 C) and in his third of Bion, a professed atheist who surprised by death, "la mort le surprenant" capitulated to the most extreme religious superstitions (423 C).

There is a certain irony in the fact that Montaigne has chosen the arguments of a pagan philosopher to buttress his own belief that reason has no place in theological quandaries. His statement that the above examples from Plato's works demonstrate that men are led back to a belief in God either by love or by fear (423 C) is really a statement about Montaigne and his own examples. For while Plato touches on the emotions of fear and gratitude, the predominant argument in Book X is that men should come to a belief in the gods through reasoned dialogue. Montaigne's perspective in this part of the "Apologie" is quite different. Human reason is totally spurned as a means of knowing God, and the emotion of fear, Montaigne observes, is often the only inducement to belief.

Having borrowed from Plato's works in this part of the "Apologie," Montaigne concludes with his estimation of Plato, not as a thinker, but as a man with a religious viewpoint. Montaigne accuses paganism and the lack of Christian grace for leading Plato astray in his belief about the gods. Plato is wrong to assert that children and old men are more susceptible to religion, as if religious belief was most amenable to an undeveloped reason, or a decrepit mind (423 C-424 B). Montaigne asserts that man should never rely on his logical faculties to determine the existence of God and that faith is the only basis for our belief.

Le neud qui devoit attacher nostre jugement et nostre volonté, qui devoit estreindre nostre ame et joindre à nostre creature, ce devoit estre un neud prenant ses repliz et ses forces, non pas de noz considerations, de noz raisons et passions, mais d'une estreinte divine et supernaturelle, n'ayant qu'une forme, un visage et un lustre, qui est l'autorité de Dieu et sa grace. (II, 12, 424 A)

Montaigne concludes this part of the "Apologie" with a defense of Sebond's view that the universe does in fact attest to the existence of a supreme being. This seems a reversal of Montaigne's earlier opinion which was that man cannot know God from reasoning about his creatures or the elements of the universe. In what could be termed a defense not only of Sebond's belief in God, but of his entire cosmic

view, Montaigne speaks with praise of Sebond's labor to establish the existence of God through the evidence of his creatures:

Aussi n'est-il pas croyable que toute cette machine n'ait quelques marques empreintes de la main de ce grand architecte, et qu'il n'y ait quelque image és choses du monde raportant aucunement à l'ouvrier qui les a basties et formées. Il a laissé en ces hauts ouvrages le caractere de sa divinité, et ne tient qu'à nostre imbecillité que nous ne le puissions descouvrir. C'est ce qu'il nous dit luy mesme, que ses operations invisibles, il nous les manifeste par les visibles. Sebond s'est travaillé à ce digne estude, et nous montre comment il n'est piece du monde qui desmante son facteur. Ce seroit faire tort à la bonté divine, si l'univers ne consentoit à nostre creance. Le ciel, la terre, les elemans, nostre corps et nostre ame, toutes choses y conspirent; il n'est que de trouver le moyen de s'en servir. Elles nous instruisent, si nous sommes capables d'entendre. (II, 12, 424 A)

Plato labors equally hard in Book X of the *Laws* to prove the existence of the gods, but his means of using reasoned arguments is rejected out of hand by Montaigne throughout the "Apologie." Nevertheless, it is fascinating to note the similarity of viewpoint and language which the following passage from Book X shares with Montaigne's eulogy of Sebond. Speaking of souls or prime movers, the Athenian describes the elements of the universe and the machine which orders them:

ATH. Concerning all the stars and the moon, and concerning the years and months and all seasons, what other account shall we give than this very same,—namely, that, inasmuch as it has been shown that they are all caused by one or more souls, which are good also with all goodness, we shall declare these souls to be gods, whether it be that they order the whole heaven by residing in bodies, as living creatures, or whatever the mode and method? Is there any man that agrees with this view who will stand hearing it denied that "all things are full of gods"? (X. 899B)

While we can point to at least four parallel ideas which the two passages share, it is especially telling that in each case it is Montaigne's thought which is the more definite and his language which is the more concrete. The Athenian's "one or more souls, which are good also with all goodness," finds a more precise

definition in Montaigne's "architecte" and "ouvrier." Likewise, the Athenian's statement that these souls "whether it be that they order the whole heaven by residing in bodies, as living creatures, or whatever the mode and method," (X. 899B) is more vague than Montaigne's description of the architect's operations which though they remain invisible, "il nous les manifeste par les visibles," (424 A). While the Athenian tells us that the stars, the moon, the years, months, and seasons are "all caused by one or more souls," (X. 899B), Montaigne tells us that all of these elements conspire to make us believe in the creator. "Le ciel, la terre, les elemans, nostre corps et nostre ame, toutes choses y conspirent..." (424 A). Finally, the rhetorical nature of the Athenian's question, "Is there any man that agrees with this view who will stand hearing it denied that 'all things are full of gods'" (X. 899B) parallels that of Montaigne's opening sentence in the above passage of the "Apologie:" "Aussi n'est-il pas croyable que toute cette machine n'ait quelques marques empreintes de la main de ce grand architecte, et qu'il n'y ait quelque image és choses du monde, raportant aucunement à l'ouvrier qui les a basties et formées," (424 A). As in the other three examples, Montaigne fleshes out in precise and concrete images what the Athenian only sketches in a vague manner. In his attempt to defend Sebond's cosmic view, Montaigne appears to reverse his earlier opinion that man cannot know God from reasoning about his creatures or the elements of the universe. And, if the similarity of content and language which the above passage from the "Apologie" shares with Book X of Plato's *Laws* is no more than coincidence, Montaigne's debt to Plutarch and ultimately to Plato in the next sentence is unarguable:

Car ce monde est un temple tressainct, dedans lequel l'homme est introduit pour y contempler des statues, non ouvrées de mortelle main, mais celles que la divine pensée a fait sensibles: le Soleil, les estoilles, les eaux et la terre, pour nous représenter les intelligibles. (II, 12, 424 B)

The apparent source of Montaigne's words, a passage from Plutarch's *Moralia* entitled, "On Tranquility of Mind," follows:

For the universe is a most holy temple and most worthy of a god; into it man is introduced through birth as a spectator, not of hand-

made or immovable images, but of those sensible representations of knowable things that the divine mind, says Plato, has revealed, representations which have innate within themselves the beginnings of life and motion, sun and moon and stars, rivers which ever discharge fresh water, and earth which sends forth nourishment for plants and animals.⁸

That Montaigne's description of the world in passage 424B is an almost verbatim copy of Plutarch's description is quite evident. More important for our study is the fact that Plutarch acknowledges his debt to Plato in this passage, summarizing Plato's description of the creation of the universe in the *Timaeus*.⁹ Unlike Montaigne's almost verbatim translation of Plutarch's words in the above passage (424 B), Plutarch's summary of creation is instead a composite of ideas advanced by Plato in the *Timaeus*. Part of Plutarch's description does bear a resemblance to a specific passage in the Platonic dialogue. When Plutarch states that man is introduced into the world to contemplate all "sensible representations of knowable things that the divine mind says Plato, has revealed," (6: 477) he is most probably drawing his inspiration from the concluding passage of the *Timaeus*:

We may now say that our discourse about the nature of the universe has an end. The world has received animals, mortal, and immortal, and is fulfilled with them, and has become a visible animal containing the visible—the sensible God who is the image of the intellectual, the greatest, best, fairest, most perfect—the one only-begotten heaven. (*Timaeus* 92C)

The second half of Plutarch's summary where he defines these "sensible representations" as the sun, moon, stars, rivers and earth and declares that they have the beginnings of life and motion within them is an accurate, though extremely succinct interpretation of a more detailed account in the *Timaeus*. There Plato describes the generation and function of each of these elements in the universe.

⁸ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 17 vols. trans. H. Cherniss and W. Hembold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970) 6: 477.

⁹ In fact, in the opening sentence of Plutarch's tale he addresses his friend Paccius, saying that he has composed "On Tranquility of Mind" not only to discuss that subject, but also to clarify certain points which Plato had made in the *Timaeus*. See *Moralia*, 6: 464 E-F.

If we look at the various debts which Montaigne owes to his predecessors in this passage of the "Apologie," (424 B) we learn several things about Montaigne's mode of composition and the intertextuality of his writing in the *Essais*. For while Plato's *Timaeus* served as a source of inspiration for Plutarch's piece, "On Tranquility of Mind," a source which Plutarch openly acknowledges, Montaigne fails to credit either Plutarch or Plato for the content and language of his passage in the "Apologie." Yet, it is the concrete and descriptive language of the passage from Plutarch which served unarguably as the subtext for Montaigne's own description of the universal architect, the prime mover of Sebond's cosmos as well. Montaigne was no doubt aware of Plutarch's debt to Plato, because Plutarch mentions it himself. In his reproduction of the passage from Plutarch, however, Montaigne fails to include any mention of Plutarch or of Plutarch's borrowing from the *Timaeus*.

The fact that this passage in the "Apologie" can be traced back to the *Timaeus* through Plutarch is somewhat ironic. For the *Timaeus*, more than any of his other dialogues, was Plato's attempt to explain the creation of the universe—a universe which he believed to be inhabited by intelligent beings who share in the Divine Intellect. Up to this point in the "Apologie" Montaigne eschews any attempt by man to prove the existence of a Divine Being by means of his intellect or rational faculties or by reasoning about the creatures or elements of the universe. And, as we shall see in the next part of the "Apologie," Montaigne will spurn any of man's attempts to define himself in terms of a greater or higher intellect. In this part of the "Apologie," however, Montaigne comes closest to defending Sebond's view. That he does so with the help of Plato's *Laws* and *Timaeus*, along with a poetic passage from Plutarch's *Moralia*, should not surprise us. For often in the *Essais* Montaigne seems willing to borrow from his predecessors, and if necessary, to reinvent their message to corroborate his own views on a particular subject. In this case he did the borrowing and reinventing on Sebond's behalf, leaving his own thoughts on the matter momentarily aside.

* * *

Montaigne presumably composed the next section of the "Apologie" as a rebuttal to those who claimed that Sebond's thesis in

the *Liber Creaturarum* would not hold up in the face of human reason (429-465). Rather than claiming that Sebond's arguments can weather human investigation, Montaigne instead attempts to show the arrogance men have in claiming such pretensions for human reason. He accomplishes this by comparing men to the animals. Recalling Plato's account of the golden age when men communicated with the animals, supposedly sharing a more equal status, Montaigne praises the animals who share complete communication among themselves (430 C-A). Man's interpretation of nature is incorrect, asserts Montaigne, and man errs in his thought when he claims that nature guides and rewards animals with instincts and natural resourcefulness while abandoning man "au hazard et à la fortune" and "à quæster par art les choses necessaires à nostre conservation..." (433 A). Nature, maintains Montaigne, shows herself equal and fair in her treatment of all living beings:

J'ay dit tout cecy pour maintenir cette ressemblance qu'il y a aux choses humaines, et pour nous ramener et joindre au nombre. Nous ne sommes ny au dessus, ny au dessous du reste: tout ce qui est sous le Ciel, dit le sage, court une loy et fortune pareille,

[B] *Indupedita suis fatalibus omnia vinclis.* (II, 12, 436 A-B)

Montaigne views man as an integral part of nature, then, but also as one composed of the same matter as all other creatures of the universe. The quotation from Lucretius, "Indupedita suis fatalibus omnia vinclis," who was himself a disciple of Archelaus' school of materialism, serves to underscore Montaigne's message that all creatures of the universe have an identical fate, one which does not depend on man's ability to reason. That a large part of this section of the "Apologie" is inspired by Plutarch's *Moralia* and Pliny's *Natural History* has been well established.¹⁰ Montaigne attempts, however, to show that man is no different from the animals by demonstrating that animals approach humans and at times surpass them in their characteristics and behavior.

¹⁰ For example, see Floyd Gray's discussion of animal ingenuity in the "Apologie" in "Montaigne and Sebond: The Rhetoric of Paradox," *French Studies* (1974), pp. 140-42.

A particularly striking passage for our study, one in which Montaigne compares the sexual desires and habits of men with those of the animals, occurs in 450-451A. The substance of this passage can be traced to Book VIII of Plato's *Laws*, even though Montaigne most likely came to the ideas which he expresses here through his reading of Plutarch's *Moralia* and Oppianus' *De Venatione*. Determining exactly to whom Montaigne owes a debt for ideas will figure in our discussion. However, the opinion which Montaigne himself formulates about sexual desires in the animal and human worlds proves to be just as significant as the allusions which he makes to other writers and attests once again to the essayist's originality of thought.

Les cupiditez sont ou naturelles et necessaires, comme le boire et le manger; ou naturelles et non necessaires, comme l'accointance des femelles; ou elles ne sont ny naturelles ny necessaires; de cette derniere sorte sont quasi toutes celles des hommes; elles sont toutes superfluës et artificielles. (II, 12, 450 A)

In these lines Montaigne has paraphrased lines from Plutarch's piece, "That the beasts use reason," adhering, nonetheless, to Plutarch's language:

Entre les cupiditez vous voiez beaucoup de differences, comme celle du boire, oultre ce qu'elle est naturelle il est certain qu'elle est aussi necessaire: & celle de l'amour, encore que nature en donne le commencement, si est-ce que l'on peut bien commodement vivre en s'en passant, & pour ce doit elle estre appelee naturelle, mais non pas necessaire.¹¹

Man, says Montaigne, has created the majority of his appetites which are neither natural nor necessary:

Ces cupiditez estrangeres, que l'ignorance du bien et une fauce opinion ont coulées en nous, sont en si grand nombre qu'elles chassent presque toutes les naturelles; ny plus ny moins que si, en une cité, il y avoit si grand nombre d'estrangers, qu'ils en missent

¹¹ Wherever a passage from Plutarch appears in French it is from the Amyot translation which Montaigne himself read, *Les Œuvres morales et meslées*, 2 vols. trans. Amyot (1572), 1: 272.

hors les naturels habitans ou esteignissent leur autorité et puissance ancienne, l'usurpant entierement et s'en saisissant. (II, 12 450 A)

When he compares the influx of unnatural and unnecessary desires into man's being to the influx of foreigners into a city besieged by another power, Montaigne agains borrows directly from the passage in Plutarch's *Moralia*:

Il y a un autre genre de cupiditez, qui ne sont ny naturelles ny necessaires, ains coulées de dehors par une ignorance du bien, par une vaine opinion: & celles la sont en si grand nombre qu'elles chassent presque toutes les naturelles, ne plus ne moins que si en une cité il y avoit si grand nombre d'estrangers, qu'ils forceassent les habitans. (*Œuvres morales*, I: 272)

Plutarch's text, "Que les bestes brutes usent de la raison," from which these lines are taken is actually a conversation between Odysseus and Gryllus, the man whom Circe had long before turned into a pig. Odysseus tries to convince Gryllus to return to the human world, but has little success, as Gryllus asserts that the existence which he leads as an animal is far superior to the one he led as a man. Plutarch's main thesis, however, that animals are superior to men in the way in which they moderate their sexual desires as well as in the way they practice other virtues, is not fully acceptable to Montaigne. The essayist's judgement on this matter is qualified by what he has learned from other writings and his own experience.

Les animaux sont beaucoup plus reglez que nous ne sommes, et se contiennent avec plus de moderation sous les limites que nature nous a prescripts; mais non pas si exactement qu'ils n'ayent encore quelques convenance à nostre desbauche. (II, 12, 450 A)

In the passage which follows and begins with the lines, "Et tout ainsi comme il s'est trouvé des desirs furieux qui ont poussé les hommes à l'amour des bestes, elles se trouvent aussi par fois esprises de nostre amour et recoivent des affections monstrueuses d'une espece à autre" (450-451 A), Montaigne recounts a series of anecdotes which will call into question three areas of sexual behavior

among the animals: relations between different species; homosexual relations; and incestuous relations.

In the piece from Plutarch, Gryllus maintains that animals have much greater temperance in sexual matters, neither pursuing members of different species nor of the same sex. Cherniss and Hembold, commentators of the *Moralia*, note that Plutarch owes much of this discussion to the eighth book of Plato's *Laws* (*Moralia*, 12: 489-533). Certainly in the following passage from Book VIII Plato makes an implicit claim for sexual relations within the same species only. His claim that the animals avoid homosexual relations is explicit.

ATH. Now that we have reached this point in regard to our regulation, but have fallen into a strait because of the cowardice of the many, I maintain that our regulation on this head must go forward and proclaim that our citizens must not be worse than fowls and many other animals which are produced in large broods, and which live chaste and celibate lives without sexual intercourse until they arrive at the age for breeding; and when they reach this age they pair off as instinct moves them, male with female and female with male; and thereafter they live in a way that is holy and just, remaining constant to their first contracts of love: surely our citizens should at least be better than these animals. (VIII. 840D-E)

Montaigne, on the other hand, sees no such behavior occurring more frequently among the animals than among men, and relates another tale from Plutarch's *Moralia* which negates the lesson of Gryllus' tale. Borrowing directly from Plutarch's piece, "Quels animaux sont les plus advisez" (*Œuvres morales*, 2: 507-523) Montaigne relates the stories of an elephant in love with a flower girl, a dragon in love with a young girl, a goose in love with a boy, and finally, a ram in love with minstrel girls (II, 12 451 A). Montaigne, a master of self-contradiction, has in this case called up two passages from Plutarch which essentially contradict each other. The lesson of the first tale, "Que les bestes brutes usent de la raison," maintains that the animal world observes the prohibition of relations between different species, while the lesson of the second tale, "Quels animaux sont les plus advisez" asserts just the opposite. That Montaigne has made use of such contradictions in Plutarch should not really surprise us. Somewhat later in the "Apologie" when

Montaigne deals with the subject of Pyrrhonism, he will comment himself on the contradictions inherent in the philosophical pursuit referring among others to the writings of Seneca and Plutarch:

[A] Il est ainsi de la part des auteurs de ce tiers genre: [B] comme les anciens ont remarqué des escripts d'Anaxagoras, Democritus, Parmenides, Zenophanes et autres. [A] Ils ont une forme d'escrire douteuse en substance et un dessein enquerant plustost qu'instruisant, encore qu'ils entresement leur stile de cadences dogmatistes. Cela se voit il pas aussi bien [C] et en Seneque [A] et en Plutarque? [C] Combien disent ils, tantost d'un visage, tantost d'un autre, pour ceux qui y regardent de prez! Et les reconciliateurs des juristconsultes devoient premierement les concilier chacun à soy. (II, 12, 489 A-C)

Montaigne next counters in 451A the principle that animals do not engage in incestuous relations, an idea advanced by Plato in Book VIII of the *Laws*, Plutarch in "Que les bestes brutes usent de la raison," and Oppianus in the *De Venatione*.¹² Just as he maintained that sexual relations do occur between members of different species, Montaigne claims that both homosexual and incestuous relations occur often in the animal world: "On void aussi certains animaux s'adonner à l'amour des masles de leur sexe; Oppianus et autres recitent quelques exemples pour monstrier la reverence que les bestes en leurs mariages portent à la parenté...", (II, 12, 451 A). Contrary to what Oppianus recounts, experience, claims Montaigne, proves the contrary. Montaigne then completes his thought with a long quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, "nec habetur turpe juvencae/Ferre patrem tergo; fit equo sua filia conjux/ Quasque creavit init pecudes caper; ipsaque vujus/ Semine concepta est, ex illo concipit ales (451 A). These lines from Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* tell of the heifer who mates with her sire, the stallion who mates with his filly, the goats who pair with their young, and the birds who breed with their parent birds.¹³

¹² Oppiani, *De Venatione*, 4 libri trans. Joan Bodin (Lutetiae, 1555), I: 236.

¹³ My paraphrase of these lines from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is based on Donald Frame's translation in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 347. Mary McKinley has examined in great detail the subtlety and intertextuality of Montaigne's use of Latin quotations in the *Essais*. See McKinley, *Words in a Corner: Studies in Montaigne's Latin Quotations*,

Montaigne's allusion to Oppianus in this passage certainly proves more than cursory, so powerfully does it unlock a tradition of literary borrowing within the Ancient world, as well as in the world of Montaigne and his contemporaries. We learn from Villey that Montaigne actually read Jean Bodin's 1555 Latin translation of Oppianus' *De Venatione*.¹⁴ Bodin himself wrote a commentary on the *De Venatione* in which he refuted the principle advanced earlier by Plutarch that animals never mate outside their species. However, as Villey informs us, Bodin appears to have been partially mistaken in attributing the false principle to Plutarch. Plutarch actually borrowed the notion from Book VIII, 840D-E, of Plato's *Laws*, (Villey, 4: 226). While Plutarch does make this principle—that animals never mate outside their species—the lesson of one of his tales, we have also seen how he contradicts the same principle in another tale. Plato, on the other hand, maintains throughout Book VIII of the *Laws* the principle that animals of any species are exclusionary in their mating habits.

Montaigne's ostensible intention in this part of the "Apologie" was to show that men are no better than the animals. Ironically, he ends by demonstrating instead that the animals are no better than men, and that in fact, man and the animals are very similar. Without losing ourselves in the semantic aspect of this argument, we should look to what Montaigne actually achieves in this passage. In disputing the ideas of those who would establish a basis for human sexual behavior and mores in the natural or animal world (in this case, Plato, Plutarch, and Oppianus) Montaigne also counters those who would posit a basis for human custom and law in a higher so-called Natural law.

French Forum Monographs 26 (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 1981).

¹⁴ The relevant lines from Bodin's Latin translation, followed by a 1575 French translation, tell of the way in which the animal world avoids incestuous relations, respecting Nature's law with regard to mating: "Naturam sedenim magno venerantur honore/ Quis credat nolle incestus foedare nefando corporu/ Quod solum venerem amplectantur honestam?" *De Venatione* (1555), I: 236. "Aussi vers la nature ils font respectueux/ Et ne font en amour jamais incestueux/ Mais sans se polluer d'un vilain Hyménée/ Cherchent l'honneste amour licite et ordonnée," *Les quatre livres de la vénérie d'Oppian*, trans. Florent Chrestien, (Paris: Imprimerie de Robert Estienne, 1575), I.5.

Before leaving this part of the "Apologie" let us reconsider Villey's contention that Montaigne did not really study Plato or his *Laws* before 1588 (4: 215). The above passage from the "Apologie" (450-451 A) is an excellent example of Montaigne's owing a primary debt to one Ancient writer, in this case Plutarch, and at the same time a secondary debt to Plato, whose Book VIII of the *Laws* informed a good deal of the passage from the *Moralia*. The passage from the *Laws* (VIII. 840D-E) which informed Plutarch's piece, "Que les bestes brutes usent de la raison" and whose substance Montaigne counters in this part of the "Apologie," forms part of a lengthier passage in Book VIII, 835D-841E, where Plato discusses sexual mores and practices in his ideal society. It is this longer passage in the *Laws* (835D-841E) which also served as a source for Montaigne's borrowings in essay I, 23, "De la coutume et de ne changer aisément une loy receüe," where he discusses sexual mores, and in particular, incestuous relations. That passage (I, 23, 115-116 C) which Montaigne enriched with his borrowings from Book VIII, was a later [C] addition to the essay.¹⁵

We could speculate that Montaigne first became aware of the ideas central to Book VIII of Plato's *Laws* around 1575-76 through his familiarity with the tale from Plutarch's *Moralia*.¹⁶ The Amyot translation of the relevant passage from Plutarch's work, however, makes no mention of the *Laws* (1: 272) so exactly when Montaigne became aware of Plutarch's debt to Plato we cannot be sure. We do know, however, that after 1588 Montaigne returned to the same section of Book VIII of the *Laws* to enrich his discussion of sexual mores in a [C] addition to essay I, 23 and to say much the same thing as he had already said in the "Apologie."

It is also quite possible that Montaigne returned to Plutarch's *Moralia* after reading Jean Bodin's commentary of the *De Venatione*.

¹⁵ The connection between essay I, 23 and the above passage in the "Apologie" clearly goes back to Book VIII of the *Laws*. For Montaigne's position vis-à-vis natural law, see Carol Clark, "Montaigne and the Law," in *Montaigne and His Age*, ed. Keith Cameron (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1981), pp. 49-68.

¹⁶ Here I am following the dates which Frame suggests for the composition of the essay. Along these lines he maintains that the "Apologie" was composed around 1576 (*The Complete Essays*, xii-xx). Villey suggests that a part of the "Apologie" was composed between 1575-76 with important additions occurring between 1578 and 1580 (Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne* (1908. New York, 1968), 1: Appendix 1.

Montaigne's allusion to the *De Venatione* at the end of this passage in order to counter a principle which Oppianus had advanced with regard to mating practices in the animal world (II, 12, 451 A) could have easily been spurred on by Bodin's own refutation of Plutarch's claims about these mating practices. So, while Montaigne owes a considerable debt to Plutarch's *Moralia*, borrowing from two separate tales in this passage of the "Apologie" (450-451 A) and a secondary debt to Book VIII of Plato's *Laws* which informed one of these tales, it is quite possible that he owes yet other debts to Oppianus and Bodin whose commentary on the *De Venatione* suggested another look at the *Moralia*. This entire passage from the "Apologie" (450-451 A), then, sheds particular light on Montaigne's methods of literary imitation and reinvention in the *Essais*.¹⁷ For not only does Montaigne return to the world of Antiquity to incorporate and weave together ideas from Plato, Plutarch, and Oppianus; in this case, he most likely did so on the impetus of reading a commentary on Oppianus' work written by his contemporary, Jean Bodin.¹⁸

¹⁷ My understanding of literary imitation in Montaigne's *Essais* owes much to Thomas M. Greene's *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) and to Terence Cave's *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). More recently Timothy Hampton has brought to light certain examples of Montaigne's encounter with Ancient philosophers in his work, *Writing from History. The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 134-197. Hampton's argument depends on the articulation of an opposing stance which Montaigne takes vis-à-vis the writings of his Ancient predecessors in order to further the humanist cause and what might be termed a move towards modernity. While the central argument of my article does not negate that of Hampton, it focuses rather on the reweaving and assimilation of Ancient texts in Montaigne's work and depends on a close reading and analysis of specific passages in the *Laws* which demonstrate the intertextuality of Montaigne's writing. Indeed, Montaigne borrows and assembles in the "Apologie," sometimes through an intermediary such as Plutarch, the materials he needs to articulate his own more modern stance.

¹⁸ This is not to suggest consistently similar perspectives on the part of Montaigne and Bodin. As Geralde Nakam indicates, Bodin was much more systematic and authoritarian in his views than Montaigne could ever be. For a very instructive comparison of the two philosophers' political views see Nakam's *Les 'Essais' de Montaigne. Miroir et Proces de Leur Temps* (Paris: Nizet, 1984), pp. 239-265. For an understanding of Bodin's role in forging a new jurisprudence, see Julian H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Sixteenth-Century Revolution in the Methodology of Law and History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

* * *

In a lengthy section of the "Apologie," which extends from 465 to 540, Montaigne discusses the futility of pursuing a knowledge which has never succeeded in making man happy, virtuous or free. Neither the Delphic admonition, "Know thyself," nor the wisdom of St. John (8: 32) that "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," suggest keys to understanding this part of the "Apologie." Montaigne does elaborate on his own ideas about man's unsuccessful quest for knowledge, however, and returns again to Plato's *Laws* to buttress his own Pyrrhonist views.

Montaigne first attempts to show that knowledge, no matter in what form, can never make us happy. Philosophers have never had a happier, more comfortable existence than the common laborer or plowman. On the contrary, the innocent man, the one who remains ignorant of the mysteries of life and goes about his work as best he can, is actually wiser and happier, finding greater peace and tranquility. "J'ay veu en mon temps cent artisans, cent laboureurs, plus sages et plus heureux que des recteurs de l'université, et lesquels j'aimerois mieux ressembler" (466 B). It is even more incorrect, asserts Montaigne, to equate knowledge with virtue. He reminds us that it was a desire for knowledge which led man to his original fall and knowledge itself which has failed to redeem him. "J'en diray seulement encore cela, que c'est la seule humilité et submission qui peut effectuer un homme de bien" (467 A). And a bit later: "La peste de l'homme, c'est l'opinion de sçavoir. Voilà pourquoy l'ignorance nous est tant recommandée par nostre religion comme piece propre à la creance et à l'obeissance" (467-468 A). Finally, he reminds us of St. Paul's admonition that it is the simple man, without knowledge, who gains the kingdom of heaven, "Les simples, dit St. Paul, et les ignorans s'eslevent et saisissent du ciel: et nous, à tout nostre sçavoir, nous plongeons aux abismes infernaux" (477 A).

In this part of the "Apologie" Montaigne does not so much ponder the question of whether man should search for knowledge or not, but more to what degree man should pursue this knowledge. His description of the man athirst for knowledge is often that of a man who has accelerated his descent into hell. Indeed, much of Montaigne's language in this section suggests a preoccupation with descents, plunges, falls and abysses. While the ignorant or simple

man remains steady and stable in his ignorance, the man motivated by a curiosity to know falls at a rate many times faster than his innocent counterpart. Reminding us that Christians are aware of the danger of seeking too great a knowledge of supernatural mysteries, he again speaks of a man who hurls himself to damnation. "Les Chrestiens ont une particuliere cognoissance combien la curiosité est un malnaturel et originel en l'homme. Le soing de s'augmenter en sagesse et en science, ce fut la premiere ruine du genre humain; c'est la voye par où il s'est precipité à la damnation eternelle" (II, 12, 477-478 A).

It is at this point that Montaigne refers us to Book VII of Plato's *Laws*, but not before he has established the wisdom of Socrates, Tacitus, Ecclesiastes, and St. Augustine on the necessity to believe in God rather than to know him. Plato, Montaigne tells us, also sees impiety in being too curious about supernatural mysteries. "Et Platon estime qu'il y ayt quelque vice d'impieté à trop curieusement s'enquerir et de Dieu et du monde, et des causes premieres des choses" (479 C). The passage to which Montaigne refers us in Book VII of the *Laws* extends from 821A-822D and, like this part of the "Apologie," is concerned with the degree to which men should seek knowledge of the supernatural. The Athenian's words, which Montaigne has correctly paraphrased in the "Apologie," follow:

ATH. We commonly assert that men ought not to enquire concerning the greatest god and about the universe, nor busy themselves in searching out their causes, since it is actually impious to do so; whereas the right course, in all probability, is exactly the opposite. (VII. 821A)

What is not clear from Montaigne's text is that the Athenian's words in 821A actually introduce a discussion about when it is wise to make an exception to this law of never inquiring about the gods or the universe.

ATH. My statement sounds paradoxical, and it might be thought to be unbecoming in an old man; but the fact is that, when a man believes that a science is fair and true and beneficial to the State and altogether well-pleasing to God, he cannot possibly refrain any longer from declaring it. (VII. 821 A-B)

The Athenian then points to a falsehood commonly held among the Greeks that the sun, moon, and stars wandered through the universe instead of traveling on a fixed path. Since in fact, the truth is just the opposite, were not the Greeks erring in their comprehension of the heavenly bodies? Likewise, maintains the Athenian, when we err in our estimation of the gods are not the gods displeased with the falsehoods engendered about them? (822 C). Clinias cannot help but agree with the Athenian and so the Athenian concludes his argument. Knowledge of a subject, whether it be the stars or the gods, should be limited to what we can know and then left alone. "Then, if we demonstrate that they really are so, shall all these subjects be learnt up to the point mentioned, and, failing that demonstration, be left alone? Is that to be our agreement?" (822 C). Plato thus uses the example of man's error in his astronomical conjectures to show that man can err in any area of knowledge, including, and especially, that which he believes to be true about the gods. When the Athenian declares that "subjects be learnt up to the point mentioned, and, failing that demonstration, be left alone," he is actually speaking for a wise limit to our knowledge, but a limit which can be pushed ever outward should new knowledge warrant it.

While Montaigne correctly paraphrases the Athenian's words in Book VII of the *Laws*, he precedes them in his own text with a quote from Tacitus—that it is holier to believe about the actions of the gods than to know them—and follows with a quote from Cicero—that it is not only difficult to know the father of the universe, but it is sinful to reveal him to the vulgar if this knowledge ever be found (II, 12, 479 C). This is clearly a case where Montaigne borrows lines from the *Laws* and manipulates them for his own purposes. For, as we have seen, the Athenian's words in Book VII actually precede a lengthier discussion on the importance of limiting one's knowledge about the gods to what we can know. While the Athenian's "what we can know" remains a somewhat vague entity, it surpasses, nevertheless, what Montaigne believes we can ever know about the actions of God. Along these lines, we should also recall that Plato goes to great length in Book X of the *Laws* to establish the existence of the "greatest god" and the first causes of the universe. Montaigne makes no secret of eschewing both of these tasks in the "Apologie." He does, however, as we have already seen, rely heavily on Book X

in his discussion of atheism and the nature of belief in the opening pages of the "Apologie."

Often interpreted as that part of the "Apologie" which most shows Montaigne's Pyrrhonist tendencies, the passage which extends from 480-540 is also one where Montaigne reveals a keen political pragmatism in the face of philosophical and epistemological questions.¹⁹ Scorning all forms of dogmatism, Montaigne opts for Pyrrhonism for a number of reasons. Not least among these is the ability and willingness of the Pyrrhonist to adapt to the laws and customs of his place and time. Since man can never know the truth about these matters and must suspend his judgement, one set of laws appears to be as good as another.

Quant aux actions de la vie, ils sont en cela de la commune façon. Ils se prestant et accommodent aux inclinations naturelles, à l'impulsion et contrainte des passions, aux constitutions des loix et des coutumes et à la tradition des arts. (II, 12, 485 A)

Montaigne himself expresses the opinion that man is better off not knowing, that the majority of the arts are based upon conjecture rather than certain knowledge. From a religious or political point of view the man who professes not to know, merely suspending his judgement, is a better citizen and hence, better off in the long run. "Combien, et aux loix de la religion et aux loix politiques, se trouvent plus dociles et aisez à mener les esprits simples et incurieux, que ces esprits surveillants et paedagogues des causes divines et humaines" (486 C). Such a view can also accommodate the fideist's practice which is to depend entirely upon faith in God in order to know Him. "Plus nous nous renvoyons et commettons à Dieu, et renouons à nous, mieux nous en valons" (486-487 B).

Montaigne has recourse to Platonic thought several times in this part of the "Apologie" and makes several comments from which we could infer his opinion of the Greek philosopher. In 489A, for example, Montaigne notes that some have thought Plato to be a dogmatist while others have considered him a doubting philosopher. "Au demeurant, les uns ont estimé Plato dogmatiste; les autres, dubitateur; les autres en certaines choses l'un, et en certaines choses

¹⁹ For a discussion of Montaigne's Pyrrhonism and Pyrrhonism in the Ancient world, see again Popkin, pp. 42-65 and Schaefer, pp. 80-91.

l'autre" (489 A).²⁰ For our purposes, it is Montaigne's view of Plato's dialogic form as the embodiment of the Pyrrhonist's philosophical mode which forms the basis for his use of the Platonic dialogue in this part of the "Apologie." "Platon me semble avoir aymé cette forme de philosopher par dialogues, à escient, pour loger plus decemment en diverses bouches la diversité et variation de ses propres fantasies" (489-490 C). Indeed, Montaigne claims, the Pyrrhonist stance affects Plato's political and social thought as well as his literary style. Let us look at three separate passages in the "Apologie" where Montaigne demonstrates Plato's affinity for the Pyrrhonist perspective.

The first of these passages (492-493 C) incorporates ideas from both the *Laws* and the *Republic*, and as he did in the opening section of the "Apologie," Montaigne again links the two Platonic works as he explores an idea of no small political significance. Montaigne precedes his allusions to Plato by recounting a story about Diogenes. It seems that when others reproached the Greek philosopher for practicing philosophy, Diogenes responded that it is in the nature of a philosopher to weigh every aspect of a question. However, Montaigne himself reminds us that when composing ideas for the masses, philosophers have always had to take care not to permit their intellectual meanderings to carry them too far afield of the popular beliefs and practices. Plato himself maintained this dichotomy, remarks Montaigne, and in the passage which follows Montaigne draws a clear distinction between Plato the author and Plato the legislateur:

Platon traicte ce mystere d'un jeu assez descouvert. Car, où il escrit selon soy, il ne prescrit rien à certes. Quand il faict le legislateur, il emprunte un style regentant et aseverant, et si y mesle hardiment les plus fantastiques de ses inventions, autant utiles à persuader à la commune que ridicules à persuader à soy-mesmes, sachant combien nous sommes propres à recevoir toutes impressions, et, sur toutes, les plus farouches et enormes. (II, 12, 492 C)

²⁰ Popkin informs us that in his 1548 work *Academica*, Talon placed Plato among the Academic Sceptics rather than the Pyrrhonists. "To achieve this end, Talon traced the history of the Academic movement, as set forth in Cicero, from Plato to Arcesilas to Carneades, and its roots in Socratic and pre-Socratic thought, and indicated the logic by which the Academics came to the conclusion that one ought not to judge any questions whatsoever," (Popkin, p. 28).

Knowing the common man's proclivity for the mythical and fantastical, Plato takes great care in his laws to allow only those poems to be sung in public which have some utilitarian message. "Et pourtant, en ses loix, il a grand soing qu'on ne chante en publique que des poësies desquelles les fabuleuses feintes tendent à quelque utile fin" (492 C). Here Montaigne is most probably referring to Book VII of the *Laws* where Plato discusses the proper music to be taught to children in his ideal society. In the relevant passage, the Athenian's admonition about music forms part of his disquisition on the regulation of drama and tragedy (VII. 817A-E). The most shocking lines in Montaigne's passage, however, contain what he judges to be Plato's estimation of the common man and complete those quoted from above: "...et, estant si facile d'imprimer tous fantosmes en l'esprit humain, que c'est injustice de ne le paistre plustost de mensonges profitables que de mensonges ou inutiles ou dommageables," (492 C). Montaigne's interpretation of Platonic thought comes from a passage at the end of Book II of the *Republic*. In the relevant passage Socrates makes a distinction between the "true lie" and the "verbal lie." He concludes with Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus that the "verbal lie" is at times both good and necessary.

What about the verbal lie? When and to whom is it useful and not deserving hatred? Is it not useful against one's enemies and those of one's so-called friends who, through madness or ignorance, are attempting to do some wrong, in order to turn them away from it? (*Republic* II. 382c-d)

Montaigne's direct allusion to the *Republic* in this passage suggests that his thought was most informed by the relevant passage from Book II of that dialogue. When he mentions Plato's habit of mixing fantastic stories which are useful with his more severe system of laws, "Quand il faict le legislateur, il emprunte un style regnant et aseverant, et si y mesle hardiment les plus fantastiques de ses inventions, autant utiles à persuader à la commune que ridicules à persuader à soy-mesmes," he is no doubt drawing from this notion of the utilitarian "verbal lie."

Montaigne concludes that down through the ages sects which have followed utility rather than truth have fared better (492-493 C).

No doubt his conclusion is based on his belief (not unlike Plato's in the *Laws* and the *Republic*) that the mass of men are incapable of following the truth and at the same time peacefully co-existing. But Montaigne's Pyrrhonism takes him even further along this route. For if knowledge is unattainable, it behooves men to live simply and in accord with the laws and customs of their country. The philosophical pursuit of truth can continue to occur on an individual basis, but men must not seek to find its meaning in the political or judicial arenas.

The next time Montaigne refers us to Plato's *Laws* in the "Apologie" occurs in a summary fashion where the essayist presents us with a catalogue of Ancient philosophers and their beliefs in the Divinity (495 C). After telling us what such thinkers as Thales, Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Empedocles thought about God, he gives us a fairly succinct account of Plato's thought on the subject. Montaigne's interpretation of Platonic belief depends on the *Timaeus* as well as the *Laws*:

Platon dissipe sa creance à divers visages; il dict, au *Timae*, le pere du monde ne se pouvoir nommer; aux *Loix* qu'il ne se faut enquerir de son estre; et ailleurs, en ces mesmes livres, il facit le monde, le ciel, les astres, la terre et nos ames Dieux, et reçoit en outre ceux qui ont esté receus par l'ancienne institution en chasque republicque. (II, 12, 495 C)

The major effect of presenting such a catalogue of thinkers is to demonstrate both diversity of belief and the inability of man to really know God. In the above passage from the "Apologie" Montaigne claims a similar fragmentation or multifaceted aspect to the images which Plato chooses to speak about God, pointing to the contradictions inherent in the corpus of Platonic dialogues. We should recall that Montaigne refers us to Book VII of the *Laws* when he discusses the futility of man's effort to learn about metaphysical matters (479 C). Although in that passage (VII. 821 A-B) Plato circumscribes the areas which men should pursue and limits knowledge to those things we can actually know or demonstrate, he also speaks for man's right to seek truth rather than accept falsehood, even if that means pushing the limits of his knowledge outward. As we saw in the early pages of the "Apologie," Montaigne refers to Book X of the *Laws* where Plato describes the world, heavens, stars, and even human souls as gods in themselves (X. 899 B). This

deification of the various elements in the universe finds a more subtle expression in Montaigne's use of a passage from the *Moralia* where Plutarch defines the celestial bodies as "sensible representations" of the Divine intellect. As we have seen, Plutarch borrowed this concept from Plato's *Timaeus*, the dialogue in which Plato attempted more than in any other to explain the creation of the universe.

The third instance in this part of the "Apologie" where Montaigne has recourse to Platonic thought occurs in a passage where Montaigne considers the immortality of the soul (534 A). While this notion has always been disputed by philosophers and thinkers, there are those, Montaigne tells us, who have maintained it to be plausible opinion, "cette opinion plausible" (534 A) for two reasons. The first reason involves the hope of greater glory after death, and incentive for living the virtuous life. The second, that justice be realized, if not in this world, then in the world hereafter.

[A] Deux choses leur rendoient cette opinion plausible: l'une, que, sans l'immortalité des ames, il n'y auroit plus de quoy asseoir les vaines esperances de la gloire, qui est une consideration de merueilleux credit au monde; l'autre, que c'est une très-utile impression, [C] comme dict Platon, [A] que les vices, quand ils se desroberont à la veue obscure et incertaine de l'humaine justice, demeurent tousjours en butte à la divine, qui les poursuivra, voire après la mort des coupables. (II, 12, 534 A-C-A)

Villey maintains that even though Montaigne attributes his second reason, the hope of divine justice, to Plato, "comme dict Platon" that Montaigne did not learn this himself from Plato (4: 260). Though he disputes Plato as the source of Montaigne's idea, Villey indicates no other source and suggests that if Montaigne is referring to a Platonic text, it is most probably a general reference to Book X of the *Laws* where the Athenian convinces his companions that the gods cannot be bribed by wrongdoers and are the watchful guardians of all matters in the universe (X. 907A-E).

If we look at Book IX of the *Laws*, however, we can point to a passage which could have easily inspired Montaigne's thinking when he composed this part of the "Apologie," or at least when he added the [C] phrase "comme dict Platon" to the passage in 534A. While the entire ninth book of the *Laws* is devoted to establishing the

proper penalties for specific crimes with a view to rehabilitating the criminal and compensating the victim, the passage we are interested in, IX. 870D-E, deals directly with the question of divine justice. Indeed, in the last half of Book IX there are several passages in which the Athenian attempts to add the force of divine justice as portrayed in myth and stories to his own well-wrought plan of human justice.

ATH. Concerning all these matters, the preludes mentioned shall be pronounced, and, in addition to them, that story which is believed by many when they hear it from the lips of those who seriously relate such things at their mystic rites,—that vengeance for such acts is exacted in Hades, and that those who return again to this earth are bound to pay the natural penalty,—each culprit the same, that is, which he inflicted on his victim,—and that their life on earth must end in their meeting a like fate at the hands of another. (IX. 870D-E)

The Athenian advocates a form of justice based on suffering equal to that which a criminal has caused his victim. In the above passage (870D-E) he speaks of a penalty for those "who return again to this earth," and in a later passage he states that "the doer of such a deed must of necessity suffer the same as he has done" (872E). His concluding words: "Wherefore, in dread of such vengeance from Heaven a man should refrain himself," (873A) clearly correspond to Montaigne's conclusion that the inevitable prospect of justice is a useful impression to create among men, "c'est une très-utile impression" (534 A) and should deter men from evil actions.²¹

According to the Pleiade edition of the *Essais*, Montaigne went back and inserted the phrase "comme dict Platon" in a [C] addition. But Plato's underlying presence is there throughout the entire passage (534 A-C-A) in the argument that divine justice is a useful tool for exacting virtue from men. This suggests again that Montaigne had read the *Laws* before 1588, although in this case, he makes no precise reference to Plato until after 1588. The insertion of the phrase "comme dict Platon" also imparts an Ancient sanction to Montaigne's

²¹ See Trevor J. Saunders, "Penology and Eschatology in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Laws*," *Classical Quarterly* 23 (1973), pp. 232-44 and Philip Schuchman, "Comments on the Criminal Code of Plato's *Laws*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963), pp. 25-40.

idea that justice and the prospect of an after life serve utilitarian purposes in society.

Yet another reason for positing the influence of Book IX of the *Laws* on Montaigne's thought in the "Apologie" is the use he makes of Book IX in his "Warning to the Princess" (540-542 A). It is commonly believed that Montaigne undertook his "Apologie" at the request of the princess, Margaret of Valois, and though he failed in large part to defend Sebond, he nevertheless took advantage of the opportunity to advance his own views of fideism and the dangers of relying too much on human knowledge (Frame, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, p. 319). A large part of this section of the "Apologie" is devoted to a discussion of the necessity of upholding the laws of a state, a view in line with Montaigne's Pyrrhonism.

The lines in which Montaigne refers us to Book IX of the *Laws*, "Et Platon, à deux doits près, que, sans loix, nous viverions comme bestes brutes; et s'essaye à le verifir" (541 C) pertain to a passage in Book IX which extends from 874E to 875D and functions as a preamble to the highly developed system of legal penalties the Athenian will advance. Taken in its entirety, this passage in Book IX (874E-875D) can be viewed as a subtext for the part of the "Apologie" in which Montaigne warns the princess about the social and political struggle of their time. Montaigne's summary of Plato's thought is correct and can be seen in the opening lines of this passage from the *Laws*:

ATH. Concerning all such cases we must make a prefatory pronouncement to this effect:—It is really necessary for men to make themselves laws and to live according to laws, or else to differ not at all from the most savage of beasts. (IX. 874E-875A)

Returning to the passage in the "Apologie" (540-542 A), we see that Montaigne again speaks of the inability of the human mind to perceive and capture the truth of a situation. He speaks of the lack of integrity among men of his time, even though they may possess intellectual quickness or excellence of one sort or another. In spite of these attributes they are incapable of conforming to a high level of social conduct.

Nostre esprit est un util vagabond, dangereux, et temeraire: il est malaisé d'y joindre l'ordre et la mesure. Et, de mon temps, ceus qui

ont quelque rare excellence au dessus des autres et quelque vivacité extraordinaire, nous les voyons quasi tous desbordez en licence d'opinions et de meurs. C'est miracle s'il s'en rencontre un rassis et sociable. (II, 12, 541 A)

Plato speaks likewise of the rarity of finding men capable of administering the civic good, and in a passage which directly follows his statement that men would live as beasts if it were not for laws, the Athenian addresses the problem of finding men enlightened enough to be rulers.

ATH. The reason thereof is this,—that no man's nature is naturally able both to perceive what is of benefit to the civic life of men and perceiving it, to be alike able and willing to practice what is best. For, in the first place, it is difficult to perceive that a true civic art necessarily cares for the public, not the private, interest,—for the public interest bind States together, whereas the private interest rends them asunder,—and to perceive also that it benefits both public and private interests alike when the public interest, rather than the private, is well enacted. (IX. 875A-C)

While their ideas may be cast in slightly different language, the thrust of the Athenian's comments is the same as that of Montaigne's in the earlier passage (541 A). The Athenian finds fault with man's nature which is incapable of perceiving what is best for the civic good and at the same time practicing it. Montaigne lays the fault with the human spirit which he believes to be a wandering, dangerous and bold tool, incapable of acting with order or moderation, "un util vagabond, dangereux, et temeraire: il est malaisé d'y joindre l'ordre et la mesure" (541 A). Even those individuals who evince signs of superior intellect and extraordinary quickness, claims Montaigne, more often than not disappoint us in their opinions and behavior, "nous les voyons quasi tous desbordez en licence d'opinions et de meurs" (541 A). Thus, even among those who offer the possibility of becoming civic-minded and public-spirited there is little hope. Montaigne implies that the only hope for a virtuous ruler is a thoughtful and virtuous man and the hope of finding one who combines both qualities is scant. For the Athenian who views the entire question in terms of the dichotomy between public and private interests there is just as little hope that such a ruler can be found among men. Maintaining a principle found in the other Platonic

dialogues, he claims that what is good for the state will of necessity be good for the individual, but finding the individual capable of understanding this principle is the real challenge (IX. 875A-C).

ATH. Yet if ever there should arise a man competent by nature and by a birthright of divine grace to assume such an office, he would have no need of rulers over him; for no law or ordinance is mightier than Knowledge, nor is it right for Reason to be subject or in thrall to anything, but to be lord of all things, if it is really true to its name and free in its inner nature. But at present such a nature exists nowhere at all, except in small degree; wherefore we must choose what is second best, namely, ordinance and law, which see and discern the general principle, but are unable to see every instance in detail. (IX. 875C-D)

The hypothetical description of an enlightened ruler which the Athenian offers, "if ever there should arise a man competent by nature and by a birthright of divine grace to assume such an office," is echoed in Montaigne's laudatory description of Margaret of Valois, "Vous qui, par l'autorité que vostre grandeur vous apporte, et encores plus par les avantages que vos donnent les qualitez plus vostres" (541 A). The Athenian's comment that "such a nature exists nowhere at all, except in small degree" corresponds with Montaigne's belief that there are few men strong and well-born enough to keep their own guidance and to whom others can look for guidance: "Certes il est peu d'ames si reiglées, si fortes et bien nées, à qui on se puisse fier de leur propre conduite, et qui puissent, avec moderation et sans temerité, voguer en la liberté de leurs jugements au delà des opinion communes" (541 B). Perhaps the only point in the Athenian's speech with which Montaigne would take issue is the Athenian's contention that knowledge and Reason are "lord of all things," and that the completely enlightened ruler would be all-knowing and all reasonable. For throughout the "Apologie" Montaigne contends that knowledge and human reason often precipitate man's downfall. This one point notwithstanding, it is clear that this passage from the *Laws* (IX. 874E-875D) had a much greater influence on Montaigne's "warning" to Margaret of Valois than the simple allusion Montaigne makes to the passage in 541 C would suggest. Further, the lines from the "Apologie" which betray this influence belong to either [A] or [B] passages, suggesting once again

that Montaigne's initial reading of Book IX occurred before 1588. His statement, "Et, Platon, à deux doits près..." (541 C) belonging to the later addition notes his return after 1588 to the same passage of the *Laws* which earlier served to inform his warning to the princess. A common phenomenon in the *Essais*, the explicit reference in the [C] material acknowledges Montaigne's implicit debt to Plato in the [A] and [B] strata.

If we accept the Athenian's speech in IX. 875C-D as a subtext for Montaigne's comments about Margaret of Valois in 541 A-B, we must still come to terms with what Montaigne is actually saying about the princess in this section of the "Apologie." Montaigne implies that of all living people Margaret of Valois possesses the qualities of the enlightened ruler of which the Athenian speaks. But even she would fall short of the task. This would hardly be to her disgrace, since even the finest and quickest minds of the time do not possess the stability and moderation required of an enlightened ruler. In lieu of an enlightened ruler we must choose "ordinance and law" (IX. 875D) and Montaigne's final exhortation to the princess returns us again to the Athenian's speech in 875D as it reflects Montaigne's concern for maintaining prescribed law and custom, even though the Princess, herself, might be capable of living above them.

Et n'y a point de beste à qui plus justement il faille donner des orbieres pour tenir sa veuë subjecte et contrainte devant ses pas, et la garder d'extravaguer ny çà, ny là, hors les ornieres que l'usage et les loix tracent. [A] Parquoy il vous siera mieux de vous resserrer dans le train accoustumé, quel qu'il soit, que de jeter vostre vol à cette licence effrenée. (II, 12, 542 C-A)

* * *

An examination of those parts of the "Apologie" which incorporate Plato's *Laws* does not offer an exhaustive study of the epistemological or metaphysical questions which Montaigne raises in his longest essay. It does, however, offer a means of examining the highly intertextual nature of Montaigne's composition by scanning the breadth and depth of a work usually considered to be full of complexities and contradictions. The four sections of the "Apologie" which we have examined and in which Montaigne makes use of the *Laws* extend over one-hundred twenty-five of the one-hundred

seventy-five pages of the essay, providing us with the opportunity to look closely at several philosophical questions which Montaigne poses in his pretense of defending Sebond. Among these are the questions of atheism; man's relation to the animals (is man any better than the animals and if not, what is the value of human reason?); man's hubris in trying to know everything about God, the universe and first causes; Pyrrhonism and its viability as a political philosophy; the immortality of the soul and the human desire for Divine justice; and the search for an enlightened ruler: Montaigne's warning to Margaret of Valois. These questions and the impetus they provided Montaigne for returning to the *Laws*, as well as the *Republic* and *Timaeus*, offer yet another opportunity to determine the way in which Montaigne reinvents the ideas and expression of his Ancient predecessor, enriching and emboldening his own writing while at the same time venerating the wisdom of Antiquity.

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Montaigne's Customs

Ulrich Langer

Personal Customs

Quoy que j'aye esté dressé autant qu'on a peu à la liberté et à l'indifference, si est-ce que par nonchalance, m'estant en vieillissant plus arrêté sur certaines formes (mon aage est hors d'institution et n'a desormais dequoy regarder ailleurs qu'à se maintenir), la coustume a desjà, sans y penser, imprimé si bien en moy son caractere en certaines choses, que j'appelle excez de m'en despartir. (III, 13, 1083)¹

The movement of this sentence in "De l'experience" introduces the reader into the imperceptible insinuation of custom. Beginning with an initial state of freedom from constraint, a state which, however, also constitutes a training, a *dressage* from the outside, the *je* slides through this slowly evolving *periodus*, by nonchalance, without thinking, into the forms of personal habit, forms which preoccupied old age neglects to change. The passage of time is a sort of unconscious and nonrational solidification, precipitation of actions that, once solidified, are skeletal structures seemingly outside of or beyond the passage of time that had allowed them to develop in the first place. What is left to the self-involved narrator is to *name* them, gather them together, present them *pêle-mêle* to the reader:

¹ All quotations from Montaigne's *Essais* refer to the edition by Pierre Villey (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965). My thanks to Susan J. Erickson and Jan Miernowski for their comments on this article.

Et sans m'essaier, ne puis ny dormir sur jour, ny faire collation entre les repas, ny desjeuner, ny m'aller coucher sans grand intervalle, comme de trois bonnes heures, apres le soupper, ny faire enfans qu'avant le sommeil, ny les faire debout, ny porter ma sueur.... (ibid.)

The list continues in sometimes expanded sentences, interrupted by reflections on examples of others' personal habits. This initially anaphoric presentation (*ny... ny... ny...*) underlines the simultaneous presence of these habits, their seemingly timeless nature. The narrator as it were hovers above his various personal habits, picking arbitrarily. A little later, Montaigne presents us with a whole list of culinary preferences:

Je ne suis excessivement desireux ny de salades ny de fruits, sauf les melons. Mon pere haïssoit toute sorte de sauces; je les aime toutes. Le trop manger m'empeche.... (1102)

Again, the unmediated presentation of these habits is not a *peinture du passage*, but a collection of timeless and disconnected forms, held together by a narrative voice not imprisoned by habit, but willfully independent, in its very nonchalant designation of its personal customs. Change is possible, among habits: "En plusieurs choses je sens mon estomac et mon appetit aller ainsi diversifiant: j'ay rechangé du blanc au claret, et puis du claret au blanc" (1102-1103). The movement from white wine to red wine, and back again, is in its very arbitrariness a timeless, disconnected habit, somehow not constraining. Montaigne tells the reader in the first sentence quoted that he has been able to accept abandoning his *liberté* to custom, but he has in the same movement acquired a sort of autonomy over and above custom, through the very act of collecting and naming, in his quirky, unmotivated way, the personal habits that make up his quotidian self.²

The discourse of personal habit, of Montaigne's own *consuetudines*, partakes of a more general discourse underlying the notion of custom in the Renaissance. This discourse is largely filtered through juridical texts, not in the sense that certain customs

² The very nonchalance and willfulness of the Montaignian voice here is in stark contrast to the doleful condemnation of the *vinculum consuetudinis* in Saint Augustine (for example, in *De doctrina christiana*, I, 24, 25).

in the legal domain correspond to certain habits, but in that the complex notion of custom in its relationship to law in the sixteenth century provides thematic reference points for the kind of authorial voice and the kind of text Montaigne is presenting. Underlying Montaigne's description of his personal habits is the important essay on custom (I, 23), with its foray into skepticism and its essentially conservative message: "Car c'est la regle des regles, et generale loy des loix, que chacun observe celles du lieu où il est" (118). Montaigne's similar dictum in "De l'experience," "la coustume a ... imprimé si bien en moy son caractere en certaines choses, que j'appelle excez de m'en despartir" (1083), is linked to "De la coustume. . ." not only in a superficial, verbal way, but through certain common discursive properties which will become clear through a closer analysis of the earlier essay.

Coûtume versus Loy

The title of the essay is not innocent: "De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy receüe." Montaigne seems to conflate *coustume* and *loy*, *mores* or *consuetudines*, and *leges*, customs or customary law and civil law, a conflation that is already arguably present in the Greek word νόμος.³ However, the distinction between customs established by precedent, and differing from place to place, and laws having been established by decree of the sovereign or an assembly, such as the body of the *Corpus iuris civilis* and its glosses, or the *Decretales*, was certainly commonplace in Montaigne's time and a feature of his juridical education and experience.⁴ The humanist jurist Louis Le Caron explains the distinction by the traditional reference to written law and unwritten

³ In the LEJIKON ELLHNORVMAIKON, *Hoc est, Dictionarium Graeco-latinum* by Guillaume Budé et al. (rev. ed. Basel: Sebastianus Henricpetrus, 1584) we find under νόμος: "lex, institutum, disciplina, jus, hominum moribus recepta consuetudo, sanctio." The ambiguity *lex/consuetudo* is telling; a similar ambiguity is found in the Latin *institutum*.

⁴ See André Tournon, *Montaigne: La glose et l'essai* (Lyons: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983), pp. 147-202. Tournon's book contains much valuable information on the work Montaigne himself did as a magistrate with the *Coûtumier de Guyenne*, especially as regards the commentary of a custom and the argumentation *in utramque partem* that was necessary before a decision was reached.

custom:

La France [est] divisée en pays de droict escrit, & pays coustumier: estant le pays de droict escrit, celuy qui se gouverne par les loix Romaines, & le coustumier par les coustumes particulieres des Provinces, lesquelles jadis n'estoient escrites, ains consistoient en l'usage commun, qui se prouvoit par turbes de Practiciens.⁵

The proof of the existence of a custom was done *par turbe*, that is, by an interrogation of a representative sample of members of a social group or profession by the presiding judge.⁶ The best proof of a custom was the unanimous declaration by this group that the custom had existed "from time immemorial," but limited time periods were also acceptable.⁷ The argument from temporal precedent assumes that repetition in time is both possible and an indication of authority. First, the prior event confers to the later event its unadulterated nature. Second, there is a steady accretion of authority through successive conferrals. Montaigne will question the

⁵ Louis Charondas Le Caron, *Pandectes ou digestes du droict françois*, 1st ed. 1587 (Paris: P. L'Huillier, 1607), vol. 1, ch. XXV ("De la coustume"), pp. 396-7. On Le Caron and the French scholars of feudal or customary law, see Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 184-201, and *passim*.

⁶ The costliness and complexity of this proof were, according to the customary jurist Guy Coquille, the reason for the codification of customs in France: "Le Roy Charles septiesme voyant que la preuve qui en estoit à faire par turbes, apportoit beaucoup de perplexitez, incommoditez & fraiz, ordonna que par l'avis des Estats de chacune Province de son Royaume, les Coustumes fussent arrestées & redigées par escrit" (*Questions et responses sur les coustumes de France* [Paris: Pierre David, 1633], p. 2).

⁷ See François Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du droit français des origines à la Révolution* (Paris: Domat Montchrestien, 1951), pp. 112-13, and on the systematization of customary law in the 16th century, pp. 421-28. Estienne Pasquier comments on the length of time necessary to establish a custom: "Parceque la Coustume naist, en nos esprits, *ex longo et diuturno usu*, on fait un ample discours en droict: combien de temps il fault pour introduire une Coustume, en nos provinces? Quelques docteurs estiment, in L. 1, (au Code Just., VIII, 53) tit. *Quae sit longa consuet.*, qu'il ne fault seulement que dix ans, opinion toutefois que j'estime erronnée, d'autant que je tien qu'il fault une possession immémoriale, c'est a dire cent ans" (*L'Interprétation des Institutes de Justinian avec la conférence de chasque paragraphe aux ordonnances royaux, arrestz de parlement et coustumes générales de la France*, ed. M. le Duc Pasquier [Paris: V. Ainé, A. Durand, 1847], chap. XVI, pp. 34-35).

truth of the first statement, and the desirability of the second. Whereas the longevity of a custom is a mark of its authority, temporal considerations are not important where laws are concerned. Le Caron underlines this distinction:

Toutesfois y a grande difference entre la loy & la coustume: car la loy est une ordonnance generale, laquelle à la descrire proprement, si elle n'est juste, & produite de la droite raison, ne peut estre telle reputée: mais la coustume est une commune observance, qui s'est coullée doucement par un taisible consentement de ceux qui en ont usé, & quelquefois plustost pour le profit ou commodité des plus puissans, que par iuste & droite raison: & souvent n'est generale, ains particuliere du pays, où elle a prins force & auctorité.... (398)⁸

Le Caron then provides an analogy that recalls directly the analogy Montaigne starts his essay with; custom is like the tyrant who insinuates himself slowly but fatally:

Je compare la loy au Roy & la coustume au tyran. Car (comme dit Platon [*Republic*, 8, 569 a-c]) le tyran s'insinue doucement, & peu à peu s'establit, refusant le nom de tyran: mais s'estant fortifié il use de force & commandement. Au contraire le Roy gouverne de plaine puissance, non par la force, ains par les loix. La coustume n'a souvent pour raison que l'usage: mais la loy est fondée en raison naturelle ou civile.... (398-99)

The sense of custom's insinuation, that is, quasi-physical penetration, is already found in Baldus (*consuetudo habet potestatem in sanguinem hominis*),⁹ but Le Caron develops the temporal contrast between law and custom. The opposition most relevant to us is the historical becoming implied in the establishment of custom versus the atemporal writing of laws caused not by repetition and accretion

⁸ The possibly pernicious side of custom even among equals is underlined before Le Caron by André Tiraqueau: "Quod de consuetudine autem dictum est, facile apparet vel caecis consuetudinem ipsam, quam conversationem alii vocant, alii familiaritatem, quae frequens est, imo vero quotidiana atque assidua inter dominos et famulos, habere multum momenti & virium, tum ad depravandos, tum ad corrigendos hominum mores, etiamsi alter conversantium non alteri praesit, neque etiam subsit ..." in *De poenis legum ac consuetudinum, statutorumque temperandis, aut etiam remittendis ...* (1559) in *Opera omnia*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt: Joh. Feyrabend, 1597), Causa 51.99 (p. 100).

⁹ Quoted by Tiraqueau, *De poenis*, praefatio 6 (p. 5).

but by the exercise of reason. In fact, this overt critique of the diversity and temporal weight of custom by Le Caron corresponds to the efforts, on the part of 16th-century jurists such as the Parisian Christofle de Thou, to systematize French customary law and make it resemble written Roman law (or rather, Roman law improved and rendered more coherent and rational).¹⁰ The mid-century juridical scholar Charles Dumoulin, for example, intended, by his unification of provincial customs into one written national code, to create an "eÑomœa æquissima, clarissima, & absolutissima."¹¹ This systematization requires the reduction of the *confusio* and *incertitudo* of customs entailed by their variety, which in turn is often the product of time: "licet successu temporis in singulis municipiis quaedam circa particularia variata sint: quæ varietas ut plurimum omni ratione & utilitate caret." (691). The heuristic abstraction from the *successus temporis* is, then, an important first step; thus the evacuation of origin is at least theoretically an ambition of the composer of the *Grand coutumier general* of 1567. In this way the sixteenth-century codifiers of feudal customs were probably consciously imitating the *Corpus iuris civilis* whose patron Justinian similarly declared precedent and historical origin to be irrelevant.¹² In the presentation of the *Institutes* to prospective students of law Justinian formulates this irrelevance in a manner that has, I believe, important discursive consequences for Montaigne's essay:

[We gave the order to compose these Institutes] ut liceat vobis prima legum cunabula non ab antiquis fabulis discere, sed ab imperiali splendore appetere et tam aures quam animæ vestræ nihil inutile nihilque perperam positum, sed quod in ipsis rerum optinet argumentis accipiant: et quod in priore tempore vix post quadriennium prioribus contingebat, ut tunc constitutiones imperatorias legerent, hoc vos a primordio ingrediamini digni tanto honore tantaque reperti felicitate, ut et initium vobis et finis legum

¹⁰ A fervent defender of French custom, Guy Coquille, nevertheless points out de Thou's admiration for Roman law: "Feu Monsieur le President de Thou, quand il parloit du droict escrit des Romains, il l'appelloit la raison escrite" (*Questions et responses sur les coutumes de France*, p. 5).

¹¹ Quoted from his *Oratio auctoris [of the Coutumier general] de concordia et union consuetudinum Franciæ* (in Dumoulin's *Opera omnia* [Paris: P. Rocolet, 1681], vol. 2, p. 692).

¹² The mere titles of some of the codifications are telling in their echoing of Roman law: Le Caron's *Pandectes*, Antoine Loysel's *Institutes coutumieres* (1607).

eruditiones a voce principali procedat.¹³

The "cradle of the law" (*prima legum cunabula*) is not to be recovered by the *fabulae*, anecdotes, narratives, but attained through imperial light, and the principles of legal education will proceed from the *vox principalis*, which means the imperial or princely voice, but also the originary, first voice. The fundamental rules can be received as if they were detached from time, as if they emanated directly from the mouth of the emperor *legislator*.

In spite of the Gallic humanist insistence on the historical boundness of Roman law and its limited relevance to contemporary French society, the avowed abstraction from temporal and geographical circumstances that made Roman law generally attractive is found in the language of the codifying scholars of custom. Custom has become law.¹⁴

From Tyrannical Custom to Atemporal Skepticism

Given his juridical context, Montaigne's confusion of law and custom is not unusual, although his examples are, in typically

¹³ "Our intention was to give you an elementary framework, a cradle of the law, not based on obscure old stories but illuminated by the light of our imperial splendour; and to ensure that you hear and adopt nothing useless or out of place but only the true principles at the heart of the subject. Until now even the best students have barely begun to read imperial pronouncements after four years of study; but you have been found worthy of the great honour and good fortune of doing so from the beginning and of following a course of legal education which from start to finish proceeds from the Emperor's lips" (*Justinian's Institutes*, ed. Paul Krüger, trans. Peter Birks, Grant McLeod [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987] prologue [3]). Jean Bodin's presentation of the distinction between custom and law is similarly tied to the atemporal or instantaneous enunciation of the law by the sovereign: "Lex quid. - Cùm lex nihil aliud sit quàm summae potestatis jussum sive sanctio. est enim sancire & sciscere, jubere" (*Juris universi distributio [Tableau de droit universel]* in *Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. Pierre Mesnard [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951], p. 72 B 49-50). Custom is tied to the temporal: "consuetudines ... usu diuturno coalescunt ... leges omnes uno & eodem momento vim accipiunt" (*ibid.*, p. 72 B 41-44).

¹⁴ See Le Caron (*Pandectes*, vol. 1, chap. II "De l'origine du droict françois & premiers auteurs d'iceluy," pp. 13-4): "Puisque maintenant toutes les coustumes des principalles Provinces du pays de France qu'on appelloit coustumier, sont redigees par escrit, il semble que la distinction du droict escrit, & non escrit n'a plus de lieu: consideré mesmement que quand on parle du droit, on entend celuy qui est general pour tout un pays, & non les mœurs & coustumes des provinces particulieres."

skeptical fashion, startling. Montaigne speaks indifferently about nose-blowing and the laws of Lycurgus and Charondas, about killing fleas by biting them and the condemnation of Socrates. The essay begins by a condemnation of tyrannical custom that has several sources. It recalls the discussion of tyranny in Plato, and it also recalls the role of custom in La Boétie's analysis of the "voluntary" tyranny.¹⁵ Furthermore, as we have just seen, Montaigne's condemnation is related to the sixteenth-century juridical reevaluation and codification of custom:

Celuy me semble avoir tres-bien conceu la force de la coustume, qui le premier forgea ce conte, qu'une femme de village ayant apris de caresser et porter entre ses bras un veau des l'heure de sa naissance, et continuant tousjours à ce faire, gaigna cela par l'accoustumance que tout grand beuf qu'il estoit, elle le portoit encore. Car c'est à la verité une violente et traistresse maistresse d'escole, que la coustume. Elle establit en nous, peu à peu à la desrobée le pied de son autorité: mais par ce doux et humble commencement, l'ayant rassis et planté avec l'ayde du temps, elle nous decouvre tantost un furieux et tirannique visage, contre lequel nous n'avons plus la liberté de hausser seulement les yeux. (I, 23, 108-9)¹⁶

"L'ayde du temps" allows custom to become like a tyrant against which the individual is powerless. The commentary of the calf-bull anecdote by Montaigne is informed by the juridical critique of custom, but it is also somewhat wacky. The usual version is that Milo gained his strength from carrying a calf every day until he was able to carry the full-grown bull. This story is recounted by Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria*, 1.9.5) and forms the basis for an adage of Erasmus ("Taurum tollet, qui vitulum sustulerit" 1.2.51).

¹⁵ Custom makes the unnatural yoke of tyranny seem natural: "C'est cela que les hommes naissent sous le joug, et puis nourris et eslevés dans le servage, sans regarder plus avant, se contentent de vivre comme ils sont nés, et ne pensans point avoir autre bien ni autre droict que ce qu'ils ont trouvé, ils prennent pour leur naturel l'estat de leur naissance. (...) Mais certes la coustume, qui a en toutes choses grand pouvoir sur nous, n'a en aucun endroit si grand vertu qu'en cecy, de nous enseigner à servir. (...) [La nature] a en nous moins de pouvoir que la coustume" (Estienne de La Boétie, *De la servitude volontaire ou Contr'un*, ed. Malcolm Smith [Geneva: Droz, 1987], pp. 46-47).

¹⁶ When indicated, I have adopted the punctuation of the 1580 edition of the *Essais* (ed. Daniel Martin [Geneva: Droz, 1976], vol. 1, pp. 134-5).

The calf-bull part is given an obscene meaning in Petronius. There are many other references to the anecdote in Montaigne's time, such as in Guazzo's *La civil conversatione*. However, being able to carry the bull or cow is always interpreted as an advantage or ability, not as a constraint or enslavement to a "violente et traistresse maistresse d'escole." Montaigne's commentary is skewed: what is, strictly speaking, a habit or custom, becomes a constraining law. The causal temporal chain leading to a present custom is thought of not as enabling, but as dangerous, as inhibiting the freedom of the "écolier." The violence of Montaigne's vocabulary is striking, as it does not seem to be motivated by the anecdote itself or by its usual interpretation.

There is, then, in Montaigne's commentary, an unusual investment in negative freedom, the freedom *from* the obligations of custom, habit, law. At the same time, the violence of custom is unrelated to its historical evolution, it is something out of proportion with its feeble and innocuous beginnings. The investment in absolute-ness, in being free from the bonds of tyrannical custom, and the conflation of custom and law, are, I think, dialectically related. As the Augustinian formula *vinculum consuetudinis* suggests, the constraint of custom is like the constraint of the law, in the Roman sense of *iuris vinculum* (*Inst.* 3.13). It is with the supposition that all custom is law, that is, an obligation that binds us, that Montaigne distinguishes the hypothetical interior realm of the free skeptic/stoic from the constraints of the outside world.¹⁷

For the second step in Montaigne's essay is the claim that all law is custom, a claim that goes exasperatingly beyond what his fellow jurists envisaged. If customs are equivalent to laws, then, as Montaigne seems to suggest, laws vary as much as customs, and can be assumed to be the product of historical circumstances and quirks as much as customs. This flies in the face of the conception of law as rational order that is found in jurists contemporary to Montaigne, such as Louis Le Caron, who maintains that "la loy est fondée en raison naturelle ou civile," and that a custom may be overruled when it is "incivile, barbare, des-raisonnable," assuming a genuinely

¹⁷ See Max Horkheimer, "Montaigne und die Funktion der Skepsis," in *Anfänge der bürgerlichen Geschichtsphilosophie ...* (1st ed. 1938, repr. [Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1968]), pp. 96-144, on the constitution of a self in skeptical argumentation.

objective, universal basis for the legal order.¹⁸ Other defenders of French customs admit even more explicitly recourse to Roman law as an external rational order: Guy Coquille remarks that "quand nos loix particulieres nous defaillent, nous avons recours aux Romains, non pas pour nous obliger precisément; mais pource que nous cognoissons qu'elles sont accompagnées, *imo* fondées en toute raison."¹⁹ Reason itself is, for Montaigne, hardly an objective basis for law, as it is as much a product of human diversity as custom: "La raison humaine est une teinture infuse environ de pareil pois à toutes nos opinions et moeurs, de quelque forme qu'elles soient: infinie en matiere, infinie en diversité" (112). When Montaigne equates law and custom, he seems to transform the search for a natural, necessary basis of the legal order into another contingent, local phenomenon. The basis for any universal law of nature or of conscience is thus vitiated: "Les loix de la conscience, que nous disons naistre de nature, naissent de la coustume: chacun ayant en veneration interne les opinions et mœurs approuvées et receües autour de luy" (I, 23, 115). For this reason the "foundation" of the law can never be objective justice, but, as in the case of custom, the "foundation" is simply the fact that laws *are there*. In "De l'experience" the consequence of this confusion is even more clearly stated: "Or les loix se maintiennent en credit, non par ce qu'elles sont justes, mais par ce qu'elles sont loix. C'est le fondement mystique de leur autorité; *elles n'en ont poinct d'autre*" (1072, my italics).

Montaigne's essay takes Pyrrhonist advantage, as it were, of this double attack: on the one hand the force of the custom becomes the force of the law, on the other the variety of custom is projected onto the written law. This extreme argumentation is based on the

¹⁸ *Pandectes*, pp. 399, 401. Compare Pasquier, *L'Interprétation des Institutes*, p. 35: "quand une longue coustume se trouve estre directement contre les préceptes moraux et naturels, contre la religion ou contre l'honesteté publique, en ce cas, on n'est pas tenu d'y obéir." Montaigne's critique of this rational and natural order goes beyond what Timothy J. Reiss seems to allow, in discussing Montaigne's relationship to sixteenth-century legal thinking, in "Montaigne and the Subject of Polity," in Patricia Parker, David Quint, eds., *Literary Theory / Renaissance Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 115-149, and especially pp. 141-142.

¹⁹ *Questions et responses*, p. 4. In the *Coustumier de Guyenne* owned by Montaigne, recourse to written law is justified, even before recourse to "natural reason" (see Tournon, *Montaigne*, p. 198).

effacement of the difference between the historical contingency of custom and the atemporality of codified, written law.

The latter is, however, the basis for Montaigne's *discourse*. It is in the atemporal disposition of Montaigne's Pyrrhonist texts that the link between the *vox principalis* of Justinian and the sovereign authorial voice becomes clear. This link is first hinted at in a negative way, as a subversion of the historical causal order, as a deprecation of the "first cause." Montaigne emphasizes again and again the force with which customs "dominate" us, the tyrannical nature of accepted rules, and on the other hand, the feebleness of their origin or first cause. The initial episode about the calf that becomes a bull and is still carried by the village woman sets the tone for the entire essay. Thus we learn that Montaigne in good humanist fashion once hunted down the origin of a well-established custom:

Autrefois ayant à faire valoir quelque'une de nos observations, et receüe avec resolute autorité bien loing autour de nous, et ne voulant point, comme il se faict, l'establir seulement par la force des loix et des exemples, mais questant tousjours jusques à son origine, j'y trouuai le fondement si chetif et si foible, qu'à peine que je ne m'en degoutasse moy, qui avois à la confirmer en autrui. (116-117, version of 1580: 140-141)

The weakness of the first instance or origin of the custom is in direct contrast to its present strength; far from deriving its strength from that first cause, it is in removing itself from its first cause that custom gathers its force. The "dégoût" the first cause inspires, in its weakness, is however also the feeling provoked by any change of established custom: "Je suis desgousté de la nouvelleté, quelque visage qu'elle porte" (119).²⁰ Present law or custom is supreme precisely because of the feebleness of a first cause: in spite of a perhaps laudable intention, the Reform of the Church had effects whose perniciousness and unforeseeability are incommensurable with that intention (*ibid.*). In this sense Montaigne's "conservatism"

²⁰ See, in a different perspective, Saint Augustine's recommendation that one follow the customs of one's own place (in the *Confessions* III, 8). For varying treatments of Montaigne's conservatism and related thoughts on custom, see Manfred Kölsch, *Recht und Macht bei Montaigne: Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der Grundlagen von Staat und Recht* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), pp. 83-97; David Lewis Schaefer, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 157-161 and *passim*.

seems coherent in its distrust of causal relationships involving time and the social order. What is presently in force is an absolute rule; custom is Law, for it is useless or even dangerous to inquire into their difference. Instead of concerning oneself with *fabulae antiquae*, one should simply heed the *vox principalis*.

Montaigne, however, hedges his bets. At the end of the essay he praises those leaders who, when the public good required it, were able to bend the laws, or even "command" the laws: "C'est ce dequoy Plutarque loüe Flaminius [Philopaemen in 1588] qu'estant né pour commander, il sçavoit non seulement commander selon les loix, mais aux loix mesme, quand la nécessité publique le requeroit" (123, version of 1580: 149).²¹ As Justinian's *vox* was the voice of the *princeps*, he who commands but also he who begins, so does Plutarch's formula contain the double meaning of command and beginning, «n nom«n çrxein, which can signify both to command the laws and to begin the laws. What this implies is that when the *legislator* or *princeps* speaks, there is no prior anecdote or *fabula* which represents the "foundation" of the law, but it is that voice itself that *is* the law. In this sense etiology is irrelevant, and the risk of *desgoust* removed. The conflation of law and custom confirms and is confirmed by the suspicion surrounding the first cause in a chain of causes. Simultaneity or atemporality replace precedence or temporal succession.

The main body of the essay is a compilation of examples of strange customs, introduced by "J'estime qu'il ne tombe en l'imagination humaine aucune fantaisie si forcenée, qui ne rencontre l'exemple de quelque usage public, et par consequent que nostre discours n'estaie et ne fonde" (111).²² The following examples,

²¹ It is interesting to note that in this case the decision to set oneself above the laws is not justified by the principle of equity, which is an option to sixteenth-century courts, if neither customary nor Roman law covers the particular case, but in cases of "nécessité publique," that is, military and other emergencies. On the parliamentary option of a ruling by "équité," an option that Montaigne does not consider in this essay, see Tournon, *Montaigne*, pp. 188-90.

²² In my *Divine and Poetic Freedom in the Renaissance: Nominalist Theology and Literature in France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 114-124, I discussed the calf-bull episode and the Pyrrhonist passages in this essay from a nominalist theological perspective, which, I believe, is consonant with the juridical subtext I have been exploring here. Portions of the analysis are therefore repeated.

mostly from Gomara's *Histoire générale des Indes*, Herodotus, and Goulard's history of Portugal, mixing ancient and modern sources, are intended to shock and dismay a reader less *averti* than Montaigne himself. The variety of examples is meant to demonstrate the complete relativity of social legislation, and the power of habit which makes even the most disgusting practice acceptable. The list of examples is punctuated anaphorically by the formula "Il est des peuples où ..." which is later reduced to "Il en est où ..." and finally becomes simply "Où ..." The examples are also often presented in a succinct sentence, accelerating the rhythmic presentation by "Où ...," and inducing a kind of vertigo in the reader. This vertiginous variety is, however, not linked to any specific place or time, but exists in an atemporal simultaneity, designated by the authorial "Où" who, as it were, is outside of time and space, and conjures up examples in a void. The examples are not aligned in a specific thematic succession or hierarchy, but seem to be the product of the author's willfulness, the *vox principalis*. This effect of simultaneity or disjointedness destroys any sense that the text itself is a succession of causes and effects, that the prior implies the later, that the order of the text foreseeably flows out of an initial cause or impetus.

But let us look at a precise instance. Towards the beginning of the list, Montaigne adduces the example of a king whose most favored courtiers are allowed to gather his excrement in linen. At this point Montaigne interrupts the flow of examples introduced by "Il est des peuples où ..." and interjects an anecdote. Whereas the list is from the 1588 edition, the intercalated anecdote is a later addition by the author.

Desrobons icy, la place d'un compte. Un Gentil-homme François se mouchoit tousjours de sa main: chose tresennemie de nostre usage. Defendant là-dessus son faict (et estoit fameux en bonnes rencontres) il me demanda quel privilege avoit ce salle excrement que nous allassions lui apprestant un beau linge delicat à le recevoir, et puis, qui plus est, à l'empaqueter et serrer soigneusement sur nous ... (111)

Montaigne goes on to note that custom has kept us from perceiving this habit to be strange, even though we find similar habits strange when they are found in other countries. The intercalation of this anecdote is therefore motivated by the mention

of the linen used to receive the king's excrement or French gentlemen's nasal mucus. But the effect of Montaigne's introductory "Desrobons icy, la place d'un compte" is more complicated. The fact that the author must *steal* the space for an anecdote is puzzling. This furtiveness somehow implies that the anecdote is inserted into what is a prior order. Not only is that far from being the case, but one wonders why it would be important for Montaigne to point out here the chronological difference in his text between the prior list and the later interjection, for Montaigne does not usually signal his interventions. This pointing out of chronological compositional levels does not demonstrate, say, the evolution of a thought, its progressive ripening, or the crystallization of an idea through time. Instead, the insertion of the anecdote demonstrates the pure *contingency* of the list; it paradoxically *frees* the text from the pursuit of a telos. Montaigne is showing that at any point he may jump in and offer corrections, additions, examples, that he is, as it were, hovering over his list, ready to change its *dispositio*, which is not an *ordo naturalis* but an *ordo artificialis* completely dependent upon the ever-present *vox principalis*. Traces of time are, then, in the service of this voice that can make what is prior later and what is later prior, that can efface differences between examples taken from Herodotus and those from Gomara or Goulard, especially since compositional levels were not indicated nor necessarily intended to be indicated. In Montaigne's Pyrrhonist enumerations textual succession is neither chronologically nor thematically or causally motivated.

The release from time and from the weight of historical becoming that Montaigne's Pyrrhonist and legal argumentation envisages is described in the essay itself. It involves, in a deeply humanist paradox, both historical research and the juridical and judicious application of reason that allows one to be free from that becoming:

Qui voudra essayer de mesme, et se desfaire de ce violent prejudice de la coustume, il trouvera plusieurs choses receues d'une resolution indubitable, qui n'ont appuy qu'en la barbe chenue et rides de l'usage, qui les accompagne: mais, ce masque arraché rapportant les choses à la verité et à la raison, il sentira son jugement comme tout bouleversé, et remis pourtant en bien plus seur estat. (117, version of 1580: 141)

The solution for the wise individual is a critique of custom that uses truth and reason to tear off the mask of authority. The kind of authorial, private understanding of law Montaigne seems to accept is related, finally, to the striking image of the mask of custom's authority we encountered at the beginning of the essay on custom: "[la coutume] nous descouvre tantost un furieux et tirannique visage" (109). The face of tyrannical custom is "furieux," an adjective that in a legal context (*furiosus*) means "insane". In Roman law, a *furiosus* cannot make wills or transactions because he does not understand what he is doing: "Furiosus nullum negotium gerere potest, quia non intellegit quid agit" (*Inst.* 3.19.8).²³ Similarly custom entails a sort of blindness to the reason for and origin of a particular rule or usage. The understanding of blind custom involves historical research in order to be free from the authority of history, and can be performed by one person reflecting and commenting on the laws and customs around him. Which is, of course, precisely what Montaigne does himself in this essay. This critique is by no means programmatic, that is, it does not advocate any change in existing laws. Instead, it is a hypothetical exercise in discourse and reason, *discours* in the modern and sixteenth-century senses. This discourse is governed by the voice of an author outside of time and intervening in unforeseeable ways.

* * *

Montaigne's presentation of himself is woven into a complex understanding of custom that provides his autobiographical discourse with a legal subtext without, however, limiting it to a reproduction of his context. The juridical reduction of custom to written law, with its rational and ideological underpinnings, enables a kind of intellectual freedom from the pernicious and imperceptible insinuation of custom or habit. Thus, the evocation of Montaigne's own *consuetudines* as part of his self-portrayal is in itself an act of autonomy. But the subversion of "rational" law is also part of Montaigne's discourse on custom and the resulting willfulness of any presentation of *consuetudines* goes beyond the legal paradigm. Montaigne's own habits curiously reflect this arbitrariness: the fact that Montaigne likes melons is both a rigid law and without any *extension*, without

²³ Compare *Inst.* 2.12.1; insane people cannot make wills since they "lack intelligence": "furiosi [testamentum facere non possunt], quia mente carent."

any *vinculum*, any profound obligation towards anyone else. Which is precisely what law ends up being if it is only custom, for the skeptical observer.

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Seeing the Dead: The Gaze As Commemoration

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"Tout ainsi que nature nous faict voir, que plusieurs choses mortes ont encore des relations occultes à la vie" (Montaigne, *Essais*, I, 3).

What responsibility does literature demand from its readers? What constraints are placed upon the reader's capacity for interpretation of the literary sign? In *The Ethics of Reading*, Hillis Miller reports the "strange experience of a coercion by something, the clear matter, the 'thing,' that looks as if it were open to any mode of traversal and were incapable of imposing any sort of coercion on my freedom to walk where I like."¹ Miller's paradoxical experience of coercion by an apparently open form might be pointedly applied in that area in which reading relies on seeing, or more directly, is regarded as a form of seeing. How is it that the reader's curiosity or pleasure—stimulated by a direct or implied invitation to read, to see, to observe, to spectate—are drawn along particular avenues of perspective and transformed into the responsibility to witness specific sights with corresponding specific effects? In sum, what contractual bond exists between the reader and the text s/he has decided to read (between aesthetics and ethics, in Miller's understanding of those terms)? Ronsard, D'Aubigné and Montaigne ask that question most plainly and precisely when dealing with the question of seeing the dead in a number of exemplary pieces: the

¹ J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading*, The Wellek Library Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 115.

"Elégie," dedicated to Marie Stuart, which was written before 1565 and printed in the *Œuvres* of 1567; the episode of the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day from *Les Tragiques*; and the opening of the essay "De l'amitié" and corresponding passages in "De la vanité." In all these instances, the argument will run, the writers engage in a reverse prosopopoeia, keeping their heroes or heroines in sight but voiceless and indeed without the independence which normally characterizes prosopopoeias and makes of them hyperboles of *enargeia*. The last part of this essay will then discuss what can be inferred from the analyses.

* * *

It might seem paradoxical, at the very least, to begin with what is to all appearances not dead but absent. Ronsard's "Elégie" nevertheless presents various kinds of absence. Expressly a commemoration of Marie Stuart, the poem is placed a priori under the sign of death, since Marie is in mourning for her husband, François II. The commemoration of Marie takes the form of a portrait in which the description of the queen is set within a frame. As the reader proceeds with the poem, he discovers that that frame is part of a diptych, the other half of which is a picture of Marie's brother-in-law, Charles IX. Indeed, Charles goes on to deliver a love elegy over the departed queen and the poem ends with reflections on the bitterness of love. The question of the mode of Marie's absence arises most insistently because the opening portrayal of Marie Stuart is the occasion for some of Ronsard's most spectacular aesthetic effects of presence. Critics such as Marcel Raymond and Odette de Mourgues² have rightly and with great finesse drawn attention to the great fluidity of the opening section which superimposes the pitching and rolling of a sea journey onto the stable planes of a Renaissance garden. The play of images and sudden shifts into and out of metaphor do indeed display a dazzling virtuosity. But it is worth investigating how these metaphorical fluctuations are grounded, not least because the poem itself overtly offers these premises for the reader's examination:

² Marcel Raymond, *Baroque et Renaissance poétique* (Paris: Corti, 1955), pp. 140-145; Odette de Mourgues, "Ronsard's Later Poetry," in *Ronsard The Poet*, ed. Terence Cave (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 294.

Bien que le trait de vostre belle face
 Peinte en mon coeur par le temps ne s'efface,
 Et que tousjours je le porte imprimé
 Comme un tableau vivement animé,
 J'ay toutesfois pour la chose plus rare
 (Dont mon estude & mes livres je pare)
 Vostre portrait qui fait honneur au lieu,
 Comme un [sic] image au temple d'un grand Dieu.
 (XIV, 152, vv. 1-8)³

This initial section exhibits the standard features of *ut pictura poesis*, but visual comparison between poetry and painting is complicated by a further indirect comparison between painting and the image of the lady which the poet carries in his heart. Poetry and painting are both aesthetic media and any comparison between them is a comparison internal to aesthetics; it overrides generic divisions, but does not overstep the boundary separating Art from what lies outside it. The assimilation of the heart to an art gallery opens more radical possibilities. In effect, Art and Nature now change places: the lady's face is "peinte en mon coeur," her features are "comme un tableau vivement animé." If Nature authenticates Art, Art in turn authenticates Nature. This elegant chiasmus eliminates any formal establishment of literal and metaphorical while binding together natural presence and rhetorical *enargeia*. The heart, Nature's place of feeling, is the *locus* of Art, and vice versa.

It would be fair to argue that the reader's role in the first instance is to appreciate the constitution of the aesthetic as such. The portrait of Marie Stuart, as initially given, surprises and delights the eye, whose task is to make sense of the shapes and perspectives set before it. Yet the edges of shape are not well-defined (they are subject to mutability) and perspective too is not always easily focused. By a pictorial version of *correctio*, the portrait constantly shifts and extends the lines which might compose a stable definition of its subject. Thus Marie's mourning clothes, billowing in the breeze, are transformed via simile into the swelling sails of a ship:

³ All quotations will be taken from *Pierre de Ronsard: Œuvres complètes*, ed. Paul Laumonier, 20 vols., (Paris: Didier, 1914-1975). Volume number is followed by page and line number(s).

Un cresse long, subtil & delié,
 Ply contre ply retors & replié,
 Habit de deuil, vous sert de couverture
 Depuis le chef jusques à la ceinture,
 Qui s'enfle ainsi qu'un [sic] voile, quand le vent
 Souffle la barque & la pousse en avant.
 (XIV, 153, vv. 19-24)

In the same way, Marie's fingers become trees—"et voz beaux doids, cinq arbres inegaux" (XIV, 153, v.15)—and the Fontainebleau garden in which she walks suggests through metaphor the sea over which her departing vessel sails ("Tous les jardins blanchissoient sous voz voilles./Ainsi qu'au mast on voit blanchir les toilles/Et se courber bouffantes sur la mer," XIV, 153, vv. 33-35). The result is a complex superimposition of shape and color which never settles into the direct seeing of the object. Perspectives alter, melt into each other or are superimposed. All the while the reader is acted upon seductively by the picture through the eye as organ of seduction and s/he is invited to compare the activities of simile and metaphor rather than assess either of them in respect of a real to which they might refer.

Up to this point, it might well appear that Ronsard is almost interested in a pure signifying form: the play between Art and Nature, the unsettled perspectives, the reader's eye caught and held by line, shape, color—all these features might be read as surrogates of or allegories for the conditions of imitation itself, imitation in a vacuum, imitation at play. This opening section of the poem, in highlighting the seductive practices of Art, pulls the attention away from Marie and makes her thereby more utterly absent. However the poem as a whole does not entirely endorse this initial emphasis. The remainder of the poem will shift the register and deepen that absence into loss. Charles IX bewails that loss, which is expressed as the loss of love. For her part Marie is allowed to gesture her response (vv. 147-50), but as previously she is voiceless and featureless, a prosopopoeia not resuscitated into speaking life. Throughout Ronsard continues to spotlight fictional framework in which this loss is set: "Chacun diroit" (v. 58), "On jugeroit" (v. 63), "mon maistre/... fait semblant" (vv. 137-138), "vous d'autre part faites semblant" (v. 147). The repetition of the fictionalizing devices ("fait semblant,"

"faittes semblant") is especially striking, as if Ronsard were highlighting the techniques out of which prosopopoeia is made. In retrospect, indeed, that self-consciousness is written into the poem from the outset, with the initial theoretical reflection on Art and Nature. At this new juncture, it signals the fact that fiction itself, so bright with movement and form in the opening passages of the "Elégie," can do nothing to redeem that loss. Despite the poet's best efforts at fictionalizing Charles as Marie's lover and Marie's feigned gracious acceptance of his attentions, the brute fact remains unavoidable:

Mais ceste mer qui s'espent entre-deux,
D'un large champ escumeux & ondeux
Vous porte envie, & ne veut point, ce semble,
Que soyez joints par mariage ensemble.
(XIV, 158, vv. 151-154)

The brute fact of permanent separation remains unfictionalized, irrecoverable into elegant imitative gestures. If the poem ends with bitter reflections on love (XIV, 159, vv. 171-174), it nonetheless commemorates Marie: the "Elégie" no longer elaborates an aesthetic of seduction, alluring and enticing the reader; in its place, the reader's gaze becomes a gaze of commemoration in the face of loss, so that by its close, the poem has substantiated its title. The reader's eye no longer traverses a skein of images, similes and metaphors; rather it is drawn in one direction and multiple perspectives are replaced by a single sight-line by which to view the subject matter of the poem. And that subject matter, the thing itself, as Hillis Miller puts it, holds the reader to an unequivocal course and prevents him from moving where he pleases.

The whole poem owes its remarkable effect to the fact that none of the characters is in full possession of the discourse which evokes him or her. In general, it could be argued that the "Elégie" manifests the particular power which works only through varieties of absence—through possibility, fantasy, imagination. Fantasy in particular is stronger in that respect than imitation, since imitation creates out of what it has seen, whereas fantasy creates out of what it has not seen. Fantasy is valued for extending the range of seeing beyond simple sight, to enable the reader to see what is not there, to see what cannot be seen by the naked eye. Death is the most radical

form of what can no longer be seen but can be brought back into view through fantasy; and this is because at the level of rhetorical enactment *phantasia* is not simply synonymous with *prosopopoeia* or *enargeia*; it extends the range of sight without translating death into presence. This perspective may allow us to re-interpret the position of Marie herself, for it is a noticeable feature of the poem that she is enigmatically will-o'-the-wisp, there and not quite there, voiceless, silent, all but gestureless. Indeed given the depth of her submergence beneath the processes of the poem, it might be easier to regard her as to all intents and purposes dead.⁴ On this view, Marie is not so much a figure made silent through the muted applications of rhetorical presence, but rather a dead figure ("departed" in a profound sense) whose deadness is kept as deadness, not vivified by rhetorical strategies. The poem is seeking means *not* to convert the deadness into aliveness through *prosopopoeia* or the like, but to keep the deadness as deadness. Certainly the poem is suffused by a sense of loss; and the elegiac strain will be stronger if Marie's white dress is not just mourning clothes for a dead husband but equally a token of the poem's mourning for her.

* * *

The tensions which affect Ronsard's "Elégie" clarify the kinds of opposing forces at work in D'Aubigné and Montaigne. Ronsard, we have seen, plays deftly on keeping an invisible object visible yet feeds that object with only a pale life. All the devices are employed to interest and hold the spectator's eye, yet the principal object of focus—Marie herself—is an almost invisible personality, strangely voided of animation. D'Aubigné, by contrast, makes seeing (and hence reading) an overtly ethical issue: he is at once the most constraining about his own responsibilities and the most coercive about ours. Where Ronsard delights and teases the eye, D'Aubigné surprises and shocks. His description of the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day works by a complex framing, a setting of frames within frames which is often D'Aubigné's preferred stratagem. He opens his account with reference to multiple seeing, a statement of

⁴ Cf. the 1578-1587 variant of line 9: "Vous *n'estes vive* en drap d'or habillée" (emphasis mine).

entranced viewing ("Jà les vives splendeurs des diversités peintes/Tiroyent, à l'approcher, les yeux des ames saintes," *Les Fers*, vv. 745-746),⁵ which soon turns to shock—"Le front des spectateurs s'advise, à coup transi ...," (*Les Fers*, v. 788)—shock which has already caused the sun to desist from spectating:

le pasle soleil
 Presta non le flambeau, mais la torche de l'oeil,
 Encor pour n'y montrer le beau de son visage
 Tira le voile en l'air d'un louche, espais nuage.
 (*Les Fers*, vv. 783-786)

When attention next moves on to the account of the Massacre itself, the call to see is oft-repeated and passes to and fro between the audience ("vous voyez" [v. 867], "on void" [v. 879]) and the *persona* of the narrating poet ("mais qu'est-ce que je voy?" [v. 901], "je voy" [v. 921]): the poet who knows addresses an audience which sees, hears and understands. The bodies floating in the Seine are then pictured as framed by the windows in the Louvre: "[...] fenestres, creneaux/Et terrasses servoyent à contempler les eaux [...]" (vv. 931-932). The following lines then mark a further framing still, that of the spectating courtiers whose gaze is set within the window frames of the palace:

Les dames mi-coiffées
 A plaire à leurs mignons s'essayent eschauffées,
 Remarquent les meurtris, les membres, les beautés,
 Bouffonnent salement sur leurs infirmités.
 (*Les Fers*, vv. 933-936)

The courtiers jostle for the best place from which to view the spectacle:

C'est à qui aura lieu à marquer de plus prés
 Celles que l'on esgorge et que l'on jette après.
 (*Les Fers*, vv. 939-940)

⁵ All references in the text are to Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, in: *Œuvres*, ed. Henri Weber, Jacques Bailbé and Marguerite Soulié, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

The window frames, in fact, act as a line of demarcation for this drama in more than just the physical sense that the courtiers are alive and the Huguenots are dead. In the usual course of a drama, one might naturally expect the viewer to be in reality and the viewed to be a piece of staged fiction. D'Aubigné reverses this: the dead are the reality, the *être*, who are observing the *paraître* of the court. Inside and outside as customarily understood are now inverted. In so doing, the poet is bringing to its culmination that collusion in seeing—and hence that responsibility in reading—which he had effectively enjoined on the reader earlier in his description of the dead bodies:

D'un visage riant nostre Caton tendoit
 Nos yeux avec les siens, et le bout de son doigt,
 A se voir transpercé...
 (*Les Fers*, vv. 831-833)

Condé sees himself pierced through; he has the authority and function of the prosopoeia, but he is the only dead Huguenot allowed to see. For the spectator-reader, to see with Condé—to allow Condé to direct our gaze—is to be morally outraged by the spectacle before us. For if the dead cannot see, the spectator can, and his gaze is such as to condemn the courtiers for treating this tragedy as a comedy ("*Bouffonnent* salement sur leurs infirmités," v. 936). The courtiers are, therefore, not just poor readers; they are irresponsible readers, wilfully unable to recognize the significance of the sight they are witnessing. They have eyes but they cannot see, and are condemned by this implicit intertext of which they are equally oblivious. The ultimate advantages of framing in this section of *Les Tragiques* lie not with the courtiers (apparently so secure in the Louvre), but with the reader for whom viewing is an obligation, an inevitability. It is the spectator who knows where he stands and how he must see. Seeing here is an act of commemoration, involving judgement on the viewer as well as judgement on what is viewed: "Si un jour, oublieux, tu en perds la memoire," D'Aubigné warns Navarre, "Dieu s'en souviendra bien à ta honte, à sa gloire" (*Les Fers*, vv. 1029-1030). Although therefore the frames are multiple in D'Aubigné's account of the Massacre, they are never so much so that the focus is compromised. Even when D'Aubigné reverses the perspective, turning it inside out, the focus remains sufficiently well-defined so that the surprise the author creates remains a surprise

rather than a confusion. The moral imperative, so to say, straightens out the lines of perspective.

The opening of Montaigne's "De l'amitié" offers both a meditation on an absent friend and an equivocation about the very possibility of framing and focusing which that meditation requires.⁶ In Ronsard and D'Aubigné, the poet speaks on behalf of the dead, by a form of diverted prosopopoeia. Montaigne does not allow himself even that; his is a subject without subject matter. This conclusion is not apparent straightaway, because Montaigne proceeds indirectly, by comparing his work with that of "un peintre que j'ay" (I, 28, 183 A).⁷ Just as the painter fills the edge of his picture with "crottesques, qui sont peintures fantasques, n'ayant grace qu'en la variété et estrangeté" (ibid.), so too the *Essais* are "crottesques et corps monstrueux, rappiechez de divers membres, sans certaine figure, n'ayants ordre, suite ny proportion que fortuité" (ibid.). First the comparison; then the contrast: the painter has painted "un tableau élaboré de toute sa suffisance" (ibid.), whereas, Montaigne claims, "ma suffisance ne va pas si avant que d'oser entreprendre un tableau riche, poly et formé selon l'art" (ibid.). And so Montaigne is choosing La Boétie's *De la servitude volontaire* to serve as the content to his essays, as the picture to his frame. In this opening passage, Montaigne evokes a principle of imitation which he shares with fellow writers. It expressly takes the form of a comparison between himself and the painter, between the *Essais* and painting. This comparison is standard enough to figure as the central metaphor in the pieces by Ronsard and D'Aubigné examined earlier. Montaigne's application of it surprises: instead of stressing the similarity of content between (this piece of) literature and painting, he relegates the *Essais* to the edges, and makes of them the frame for the second imitative principle, the intertextual borrowing from La

⁶ For other types of prosopopoeia in the *Essais*, see André Tourmon, "Les prosopopées ironiques dans les *Essais*," in: *Rhétorique de Montaigne*, ed. Frank Lestringant (Paris: Champion, 1985), pp. 113-121. Montaigne and the subject of death has of course received magisterial treatment from Claude Blum, *La Représentation de la mort dans la littérature française de la Renaissance* (Paris: Champion, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 649-776.

⁷ All references to the *Essais* are to *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965, re-ed. 1978). The standard lettering A B C has been added to mark the stages of Montaigne's thought.

Boétie ("Je me suis advisé d'en emprunter un [tableau] d'Estienne de la Boitie," I, 28, 183 A). However, although the *Essais* claim that La Boétie will provide their center of attention, no physical portrait of him is drawn (unlike the two poets, therefore). A literal picture of him is to be replaced by writing, discourse, which is all that remains of him ("il n'est demeuré de luy que ce discours," I, 28, 184 A).

Montaigne's procedure here can be interpreted as recovering La Boétie's relics ("c'est tout ce que j'ay peu recouvrer des ses reliques," I, 28, 184 A) and setting up, in order to house them, a monument or a mausoleum which, as Blanchard reminds us, has an empty center, like the picture here.⁸ Blanchard draws the conclusion: "c'est par la marque de l'absence, la référence au *vide* que l'écrivain réalise son projet de monument au mort."⁹ The empty space is also a place of memory, reminding the reader that La Boétie is the palimpsest to which the book alludes. Yet the allusion remains elusive; like the painter with whose activity Montaigne compares and contrasts his own, Montaigne works by deft strokes. "Tant y a qu'en ces memoires, si on y regarde, on trouvera que j'ay tout dict, ou tout designé. Ce que je ne puis exprimer, je le montre au doigt" (III, 9, 983 B). Montaigne never fully conjures up a picture of La Boétie, but points at it. He is careful not to fill the void, and in so doing is paradoxically faithful to the terms of his own self-portrait, "cette peinture morte et muete" as he describes it in "De la ressemblance des enfans aux peres" (II, 37, 784 A). The dead La Boétie cannot speak for himself; the written portrait of Montaigne is likewise "morte et muete." What remains of the classical figure of prosopopoeia is a voiceless vacuum, a trope unable to fulfil its standard rhetorical function. Unlike the elegant and authoritative narrators of Ronsard's "Elégie" or D'Aubigné's Saint-Barthelémy episode, Montaigne will not allow himself an advantage which he denies La Boétie and rejoins his friend in the silence of a still life.

Does this stillness imply obliteration, an eradication of any image or seeing? Montaigne returns to this issue in essay III, 9, in a passage devoted to a reflection on the image of himself as seen by others. The space of absence is now redefined in more positive

⁸ Marc E. Blanchard, *Trois portraits de Montaigne: Essai sur la représentation à la Renaissance* (Paris: Nizet, 1990), p. 55.

⁹ Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

terms: "si l'absence lui [i.e. "à mon amy"] est ou plaisante ou utile, elle m'est bien plus douce que sa presence; et ce n'est pas proprement absence, quand il y a moyen de s'entr'advertir" (III, 9, 977 B). This comment regards absence without the sense of irredeemable loss evident in the earlier essay. Friendship plays backwards and forwards across the space of absence, which can be profitable and worthwhile; the dividing line between absence and presence is moreover less than clearcut: "la separation du lieu rendoit la conjonction de nos volentez plus riche" (ibid.). Montaigne indeed intensifies this paradox: "Nous remplissons mieux et estandions la possession de la vie en nous separant: il vivoit, il jouissoit, *il voyoit pour moi, et moy pour luy*, autant plainement que s'il y eust esté" (ibid.; emphasis mine). It becomes possible for the absent to communicate with each other, to see for each other. The communality of souls implies a shared perception; two sets of eyes with a single gaze span the distance separating the friends. That doubled and yet singular seeing now allows us to perceive retrospectively, in "De l'amitié," some of Montaigne's most adventurous thinking: he stands at the edge of the frame and we are to view him obliquely, through an image of La Boétie which itself can only be glimpsed through the interstices of the discourse Montaigne composes around it. Henceforward Montaigne must see for La Boétie and his portrait will be a "peinture voilée et tenebreuse" (II, 12, 536 C)—"voilée" both because it is hidden from view and because it is covered with the drape of mourning. Yet for all that communication proceeds across the apparent barrier of absence: "il y a moyen de s'entr'advertir." Where there is unity of wills, abolition of distance, and the means for communication, the mere presence of a body seems superfluous. Even so, it remains Montaigne's most audacious contribution to the theme of seeing the dead that the *Essais* remain bereft of the central object to which the reader's gaze is nevertheless strongly directed. This constitutes an especially powerful demonstration of how an object of sight can be permanently unavailable for the spectator's inspection and yet, despite this, continue to exert constant authority over a text which commemorates that authority. Thereby the central metaphor of seeing-as-reading is both potently enacted and vigorously denied.

* * *

Speaking of the work of mourning, Derrida writes: "It entails a movement in which an interiorizing idealization takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person, ideally *and* quasi-literally devouring them."¹⁰ This remark has the advantage of collecting together the distinctive features of the commemorative gaze as illustrated by the authors we have been reviewing: the commemoration itself ("interiorizing idealization") which leads to the life-like portrait, the prosopopoeia ("the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person") and a recognizable version of imitation ("devouring"). This remark is admirable as a brief definition of the relationship between the author and his subject matter. Yet with its emphasis on the subject who organizes the portrait, it leaves out of account at least one variable—the object depicted. At its most extreme, there is an absent body situated in the picture, part of the picture yet in some way eccentric to it. While the object depicted may be dead, it is not a still life. Curiously, and paradoxically, although the dead person has little by way of conventional autonomy, s/he retains, nonetheless, undiminished power to assert lines of perspective, command attention, impose responsibilities of reader reaction. In their different ways, the massed corpses in *Les Tragiques* and the gaping void in the *Essais* offer a redefinition of object relations: the desire attaching to the object (a desire composed diversely of longing, anger, sorrow) is returned to the writer (the origin of the desire) as a command, an order: the writer's *mémoire* (meaning both "memory" and "written account") is to be the place where aesthetics and ethics meet. Literary objects are no longer just objects, to be manipulated at will according to aesthetic laws not of their own making: to write about the dead is to recognize, however obscurely, their status as subjects. Subjects without any ordinary subjecthood, within our field of vision yet somehow never fully "there," the dead rewrite the texts which write about them. D'Aubigné faced as a child with the spectacle of the severed heads of the conspirators of Amboise is one primary example of the dead affecting the choices and responsibilities of the

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, The Wellek Library Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), second edition, p. 34.

living.¹¹ Montaigne has a no less important formulation of being re-imaged by La Boétie: "Il n'y a personne à qui ie vouisse pleinement compromettre de ma peinture: luy seul iouyssoit de ma vraye image, & l'emporta."¹² Derrida's quotation at the beginning of this paragraph suggested that the mourner created the idealization of the other out of his image which he had devoured. Montaigne calls attention to the startling and unexpected corollary: the dead make a true picture of us and perhaps even place us within the frame where we had thought we were placing them.

How, then, are we to react to these objects which are not literary objects in the usual sense of the term? The account given above may seem heavily prescriptive in outlook and intentionalist in consequence. If (the objection would run) the reader is obliged to follow certain lines of perspective, this would imply that the text imposes some interpretations rather than others: the eye follows straight lines towards specific points, which analogously constitute intentions of meaning to which the reader is directed. While this may be true of D'Aubigné, Ronsard and Montaigne take less direct views. Ronsard allows the reader to savor, at least as much, the pleasure of sensuous form, and places unilinear perspectives alongside (or perhaps within) multiple perspectives. Montaigne similarly avoids straight lines (and so interpretations based on teleological models). In Montaigne, every line is in fact doubled, every frame is twofold: Montaigne and La Boétie, the narrator and the painter, the *Essais* and painting, the reader and any or all of these. All these writers provide a direction for the gaze, a line for the sight, but that is not the same as imposing a univocal interpretation: the analogy between reading and seeing is imperfect in that respect, but crucial insofar as it writes the viewer into the text. "A la Renaissance, le regard du spectateur, comme la pensée du lecteur, est sollicité pour participer à la dynamique de la création artistique."¹³ Demerson is stating the

¹¹ Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Sa Vie à ses enfants*, in *Œuvres*, ed. cit., pp. 385-386; cf. p. 389.

¹² *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne* ("Edition Municipale"), ed. Fortunat Strowski and François Gebelin, volume III, p. 255 *ad* essay III, 9. The passage is not quoted in Villey-Saulnier. It is cited in Thibaudet-Rat, p. 1652, but with the erroneous reading "emporte" for "emporta."

¹³ Guy Demerson, "Exposé de synthèse," in: *Le Paysage à la Renaissance*, ed. Yves Giraud (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1988), p. 332.

obvious, but not the trite. Indeed—it could be argued—one long-term consequence of this view, in the present context at least, is that the true prosopopoeia is that of the reader herself/himself, the unvoiced image which is the *sine qua non* for the act of commemoration to take place. The reader is not simply called upon to remember: s/he is the text's memory, responsible for its perpetuation as well as for its interpretation. Such is the nature of the contractual bond upon which these texts seem to rely. If that is true, then the reader stands at a deeper level still, for s/he is one of those phenomena which exist "sans estre exprimez et sans voix et sans figure" (*Essais*, III, 5, 848 C). But along that path lies nothing less than a re-evaluation of the reader's image, countenance and voice.

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Montaigne and the French Catholic League

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Raymond Lebègue's "La littérature française et les Guerres de Religion" provides a brief but wide-ranging survey of the impact which the civil wars had on contemporary literature. He encompasses, as one would expect, committed propagandists like Ronsard, D'Aubigné and Du Bartas, and discusses the impact which the crisis had both on political thought and on general moral attitudes. He highlights the works of the various monarchomachs and the "morale stoïcienne" which had an obvious appeal in a time of crisis. He also focusses on "la littérature de l'évasion" (travel literature and pastoral poems), however, and acutely observes that even a Desportes ("qui s'enferme dans la poésie amoureuse") cannot escape from political constraints: "[il] sert ainsi la politique de Cathérine de Médicis [qui] aime mieux, en effet, que les seigneurs de la Cour passent leur temps en galanteries qu'en menées politiques." It is something of a surprise, therefore, that he should pay so little attention to Montaigne, who, though mentioned in the context of "la littérature moralisante," is not given a prominent role.¹

The essayist's virtual omission is surprising in view not only of his status as one of the greatest writers of the period but also of the evident impact which the Religious Wars have on his thought. This had already been highlighted by several general studies which predated Lebègue (Plattard's *Montaigne et son temps*, 1933, for example), and has since provided Géalde Nakam with much of the

¹ *The French Review*, 23 (1950), pp. 205-13.

material for a hefty two-volume thesis.² Nakam has done an extremely valuable job in identifying a vast number of the links between the *Essais* and the "siècle gasté" in which they were written. One could query the odd detail (see below); but it would be difficult to seriously challenge her overall conclusion: "La guerre civile accompagne Montaigne tout au long de sa vie d'homme. Elle est la réalité de base de son livre, l'arrière-plan de sa création, et, très profondément, la matière première de sa réflexion" (I.104). A problem is raised, however, when she goes on to argue that Montaigne is not just an observer of his times, but that he is also a committed writer "[qui] par une interrogation permanente des réalités ... oriente son lecteur vers des réponses politiques fermes et subtiles" (II.178). Here, she makes a much greater contribution than the recent Dassonville volume (*Ronsard et Montaigne: écrivains engagés?*, Lexington, 1989), which (despite the eminence of the contributors) leaves the reader wondering whether Montaigne really was a committed writer.³ Yet, despite her own preferred methodology (which is to interpret the *Essais* in their precise historical context), she fails to explore the relationship between the *Essais* and contemporary polemical literature. Montaigne affects to despise the "milliasse de petits livrets que ceux de la Religion pretendue reformée font courir pour la deffence de leur cause";⁴ but he is well aware that he is often trespassing (albeit with different motives) onto the same ground:

l'ordonnance de ne s'entremettre que bien reservéement d'escrire de la Religion à tous autres qu'à ceux qui en font expresse profession, n'auroit pas faute de quelque image d'utilité et de justice; et à moy avec de m'en taire? (I, 56, 309 B)

The polemics, of course, did not come just from the Protestant side. The Catholics retaliated in kind, becoming particularly vociferous following the creation of the second league when the Protestant

² Géralde Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps* (Paris: Nizet, 1982) and *Les Essais de Montaigne* (Paris: Nizet, 1984). In order to save space these will be identified in subsequent references as vol. I and vol II respectively.

³ See my review in *Modern Language Review*, 85 (1991), p. 203.

⁴ *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), II, 32, 699 A.

Henri de Navarre became heir to the throne in 1584. Thus, when Montaigne writes: "il y devoit avoir quelque coërcction des loix contre les escrivains ineptes et inutiles, comme il y a contre les vagabons et faineants. On banniroit des mains de nostre peuple et moy et cent autres," he is not simply indulging in false modesty. He is highlighting the deleterious effect on the body politic of unbridled "escrivaille": "Quand escrivismes nous tant que depuis que nous sommes en trouble?" (III, 9, 923 B). What, therefore, is the relationship between the *Essais* and this literature? How serious are the arguments to which Montaigne is replying? And how does he go about persuading the reader to adopt his preferred political position?

* * *

Responses to late sixteenth-century pamphlet literature are generally of two kinds. The literary specialist, whether Lenient in 1866⁵ or the authors of the more recent *Le Pamphlet en France au XVI^e siècle*,⁶ tends to concentrate on literary value at the expense of content. Where content is considered, as by Sidney Anglo in a study significantly entitled "A Rhetoric of Hate," it is often dismissed with (from a liberal twentieth-century point of view) understandable contempt: "We are here truly descending into the moral abyss of extremism begetting not only more extremism but also its own ethical justification."⁷ Such a judgment conflicts not only with the increased importance (and understanding) which historians like Frederic Baumgartner have given to the radical reactionaries of the Catholic League⁸ but also with the insights of Natalie Davis, who, having emphasised the links between religious violence and "a repertory of traditional punishments and forms of destruction," argues that it is best understood if it is related "less to the

⁵ Charles Lenient, *La Satire en France, ou la littérature militante au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1866).

⁶ Edited by R. Aulotte et al. (Paris: Collection de l'Ecole Normale des Jeunes Filles, 1983).

⁷ Sidney Anglo, "A Rhetoric of Hate," in Keith Cameron, ed., *Montaigne and his Age* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1981), 1-13, p. 8.

⁸ Frederic Baumgartner, *Radical Reactionaries: The Political Thought of the French Catholic League* (Geneva: Droz, 1975).

pathological than to the normal."⁹ Where Anglo tells us that "Discursive arguments are resorted to in order to justify actions undertaken not as a result of reasoning but rather as a result of extreme emotion,"¹⁰ Davis insists on the rioters' conviction of the "rightness of their judgment."¹¹ With his hatred of cruelty and killing, Montaigne would obviously have been more in sympathy with Anglo than with Davis; but he will have been fully aware of the mentality which he had to oppose and of the arguments which he had to counter or (where he deemed it more expedient) to deflect.

Montaigne's criticisms of the Protestants are too well known to need detailed discussion here.¹² As Nakam has rightly observed in any case (II.193), the position of the reformers became "politiquement traditionaliste" (and therefore more acceptable to Montaigne) when Henri de Navarre became heir to the throne. It was then the turn of the Catholic League to adopt the more radical positions of their foes and to insist on the continuation of the wars. In what follows, therefore, I shall concentrate on the key *Ligueur* arguments as they emerge from a small but fairly representative number of pamphlets.

One argument which consistently vexed the *ligueurs* was the suggestion made by Protestants like La Noue and by *politiques* like Pasquier that the Protestants and Catholics differed on only minor issues "pour lesquelles on ne se doit pas formaliser, veu qu'ils cognoissent tous un mesme Jesus-Christ, et font profession d'un mesme Evangile."¹³ Protestants and *politiques* hoped that these

⁹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Cambridge/ Oxford: Polity Press/Blackwell, re-ed., 1987), p. 186.

¹⁰ Anglo, op. cit., p. 12.

¹¹ Davis, op. cit., p. 159.

¹² Frieda S. Brown, *Religious and Political Conservatism in the "Essais" of Montaigne* (Geneva: Droz, 1963); M. Hermann, "L'Attitude de Montaigne envers la Réforme et les Réformés," in François Moureau et al., *Montaigne et les Essais 1580-1980* (Paris/Geneva: Champion/Slatkine, 1983), pp. 352-67.

¹³ François de la Noue, *Discours politiques et militaires*, ed. Frank E. Sutcliffe (Paris/Geneva: Minard/ Droz, 1967), pp. 20, 87 ff; Pasquier, *Ecrits politiques*, ed. Dorothy Thickett (Geneva: Droz, 1966), pp. 85-87. See the replies by Guillaume Rose, *De iusta reip. christianae in reges impios et hereticos autoritate...*, (Antwerp: Ioannes Keerbergium, 1592), p. 307; and Dorléans (attributed to), *Advertissement des Catholiques anglois aux françois Catholiques...* (Toulouse: Edouard Ancelin, 1590 [1st ed. 1586]), p. 32.

disagreements could be resolved by a free church council; but Leaguers insisted that the Protestants would never recognise any council as free unless it ratified their own position and that the decisions of the Council of Trent were in any case final.¹⁴ Jean de Caumont argued that the Catholic concept of the sacrifice of the mass is central to true belief "tellement qu'iceluy cessant, toute la Religion de Chrestienté cesse."¹⁵ Fellow Leaguers also reminded the Protestants of their own inflammatory assertions: "que le pape estoit l'antéchrist, et les papistes Idolaytres, appellant par dérision le precieux corps de Jesus-Christ, Idole et les Prestres sacrificateurs, joëurs de farce, et basteleurs."¹⁶ They also attack Calvinist doctrines, especially predestination, which, they claim, can lead only to atheism: "Car faisant Dieu autheur de peché, j'ay mieux aymé n'en croire point du tout." Atheism, they argue, is a natural consequence of the multiplicity of Protestant sects and of the freedom of conscience by which they claim to set such store: "la liberté de conscience, qui n'est qu'une vraye peste, et mort de l'âme..., qu'une vraye liberté d'errer, qu'un abandon au mal-faire, une ouverture à l'athéisme."¹⁷

Leaguer writers were particularly incensed at the idea of toleration. They pointed out that it had been rejected by St Augustine, one of the Reformers' main authorities,¹⁸ that there was ample Biblical support for the view that true believers should have nothing to do with heretics¹⁹ and that, if they did so, they risked

¹⁴ Dorléans, op. cit., p. 54; anon., *Advis aux françois de la resolution prise aux estats de Bloys MDCLXXXVIII contre Henry de Bourbon...* (Paris: à l'enseigne du Pélican, 1589), pp. 24-25.

¹⁵ *De l'union des Catholiques avec Dieu...* (Paris: Nicolas Nivelles, 1587), pp. 21-22.

¹⁶ Anon., *De la différence du Roy et du tyran* (Paris: Rolin Thiery, 1589), p. 45.

¹⁷ Dorléans (attrib. to), *Le Banquet et apres disnée du comte d'Arete...* (Paris: Guillaume Bichon, 1594), no page reference (after f. Cij recto); anon., *Remonstrance aux Catholiques de tous les Estats de France pour entrer en l'association de la Ligue* (no place, 1586), f. xviii recto.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. vij recto.

¹⁹ Jean de Caumont, *Advertissement des Advertissements au peuple très-chrestien* (no place, 1587), ff. 9 verso-10 recto, 26 verso, 27 verso.

being infected with their dangerous beliefs.²⁰ Tolerance had already been tried, and had produced only an increase in the numbers of the miscreants and in the civil strife which they caused.²¹ The ensuing destruction—for which the Protestants were held to be entirely to blame—pleased only France's external enemies, who were delighted to see it weakened from within.²² Although the Protestants called for freedom of belief when they were threatened, they did not permit it in Geneva, nor could they be trusted to maintain it if they ever got the upper hand in France.²³ Nor, indeed, as Dorléans argued, should they! Of the two beliefs, ONE must be erroneous and only an atheist could knowingly permit the practice of a false religion. It was the practice of false religion (i.e. Protestantism) which had led God to punish France for its impiety.²⁴ Piety was not only the source of all virtue, Jean Boucher argued: it was also the source of political wellbeing. As a result, no true believer could tolerate heresy. When Louis Dorléans affirmed that "la piété doit faire guerre ouverte à l'impie," he was speaking literally, therefore. Unlike the *politiques*, "[qui] donnent tout aux hommes et rien à Dieu," the Leaguers should fight the heretics: "qui veut avoir la paix avec Dieu, il faut faire la guerre contre ceux qui sont hors de l'Eglise."²⁵ Seeing themselves as Davids fighting a dangerous Goliath, the Leaguers identified Charles IX with Saul, who (as in La Taille's tragedy) is blamed for sparing the enemy of God. The "inhumaine miséricorde" which had prevented Charles IX from pursuing the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre to its logical conclusion had only made things worse: "faute d'avoir nettoyé cette plaie en temps et lieu, la douleur nous tient encores par tous les membres." With gangrene spreading

²⁰ Dorléans (attrib. to), *Apologie ou Defence des Catholiques unis...* (no place, 1586), p. 7.

²¹ Op. cit., pp. 5-6.

²² Dorléans, *Advertissement des Catholiques*, f. 87 recto; Jean Boucher (attrib. to), *La Vie et faits notables de Henry de Valois...* (no place, 1589), p. 45.

²³ Oudart Raynssant de Viezmaison, *Representation de la Noblesse heretique sur le theatre de France* (Paris: Guillaume Bichon, 1591), ff. 79 recto-81 verso; Boucher, *Vie et faits notables*, p. 45.

²⁴ Dorléans, *Apologie*, p. 24, and *Second Advertissement* (Toulouse: Edouard Ancelin, 1591), ff. 52 verso-53 recto.

²⁵ Boucher, *Couronne mystique, ou armes de piété* (Tournai: Adrien Quinque, 1624), pp. 94, 149; Dorléans, *Banquet*, no pagination (after f. p. i verso).

rapidly, urgent measures are called for: "c'est pourquoi il faut mettre le fer et le feu bien avant." This, of course, means destroying the Protestants, who could be exterminated with a clear or, rather, with a good conscience: "le zele de Dieu devore tout."²⁶ In case this sounds too outrageous, I should point out that not all Ligueur writers were bloodthirsty²⁷ and that the hardships and destruction involved even in a "Holy War" were bound to affect the Leaguers themselves. As Louis Dorléans, who had lived through the siege of Paris, observed, any sane man would admit that peace and honours are more comfortable than the horrors of war. He concluded, nonetheless, that he had a duty to transmit to future generations the faith which he had received from his ancestors: "perisse la paix si elle nous faict perdre nostre Religion."²⁸ Such an argument is certainly emotive; but it is not in any evident sense fallacious.

As recent studies have shown,²⁹ the political dimension to *Ligueur* thought also needs to be taken seriously. With reference to the crisis created by the death of the Duc d'Anjou, the *politique* De Thou affirmed that "la plus saine et nombreuse partie jugeoit qu'il n'y avoit aucune espérance de conserver l'état qu'en gardant l'ordre de succession établi par les loix," by which he meant that, by strict primogeniture, Henri de Havarre should succeed in the event of the death of the king.³⁰ To this, the *Ligueurs* replied with a variety of arguments. One of these was that, if the crown was to pass from the Valois to the Bourbons, then, by consanguinity (the principle used by Roman law), the nearest in line was Navarre's uncle, the Cardinal de Bourbon. Representing a collateral line, Antoine de Navarre (Henri's father) had never been regarded as the first prince of the blood and could not transmit a birthright that he had not possessed.³¹ As for the Salic law, which precluded the crown's passing to Henri II's granddaughter, the Spanish Infanta, it had weak foundations, and

²⁶ Dorléans, *Advertissement des Catholiques*, pp. 20-23.

²⁷ See, for example, *Remonstrance aux Catholiques*, f. xiiij verso.

²⁸ *Banquet*, as in note 23.

²⁹ See Baumgartner, op. cit.; Elie Barnavi, "La Ligue parisienne (1585-94), ancêtre des partis totalitaires modernes," *French Historical Studies*, 11 (1979), pp. 29-57.

³⁰ Quoted by Nakam (I.173, note 158).

³¹ Mark Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), p. 28.

was, in any case, less significant than another and, it was claimed, even more fundamental law of the kingdom: Catholicity. Unlike the Salic law, this had never been tested since, prior to the Reformation, there was no question of the king *not* being a catholic. A priori, however, the case was, as Mark Greengrass has argued, "imposing":

The French king was "the Most Christian King" in Europe with powers to heal scrofula, to appoint bishops and take revenues from the Catholic Church. The mystique of the monarchy, the symbolism of the crown, coronation, and the ritual which gave the institution its social significance and political authority, relied on Catholicism.³²

The solution, as Henri III realised, was to persuade Henri de Navarre to abandon Protestantism; but, the *Ligueurs* argued, he had already espoused Catholicism once before and could not be relied upon to convert sincerely.³³ He had, indeed, been excommunicated as a relapsed heretic and declared ineligible for the French throne by Sixtus V in 1585. The fact that Henri III was prepared to contemplate his accession to the throne simply proved that the last of the Valois was himself unworthy to rule. This appeared to be confirmed by the assassination of the duc de Guise and the cardinal his brother at the Estates General of 1588: Henri III was himself excommunicated, and his subjects were freed from their obedience to him both by the Pope and by the Sorbonne.³⁴

With their desperate desire to mobilise Catholic opinion, *ligueur* writers sometimes had recourse to arguments which were evidently silly: that the Huguenots would introduce the Koran as willingly as the Protestant Bible, or that, if he took Paris, Henri de Navarre would have all the men killed and (a fate worse than death?) force the women to marry Gascons, for instance.³⁵ One can see, however, that, whatever their excesses, their basic case was far from being an unreasonable one. Even if it had been, we know that, for the ten-year period extending from Anjou's death in 1584 until Henri IV's entry

³² Ibid.

³³ Anon., *Lettre missive d'un gentilhomme catholique...à un sien voisin du party contraire* (no place: 1589), p. 14; Dorléans, *Banquet*, f. G ij verso.

³⁴ Raynssant, *Representation*, f. 71 recto.

³⁵ Dorléans, *Banquet*, f. C ij recto; *Lettre missive*, p. 8.

into Paris in 1594, there was a willing and receptive audience. The question which we have to address, therefore, is this: to what extent did Montaigne participate in the debate? And what strategies did he use?

For G eralde Nakam, the situation appears to be simple. Montaigne, she tells us, "est du 'juste parti,' du roi, et de son successeur l gitime" (I.196). Following the crisis of 1584, he binds himself ever more closely to *le vert galant*: "il suit alors de pr s la carri re d'Henri de Navarre, dont il est...de fa on de plus en plus d clar e le partisan" (I.99). Conversely, "L'opposition de Montaigne   la Ligue se manifeste   Bordeaux et dans les *Essais*" (I.224). While I would not seek to contest the overall accuracy of these remarks, I am struck by the fact that Montaigne is rarely as categorical as she here suggests.³⁶ Statements like "les loix m'ont ost  de grand peine; elles m'ont choisy party et donn  un maistre" (III, 1, 772 B) and "on peut desirer autres magistrats, mais il faut, ce nonobstant, obeyr   ceux icy" (III, 9, 972 B) make Montaigne's fundamental loyalism perfectly clear. But, as Nakam herself observes,³⁷ remaining faithful to the vacillating Henri III will have required some diametrical changes of policy: supporting a limited degree of toleration according to the Peace treaty of Fleix in 1580; suppressing heresy following the Treaty of Nemours in 1585; and subscribing to an alliance between the king and his newly recognised (but still Protestant) successor in 1589. Is Montaigne complaining of such changes when he laments the state of France: "Pauvre vaisseau, que les flots, les vens *et le pilote* tirassent   si contraires desseins!" (III, 10, 994 B, my italics)? A 1595 addition to "De l'utile et de l'honneste" certainly makes it clear that his loyalty to Henri III had its limits. Probably referring to the killings at Blois, which the 1588 text might seem to justify, Montaigne adapts an earlier statement to read: "[B] toutes choses ne sont pas loISIBLES   un homme de bien pour le service [C] de son Roy ny [B] de la cause generale et des loix" (780).

Criticism of the League is easy to find, but it needs to be interpreted with care. Montaigne's condemnation of those who would foment strife in Paris ("Je l'advise que de tous les partis le pire sera

³⁶ She does on occasion admit that Montaigne can be vague (e.g. II.205).

³⁷ See I.171.

celuy qui la mettra en discorde," III, 9, 950 B) is clearly aimed at the *Ligueurs* who were so soon to set it against its king. Although not named, the League is evidently being criticised too when Montaigne condemns the blind commitment demanded not only by the Protestant party but also by "cet autre qui est nay depuis, [qui] en l'imitant, le surmonte" (III, 10, 991 C). One should note, however, that, like *ligueur* polemicists, Montaigne ultimately ascribes responsibility for all that has happened to the Protestants who first destabilised the kingdom:

Je suis desgousté de la nouvelleté, quelque visage qu'elle porte... Celle qui nous presse depuis tant d'ans, elle n'a pas tout exploicté, mais on peut dire avec apparence, que par accident elle a tout product et engendré, voire et les maux et ruines qui se font depuis sans elle, et contre elle. (I, 23, 118 B)

Montaigne's praise of François de Guise in "Divers événements de mesme conseil," his insistence in the teeth of Protestant (and *politique*) propaganda³⁸ that he was a true Frenchman (I, 24, 122 A) and his forthright defence of his strategy during the Battle of Dreux (I, 40, 264 A) also show that he refused to adopt a totally hostile line to the Guise family and all that they represented.³⁹

Montaigne's involvement in the negotiations between Henri III and Henri de Navarre show that Nakam is right in arguing that he was hoping to cement an alliance between the two kings (I.184). The *Essais*, however, provide little *clear* support for Navarre's case. He is mentioned by name only once, and even then in a passage where Montaigne is stressing his moderate attitude to all parties (III, 10, 990 C). The context in which it is quoted ("si nous continuons, il restera malaysément à qui fier la santé de cet estat") shows that Nakam is correct in interpreting Montaigne's quotation of Virgil (*Hunc saltem everso juvenem succerere seculo/Ne prohibite*, III, 12, 1019 B) as proof of his desire that Navarre should succeed to the throne in the event of Henri III's death (I.158); but it is the only text

³⁸ Anon., *Conference chrestienne, de quatre docteurs de theologie, et trois fameux avocats...* (no place, 1586), p. 4; Pasquier, *Ecrits politiques*, p. 196.

³⁹ See Michel Simonin, "Poétique(s) du politique: Montaigne et Ronsard prosopographes de François de Guise," in Michel Dassonville, *Ronsard et Montaigne. Ecrivains engagés?* (Lexington: French Forum, 1989), pp. 83-101.

of this nature, and is not really direct enough to support the view that, in the *Essais*, Montaigne showed himself a declared partisan of Navarre.

Nakam, it is true, claims to find indirect support for her case in a passage in III, 1 where Montaigne argues: "Hors le neud du debat, je me suis maintenu en equanimité et pure indifference" (989 B):

Si l'expression "le neud du debat" désigne la religion, Montaigne, catholique, se déclare irréductible sur ce seul point et rejoint les rangs des antiprotestants convaincus. Le sens change du tout au tout si l'expression désigne, comme je le pense, le principe de légitimité monarchique et la loi de succession au trône: Montaigne parle alors en politique. (I.171)

I shall return to the ambiguity of some of Montaigne's statements shortly. For the moment, it is more important to point out that Montaigne's defence of the Salic law (which was, as we have seen, a key issue) is at best rather half-hearted⁴⁰:

il me semble, *je ne sçay comment*, qu'en toutes façons la maistrise n'est aucunement deuë aux femmes sur des hommes... C'est *l'apparence* de cette consideration qui nous a fait forger et donner pied si volontiers à cette loy, *que nul ne veit onques*, qui prive les femmes de la succession de cette couronne. (II, 8, 379)

The note of scepticism was no doubt less crucial when the text was written (before 1580); but Montaigne never thought it necessary to amend it, or even to suppress it, as one would have expected had he wanted the *Essais* to support Navarre in a more obvious way.

Another factor which Nakam takes into account when interpreting the *Essais* is Montaigne's alleged statement on another key issue: toleration. Montaigne, it is true, never says anything to suggest that he would support attempts to impose conformity of religious belief; but one may wonder whether Nakam is right to assume that "De la liberté de conscience" provides an explicit defence of freedom of conscience and, in the person of Julian the Apostate, a model of the ideal prince (II, 183, 225). Montaigne points out that Julian had permitted freedom of conscience in order

⁴⁰ The situation concerning the Salic law was by no means straightforward (Greengrass, *op. cit.*, p. 27).

to divide his subjects not to unite them, as the French kings had recently tried to do. The essayist entertains the thought that granting freedom of conscience may make heresy less appealing ("lascher la bride aux pars d'entretenir leur opinion, c'est les amolir et les relacher par la facilité et l'aisance"), but concludes on a note which suggests that he does not entirely approve: "Et si, croy mieux, pour l'honneur de la devotion de nos rois, c'est que, n'ayans peu ce qu'ils vouloient, ils ont fait semblant de vouloir ce qu'ils pouvoient" (II, 19, 654 A).

I am sure that Mme Nakam would like to defend her interpretation of these texts; but the important thing, from my point of view, is their very ambiguity, which is all the more significant since they are not the only ambiguous texts. When Montaigne says that it is hard to catch traitors at their own game "tesmoing la poisante experience que nous venons d'en sentir" (III, 1, 774 B), is he referring to the Treaty of Nemours as Nakam suggests (I.197) or to the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, as I. Cremona seems to believe?⁴¹ When he attacks the "la derniere des difformations" resulting from inept attempts at 'reformation' (III, 12, 1020 C), is he attacking the Protestants as Frame suggests,⁴² or, as Nakam believes, the 'Counter-Reformation' which the League was seeking to impose (I.171)? Nakam herself argues (I.192) that it is impossible to know whether the leader who damages his cause by refusing to risk a *rapprochement* with his enemies in I, 24 is Henri III or Henri de Navarre, or whether the prince who adopted a contrary role—and whom Montaigne seems to admire—is Navarre or Guise (128 BC). As we have seen, she also admits that Montaigne's statement concerning the "neud du debat" takes on a very different meaning according to whether Montaigne is understood as referring to Catholicity or to the Salic law.

Mme Nakam is quite right to suggest that Montaigne's contemporaries probably understood his allusions better than we do (I.171); but the extent of the ambiguity is such that it probably represents a deliberate strategy on Montaigne's part. Nakam, who has gone through the *Essais* searching for contemporary references,

⁴¹ Isabelle Cremona, "La pensée politique de Montaigne et les guerres civiles," *Studi Francesi*, 23 (1979), pp. 431-48 (p. 443, note 60).

⁴² Donald M. Frame, *Montaigne. A Biography* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984 [1st ed., 1965]), p. 294.

notes that, though Montaigne begins by mentioning several specific battles in the Religious Wars, his references to the *troubles* become increasingly indirect (I.97). Battles up until Moncontour (1569) are mentioned by name and the Paix de Monsieur (1576) is clearly the inspiration for "De la liberté de conscience," but there are no references to the siege of La Rochelle, to Auneau or even to the victories of Navarre. Nakam suggests several reasons for this: a possible change in personal interests; the fact that the wars became too endemic to require specific mention; or, more interestingly, that the wars had become so serious that "il [n'était] plus innocent d'en mentionner quelque nom que ce soit" (I.87-8). The latter interpretation appears to clash, however, with her view that Montaigne is trying to guide the reader in his political choices (I.222). Given his disapproval of the League, why not seek to mobilise public opinion by criticising its leaders? In part, of course, in order not to get embroiled in bitter personal slurs of the kind which had been directed at Ronsard when he had attacked the Protestants. But there is, I think, another deeper reason. Montaigne's strategy is a double one. On the one hand, he always assumes that the basic issues are clearcut—which is easier to do if you leave them as vague as possible. On the other, he tends consistently to minimise the differences between the Protestant and the *Ligueur* causes, thereby presenting the wars as pointlessly destructive.

We have seen that *Ligueur* literature raises several complex issues. Montaigne, however, prefers to concentrate on an undefined "neud du debat." This is deliberately left vague since Montaigne wishes to insist that those who pursue the war with fanatical enthusiasm must be motivated by unjustifiable self-interest: "Ceux qui alongent leur cholere et leur haine au delà des affaires, comme faict la plus part, montrent qu'elle leur part d'ailleurs et de cause particuliere" (III, 10, 989-90 BC). This is why he can claim to reject the specious arguments of rebellious Protestants and Catholics alike and make a firm and unhesitating choice: "Autant que l'image des loix receues et antiennes de cette monarchie reluyra en quelque coin, m'y voilà planté" (III, 9, 972 B). Whereas the political situation, the balance of power between Protestant and *Ligueur* forces and even royal policy will vary, the essayist deliberately claims to follow an unswerving path: "Nostre guerre a beau changer de formes, se multiplier et diversifier en nouveaux parts; pour moy, je ne bouge."

While the political and military situation becomes ever more complicated, Montaigne eschews detailed analysis of the problems which preoccupy the polemicists of both sides, preferring to concentrate instead on (by 1588) apparently rather pointless condemnation of the presumption which the Protestants had shown in precipitating a civil war in the first place. He is prepared—when it suits his case—to concede that there *are* certain religious points at issue, but avoids specifying what they are, insisting instead on the Christian's general duty to obey his rulers: "La religion Chrestienne a toutes les marques d'extreme justice et utilité; mais nulle plus apparente, que l'exacte recommandation de l'obeissance du Magistrat" (I, 23, 119-21 BC). This appears to be a heartfelt cry, but it sidesteps rather than answers the arguments of those—both Protestant and *Ligueur*—who were only too willing to obey the king but were convinced that he, in his turn, should obey God's laws—which, of course, they, quite sincerely, conceived in different ways.⁴³

Rather than analyse and answer the various arguments involved, Montaigne decides to suppress them by reducing all of them—even those which he finds more convincing—to an indistinguishable mass of distorted special pleading: "J'aperçois, en ces desmambremens de la France et divisions où nous sommes tombez, chacun se travailler à deffendre sa cause, mais, jusques aux meilleurs, avec desguisement et mensonge" (III, 9, 972 B). Deciding now to deny that the war has any kind of sincerely religious dimension ("Sentez si ce n'est par noz mains que nous la menons..."), he emphasises the conflicting views of religion but only in order to reduce all the participants to the same base level:

Ceux qui l'ont prinse à gauche, ceux qui l'ont prinse a droite, ceux qui en disent le noir, ceux qui en disent le blanc, l'employent si pareillement à leurs violentes et ambitieuses entreprinses qu'ils rendent douteuse et malaysée à croire la diversité qu'ils pretendent de leurs opinions...

Refusing to believe that, depending on the conditions prevailing, Protestants and Catholics can be equally convinced of the need to

⁴³ See *Remonstrance aux Catholiques*, f. xvij verso: "quand Dieu parle, il faut que tous obeissent: et si la raison a esté bonne pour nox ennemis, [nous] sommes mieux fondez en la possession de l'heritage de Dieu."

obey God rather than man and therefore to pursue similar rebellious policies,⁴⁴ Montaigne uses the sudden change in political circumstances following the assassination of Henri III in order to mount a scathing attack on both groups of extremists:

Voyez l'horrible impudence dequoy nous pelotons les raisons divines, et combien irreligieusement nous les avons et rejetées et reprinses selon que la fortune nous a changé de place... Cette proposition si solenne: S'il est permis au sujet de se rebeller...contre son prince pour la defence de la religion, souvenez-vous en quelles bouches, cette année passée, l'affirmative d'icelle estoit l'arc-boutant d'un parti, la negative de quel autre parti c'estoit l'arc-boutant; et oyez à present de quel quartier vient la voix...et si les armes bruyent moins pour cette cause que pour cette là. (II, 12, 420 C)

Montaigne is very careful, as one can see, not to mention the precise causes (the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the death of the duc d'Anjou, the assassination of the duc de Guise) which had prompted the various changes in policy. This would have given his opponents the opportunity to open a debate in which he has no intention of indulging. He prefers instead to present his favoured cause as having unspecified weaknesses which serve—paradoxically—to strengthen its claim to support: "Le plus juste party, si est ce encore le membre d'un corps vermoulu et vereux. Mais d'un tel corps le membre moins malade s'appelle sain" (III, 9, 972 B).

Montaigne's use here of what Carol Clark calls a "stock image"⁴⁵ aptly symbolises his relationship with contemporary polemicists. The image of the sick body in need of medical treatment was usually used to justify calls for the extermination of the opposition.⁴⁶ Montaigne, however, puts it to a very different use, emphasising BOTH the futility of religious controversies which do not bring the expected improvement ("Il advient de la leur, comme des autres medecines foibles et mal appliquées; les humeurs qu'elle vouloit

⁴⁴ On the cross-fertilisation of political ideas, see John H.M. Salmon's excellent study of Buchanan and Rossaeus, in *Renaissance and Revolt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 136-54.

⁴⁵ Carol Clark, *The Web of Metaphor* (Lexington: French Forum, 1978).

⁴⁶ *Remonstrance aux Catholiques*, f. vij recto; Dorléans, *Advertissement des Catholiques anglois*, pp. 21-22.

purger en nous, elle les a eschauffées....," I, 23, 121 B) AND the destructive nature of civil war:

En ces maladies populaires, on peut distinguer sur le commencement les sains des malades; mais quand elles viennent à durer...tout le corps s'en sent, et la teste et les talons; aucune partye n'est exempte de corruption.

The only possible conclusion is that religious controversy and civil war must be abandoned before it is too late: "Si que, si nous continuons, il restera malayséement à qui fier la santé de cet estat, au cas que fortune nous la redonne." It is in this context that Montaigne discreetly quotes Virgil, implying that only Henri de Navarre can bring peace to the kingdom: "Hunc saltem everso juvenem succerere seculo/Ne prohibite" (III, 12, 1018-19 B). In all probability, Montaigne assisted Henri III in his efforts to persuade Navarre to convert to Catholicism; but he carefully avoids detailed discussion of such topics in his *Essais*. He prefers instead to make general statements of fidelity to France's monarchical and Catholic traditions, implying that there is no viable alternative. This is a much more subtle kind of propaganda than one finds in the pamphlets of Boucher, Caumont and Dorléans, but it is propaganda nonetheless. Ultimately, perhaps, it also proved much more effective.

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Stoic Posturing and Noble Theatricality in the *Essais*

David Matthew Posner

One of the more carefully elaborated Montaignian personæ we find in the *Essais* seems to be a direct response to the problems of Montaigne's historical moment. This is the neo-Stoic nobleman who, disillusioned with the ills of the age, accepts the vicissitudes of fortune with equanimity and spends his life preparing to *faire une belle mort*. Such a stance is hardly surprising; there is a clear link between the historical position of the sixteenth-century *noblesse d'épée*—a group which senses its feudal privileges and political strength slipping away as royal power increases, while its military role is being reduced by the changing nature of military strategy (gunpowder, increasing professionalism), and its economic power undermined by the expansion of a trade economy in which it cannot directly participate—and the discursive style it chooses to adopt. To a class thus threatened on all sides with loss of status, both real (politico-economic) and symbolic (honor and prestige vis-à-vis the Crown), it is certainly conceivable that an attitude of seeming indifference to the inevitable, and a corollary claim to real fulfillment in some inner realm, might have considerable appeal.¹ Montaigne's

¹ On this trend in general, see John H. M. Salmon's essay, "Cicero and Tacitus in Sixteenth-Century France," which surveys sixteenth-century French responses to Ciceronian and Tacitean models of civic behavior, emphasizing the links between rhetoric and public comportment. This essay constitutes the first chapter of his *Renaissance and Revolt. Essays in the Intellectual and Social History of Early Modern France*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History (Cambridge:

position relative to this class and to this model of noble behavior is, however, somewhat more complex, since Montaigne was a noble *de robe* anxious, like many of his counterparts, to be seen as a "true" noble, a noble *d'épée*. Rather than being himself a "real" Stoic, or even presenting this version of the noble self as a model to be emulated, it seems more probable that, even in such essays as "Que philosophe c'est apprendre à mourir" (I, 20), and "De la solitude" (I, 39), Montaigne is setting up something of a straw man, a hypothetical entity to be examined and discussed, but not necessarily imitated.² In this essay, I will try to discover just how seriously

Cambridge University Press, 1987); it originally appeared in *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980): pp. 307-31. See also his *Society in Crisis: France in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Ernest Benn 1975).

Arnaldo Momigliano, in his essay "Tacitus and the Tacitist Tradition," links together Tacitus and Seneca in this context [123]: "The popularity of Seneca both as a stylist and as a philosopher was mounting; Neo-Stoicism became the faith of those who had lost patience with theology, if they had not lost faith altogether. The fortunes of Seneca and Tacitus became indissolubly connected towards the end of the sixteenth century." The essay appears as ch. 5 of Momigliano's *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, Sather Classical Lectures, v. 54 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 109-131.

I wish here to thank Natalie Zemon Davis, Alban K. Forcione, Lionel Gossman, François Rigolot, and especially David Quint for their careful readings of and comments upon earlier versions of this essay.

² For a different view, see Gordon Braden's *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition. Anger's Privilege* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), in which he proposes a theatrical model of the aristocratic self based on the Stoic themes and personages of Senecan tragedy. One of Braden's primary assumptions is that neo-Stoic ideology is closely identified, in the Renaissance, with aristocratic ideas of selfhood; he goes on to argue that Montaigne identifies himself more or less unambiguously with the *noblesse d'épée* (see p. 78), and therefore that—despite Montaigne's ambivalence towards Stoicism *per se* (p. 94)—he is situated on a line of development leading to an essentially Stoic kind of *arrière-boutique*, where "the self's ambitions are compromised into a new sense of distant inwardness" (p. 2). I do not feel, as will become apparent, that Montaigne is able or willing to align himself unequivocally with the ideology, neo-Stoic or otherwise, of the true *noblesse d'épée*. Gerhard Oestreich, in his *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), articulates still another viewpoint, namely that neo-Stoic ideologies and attitudes were adopted not so much by the old nobility as by the *noblesse de robe*, court functionaries who wanted, not unlike Montaigne, to cultivate a certain posture of quasi-aristocratic independence. Richard A. Sayce goes even farther, suggesting that this pose of independence is in fact a kind of proto-bourgeois individualism; see his *The Essays of Montaigne. A Critical Exploration* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), pp. 239-40.

Montaigne takes this Catonian ideal, and to suggest how he uses it in his delineation of a practical model of noble identity.

"De la solitude" opens with an ill-humored attack on Ciceronian humanism, with its emphasis on public action, so dear to Erasmus and Italian civic humanists.

Laissons à part cette longue comparaison de la vie solitaire à l'active; et quant à ce beau mot dequoy se couvre l'ambition et l'avarice: Que nous ne sommes pas nez pour nostre particulier, ains pour le publicq, rapportons nous en hardiment à ceux qui sont en la danse; et qu'ils se battent la conscience, si, au rebours, les estats, les charges, et cette tracasserie du monde ne se recherche plutost pour tirer du publicq son profit particulier. Les mauvais moyens par où on s'y pousse en nostre siecle, montrent bien que la fin n'en vaut gueres. Respondons à l'ambition que c'est elle mesme qui nous donne goust de la solitude: car que fuit elle tant que la société?³

If we are to believe this passage, Montaigne seems not to have been seduced by the Republican ideal of the humanist public man. Montaigne associates this ideal and its Ciceronian rhetorical style with the primary theater of political activity in late sixteenth-century France: the court, where "free" republican debate is out of the question. The Ciceronian mode is therefore linked (via the figure of Cicero himself) to courtly self-advancement. Montaigne is not fooled by "l'ambition et l'avarice" masquerading as disinterested civic virtue; he strips away the mask to reveal the truth, which inspires only disgust.

In a world where base self-interest is the sole motor, what is a virtuous man to do? Clearly, the alternatives are limited. "Il faut ou imiter les vitieux, ou les haïr" (I, 39, 238 A). And yet it does not seem possible to flee into the wilderness; one is compelled to live among humanity, repugnant though such a prospect may be. Therefore, given the necessity of living in society with "les vitieux," an inner attitude of complete detachment from and indifference to worldly concerns appears to be the only solution: "Il faut avoir

³ Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), p. 237. All further references to the *Essais* will be to this edition, and will be indicated parenthetically in the text, thus: (I, 39, 237 A).

femmes, enfans, biens, et sur tout de la santé, qui peut; mais non pas s'y attacher en maniere que nostre heur en despende" (I, 39, 241 A).⁴ The true sage can rise above such trivial considerations, finding happiness in the private contemplation of pure virtue, while preparing for death; for, as Montaigne points out in a famous remark from "Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir": "Le but de nostre carriere, c'est la mort, c'est l'object necessaire de nostre visée..." (I, 20, 84 A).⁵ And where does this activity of contemplation and preparation take place?

[A] Il se faut reserver une arriere-boutique toute nostre, toute franche, en laquelle nous establissons nostre vraye liberté et principale retraicte et solitude. En cette-cy faut-il prendre nostre ordinaire entretien de nous à nous mesmes, et si privé que nulle acointance ou communication estrangiere y trouve place; discourir et y rire comme sans femme, sans enfans et sans biens, sans train et sans valetz, afin que, quand l'occasion adviendra de leur perte, il ne nous soit pas nouveau de nous en passer. Nous avons une ame contournable en soy mesme; elle se peut faire compagnie; elle a dequoy assaillir et dequoy defendre, dequoy recevoir et dequoy donner: ne craignons pas en cette solitude nous croupir d'oisiveté ennuyeuse,

⁴ This may be compared to many passages in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, for example VIII, 5: "Hanc ergo sanam ac salubrem formam vitae tenete, ut corpori tantum indulgeatis quantum bonae valetudini satis est. Durius tractandum est ne animo male pareat: cibus famem sedet, potio sitim extinguat, vestis arceat frigus, domus munimentum sit adversus infesta temporis. ...cogitate nihil praeter animum esse mirabile, cui magno nihil magnum est."

It should be recalled that the possibility of ending up "sans femme, sans enfans et sans biens, sans train et sans valetz" was not, for Montaigne as for anyone else in late sixteenth-century France, a mere hypothetical abstraction; the civil wars made such deprivation a very real threat. The Stoic gesture is therefore to some extent practical, and not just philosophical or ideological.

Franz Borkenau neatly sums up the political dilemma of the Stoic: "Das Lebensproblem des Stoikers ist die Haltung des Individuums in der Politik, nur sie. Die Regel ist: äusserlich in ihr stehen, innerlich sich von ihr frei halten." Franz Borkenau, *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild. Studien der Geschichte der Philosophie der Manufakturperiode* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1934; reprint: New York: Arno [series: *European Sociology*], 1975), p. 190.

⁵ Of course Montaigne will radically contradict this thesis elsewhere, particularly in the third book; his most thorough exploration of the issue is to be found in "De l'exercitation" (II, 6).

[B] *in solis sis tibi turba locis.*

[C] La vertu, dict Antisthenes, se contente de soy: sans disciplines, sans paroles, sans effects. (I, 39, 241)⁶

So the stage on which the "vraye liberté" of the sage plays itself out is purely internal, wholly independent of and entirely sealed off from any "communication estrangiere"; the sage's self-sufficient "ame" needs no external stimuli whatsoever, and is both player and audience. It is surely not amiss to begin even here to wonder about the practical viability of this particular kind of solitude, or to become suspicious of the degree to which Montaigne actually believes—or hopes to persuade us that he believes—in the possibility of its realization. This is particularly true when we focus on what is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this self-reflexive theater-in-the-round: its claim to be able to subsist outside of language, "sans paroles". It is tempting to seize upon this as a kind of Rousseau-esque yearning for an unspoiled, prelapsarian universe, in which there exists only pure, unmediated interaction between persons, untainted by the corruptions of language.⁷ Terence Cave and others have pursued the general implications of such a reading of the

⁶ In some ways this seems to out-Seneca Seneca, since even the Roman seems to indicate that his retirement from the world nevertheless benefits that world, by affording him the time to produce the letters that will so edify and improve the lot of humanity. See, once again, letter VIII, 2: "Secessi non tantum ab hominibus sed a rebus, et in primis a meis rebus: posterorum negotium ago. Illis aliqua quae possint prodesse conscribo; salutare admonitiones, velut medicamentorum utilium compositiones, litteris mando..." and later in the same letter (VIII, 6): "Mihi crede, qui nihil agere videntur maiora agunt: humana divinaque simul tractant." Montaigne, as we will see, will roundly criticize just this kind of arrogance and presumption in Cicero and Pliny in "Consideration sur Ciceron" (I, 40), ironically holding up Seneca (along with Plutarch) as a counter-example.

⁷ Indeed, Jean Starobinski, in his *Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), does seem to make of Montaigne a kind of Rousseau *avant la lettre* in this respect, and many of the motifs evident in his reading of the *Essais* echo themes found in his earlier work on Rousseau (*Jean-Jacques Rousseau. La transparence et l'obstacle* [Paris: Plon, 1958]). For another discussion of this point, see Robert D. Cottrell, *Sexuality/Textuality. A Study of the Fabric of Montaigne's 'Essais'* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1981), pp. 104-109.

Essais,⁸ and it would be straightforward to show how, in this particular case, the very language in which this ideal of self-sufficiency is enunciated denies the possibility of its realization.

However, we shall focus instead on something more specific. The word "paroles" in this context means not so much language *per se*, in a global sense, but rather an excess of language, a superfluity of words—especially the wrong kinds of words, words that are misleading, confusing, or outright false. Montaigne's self-proclaimed distaste for rhetorical display and deceptive language⁹ is manifested in several places, such as "De la vanité des paroles" (I, 51), as well as in the essay immediately following "De la solitude," "Consideration sur Cicéron" (I, 40).¹⁰ There, Montaigne discusses at length the form of "parole" appropriate to a person of his station; the backbone of his argument is the famous Senecan dictum (which he cites in a C-text addition, p. 251): *Non est ornamentum virile concinnitas*. While attacking Cicero (with Pliny the Younger as a corollary figure) for his vanity and ambition in life, and for his correspondingly vain and pompous style of writing, he holds up Seneca (and Epicurus) as a model both of Stoic virtue in life and of concision, directness, and plenitude in letters.

...encore ne sont ce pas lettres vuides et descharnées, qui ne se soutiennent que par un delicat chois de mots, entassez et rangez à une juste cadence, ains farcies et pleines de beaux discours de sapience, par lesquelles on se rend non plus eloquent, mais plus sage, et qui nous apprennent non à bien dire, mais à bien faire. Fy de l'eloquence qui nous laisse envie de soy, non des choses; si ce

⁸ Terence Christopher Cave, *The Cornucopian Text. Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), part II, ch. 4: "Montaigne," pp. 271-321.

⁹ This is of course a familiar *topos* in the Renaissance; we are reminded, for instance, of the «Prologue» to Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*.

¹⁰ On Montaigne's attitudes, mistrustful and otherwise, with regard to rhetoric, see Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne* (Bern: A. Francke, 1949. 2nd ed. 1967), pp. 85-87; Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Destruction/Découverte. Le Fonctionnement de la rhétorique dans les «Essais» de Montaigne* (Lexington: French Forum, 1980); Edwin M. Duval, "Rhetorical Composition and 'Open Form' in Montaigne's Early *Essais*," in *BHR*, XLIII, 1981: pp. 269-287; and Gérard Defaux, *Marot, Rabelais, Montaigne: l'écriture comme présence* (Paris et Genève: Champion-Slatkine, 1987), especially ch. iv, "La présence recouverte: Montaigne et la peinture du Moi."

n'est qu'on die que celle de Cicero, estant en si extreme perfection, se donne corps elle mesme. (I, 40, 252 A)¹¹

For Montaigne, there is a close correlation between character and language; even if he does not completely subscribe, as Gérard Defaux claims, to the Erasmian view that "[h]abet animus faciem quamdam suam in oratione velut in speculo relucentem,"¹² at least he is willing to accept its utility on a provisional basis; for, as he remarks in "Des menteurs": "Nous ne sommes hommes, et ne nous tenons les uns aux autres que par la parole" (I, 9, 36 B).¹³ If one's

¹¹ The typically Montaignian tag at the end of the paragraph undercuts his argument at its most vehement, which should make us wonder even more just how far Montaigne is really committed to it. In some of the later additions to the *Essais* Montaigne goes even further, on occasion beginning to sound almost Ciceronian himself.

¹² Erasmus, *Ciceronianus* LB I, 1022 B; cited by Defaux, p. 204. Defaux, reading Plato's *Phaedrus* via Erasmus (rather than, he says, through Nietzsche, as certain modern critics have done), divides language, whether written or spoken, into categories of good (reliable) and bad (unreliable), and makes the anti-Derridean argument that there can be—through an Augustinian leap of faith—a direct connection between the former category and some form of supralinguistic truth. "Il s'agit donc moins pour Montaigne, on le voit, d'une opposition entre l'authenticité du dit et l'artificialité de l'écrit que d'une méditation, d'ailleurs tout à fait canonique, sur la bonne façon de parler ou d'écrire" (206). I do not think that Montaigne goes as far in this direction as Defaux claims. It seems more accurate to say that, while Montaigne is willing to distinguish between good and bad uses of language, he nevertheless maintains a clear separation between language—good, bad, or indifferent—and non-language, as expressed in the opening to "De la gloire": "Il y a le nom et la chose: le nom, c'est une voix qui remerque et signifie la chose; le nom, ce n'est pas une partie de la chose ny de la substance, c'est une piece estrangere jointe à la chose, et hors d'elle" (II, 16, 618 A). See the following footnote. Defaux pp. 202-07; see also an earlier version of the same argument: "Montaigne, Erasme, Platon, Derrida: l'écriture comme présence," in *Rivista di Letterature moderne e comparate*, vol. XXXVIII, fasc. 4 (ott.-dic. 1985): pp. 325-43.

¹³ This is, despite its apparent simplicity, an especially tricky phrase. "Parole" here has multiple meanings; in the more general sense (and the one in connection with which this passage is most often cited, not without doing some violence to the context), it may be read to mean the word as communication, language as the (only) medium of interchange between persons. Hence it could mean, for Cave, that we are wholly dependent on language, since nothing can be shown to exist outside of it; or it could mean, for Defaux, that we must place our faith in the imperfect medium of language, while remembering that there exists a supralinguistic higher essence of which that language is only a reflection. But it must be remembered that the specific sense generated by the context of the essay remains active; at this point in "Des

verbal style gives the reader or hearer indications as to one's personal *stile*, then Ciceronian rhetoric, more interested in its own beauty and persuasive power than in conveying solid truth as simply as possible, clearly indicates that its user is not to be trusted; his *parole* is, in every sense, unreliable. In "Des menteurs," as well as in "De l'institution des enfans," from which the following citation is taken, Montaigne associates this type of *parler* with a particular group of people, and a particular sphere of activity, namely the court; and he sees such corruption of language as an inevitable consequence of being a *courtisan*:

Un courtisan ne peut avoir ny loi ni volonté de dire et penser que favorablement d'un maistre qui, parmi tant de milliers d'autres subjects, l'a choisi pour le nourrir et eslever de sa main. Cette faveur et utilité corrompent non sans quelque raison sa franchise, et l'esblouissent. Pourtant void on coustumierement le langage de ces gens-là divers à tout autre langage d'un estat, et de peu de foy en telle matiere. (I, 26, 155 C)

The *parole* of the courtier is here shown to be unreliable not only because it conceals "l'ambition et l'avarice," but also because it involves a sacrifice of independence and *franchise* (that very *franchise* which is the essential defining quality of the *arriere-boutique*), a sacrifice entailing in turn a loss of the ability to speak freely. It is not just that the courtier cannot speak his own mind; he is no longer able even to speak the same language as the rest of us. Instead, he speaks a language of deception, dissimulation, and

menteurs," "parole" means "the word/language that is not misleading," "word (of honor)," etc. It is this latter meaning that has a more direct bearing on our argument, as will become apparent. The more general sense is operative in the following passage from "Du démentir": "Nostre intelligence [commerce] se conduisant par la seule voye de la parole, celui qui la fauce, trahit la société publique. C'est le seul util par le moien duquel se communiquent nos volontez et nos pensées, c'est le truchement de nostre ame: s'il nous faut, nous ne nous tenons plus, nous ne nous entreconnoissons plus. S'il nous trompe, il rompt tout nostre commerce et dissout toutes les liaisons de nostre police" (II, 18, 666-67 A). Even here, however, Montaigne makes no metaphysical claims for the power of *la parole*; on the contrary, he strictly limits its application to the realm of the practical. While human society depends on the trustworthiness of our *parole*, it remains a "util," not a philosophical abstraction; whether or not it represents some transcendent truth is irrelevant.

concealment, a language which, says Montaigne in "Des menteurs," is worse than no language at all:

Un ancien pere dit que nous sommes mieux en la compagnie d'un chien cognu qu'en celle d'un homme duquel le langage nous est inconnu. «Ut externus alieno non sit hominis vice.» Et de combien est le langage faux moins sociable que le silence. (I, 9, 37 B)

Earlier in the same passage, Montaigne remarks scornfully on "ceux qui font profession de ne former autrement leur parole, que selon qu'il sert aux affaires qu'ils negotient, et qu'il plaist aux grands à qui ils parlent" (I, 9, 36 B). Montaigne tells us, in "De la præsumption," that nothing is more repugnant to a noble soul (in this case, his own):

[A] Plustost lairris je rompre le col aux affaires que de tordre ma foy pour leur service. Car, quant à cette nouvelle vertu de faintise et de dissimulation qui est à cet heure si fort en credit, je la hay capitallement; et, de tous les vices, je n'en trouve aucun qui tesmoigne tant de lâcheté et bassesse de coeur. C'est un' humeur couarde et servile de s'aller desguiser et cacher sous un masque, et de n'oser se faire veoir tel qu'on est. Par là nos hommes se dressent à la perfidie: [B] estants duiets à produire des parolles fauces, ils ne font pas conscience d'y manquer. [A] Un coeur genereux ne doit desmentir ses pensées; il se veut faire voir jusques au dedans. [C] Ou tout y est bon, ou au moins tout y est humein.

Aristote estime office de magnanimité hayr et aimer à descouvert, juger, parler avec toute franchise, et, au prix de la verité, ne faire cas de l'approbation ou reprobation d'autrui.

[A] Apollonius disoit que c'estoit aux serfs de mantir, et aux libres de dire verité. (II, 17, 647)

Liberté, franchise, magnanimité, générosité; and their inverses, *servilité, bassesse, lâcheté, couardise*; all the code-words are there. Montaigne is enunciating—and carefully aligning himself with—an ideal of the *noblesse d'épée*, combining features of the feudal model with quasi-stoic elements appropriate to the new, incipiently disenfranchised situation of sixteenth-century nobility. His reference to "cette nouvelle vertu de faintise et de dissimulation" also links him to a degree with the contemporary current of anti-Machiavellian

thought, as exemplified in such works as the *Discours sur les moyens de bien gouverner* (popularly known as the *Anti-Machiavel*) of Innocent Gentillet (1576). However, Montaigne has too much respect for the Florentine to lend himself wholeheartedly to such polemics; later in the same essay, while discussing the unprovability of political arguments in general, he remarks:

Les discours de Machiavel, pour exemple, estoient assez solides pour le subject, si y a-il eu grand aisance à les combattre; et ceux qui l'ont fait, n'ont pas laissé moins de facilité à combatre les leurs. (II, 17, 655 A)

Before discussing in more detail Montaigne's exact relationship to this class ideal, however, let us pursue further his view of language.

Despite the great danger posed to the "free" individual by participation in the world of affairs, Montaigne does not intend that his wise man, in rejecting the deceptions of courtly discourse, should entirely abandon the cultivated use of language. The sage, too, has his characteristic discursive style; his language is as sound and authentic as his actions are disinterested and virtuous. Montaigne describes this mode of using language, whether written or performed, in "De l'institution des enfans":

[A] Le parler que j'ayme, c'est un parler simple et naif, tel sur le papier qu'à la bouche; un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serré, [C] non tant delicat et peigné comme vehement et brusque:

Haec demum sapiet dictio, quae feriet,

[A] plutost difficile qu'ennuieux, esloigné d'affectation, desreglé, descousu et hardy: chaque lopin y face son corps; non pedantesque, non fratesque, non pleideresque, mais plutost soldatesque, comme Suetone appelle celuy de Julius Caesar; [C] et si sens pas bien pour quoy il l'en appelle. (I, 26, 171-72)¹⁴

¹⁴ Space does not permit us to discuss the C-text twist at the end of this paragraph. Antoine Compagnon, in a useful article, examines Montaigne's use of this quasi-aphoristic style, showing (as we will try to do) that the reader of the *Essais* should not be fooled by Montaigne's Senecan posturing into making of him purely an author of aphorisms; Montaigne's style, he argues, is in fact a Socratic balance of the compressed and the extended, the brief and the sustained, and it is the tension between these two discursive modes, governed by the first-person authorial

The practitioners of this style are not courtiers but "real men," whose unconstrained words are at one with their heroic deeds; and Montaigne is extremely eager to be counted as one of their number.¹⁵ An important part of doing so is demonstrating that he is not really a writer, since such activity is beneath the dignity of a true gentleman. We have already seen how, in "Consideration sur Cicéron," he roundly criticizes Cicero and Pliny not only for their excessive focus on matters of style but also for their unseemly eagerness to be known as men of letters; he uses the examples of Scipio and Laelius to show that "la perfection du bien parler" does *not* "apporter quelque gloire sortable à un grand personnage" (I, 40, 249-50 A), and goes on to point out that "[c]'est une espece de mocquerie et d'injure de vouloir faire valoir un homme par des qualitez mes-advenantes à son rang..." (I, 40, 250 A).¹⁶ In fact, he says, being known as a writer is so

voice, that gives the *Essays* their organic unity. Our argument will follow a similar critical trajectory, while attempting to show that these stylistic choices, rather than existing in a vacuum, are closely linked to specific political and ideological positions. See Compagnon, "A Long Short Story: Montaigne's Brevity," in *Montaigne: Essays in Reading*, ed. Gérard Defaux (*Yale French Studies* 64 [1983]): pp. 24-50, especially pp. 34-37, where he discusses this passage from "De l'institution des enfans."

¹⁵ For another discussion of the connection between Montaigne's choice of linguistic style and his desire to be associated with a particular system of values, see Cottrell, *op. cit.* Cottrell highlights the sexual vocabulary and metaphors used by Montaigne to describe a "masculine" ethical stance of "vigor and valor" (p. 15), pointing out that "Montaigne ascribes to masculinity all the virtues ordinarily identified with Stoicism—virtues that imply, of course, unrelenting tension and rigidity" (p. 7). He then discusses how Montaigne moves from positive approbation of this kind of moral virtue to a more equivocal view, showing that Montaigne simultaneously "undermines the value of such behavior" (p. 15) and associates himself with its opposite, a kind of quasi-feminine laxity or *mollesse*, both linguistically and philosophically (pp. 22-23, 39ff.). However, Cottrell's psychoanalytic reading does not address, as we hope to do, the issues of class and historical context.

¹⁶ This is linked to a larger concept of the nobleman-as-dilettante, of which one of the earliest and most influential expressions is naturally to be found in Castiglione's discussion of *sprezzatura*, and which is set forth in Montaigne especially in "De l'institution des enfans." Montaigne's claims to poor memory, inability to be polite in a courtly context, and all-round ineptitude are all part of this package—this despite Montaigne's professed distaste for Castiglione and his ideas of courtly behavior (see, for example, "De la gloire" (II, 16), p. 622). Many critics have commented on Montaigne's studied claims to ineptitude; see, for example, Erich

embarrassing to a man of quality that some persons of his acquaintance will do almost anything to avoid it:

J'ay veu de mon temps, en plus fortes termes, des personnages qui tiroient d'escrire et leurs titres et leur vocation desadvoüer leur apprentissage, corrompre leur plume et affecter l'ignorance de qualité si vulgaire et que nostre peuple tient ne se rencontrer guere en mains sçavantes: se recommandant par meilleures qualitez. (I, 40, 250 C)

Montaigne is himself very eager indeed to avoid the label of "escrivain"; far more important, he says in "De la ressemblance des enfans aux peres," is to be known as someone who *acts*:

Quel que je soye, je le veux estre ailleurs qu'en papier. Mon art et mon industrie ont esté employez à me faire valoir moy-mesme; mes estudes, à m'apprendre à faire, non pas à escrire. Voylà mon mestier et mon ouvrage. J'ay mis tous mes efforts à former ma vie. Je suis moins faiseur de livres que de nulle autre besoigne. (II, 37, 784 A)¹⁷

However, since he is, after all, still writing, he goes to even greater lengths to show (again, in "Consideration sur Ciceron") that his own style is as close as possible to that appropriate to the "real man." First, a disclaimer to show that he really doesn't even want to discuss the question of style:

Je sçay bien, quand j'oy quelqu'un qui s'arreste au langage des Essais, que j'aïmeroye mieux qu'il s'en teust. Ce n'est pas tant eslever les mots, comme c'est deprimer le sens, d'autant plus picquamment que plus obliquement. (I, 40, 251 C)

Auerbach's famous essay, "L'Humaine Condition," ch. 12 of *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 285-311, especially pp. 298, 306-08; Friedrich, pp. 36, 87-88; and Sayce, pp. 282-84.

¹⁷ Read in this context, this statement sounds almost like testimony before a Congressional committee ("Are you now, or have you ever been...?"); and it seems less a philosophical reappropriation of "good" language (Defaux, p. 206) than a practical and political statement. See *supra*, n. 12.

Having thus insulated himself (he hopes) from the kinds of attacks he himself has aimed at Cicero, he goes on to describe, not without immodesty, his own style, both literary and otherwise, carefully aligning it with the Senecan model he has just discussed and praised (in the passage on "lettres vuides et descharnées" cited above). He first mentions, via an uncharacteristically maladroit use of a form of disclaimer familiar to all readers of Renaissance texts, that his own letter-writing abilities are not far inferior to those of, say, Seneca: "Sur ce subject de lettres, je veux dire ce mot, que c'est un ouvrage auquel mes amys tiennent que je puis quelque chose" (I, 40, 252 B). He then continues:

J'ay naturellement un stile comique et privé, mais c'est d'une forme mienne, inepte aux negotiations publiques, comme en toutes façons est mon langage: trop serré, desordonné, couppé, particulier; et ne m'entens pas en lettres ceremonieuses, qui n'ont autre substance que d'une belle enfileure des paroles courtoises. Je n'ay ny la faculté ny le goust de ces longues offres d'affection et de service. Je n'en crois tant, et me desplaist d'en dire guiere outre ce que j'en crois. C'est bien loing de l'usage present: car il ne fut jamais si abjecte et servile prostitution de presentations; la vie, l'ame, devotion, adoration, serf, esclave, tous ces mots, y courent si vulgairement que, quand ils veulent faire sentir une plus expresse volonté et plus respectueuse, ils n'ont plus de maniere pour l'exprimer.

Je hay à mort de sentir au flateur: qui faict que je me jette naturellement à un parler sec, rond et cru qui tire, à qui ne me cognoit d'ailleurs, un peu vers le dedaigneux. [C] J'honore le plus ceux que j'honore le moins; et, où mon ame marche d'une grande allegresse, j'oublie les pas de la contenance. [B] Et m'offre maigrement et fierement à ceux à qui je suis. [C] Et me presente moins à qui je me suis le plus donné: [B] il me semble qu'ils le doivent lire en mon coeur, et que l'expression de mes paroles fait tort à ma conception.

[C] A bienviennier, à prendre congé, à remercier, à salüer, à presenter mon service, et tels complimens verbeux des loix ceremonieuses de nostre civilité, je ne cognois personne si sottement sterile de langage que moy. (I, 40, 252-53)

This long and important passage brings together many of the critical issues we have thus far discussed. Montaigne begins with a focus on literary style, but the focus quickly expands to take in the spoken word and the theater in which it is deployed. If we find it impossible to separate the written and the spoken, the inscribed and the performed, it merely illustrates the intimate connection between the two in Montaigne's discursive universe.¹⁸ Literary style and "personal style" are, for Montaigne, one and the same.

As self-evident as this point may seem, it is worth emphasizing, because it has extremely significant ramifications. Montaigne expands the role of language beyond the literary to the social. Language becomes a means not only of communication, of conveying information, but also of defining and revealing social identity. The *franc parler* of Montaigne's hypothetical nobleman defines a class, limiting its membership to "real men" in the sense discussed above, and excluding those whose *parole* does not measure up. It functions as a kind of veil, through which only the initiated may pass; those who are unable to "lire dans [son] coeur," penetrating behind his allegedly inadequate and sterile language, are rigorously excluded. This claim of linguistic inadequacy seems something of a paradox, since the language of the true nobleman is also supposed to be a language of plenitude and transparency. The solution lies in the exact location of that inadequacy; it is a language which is inadequate only and precisely where the language of the court proliferates most overwhelmingly, in the public display of "lettres ceremonieuses," "presentations," and so forth.¹⁹ Likewise,

¹⁸ This is hardly surprising when we consider that, in "De l'institution des enfans," Montaigne, after counseling the young proto-noble to take his instruction in behavior not from the study of books but rather from "le commerce des hommes," goes on to clarify just which "hommes" he has in mind: "En cette pratique des hommes, j'entends y comprendre, et principalement, ceux qui ne vivent qu'en la memoire des livres" (I, 26, 156 A).

¹⁹ At the end of the essay, Montaigne discusses his letter-writing habits, and deplors the necessity of affixing not only the *formules de politesse*, "ces longues harengues, offres et prieres," but also "une legende de qualitez et tiltres," honorifics and titles which cannot be omitted or wrongly formulated without offending the honor of the addressee. He links this proliferation and consequent debasement of language to the inflation in the economy of nobility: "Tant d'innovations d'offices, une si difficile dispensation et ordonnance de divers noms d'honneur...si cherement achepitez..." (I, 40, 253-254 B)

the language of the true nobleman is perfectly transparent to those not blinded by the smokescreen of courtly discourse, whose prolixity acts as an opaque barrier concealing its own emptiness. This verbal over-luxuriance and opacity is the locus of true linguistic sterility; when the *courtisan* wants to express something real and true, to go beyond his hyperbolic *formules de politesse*, he finds himself without a language corresponding to his thoughts. His vocabulary and credibility, linguistic and social, are exhausted. The language of the private sphere, of the *arriere-boutique*, is the revealer of the true self, the carrier of truth; public language, the language of the theater of the court, can produce only an endlessly self-replicating duplicity.

Throughout this passage, Montaigne strives mightily to distance himself as greatly as possible from the language and persona of the *courtisan*. One strategy he adopts, both here and elsewhere, is a kind of temporal separation. He often associates himself with his favorite figures from antiquity, "ceux qui ne vivent qu'en la memoire des livres," as we have seen him do in comparing himself to Seneca and Epicurus; the implication, of course, is that he (or at least his language) is too noble for such corrupt times as these. He is also fond of situating himself in another historical period, chronologically closer to his own time, but equally remote, in a discursive sense, from the age of the courtier (and indeed from any historical reality that ever existed—a point to which we will return): the "good old days" of the old nobility, when men were men, and discourse was still untainted by the nefarious influence of the Italians. The discursive style of this period, a style with which Montaigne is careful to identify his own, is, we are told, "bien loing de l'usage present". In "De la præsumption," Montaigne reinforces this point, reemphasizing his own unsuitability for the courtly life in particular, and late sixteenth-century France in general:

Les qualitez mesmes qui sont en moy non reprochables, je les trouvois inutiles en ce siecle. La facilité de mes meurs, on l'eut nommée lâcheté et foiblesse; la foy et la conscience s'y feussent trouvées scrupuleuses et superstitieuses; la franchise et la liberté,

See François Rigolot's discussion of this theme, in connection with "De la gloire," in terms of the "false currency" of what he refers to as the "monde inflationniste et pervers des affaires publiques." Rigolot, *Les métamorphoses de Montaigne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), p. 57.

importune, inconsiderée et temeraire. A quelque chose sert le malheur. Il fait bon naistre en un siecle fort depravé; car, par comparaison d'autrui, vous estes estimé vertueux à bon marché. Qui n'est que parricide en nos jours, et sacrilege, il est homme de bien et d'honneur... (II, 17, 646 A)

Not only these otherwise unexceptionable virtues but also Montaigne's seemingly unconscious pridefulness in laying claim to them are coded links to an old-nobility, *épée* ideology. Montaigne is, on one level, simply complaining about the barbarousness and corruption of his times; but he is also articulating a specific political position, associated with a particular class to which he is eager to be seen to belong.²⁰

That he does not come by this position as naturally as he would have us believe is also apparent in the densely packed passage from "Consideration sur Ciceron". He remarks rather emphatically that he dislikes being perceived as participating in the discourse of the court; therefore, he says, "...je me jette naturellement à un parler sec, rond et cru qui tire, à qui ne me cognoit d'ailleurs, un peu vers le dedaigneux" (I, 40, 253 B). This *dédain*²¹ is meant to be part and parcel of the rude honesty of the true nobleman; and in "De la præsumption," Montaigne expends considerable energy demonstrating that he comes by this quality honestly, naturally, and unconsciously.

Il me souvient donc que, des ma plus tendre enfance, on remarquoit en moy je ne scay quel port de corps et des gestes tesmoignants quelque vaine et sottte fierté. J'en veux dire

²⁰ For a discussion of this phenomenon as typical of the later sixteenth century in France, see George Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes. An Essay on the Definition of Elites in Renaissance France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). In his discussion of this point, Huppert seems to take for granted the legitimacy of Montaigne's self-proclaimed connection to this class; however, it seems more prudent, while noting Montaigne's interest in *appearing* to belong to that class, not to take at face value the claim that he actually does belong to it. Cf. Huppert, p. 90.

²¹ This is almost identical to *sprezzatura*, which likewise means scorn or disdain; but Montaigne adds to it a dimension of *rudesse*, in keeping with the quasi-martial tone he wishes to set for his French nobleman, which does not seem quite in accord with the *grazia* associated with Castiglione's courtier. On this, see Compagnon, "A Long Short Story," p. 39.

premierement cecy, qu'il n'est pas inconvenient d'avoir des conditions et des propensions si propres et si incorporées en nous, que nous n'ayons pas moyen de les sentir et reconnoistre. Et de telles inclinations naturelles, le corps en retient volontiers quelque pli sans nostre sçeu et consentement. (II, 17, 632-33 A)

Later in the same essay, he links this allegedly genetic quality to his public behavior, claiming for himself—in phraseology with which we are by now familiar—the qualities of *liberté* and *franchise* we have been discussing, and insisting that these qualities force him (and/or give him license) to speak the (truth-bearing) language of the private sphere, the *arriere-boutique*, even in public:

[A] Or, de moy, j'ayme mieux estre importun et indiscret que flateur et dissimulé.

[B] J'advoue qu'il se peut mesler quelque pointe de fierté et d'opiniastreté à se tenir ainsin entier et descouvert sans consideration d'autruy; et me semble que je deviens un peu plus libre où il le faudroit moins estre, et que je m'eschaufe par l'opposition du respect. Il peut estre aussi que je me laisse aller apres ma nature, à faute d'art. Presentant aux grands cette mesme licence de langue et de contenance que j'apporte de ma maison, je sens combien elle decline vers l'indiscretion et incivilité. Mais, outre ce que je suis ainsi faict, je n'ay pas l'esprit assez souple pour gauchir à une prompte demande et pour en eschaper par quelque destour, ny pour feindre une verité, ny assez de memoire pour la retenir ainsi feinte, ny certes assez de asseurance pour la maintenir; et fois le brave par foiblesse. Parquoy je m'abandonne à la nayfveté et à tousjours dire ce que je pense, et par complexion, et par discours, laissant à la fortune d'en conduire l'evenement.

[C] Aristippus disoit le principal fruit qu'il eut tiré de la philosophie, estre qu'il parloit librement et ouvertement à chacun. (II, 17, 649)²²

²² Note that the C-text addition essentially pulls the rug from under Montaigne's original argument, by suggesting that it is careful study and self-cultivation ("la philosophie") that confers upon one the capacity for free and open speech.

However, if we return to the passage from "Consideration sur Ciceron" with which we began this discussion, and look more closely at the language he uses to describe his "natural" inclinations, we find a curious twist: "...je me jette naturellement à un parler sec...", he claims; but it is difficult to see how it is possible to *throw* oneself into a particular mode of behavior in a "natural" (spontaneous, unforced, unconscious, instinctual, automatic) way. This peculiar tension between verb and adverb is reinforced by his remark that he un/consciously chooses/hurls himself into this mode of behavior precisely *because* of his distaste for being perceived as a courtier. If his "parler sec" were as natural and unforced as he claims, surely such external stimuli would be superfluous. Indeed, it is because he is eager to appear to be a non-courtier that he adopts this "natural" mode of behavior. In other words, his protestations against the posturing artificiality of courtly discourse are themselves a pose, and his "nayfveté" resembles not so much *la nature* as the studied *sprezzatura* of Castiglione.²³

A critical and revealing moment in the *Essais*, one at which this contradiction comes most sharply into focus, is found in "Des récompenses d'honneur" (II, 7). Recall that one of Montaigne's favorite tactics for dissociating himself from courtly discourse is that of temporal separation, through identification either with a fictive version of ancient Rome or with a semi-mythical, quasi-feudal *noblesse d'épée*. In "Des récompenses d'honneur," Montaigne explicitly associates these two imaginary ages with one another precisely when he also gives his most categorically stated definition of nobility:

Mais il est digne d'estre considéré que nostre nation donne à la vaillance le premier degré des vertus, comme son nom montre, qui vient de valeur; et que, à notre usage, quand nous disons un homme qui vaut beaucoup, ou un homme de bien, au stile de nostre

²³ This contradiction is of course already at the heart of Castiglione's notion of the courtier; see the entire discussion of *sprezzatura* itself (I, xxvi), as well as the famous problem of the "occulto seme" (I, xiv), which raises, but does not answer, the question: is nobility genetic, or can it be learned? Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Ettore Bonora and Paolo Zoccola (Milano: Mursia, 1972, 1984), pp. 47ff., and 61ff. On the relationship between Montaigne and Castiglione, see Marcel Tetel, "The Humanistic Situation: Montaigne and Castiglione," in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. X, no. 3 (Fall 1979): pp. 69-84.

court et de nostre noblesse, ce n'est à dire autre chose qu'un vaillant homme, d'une façon pareille à la Romaine. Car la generale appellation de vertu prend chez eux etymologie de la force. La forme propre, et seule, et essentielle, de noblesse en France, c'est la vacation militaire. (II, 7, 384 A)

This passage has a strangely hollow ring to it, quite aside from the shakiness of its etymological argument. Montaigne's oddly dogmatic tone, combined with his formulaic assertions, gives one the sense that Montaigne is enunciating, not ideas that he has thought out for himself, but rather clichés he feels obligated to parade before the reader as part of an effort to consolidate his own identification with the class in question.²⁴ Montaigne emphasizes "la vacation militaire" not because he himself is a great warrior—indeed, he himself makes no direct claims on this score, and after all his primary interests and talents lie elsewhere—but because it is the mode of life most diametrically opposed to that of the court.²⁵ The odd formulation "au stile de nostre court et de nostre noblesse" contains a peculiar tension; note that the two terms are presented separately, and not simply assumed to be identical. Does this mean that some at least of the *noblesse* (*d'épée*, presumably) exist outside the court—and, more importantly, that perhaps some of the denizens of the court of Henri III are not (the right kind of) noble? (Recall also that, in his discussion (cited above) of the "parler...soldatesque" in I, 26, Montaigne manifests greater interest in adopting the language of the soldier than in actually performing the activities proper to such

²⁴ Braden seems to accept the identification of Montaigne with the *noblesse d'épée* when he discusses this passage, and seems to feel that Montaigne's insistent tone may be ascribed to a resistance on his part to threats to the status of the *noblesse d'épée* as a warrior class (78): "Montaigne...does not yet assent to such a basic redefinition of his class, but its imminence clearly affects him."

²⁵ Ironically, the language he uses closely echoes that of Castiglione, whose Ludovico da Canossa states that "la principale e vera profession del cortegiano debba esser quella dell'arme"; but Montaigne's emphasis is quite different, and (deliberately?) considerably less sophisticated. Castiglione enunciates the cliché, but immediately goes on to say that the reason for being a warrior is to make oneself look good; he is, after all, talking specifically about the courtier, and therefore does not waste time talking about racial history or national character. Montaigne, on the other hand, seems unwilling to ironize the idea as explicitly, at least at the moment he utters it; he seems to hope that if he shouts loudly enough, nobody will ask too many questions. See Castiglione, I, xvii, p. 51.

persons.) That Montaigne himself is hardly convinced of the soundness or veracity of his hyperbolic assertion about the "forme" of French nobility becomes even more evident when we recall that, only slightly earlier in the same essay, he points out that martial valor is actually within the reach of anyone, even the common people, and has in fact become almost "vulgaire: comme il est tres-aysé à voir par l'experience que nous en donnent nos guerres civiles" (II, 7, 383 A).²⁶

It seems clear, then, that Montaigne's model of the nobleman as the man who is literally of his *parole*, who does not hide behind masks or *visages* not his own, who performs no role other than that of his "true self," is an untenable myth; and it seems equally clear that Montaigne's effort to identify himself with this nonexistent class of beings is itself a performance, a mystification, an attempt not at revealing his "true self" (despite his innumerable protestations to the contrary) but at persuading his reader/audience that he is other than what he is. We are therefore forced to ask the following questions: first, given that he is not the kind of *noble d'épée* he has tried to describe (both because he is not and because the existence of any class conforming to his description is highly problematic), why does he spend so much time constructing this artificial identity, and then trying to perform for us in such a way as to convince us that the identity is his own? Second, if he is not what he says he is, then what is he? What alternate identities are available to him, and to us? In what follows we will try to show that Montaigne recognizes the difficulties and contradictions inherent in his model of the neo-Stoic nobleman, and that—far from simply abandoning it as untenable—he embraces its irreality as a rhetorical and theatrical device, using its purely hypothetical status as a kind of Archimedean standing-place from which to move his own political world. The irony developed as he refines and sophisticates his performance of self becomes a powerful tool to be used in the process of constructing Michel de Montaigne.

Let us first address the question of why Montaigne seems compelled, at least in some instances, to adopt this role, and/or to promulgate its propaganda line. Friedrich says that some of his

²⁶ This is of course a point that Montaigne will make in considerably greater detail later on, notably in "De l'experience" (III, 13).

"Adelsprätension" may have been due to simple vanity, but goes on to suggest that Montaigne may have wished to persuade his readers of the validity of his own noble background in order to enhance the credibility (to non-nobles *d'épée*) and effectiveness (to nobles *d'épée*) of his project of improving the image (and quality) of contemporary French nobility, which suffered from a not-entirely-undeserved reputation for illiteracy and uncultured barbarousness. He points out that Montaigne, even though he was eager to belong to the *noblesse d'épée*, nevertheless was put off by their violence and anti-intellectualism.²⁷ It may also have been something of a moral stance; perhaps Montaigne felt that such a position enabled him to hold—still within the universe of political reality—the moral high ground, to retain political power and status along with a degree of independence, without seeming to cave in to the corrupting influences of the age. Or, more simply, it may be linked to his pragmatic conservatism; confronted with the chaotic political and social situation of France in the 1560's and 1570's, it might seem natural for someone with Montaigne's horror of change and instability to take refuge in an ideology of rigor and stasis. However, this is not what Montaigne actually does in his political life; far from being (or playing the role of) an isolated country nobleman, shut up on his estate and avoiding or resisting external authority, Montaigne takes an active part in the national and local politics of his day, even after his professed "retirement" from the world. Furthermore, in the course of this activity he shows himself not to be a hard-liner of any kind, Ligueur or Huguenot; instead, he is a *politique*, an experienced courtier whose judicious adaptability earns him the respect of both sides, as for example when he acts as mediator in a dispute between Henri III and the future Henri IV. If anything, Montaigne is repelled by inflexibility and extremism.²⁸ Why, then, does Montaigne bother to articulate this pose of quasi-Stoic detachment, if he feels so little compelled to act according to its precepts? It may indeed be a persuasive strategy, as Friedrich suggests, but perhaps not in the sense that Friedrich has in mind. It may be that Montaigne's efforts to present the old-noble pose in a convincing manner may be meant to

²⁷ Friedrich, pp. 16-18.

²⁸ See, for example, his extended discussion of the topic in "De mesnager sa volonté" (III, 10).

demonstrate the importance of being able to play a role effectively, even when nobody, including the actor, really believes in the actor's identity with that role. Montaigne works very hard at his performance, not necessarily because he believes in it, but because it is necessary to be able to perform effectively, should the occasion arise; what counts is the appearance. The ability to play a role effectively is critical to his *real* project.

To see how Montaigne makes his way from the Stoic nobleman to the nobleman-as-actor, let us examine the distance that Montaigne places between himself and this Stoic role even as he enunciates it. He establishes this distance in two ways: by undermining the "true" Stoic position, and by claiming that he himself is not suited to its demands. With regard to the first of these tactics, it is worth recalling that, as we have already observed, Montaigne's so-called switch to an anti-Stoic line in the later layers of his text is less a radical repudiation of earlier attitudes than a refinement or sophistication of a previously existing position. That this is the case may be seen if we examine two versions of Montaigne's famous comparison between Seneca, held up as the Voice of Stoicism, and another of Montaigne's favorite edifying authors, Plutarch, who seems to represent something very different. We have seen how Seneca functions as a crucial model for the Stoic nobleman, both literarily and practically; and yet Montaigne is not unaware of the irony inherent in this choice of exemplar. In this passage from "Des livres" (II, 10), Seneca comes off sounding not like a Stoic sage speaking from the moral safety of his *arriere-boutique*, but rather suspiciously like a courtier:

[A] Plutarque est plus uniforme et constant; Seneque, plus ondoyant et divers. Cettuy-cy se peine, se roidit et se tend pour armer la vertu contre la foiblesse, la crainte, et les vitieux appetis; l'autre semble n'estimer pas tant leur effort, et desdaigner d'en haster son pas et se mettre sur sa targue. Plutarque a des opinions Platoniques, douces et accomodables à la société civile; l'autre les a Stoïques et Epicuriennes, plus esloignées de l'usage commun mais, selon moy, plus commodes [C] en particulier [A] et plus fermes. Il paroît en Seneque qu'il preste un peu à la tyrannie des Empereurs de son temps, car je tiens pour certain que c'est d'un jugement forcé qu'il condamne la cause de ces genereux meurtriers de Caesar; Plutarque est libre par tout. Seneque est plein de pointes et saillies; Plutarque, de choses. Celuy-là vous eschauffe plus, et

vous esmeut; cettuy-cy vous contente davantage et vous paye mieux. [B] Il nous guide, l'autre nous pousse. (II, 10, 413)

To begin with, there is the peculiar opening sentence, which ascribes to Plutarch the quality we would expect to be most Senecan (that is, if we take Seneca at his word), namely "constancy"; and Seneca is described, oddly (but, as it turns out as we read farther, accurately), as "ondoyant et divers". Montaigne conjures up an image of Seneca rushing about loudly proclaiming his inflexibility and toughness to all and sundry—but adapting his message according to his audience of the moment. Moreover, it seems that even Seneca does not enjoy complete *franchise*; his ability to speak freely and openly is hampered, and his credibility damaged, by his complicity in the tyrannies of Nero. Finally, his writings are not quite as "farcies et pleines de beaux discours de sapience" as one might wish; they too have their stylistic preoccupations, their self-conscious "pointes et saillies" which may obscure the *matière*. Seneca's arm-waving gives him away; his persona is revealed to be not an unforced expression of his true inner self, but a consciously willed performance.

That this comparison with Plutarch occurs not in a C-text portion of one of the essays of the third book but in an essay from the first two books, and in the A-text at that, indicates to us that even prior to 1580 Montaigne is aware of—and uncomfortable with—the contradictions and inconsistencies at the heart of a hard-line Stoic position. By the time this comparison is taken up again in "De la phisionomie" (III, 12), while it is still presented in similar terms, it seems more like an outright condemnation of Seneca, particularly when read in the full context of the essay. Simultaneously, Plutarch is viewed in an increasingly positive light. Montaigne begins the essay by talking about the fundamental unsoundness of our judgment: "Quasi toutes les opinions que nous avons sont prinses par autorité et à credit" (III, 12, 1037 B). Even Socrates, that greatest of men (and Montaigne's hero throughout the third book), owes his present reputation not to any merits he may himself have possessed, but simply to the inability of the rest of us to think independently. Our opinions are formed through inertia. He continues:

Nous n'apercevons les graces que pointues, bouffies et enflées d'artifice. Celles qui coulent sous la nayfveté et la simplicité eschappent aysément à un veüë grossiere comme est la nostre: elles ont une beauté delicate et cachée; il faut la veüë nette et bien purgée pour descouvrir cette secrette lumiere. [...] Nostre monde n'est formé qu'à l'ostentation: les hommes ne s'enflent que de vent, et se manient à bonds, comme les balons. (III, 12, 1037 B)

This is familiar terminology; traits of the courtier and courtly discourse, such as "artifice" and "ostentation," are contrasted unfavorably with such anti-courtly attributes as "nayfveté" and "simplicité." Montaigne here goes farther than usual in recognizing the power of such courtly qualities, their moral dubiousness notwithstanding; flashy artifice and glib deceit will sway the mind far more effectively than the plain and naked truth. Perhaps this cannot be helped, he says, but it is nevertheless to be deplored. In this context, he returns to the comparison between Seneca and Plutarch:

[B] L'un [Seneca], plus vif, nous pique et eslance en sursaut, touche plus l'esprit. L'autre, plus rassis, nous informe, établit et conforte constamment, touche plus l'entendement. [C] Celuy là ravit nostre jugement, cestuy-cy le gaigne. (III, 12, 1040)

Clearly, for Montaigne, a discursive style which "nous pique et eslance en sursaut" achieves these effects through being "pointu, bouffi et enflé d'artifice," and therefore its integrity is necessarily suspect. Ultimately, Seneca's Stoicism (as presented by Montaigne) sounds like an unsustainable pretense, not a state of inner repose. It may even be empty posturing, or—worse yet—hypocritical, concealing unpleasant truths through rhetorical display. This is not to say, however, that Montaigne is directly condemning Stoicism *per se*; he is merely saying that Seneca doth protest too much. Excessive carrying on, *à la* Seneca, in support of *any* position tends to weaken that position and make its supporter (or performer) suspect. In other words, Montaigne's critique of Senecan (literary and personal) style is just that: a stylistic critique, and not so much a direct attack on substance.

Meanwhile, Montaigne tries to disqualify himself from the ranks of the "true" Stoics by claiming that he is insufficiently tough. This is

evident even in an essay we have been reading as one of the most "Stoic" in the *Essais*, "De la solitude"; here, after describing the Stoic *arriere-boutique* and the corresponding attitude of harsh disdain for the world expected of its occupant, he describes the reading he plans to do in his own state of retreat from the world, and in a more general sense how he approaches the whole question of retirement:²⁹

Je n'ayme, pour moy, que des livres ou plaisans et faciles, qui me chatouillent, ou ceux qui me consolent et conseillent à regler ma vie et ma mort:

tacitum sylvas inter reptare salubres,
Curantem quidquid dignum sapiente bonoque est.

Les gens plus sages peuvent se forger un repos tout spirituel, ayant l'ame forte et vigoureuse. Moy qui l'ay commune, il faut que j'ayde à me soutenir par les commoditez corporelles; et, l'aage m'ayant tantost desrobé celles qui estoyent plus á ma fantasie, j'instruis et aiguise mon appetit à celles qui restent plus sortables à cette autre saison. (I, 39, 246 A)

Even in retreat, Montaigne claims that he is not up to the rigorous Stoic version of solitude; privation and mortification of the flesh are not for him—nor, for that matter, is affliction of the spirit; he wants readings to entertain and console him, not to make him more uncomfortable than he already is. He is, he tells us, simply too weak for that sort of thing. The real difficulty with the Stoic line, then, is not so much that it is wrong or unsound as that it is impracticable for "les âmes communes" like Montaigne himself.³⁰

²⁹ Note that he does so in the same textual layer [A] as the discussion of the *arriere-boutique* itself.

³⁰ Montaigne is very fond of claiming that he is old and decrepit, that he is soft, flabby, devoid of memory, and generally inept; here, however, this impulse takes on a special focus, as it is precisely his own *mollesse*-induced unsuitability for the Stoic form of retreat that he wishes to emphasize. (See Cottrell's discussion of this theme, pp. 19-41.) The veracity (dubious at best) of his claims of generalized impotence is irrelevant to his main purpose; the claims are deployed not as absolute truths but as tactics in a larger performative strategy. Ultimately, of course, Montaigne is probably suggesting that we are *all* "âmes communes," and therefore that Stoicism is indeed irrelevant to the conduct of daily life, except when it is utilized as a pose, a

We see, therefore, that this doubly oblique undercutting of Seneca renders Montaigne's own position(s) with regard to noble identity, neo-Stoic or otherwise, more sophisticated and complex; Montaigne would have us believe that it also leads towards a more realistic and accurate representation of his state, or rather process, of being. This increasing complexity also makes his positions more directly accessible. To put it another way, Montaigne's performance as a writer before an audience becomes less histrionic and more polyvalent; it is more readily legible because Montaigne offers us more points of access.

This new mode of performance is presented to us, in this comparison, through the exemplar of Plutarch. Far better than the nervous Seneca, Montaigne tells us, is Plutarch's equable calmness, a style which achieves plenitude and density without harshness, obscurity, or deception. Plutarch's rhetoric maintains an easy, measured pace, unruffled by external threats; this in turn bespeaks a solid internal *suffisance*, such as we shall find embodied in the practical counterpart (Socrates) to this literary paradigm.³¹ As a

theatrical performance. Much of "De la vanité" (III, 9), is devoted to an extended consideration of the wretched and depraved nature of contemporary society; Montaigne closes one section of this discussion (955-57) by pointing out that, deplorable as that society is, it is all there is, and—despite the best efforts of Plato, Aristotle and the rest—it cannot be otherwise. To illustrate his point, he holds up that great reformer and lawgiver, Solon, as an example of pragmatic acceptance of the *status quo* (957). Even the wisest person does not live in a vacuum, and must therefore adapt to the prevailing circumstances, whatever they may be. See Starobinski's discussions of this point, pp. 113ff. and 366-67.

³¹ Slightly earlier in "De la phisionomie," we are told where this *suffisance* is to be found: "Il ne nous faut guiere de doctrine pour vivre à nostre aise. Et Socrates nous aprend qu'elle est en nous, et la manière de l'y trouver et de s'en ayder. Toute cette nostre suffisance, qui est au delà de la naturelle, est à peu pres vaine et superflue. [...] Recueillez vous; vous trouverez en vous les arguments de la nature contre la mort, vrais, et le plus propres à vous servir à la necessité: ce sont ceux qui font mourir un paisan et des peuples entiers aussi constamment qu'un philosophe" (1039 B). Montaigne claims that this *suffisance* is not to be acquired through assiduous study of edifying texts, and that it does not result from a rigorous application of stern philosophical principles in an attempt to make oneself more virtuous. Rather, it is acquired through the application of the Delphic dictum, "know thyself," in its purest sense. We should, however, be careful not to take Montaigne too literally here, lest we fall into the trap of thinking that he will henceforth base his utterances solely upon his own experiences; after all, he has hardly given up reading ancient authors himself. Perhaps a more accurate way of putting it would be to say

result, says Montaigne, Plutarch is "libre par tout"; his rhetorical neutrality enables him to avoid the kind of questionable ethical entanglements into which Seneca's more vehement and polemical rhetoric draws him. This accounts for the description of Plutarch as more "constant" than that paragon of Stoic constancy, Seneca; but what about Montaigne's statement that Plutarch also holds opinions "douces et accomodables à la société civile"? This seeming contradiction is resolved when we realize that one who possesses or adopts this kind of serene indifference has as a result a certain liberty, a freedom to maneuver, and is therefore able to adapt to circumstances as they arise. This does not mean that Montaigne has suddenly become a crypto-Machiavellian in his dotage, although his attitudes do begin to take on more of an Italianate tinge. This "new" ideal of flexibility is actually part of and consistent with Montaigne's revised concept of the human world, as expressed in his famous remark at the beginning of "Du repentir": "Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne" (III, 2, 804 B). Montaigne applies this idea of constant flux directly to himself and to his project of representing himself through the *Essais*. "Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage..." (III, 2, 805 B). His self-representation may seem to be inconsistent and unstable, but it is actually all the more accurate for its variability: "...les traits de ma peinture ne forvoyent point, quoy qu'ils se changent et diversifient" (III, 2, 804 B). To reduce himself to a single representation, a single persona, would be misleading (if

that he is adding himself to his reading list. In other words, Montaigne (in the form of the *Essais*) has himself become a text, an (ancient) author to be read, reread, and commented upon—within the *Essais* themselves—along with Plutarch and the rest. This reflects his evident eagerness to join that exclusive club of sages "qui ne vivent qu'en la memoire des livres" to which he advises his would-be nobleman to turn for edification and self-improvement. It is interesting, in this connection, to recall Montaigne's desire (expressed in "De la vanité"), to become a citizen of (ancient) Rome: "Me trouvant inutile à ce siècle, je me rejette à cet autre, et en suis si embabouyné que l'estat de cette vieille Romme, libre, juste et florissante (car je n'en ayme ny la naissance ny la vieillesse) m'interesse et me passione" (III, 9, 996-97 B).

It should also be noted in passing, although we cannot discuss it fully here, that this passage from "De la phisionomie" is conceptually linked to one of the main themes of the *Essais*, the ideal of Socratic self-knowledge articulated at the end of the entire work (in "De l'experience") in such passages as the following: "Nostre grand et glorieux chef-d'œuvre c'est vivre à propos" (III, 13, 1108 C); and, a little further on: "C'est une absolue perfection, et comme divine, de scavoyr jouyr loiallement de son estre" (III, 13, 1115 B).

not downright dishonest), since "[I]a constance mesme n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant" (III, 2, 805 B). Therefore, his mode of self-representation, focusing on the continuous process of being, is, he claims (in a C-text addition), both more accurate and more complete than the traditional approach, which seeks to impose a false stasis on a perpetually moving subject: "Les auteurs se communiquent au peuple par quelque marque particuliere et estrangere; moy le premier par mon estre universel, comme Michel de Montaigne, non comme grammairien ou poëte ou jurisconsulte" (III, 2, 805 C).

This is a far less innocent statement than it first appears to be. It may seem that Montaigne is simply saying that he wants to show all aspects of his identity to his audience, to present a complete, comprehensive, and honest performance, without hiding behind any "marque...estrangere"; but the very language in which he makes this claim is ideologically loaded. It echoes a similar statement in "De l'institution des enfans," where the place of the term "estre universel" is taken by the word "gentilhomme." Montaigne tells a shaggy dog story ("Allant un jour à Orleans...") whose punchline ("Il n'est pas gentilhomme; c'est un grammairien..." I, 26, 168-69 A) betrays an aristocratic scorn (whether "natural" or adopted) for such lowly beings as *grammairiens*. The story is situated in the larger context of what the proper attitude of a budding *gentilhomme* should be towards his studies; and the answer is much like that given by Castiglione, advocating a kind of dilettantism for the nobility. Over-specialization is bad because it is unworthy of a *gentilhomme*, a point which Montaigne reemphasizes when he tells us that his mission in "De l'institution des enfans" is to "...former non un grammairien ou logicien, mais un gentil'homme..." (I, 26, 169 A). Likewise, here in "Du repentir," where his project is to delineate his own persona (or personæ), he wishes to distinguish himself from "les auteurs," and to establish an identity free from such degrading specializations. So the universality that Montaigne both advocates and lays claim to is not a philosophical, abstract, or absolute universality, but rather a kind of practical, even politic versatility *à la* Castiglione. In other words, Montaigne's "estre universel" seems somewhat more class-bound, and hence less "universel," than he would have us believe.

In any event, the peculiar flexibility of that "estre universel" enables Montaigne to enact or perform his noble identity or identities

in a variety of specific contexts. Indeed, such performative flexibility is an essential capacity in Montaigne's world as he describes it to us. Just as the self is no philosophical ideal, so too the circumstances to which Montaigne would have it adapt are not mere abstractions, but concrete aspects of a particular historical context. The equable adaptability found in Plutarch's literary style and in the person of Socrates (as represented via Montaigne's readings of Ficino's Latin translations of Plato) will become, in Montaigne's hands, a tool for his own survival—political, social, and physical—in late sixteenth-century France.

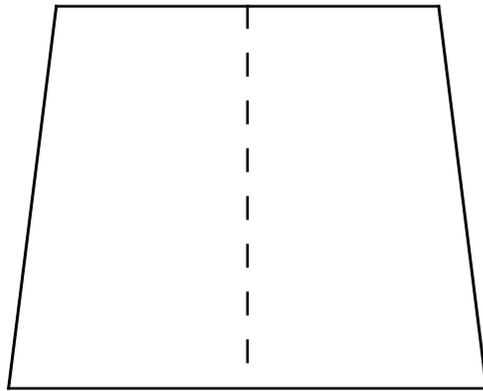
Loyola University, Chicago

**An "Allegory of Prudence:"
Text and Icon of "De la phisionomie"**

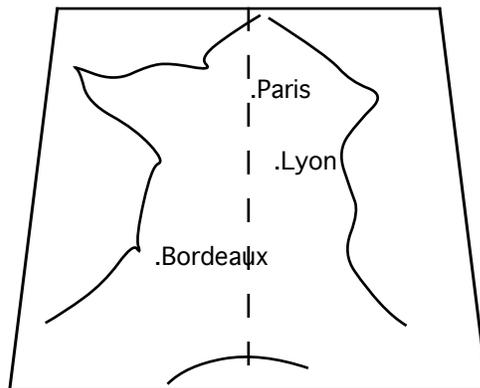
Tom Conley

Pourtant fourvoyent si souvent nos desseins. (1039)

In his *Protomathesis* (1532), a compendium of mathematics and geometry, Oronce Finé includes one of the earliest printed maps of France to illustrate the art of topographical projection. The image is accompanied by a text that explains to the reader how the author has gone about drawing the map, selecting the information he displays, and distributing it in appropriate areas on the surface. After the site to be mapped is chosen, a central longitude is drawn. Then equal units of measure are marked off to the left and right of the initial meridian. Next, the horizontal axis is graduated into equal spatial units that are inscribed to the left and right of the upper limit of the median longitude. A parallel line is drawn at the bottom, that is in turn attached to the upper and parallel latitude by two verticals that slightly converge. If the area being represented is north of the equator, the lower latitude will be wider than the upper one, thus assuring a trapezoidal plan that accounts for the curvature of the globe. Just as the latitudes are divided into equal units in order to establish the degrees of the vertical axis, so then are the two longitudes. Each degree marked along the vertical and horizontal axes serves as a point whence is extended a line that meets its appropriate point on the other side of the configuration. The initial stage appears thus:



When the grid is completed, the cartographer consults a Ptolemaic chart that provides information about the positions of towns and cities listed according to degrees and minutes obtained from careful plotting of the positions of the stars. These are set in place. Then come regional agglomerations, followed by villages and towns. Frequently the cartographer places his birthplace in the same projection before, as practice dictates, major rivers are drawn in the work:



Finally, to portray relief, "molehills" (*taupinières*) are drawn to represent mountains and valleys. When agglomerations of stick-like trees are added to designate forests, the representation is complete.

Finé's instructions are well known to cartographers.¹ In 1543 he used the same method to produce a chorographic map of Eastern France and Northern Italy. He gave the sketch (that is now lost) to Francis I but included a woodcut version of the map in his *De spheræ mundi* (1544), that was reprinted in its French translation, *Lesphere du monde* (1551 and 1552).²

The image tells much about the politics and esthetics of allegorical creations that Valois monarchy had commissioned, that had no doubt also influenced triumphal entries and even literary forms of later dates.³ The map is drawn from an ostensibly arbitrary origin and

¹ See François de Dainville, S.J., "How did Oronce Finé Draw his Large Map of France," *Imago Mundi* 24 (1970), pp. 49-55.

² The map is illustrated in François de Dainville, S.J., *Le Langage des cartographes* (Paris: Picard, 1964), p. 38.

³ In his preface to Anne-Marie Lecoq's magisterial study of the iconography of kingship in materials celebrating Francis I's accession to the throne (1987), Marc Fumaroli suggests that a pattern of representation is set in place that later monarchs will use. "Avec François I^{er}, la couronne de France cesse d'être la couronne d'épines secrète qu'elle avait été pour Saint Louis: elle devient une couronne de lauriers d'empereur selon Suétone, de prince italien selon Pier Candido Decembrio. A

begins as a vertical line that serves as the coincidence of two equal units of space that are charted on either side. When the grid is complete, an "equipollent" projection results, in which equal value is ascribed to each and every part of the map. Unlike a polar projection that pulls the eye toward a point of origin or reference, the equipollent map does not assign value to the center of its composition. Despite the vertical axis chosen as its origin, it tends to produce the illusion of a space of equal value all over its surface.⁴

In Finé's map of 1543, the tension of equipollent and centered space nonetheless emerges between its method and its final execution. On the one hand, the projection designates to its ideal reader, Francis I, the lands he had gained in the course of his career. Certain cities (such as Pavia), we can surmise, animate memory of the monarch's military victories and defeats. The map becomes a representation of history in charting the places the king had known, gained, or lost over his career. Yet, on the other, the map is about Finé and his world. At the center of the projection, located at the crossing of diagonals drawn from each of the four corners, is Briançon, immediately adjacent to Finé's birthplace at Le Champ-Rouët in Dauphiny. A residually polar or "center-enhancing" mode thus enables the cartographer to inscribe a covert autobiographical presence in the configuration. Finé folds into the projection a geometrical system that rivals with the national view obtained by the generally "equipollent" aspect of the map. The privileged site of the cartographer's signature rivals with that of the kingdom at large. We discover that no matter how faithful the projection may be to the topography of France and Italy, it remains an allegory that displays a tension of surface, memory, and of competing areas of interest in the relation between the monarch and his subject.

l'émergence de l'Etat absolutiste devait correspondre l'apparition masquée d'un 'moi' chef d'Etat" (14).

⁴ David Woodward ("Roger Bacon's Terrestrial Coordinate System," in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80.1 (March, 1990), pp. 109-122) summarizes the differences between space represented in *equipollent*, *route-enhancing*, and *center-enhancing* modes of projection. Equipollent grids, that he traces back to Roger Bacon's *Almagest*, acquire extraordinary power in the Renaissance. "It was the deceptively simple concept of plane coordinates, with its ability to assign the same importance to every point on the map and so control the accuracy of positions over its entire face, that was to become adopted for world cartography" (120).

Finé's method may also tell us something about the ways that autobiographical texts of the Renaissance are written. In the paragraphs that follow I would like to argue that it is possible to reconstruct the allegorical process of Montaigne's essays from similar perspectives. Many of the chapters of the *Essais* appear to be "gridded" according to a logic that ascribes equal value to verbal expression "all over" the surface of each chapter; the same units of text also betray "center-enhancing" or nodal areas that map out a personal geography that supplements the overall fields of meaning. Whereas the cartographer draws his projection onto a flat surface with compass and ruler, the essayist charts the placement of letters, vocables, and words with the effect of evincing tensions between "equipollent" and "centered" modes of construction.

For Montaigne, discourse becomes the material from which an iconic and textual map can be fashioned. By superimposing on a discursive or semantic field iconic and cartographic forms, the essayist is able to construct a simultaneously pictural and textual body that conveys both political commentary and autobiography. One dimension serves to reveal and to dissimulate the other. It can be

ventured that the essays are "mapped" or "gridded" so as to yield an equipollent plan at the same time they use perspective to converge upon specific problems, to underscore an art of distortion, and to invest diversity or polymorphous figures within their fields of meaning or the apparently mimetic dimensions of the text. Thus the author can at once write autobiography, accumulate citations or *centons*, approximate a chronicle, but also invent "curious" visual designs that center upon—but also disperse—materials that pertain to ideological and historical agendas concurrent with prevailing ideological dilemmas.

In this respect "De la phisionomie" is exemplary. Composed in the thick of civil strife in the first half of 1585, the chapter provides a masked account of the author's migrations during conflict and pestilence in Gascony. With bitter irony the essay speculates on the insufficiency of past and present models to provide counsel for survival in disastrous times. The essay evokes the art of physiognomy, by which a subject is advised by study of the human countenance in order to divine the future, or find a model for strong ethical conduct. The essay treats of this art at the same the text becomes the very "face" that reflects *our* reactions to the form of its design. When we look at it, its own "physiognomy" serves the purpose of evaluating the past, foreseeing the future, charting national policy and, most of all, mediating opposite sides in the Wars of Religion. It also paints a favorable portrait of the author's face so that posterity will assure him of the best of all possible fates. The writing self dissolves into the lineaments of a picture—as well as a topographical view—that mixes images of Southwestern France in 1585 with the visages of Fortune, of Socrates, of Etienne de la Boétie, of Henry of Navarre, and of the author himself.

"De la phisionomie" can also be read as a crucial moment in the development of Montaigne's self-portrait. Where, at the beginning and middle of the essay, the affected modesty of the authorial persona had been assured when Montaigne praised the commanding example of Socrates's inner beauty, the end takes up two autobiographical accounts of limit-situations—one *inside* Montaigne's domain, and the other *outside*—that show how the author's own facial beauty exceeds both that of Plato's hero and any number of other examples. The ugly demeanor that had masked Socrates's inner strength and generosity does not stand up to

Montaigne's beauty that guarantees salvation both at home and on the road. According to Richard Regosin, in a study that develops Terence Cave's pathfinding remarks about "De la phisionomie," "c'est le visage de l'essayiste lui-même qui remet la nature à sa place propre, qui surmonte l'opposition, le désaccord, la confusion du dehors et du dedans pour réaliser les 'promesses que nature avait plantées au front.'"⁵ Montaigne folds the difference of the inner and outer person over one another in order to incorporate them, or to conflate difference into the discourse itself. The folding or pleating of the opposition can be seen in the figures that the essayist uses to portray the act of writing and the context that inspire it.

An iconic and cartographical method inspires the production of meaning. If Finé's system can be used to "unfold" our reading of the essay, the longitudinal 'origin' of "Phisionomie" would be located along the remarks that follow the long citation, taken from *The Apology*, that show how Socrates transcended the civic body that expelled him from their midst. Held high as an example of civil virtue and as a figure who faces death with more clairvoyance, devotion, and generosity than any other citizen, Socrates gives way to Montaigne's portrait of his own actions in comparable circumstances. As Socrates's plea was "sec et sain, mais quand et quand naïf et bas, d'une hauteur inimaginable, veritable, franc et juste au delà de tout exemple" (1031), we wonder what indeed will surpass the great figure set before our eyes. Not only does the quotation from the *Apology* rank among the most copious that the author registers in the text of the essays; it also points to a rhetorical limit in matters of praise: no words could ever match those of the Greek philosopher at the threshold of death in any time before or since. Yet, because the French nation faces similar perils, an analogously *modern* figure is needed to bring counsel and to divine the future.

Suddenly Montaigne remarks that he could have chosen any one from "tant d'autres exemples" (1032). Yet Socrates fits well in the design. The author has sifted (*trié*) the words from the *Apology*

⁵ Richard Regosin, "Les Figures de l'interprétation: moi/texte/contextes dans les *Essais* de Montaigne," in Lawrence D. Kritzman, ed., *Le Signe et le texte* (Lexington: French Forum Publishers, 1990), p. 184; Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems in Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 302-312.

consciously, *à escient*, and set him into a decorative scheme whose basis, it must be deduced, bears analogy with a grid, a network, or a geometrical perspective made of crosshatched lines. The essay is a "filet" (1033) in which are inserted an "amas de fleurs estrangeres" (1032) that comprise the festoon of portraits decorating the chapter. The axial line of the configuration is described in such a way that the whole of the essay seems to be developed from or toward a given textual axis, a "center-enhancing" or "spatial moment," as it were, in which the description of the process of writing, because it is set where it is, explains how the verbal icon of Montaigne's physiognomy is being crafted:

Comme quelqu'un pourroit dire de moy que j'ay seulement fait icy un amas de fleurs estrangeres, n'y ayant fourny du mien que le filet à les lier. Certes j'ay donné à l'opinion publique que ces parements empruntez m'accompaignent. Mais je n'entends pas qu'ils me couvrent et qu'ils me cachent: c'est le rebours de mon dessein, qui ne veul faire montre que du mien, et de ce qui est mien par nature; et si je m'en fusse creu, à tout hazard, j'eusse parlé tout fin seul. [...] Et moy ay prins des lieux assez ailleurs qu'en leur source. Sans peine et sans suffisance, ayant mille volumes de livres autour de moy en ce lieu où j'escris, j'emprunteray presentement s'il me plaist d'une douzaine de tels ravaudeurs, gens que je ne feuillette guiere, de quoy esmailler *le traicté de la phisionomie*. [...] Ces pastissages de lieux communs, dequoy tant de gents mesnagent leur estude, ne servent guere qu'à subjects communs; et servent à nous montrer, non à nous conduire, ridicule fruict de la science, que Socrates exagite si plaisamment contre Euthydeme. J'ay veu faire des livres de choses ny jamais estudeés, ny entenduës, l'autheur commettant à divers de ses amis sçavants la recherche de cette-cy et de cette autre matiere à le bastir, se contentant pour sa part d'en avoir projectté le dessein et empilé par son industrie ce fagot de provisions incogneuës; au moins est sien l'ancre et le papier.⁶

The title of the essay, "De la phisionomie," which stood over and above the contents, is now hemmed into the discourse and appended to what Montaigne now calls the *treaty* (*traicté*) of physiognomy. The title is likened to a picture insofar as *traict* figures as one of a

⁶ *Essais*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Maurice Rat et Albert Thibaudet (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 1033 (stress added here and elsewhere). All references to the *Essais* will be made to this edition and cited between parentheses in the text above.

mass of lines that make up a sketch or a portrait. Understood according to practical manuals, the act of drawing the line would pull the essential traits of the figure being represented *off* or out of the surface on which it is inscribed. The initial and telling recurrence of the title draws attention to the ways that the design of the chapter is being seen emerging from its textual mass.

Further, when it "returns" in the text, the title tends to sketch out the contours of the essay.⁷ The title is folded over and into the body of the text in a fashion immediately resembling the effect of inversion and bending that had been used in the preceding chapter, "Des boyteux," when the title recurred at the end in order to buckle the preceding arguments. Happening upon the uncanny recurrence of the title in lower case and in a different context, the reader is led to let memory scan over or survey the body of writing that has literally been drawn and mapped out from the beginning to this pivotal area.

We discover that the space in which the text is being crafted is surrounded by a "thousand books," titles replete with equally exemplary figures. Their indiscriminate sum is focalized into *ce lieu où j'escris*, the site of composition being named to suggest that the immediate presence of the text—what we see beneath our eyes—shows us how we are being caught in its spatial rhetoric. From a thousand works Montaigne can choose, "if he likes" (*s'il me plaist*), any one from a "dozen" *ravaudeurs* likes Socrates. That "dozen" arches back to the number of the chapter (twelve), and invites us to *decipher* the discourse in such a way that its figures can be traduced as discursive units or rebuses.⁸ But after having paged through the

⁷ In "Le titrier," Jacques Derrida has shown that a title necessarily establishes a contractual obligation with the work to which it is attached. Both work and title have to co-respond to each other in order to produce a field of meaning. Even if a work has no title, it is titled (as in abstract art, that uses serial numbers to display a fear of the title or a desire to favor ciphers over language: "Composition #4," "#5:" etc). If it sets out to lead the reader astray, or to be mendacious ("les noms de mes chapitres n'en embrassent pas toujours la matiere; souvent il la denotent seulement par quelque marque...") as a demonic Montaigne reminds us in "Vanité" (973), the title is nevertheless charting the relations that govern the contract of the work. Jacques Derrida's remarks (*Parages* [Paris: Galilée, 1986]) take up the question of the role and identity of the author in the European literary tradition.

⁸ On the indeterminate relation of language and mathematical figures, see Kenneth J. Knoespel ("The Narrative Matter of Mathematics: John Dee's Preface to the *Elements* of Euclid of Megara [1570]," *Philological Quarterly* [1987], pp. 26-46), who argues that in the 1570s numbers and equations are attached to language,

Apology and any number of other texts "que je ne feuillette guiere," he has enough material, paradoxically, "de quoy esmailler le traicté de la phisionomie."

The mode of composition being described recalls the passage from an arbitrary selection of any space or place on the world's map to one that becomes committed and central to the author's enterprise as soon as a line is drawn to show that a choice and inscription are made. Thus, what belongs to Montaigne is the "filet" or grid that sustains the selection of examples. It cannot be said that the criticism he makes of those who write their books in an entrepreneurial fashion, "farming out" assignments before gathering the harvest (1033-34), does not also apply here. Context dictates that the author could be the very individual, "se contentant pour sa part d'en avoir projetté le dessein et empilé par son industrie ce fagot de provisions incogneuës; au moins est sien l'ancre et le papier," since the remark foregrounds the extraordinarily flattering picture he will soon paint of his own physiognomy.

Remarks about *how the picture is drawn*, the poetics of "De la phisionomie," become the meridian of the essay. The line is traced to demarcate real from borrowed examples; books slapped together from books artfully written; authentic accounts from bits and pieces hap-hazardly borrowed; original and true sources—the writer Montaigne—from so many factitious or localizable authors. The separation also conflates the same distinctions, since the effect of the verbal success is one that moves to the four cardinal areas of the chapter. To the West (if the reader faces North or looks back to the beginning) is the title that *le traicté de la phisionomie* recalls and encapsulates, while the East, the sacred or lower region of the text, will be the very material taken from Montaigne's own life, which furnishes *de quoy esmailler* the treaty. At the upper pole of the geography, in the fabric of signifiers that seems to billow in the

and that only later will their scientific authority be assured when they become detached from their verbal ground. Knoespel implies what Jean Céard and Jean-Claude Margolin (*Rébus de la Renaissance: des images qui parlent* [Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986], 2 vols.) state about the rebus of the same period. Pictures and figures are part of a vast analogical network that moves between ideas (hieroglyphs) and linguistic objects (ideograms). Thus we can remark that for Montaigne the following analogies are *possible*: 9 = neuf (both new and nine); xx = [vingt] (wine, the preterit of "to come," and twenty); & = et (but also a *festina lente*, in which a curved line is bent about a bar), etc.

winds of pestilence,⁹ stretches the future in the figure of a countryside at peace, in the *douceur* (from the cipher *xii*, or *douze*) that the author seeks in the dialectic of allegory and representation. To the south (or below) is the world of animals that, in the current time of upheaval, live *above* the order of humans that civil war has reduced to bestiality. The text later indicates that the chapter is varying on the theme of divination, and that it must be read in dialogue with the logic that subtends the study of facial traits. The latter constitute a grid and an image: "Si me semble il que ce *traict et façon de visage*, et *ces lineaments* par lesquels on argumente aucunes complexions internes et nos fortunes à venir, est chose qui ne loge pas bien directement et simplement *soubs le chapitre* de beauté et de laideur" (1036). Invocation of the art of divination also refers to the very text before our eyes. Lines and complexions are part of a textual picture in a paginal frame.

Spatial and temporal displacements seem to move through networks of chosen words or bundles of letters that are cast about the discourse. When the author observes, "ayant mille volumes de livres autour de moy en ce lieu où j'escris, j'emprunteray presentement s'il me plaist d'une douzaine de tels ravaudeurs," expression of free will refers to an arbitrariness that will inspire pleasure when, like the example of Socrates, *choice* of the example acquires more worth than the content of the philosopher's sayings.¹⁰ In turn, the play of space in the allegory is as attractive as what it means. For the same reason, it appears that few essays make so much of the bitter pleasure the author takes when he goes about selecting his examples. To encourage moderation in times of excess, "J'ay *pris plaisir* de voir en quelque lieu des hommes, par devotion, faire veu d'ignorance..." (1015, stress added).

A decisively spatial (and inherently cartographical) technique is visible in the way a French proverb of common stamp is nestled between two elegant citations from Cicero and Seneca: *quæ magis*

⁹ "Nostre monde n'est formé qu'à l'ostentation: les hommes ne s'enflent que de vent, et se manient à bonds, comme les balons," in contrast to the world of Socrates (1014).

¹⁰ John D. Lyons (*Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989], pp. 128-29) studies the same process in the rapport of the exemplum to historiography. "Any anecdote taken from classical or modern sources is already unusual because few actions of valor are actually recorded" (128).

gustata quám potata delectant. Tout ce qui plaist ne paist pas. *Ubi non ingenii, sed animi negotium agitur* (1016).

We cannot be sure if the proverb in the center "explains" "things more agreeable to taste than to drink" (*Tusculanes*, V, v) or if the pleasures obtained in nourishment (*paistre*) are in the soul or in wit, "as soon as it is a question of the soul, and not of ingenuity" (*Epistles*, xxxv). Axial placement of *plaist* dictates that the meaning can move in two directions at once, toward what pleases, in a limited sense (as in the citation), but also toward what displeases, in the greater sense of nourishment. The author can reap bitter pleasure in seeing how much cowardice and pusillanimity reside in ambition ["Il me *plaist* de voir combien il y a de lascheté et de pusillanimité en l'ambition (...), mais cecy me *desplaist* il de voir des natures debonnaires et capables de justice se corrompre tous les jours... (1018)]. Ambivalence is further underscored when the author reflects on the virtual "theater" or topography of present-day France. "Si cherchons nous avidement de recognoistre en ombre mesme et en la fable des Theatres la montre des jeux tragiques de l'humaine fortune. Ce n'est pas sans compassion de ce que nous oyons, mais nous nous *plaisons d'esveiller nostre desplaisir* par la rareté de ces pitoyables evenemens" (1023).

When recounting his adventure with the nobleman who wheedled his way into his home, who was ready to put Montaigne as his mercy, the author realizes that he had to display the same countenance that he had shown when he first allowed the leader entry into his château. "Trouvant qu'il n'y avoit point d'acquest d'avoir commencé à faire plaisir si je n'achevois, et ne pouvant me desfaire sans tout rompre, je me laissay aller au party le plus naturel et le plus simple, comme je faicts tousjours..." (1038). Once again expression of pleasure is accompanied by an itchiness that can be both exacerbating and desirous. In every event, *s'il me plaist* introduces the narrative of delicately ambivalent situations in which an action taken can lead to any number of disastrous consequences.

The axis of "De la phisionomie" is perched on this ambiguity. *Plaire* becomes iconic and, possibly, talismanic insofar as its resemblance to other signifiers endows it with analogical force that makes the reader glimpse a design peculiar to the essay. "Plaist" ostensibly figures in a network of terms that describe a geography of Montaigne, his displacement, and his tribulations in 1585.

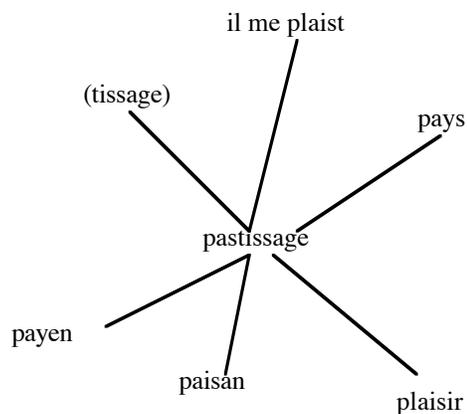
Inflections of *plaist* also include *pays*, *paistre*, and *pastissage*. These terms refer to both the area of "provision", the rural and agrarian surroundings that produce the staff of life but which are now threatened by war, plague, and calamity. Its inhabitants are both the "naturels," the *paysans* who live their lives with an unproblematic relation between language and the natural world. "La phtisie, c'est la tous pour eux" (1017).¹¹ The word extends into the depiction of a great picture—or topographic view—of the countryside. As *paysage* meant "pasture" in sixteenth-century French, Montaigne's account of his nomadism and quarantine from his own domicile evokes a broader desire to recover a peace and calm so pervasive that it will be seen in the very substantives that describe the environs. As for his deracination, "Ce crollement donq m'anima certes plus qu'il ne m'atterra, à l'aide de ma conscience qui se portoit non *paisiblement* seulement, mais fierement" (1024); that is, "comme ceux que la tristesse accable et possede se laissent pourtant par intervalles tastonner à quelque *plaisir* et leur eschappe un soubsrire, je puis aussi assez sur moy pour rendre mon estat ordinaire *paisible* et deschargé d'ennuyeuse imagination; mais je me laisse pourtant, à boutades, surprendre des morsures de ces *malplaisantes* pensées..." (1024). Peace is interrupted when, during the plague, "j'eus à souffrir cette *plaisante* condition que la veue de ma maison m'estoit effroiable" (1024). The text appears to represent Montaigne taking to the country in search of the very calm that he could find neither in the relation of the history of the word (*pagus* > *pays*; *paganus* > *païen*) to what it is supposed to describe, nor in the example of the supreme rural hero, Socrates ("Socrates faict mouvoir son ame d'un mouvement naturel et commun. Ainsi dict un paysan, ainsi dict une femme. Il n'a jamais en la bouche que cochers, menuisiers, savetiers et maçons," 1013-1014), whose outer demeanor is insufficient to draw attention to leaders who heed only those who maintain a more stylish appearance.

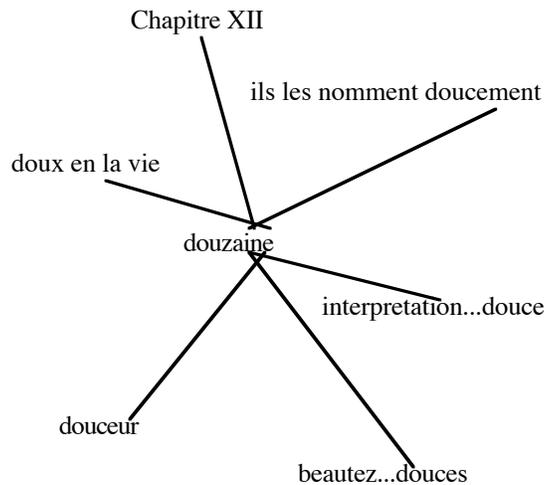
As the essay unravels its words from the core of *plaire*, *paistre*, *pais*, and *paisan*, the reader is drawn to what seems to be a gridding of signifiers that establish differential traits by means of visual resemblance and contiguity. *Paysage* makes up the rural topography;

¹¹ The remark can be read diversely: *phtisie*, a cough, resembles *physis*, the world itself, that is indeed both a cough and "all" (*tous*). Montaigne's peasants appear to utter the very events that come from Socrates's mouth.

its inhabitants ought to be at peace (*paix*) or serene because of their rusticity. Yet irony dictates that the pleasure of describing this world (*il me plaist de...*) is what produces the contrary of contentment; the local souls (*paysans*) are both antique types—since the word that names them also includes pagans—and the enemies of Christendom. Montaigne decries having passed more than half of his life in *la ruine de mon pays* (1023), and no doubt we must suspect that the design of the essay aims at doing something to rectify the currently dismal state of the nation.

The essay seems to be mapped out according to a system of vocables that are linked by common Latin filiations and, too, by superficial resemblance. A moving concatenation of figures results, with stress laid on the central, poetic area that is a key or legend to the textual system and, no less, the entire topographical surface of the text. A set of rhumbs that radiate from *pastissage* and *douzaine* might have the following aspect:





By means the art of *pastissage*, in which is found *pays* and *paix*, the text fashions "le traicté de la phisionomie," a treatise or a treaty aimed at pacifying the nation.

Calm comes with our scrutiny of Montaigne's face in view of those of Natura and Socrates. The same condition is elicited in the cipher of the title of the chapter. Uncanny recurrence of *douzaine* and figures of "twelveness" queues its subscription, "phisionomie," that is folded into the text wherever the essayist discusses the poetics of the essay. Likewise, when the author notes further on, "il y a des phisionomies favorables" (1036), Montaigne cannot fail to rank himself above Socrates. Wherever physiognomy is mentioned, so too is *traité*, implying that the consideration of faces might lead to assuaging violence or forging prudent policies that will counteract the violence of war. As *trait* and *traité* refer to "treaties" and to "lines" or mapped forms,¹² "De la phisionomie" suggests that it has an inner or concealed design that is in a dialogue with the events taking place in Gascony in the first half of the 1580s.

If the principal faces of the essay can be identified according to the verbal network of words bearing iconic traits, then four figures

¹² Randle Cotgrave (*A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* [London: 1611]) registers the masculine as "a treatise, a league, agreement, or alliance, talked of (also, one that is concluded on) between Princes, etc." The word can also mean a piece of writing or part of a book; in the feminine, *traité* means an extended line, "a transportation, outward bent, or shipping over."

come forth that appear to be moulded in the shape of a heraldic sculpture or tricephalus. The tradition of the tricephalus had in fact been aligned with the allegory of Prudence. It had no doubt come to France through *Le songe de Poliphile* or the *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili* (1499 and after) and was a figure known to all readers of Pierio Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* (1556). Both works were frequently consulted among iconographers and designers of royal entries. The shape lent itself well for three-dimensional space, such as the sculptural decor adorning tombs or fountains.¹³ Titian drew on the theme to produce a mix of allegory and autobiography when he painted a self-portrait in an ensemble with old and young faces posed over the faces of two dogs and a lion. An emblematic portrait that is adorned with a maxim on the top, the painting "glorifies Prudence as a wise employer of the Three Forms of Time: the Present learns from the past and acts with due regard to the future."¹⁴

It can be argued that Montaigne is producing a similar—but now verbal—allegory that designs a map or sculpture of forms in conjunction with the textual space of his chapter. From the two anecdotes told at the end of the essay the author's face emerges as the most "prudent" and effective of all that have been compared. His is grafted onto that of Socrates, a figure of the past, who emblemizes a time that does not "quite" apply to the present. Concurrently, the invisible face of Fortune or Nature plays a role in the scheme but, as we shall see, can be fathomed only through the myriad references to the country and to the citizens at large.

A fourth (and possibly, fifth) figure in the symmetry enters into the essay fugaciously. Early in the composition, the text confuses the figure of Socrates with more recent and current images of kings.

¹³ See, for example, Simon Bouquet's cartographical allegory of "Gallia" at the Fontaine du Ponceau in the sketchbook for the Paris entries of Charles IX and Elisabeth of Austria in 1571 (in Victor E. Graham and W. McAllister Johnson's *The Paris Entries of Charles IX and Elisabeth of Austria, 1571: With an Analysis of Simon Bouquet's 'Bref et sommaire recueil* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974], pp. 412-13 and 433). In one drawing, she holds a map of France over three allegorical figures who are set in front of three sides of a hexagon erected over arcs decorated with pilasters. Frances Yates (*Astraea: The Imperial Theme of the Sixteenth Century* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975], pp. 122-23) discusses Guillaume Postel's ideology of kingship, set forth in *Les raisons de la monarchie* (1551) that inspires the construction.

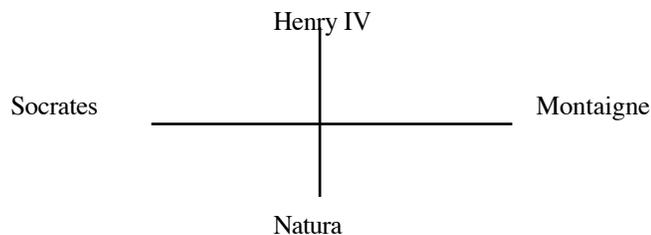
¹⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 103. See also plates 117-28.

First quoting Virgile's *Georgics*: *Hunc saltem everso juvenem succurrere seculo / Ne prohibite* (1019) [At least do not prohibit this young hero from rushing to the assistance of a century in ruins], the author obliquely aligns himself with Henry of Navarre, who had just acceded to power and who was beginning his battle for the kingship of France. Yet, because prudence requires that the Protestant monarch remain unnamed in the midst of war between Catholics and Protestants during current strife in the Bordelais, an ineffable—but no less visible—figure of Henry can function in the allegory. Perhaps in the first of the two concluding tales of the chapter, in which the stranger who "invades" Montaigne's domain is ultimately well advised by the generosity of his host's face, also refers to Henry of Navarre. In December of 1584 the future king came to the château with forty of his soldiers, where everyone spent two days of hunting on the domain.¹⁵ The anecdote in the text would thus be refining and forging the raw material of the event into a shape that resembles the allegory of Prudence. Through the abstraction of the configuration of different faces emerges a Montaigne as a triumphant sign of probity and good counsel. He stands as strong as Socrates, but is far less likely to be victimized or scapegoated. Guarded allusions to Henry of Navarre serve as a "shelter" or a coy sign that, should Henry succeed after the writing of the essay in 1585, Montaigne will not be vilipended either for his belief or faith in the leader of the contrary party. At the same time, the essay displays talents of divination that may well be of use to any future monarch.

If veiled allusion to the future king is marked at the beginning and the end of the essay, one of the problems that the author must resolve involves embracing two different opinions at once. The trick of the textual allegory entails drawing and folding one view (or portrait) over another. Identification becomes so fluid that the

¹⁵ Donald M. Frame (*Montaigne: A Biography* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965], pp. 234-45) recounts the relations that Montaigne had developed with Henry, as well as the ambience of doubt and consternation that took over when the death of the Duke of Anjou (June 10, 1584) made the Protestant the legitimate heir to the crown of France. In June of 1585, a heat wave in Bordeaux brought a plague to the city. Montaigne stays away, in Feuillas, across the Garonne. Other recent events that inflect III, 12, such as the Holy league's capture of Protestant towns along the Garonne (as far as Castillon, close to Montaigne) and the plague of August 1586, that swept over his own estate, are taken up in the following chapter (246-48).

various faces in the essay incorporate different ideological positions at once. Not only does the form of the essay become ambiguous: as its resemblance to Titian's model and to the both polar and equipollent cartographical system suggests, the allegory appears also to inflect the patterning of vocables. It may be that the author erects Socrates as a dummy-figure who draws attention *away* from Henry in order to direct it back to the portrait of the author-as-counselor. Or else, as in Titian's picture, the construction could be construed to turn according to different inflections, like a weathervane, that moves with the winds of destiny, but that also conforms to a cardinal configuration under the emblem of the French nation:



We recall that the essay opens with a flourish of praise bestowed upon Socrates; and is followed by expression of chagrin over the intestinal nature of the Wars of Religion. "Qu'est devenu cet ancien præcepte, que les soldats ont plus à craindre leur chef que l'ennemy?" (1019). In the extremity of war and plague, any remedy will inevitably be a *pharmakon*, an agent destined to kill as much as it cures. Thus the ritual murder of Socrates did more harm than good and, no less, Socrates's example—which follows in a long citation at the middle of the essay—may in fact be only partially applicable to modern times. In a carefully veiled allusion that seems to refer at once to the philosopher and to Henry IV, the essay superimposes at least two faces upon the figure of a *pagan*:

J'estois Platonicien de ce costé là, avant que je sceusse qu'il y eust de Platon au monde. Et si ce personnage doit purement estre refusé de notre consorce, luy qui, par la sincerité de sa conscience, merita envers la faveur divine de penetrer si avant en la Chrestienne lumiere, au travers des tenebres publiques du monde de son temps,

je ne pense pas qu'il nous siese bien de nous laisser instruire à un payen. (1020)

Who is this *personnage* to whom Montaigne is alluding? Is it Henry from the standpoint of the Holy League? Or is it Plato from the standpoint of Christians in general? The *payen* can be aligned with the timeless physiognomy of the goddess Natura. Sullied by tempest and plague, she does not seem to have recent history on her side. The author wonders if the Protestant leader will be able to receive "la sacrosainte douceur et justice de la parole divine" (1020). The figure of Socrates is used to play off that of the King. An art of displacement, of screening, collage, or of superimposed images, seems to be taking hold.¹⁶ In the webbing of the text, *douceur* refers to peace and calm invoked through the title and number of the chapter (12), thus confusing Montaigne's face with that of Natura. At this point the passage seems to be overlapping or dissolving diverse traits that will, by means of the intended symbolic efficacy of the writing, ultimately restore the face of the French nation. In the graphic field of the essay, the *visual* allegory of the multi-cephalic portrait is matched by verbal confusions of the same kind, such that a central or polar axis of reference—specifically that of the "pastissage" that forged "le traicté de la phisionomie" as a *mise en abyme* in the body of the work—is also matched by an "equipollent" system that scatters over the printed surface of the essay many signifiers reflective of the same ambiguities.

¹⁶ François Rigolot ("La Boétie en Boétie" in Raymond C. La Charité, ed. *Writing the Renaissance: Essays on Sixteenth Century French Literature in Honor of Floyd Gray* [Lexington: French Forum, 1992], pp. 197-210) notes that Montaigne uses citations and juxtaposes statements to produce "detours" of meaning that allow the author "d'admettre ce qu'autrement il n'avait pu reconnaître ouvertement, dans la pleine clarté d'un discours univoque" (207). It can be added that the structure of the allegory can also include the face of Etienne de la Boétie, whose political views were no less volatile than Henry's identification with the Protestant cause. La Boétie is identified in the chapter as a shadow or a figure whose contour can be inferred in the traces left by his removal. Like a sculpture that is fashioned by subtractive methods (excision of material), Montaigne imprints his friend's presence by excising allusion to his face. He had originally set his friend's portrait next to that of Socrates (1034 and 1667): "La Boétie n'avoit rien de beau que l'âme; du demourant il faisoit assez d'eschapper à estre laid." I am grateful to Raymond C. La Charité for this observation about La Boétie in III, 12.

As we have seen, bundles of signifiers have thematic and visual resemblance. *Pais*, *plaire*, *payen*, and *paysage* are focalized in *pastissage*. References to the rural world complement evocation of the visage of Nature, seen in the descriptions of the countryside in which Montaigne roams when the plague forces him to leave his home. Yet the fantasy that associates rural life and *douceur* convokes figures of death. The inhabitants of the country are portrayed as healthy souls who equate life and death in a broad process of growth, degeneration, and rebirth that follows the longer cycles of nature (of the kind praised at the outset of "Des boyteux," 1002).

The text draws the dynamic of the natural world into the verbal material wherever it exploits the topos of the *ars moriendi*. "Si vous ne sçavez pas mourir, ne vous chaille; nature vous informera sur le champ" (1028). Obvious appeal to personification relates nature to the icons of the facial allegory.¹⁷ More immediate, however, is *champ*, the field that is literally the "field of vision" seen in the frame of the description. In the textual geography, *champ* refers to the state of the French nation—its demography and geography—in respect to its depiction in Montaigne's words. Thus, praise of *prevoyance* or the clairvoyant art of living that peasants cultivate is also a "field" in which the traits of a national portrait can be inscribed. The prefix *pre-* jumps off the visual field of the printed page:

A dire vray, nous nous *preparons* contre les *preparations* de la mort. La philosophie nous ordonne d'*avoir la mort tousjours devant les yeux*, de la *prevoir* et considerer avant le temps, et nous donne après les reigles et les *precautions* pour prouvoir à ce que cette *prevoiance* et cette pensée ne nous blesse. (1028)

Commonplaces recalled from "Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir" (I, 20) acquire an emblematic or even iconic cast in the context of the peasant world and the *ars moriendi*. Life and death are folded into the same image, with the rebus-like effect such that a desire to *prevoir* amounts to a wish to restore the productive cycles of nature, in *pré-voir*. The effect being sought is contained in the very expression of seeking.

¹⁷ Michael Baraz (*L'Etre et la connaissance chez Montaigne* [Paris: Corti, 1968]) establishes connections between the composition of the *Essais* and resonant themes of naturism. It can be added that the theme binds typographical material to visual forms.

As of 1583, the interpellation to "keep the sight of death before one's eyes" had been revived and refashioned in a celebrated visual emblem. In the second chapter of his *Bigarrures*, Etienne Tabourot included a set of *rébus de Picardie* that play on language and text. Images are placed in the literal field of medallions that use space and icon to concretize bilingual puns that are printed about the circumference. With *Habe mortem præoculis*, the solemn imprecation telling the interlocutor to have death before one's eyes, we see an *abbé mort au cul lis*.¹⁸ The same rebus is located in the text above. Since *pre-* inspires the thought of calm by reference to a field, throughout the chapter the essayist is able to scatter the figure of an agrarian world into the shape of the words that bear the same prefix.¹⁹

Bundles of figures that associate *champ* and *pré* are tied to the iconic qualities of *plais* and *plaisir*, but only in the bittersweet sense that the spectacle of the country in civil war exasperates the writer. He is grieved to see destroyed what he had been taught to love. Elsewhere Montaigne calls this "un vilain et mal-plaisant spectacle" (appropriately, in "Comme nous pleurons et rions d'une mesme chose" [I, 29, 229], when Julius Cæsar is forced to look at Pompey's decapitated head and imagine his acephalic body). In "phisionomie" the dilemma is expressed through new relations established among commonplaces, as in the rapport of *pais-plaire*; in whatever the text takes up "*plaisamment*," both with pleasure and searing pain or wounding; in words underscoring a diverse range of sentiment or that convey strong charge of ambivalence.²⁰

¹⁸ Tabourot's text remained popular up almost throughout the first quarter of the next century. First published in Dijon (1583), it is reprinted and often includes additional scatological scraps: *Les Bigarrures et touches du seigneur des Accords. Avec Les apothegmes du sieur Gaulard and Les escraignes dijonnaises*. Dernière édition, revue de beaucoup et augmentée. A Rouen chez David Geoffroy, 1616. (rebus on f. 8 v°). In his *Champ fleury* (Bourges, 1529), Geoffroy Tory suggests that the rebus has been known for some time...

¹⁹ The formula is so abundant in the chapter that it can be cited almost anywhere. Beauty "tient le premier rang au commerce des hommes; elle se presente au devant, seduict et preoccupe notre jugement...(1035); "je la considere à deux doits *près* de la bonté" (1036), etc.

²⁰ The text plays on the art of folding and pleating differences so obsessively that, before the eyes of a Franco-English reader, when Montaigne underscores his freedom to choose what he wants, "s'il me plaist" in respect to "ce lieu où j'escris," it is impossible not to see *place* as a hieroglyph or translinguistic form creased into the

In the context of the *pastissage* that Montaigne fashions from borrowed examples, *plaist* indicates that an allegory is being made from overlaid figures, or even an art of pleating is making multiple images of faces or forms placed one upon the other.²¹ When Montaigne suggests that he is "paging" through books that he "scarcely" reads, he also states that he is flipping through or among figures of faces in order to *esmailler*, to forge or to hammer into place his "physiognomy treaty." The art of stamping or of embossing figures is evoked in the verb that refers to the art of making an alloy from different metals, or of crafting inlaid designs with strips of iron, brass, copper, bronze and enamel. Also suggested is that the treatise is likened to a festive coat-of-mail that will celebrate a triumph of peace. Montaigne is forging a piece of armor or a mask designed to cover and reveal the various faces that shape the allegory of prudence. Covert allusion to the smith goes in tandem with the negative particle, *guiere*, that reiterates similar constructions elsewhere in the essay. The term is identical with *guerre* and thus keeps present the malady which the allegory is being designed to negate. *Guère* inflects *guerre* no less than *guarir*: the word itself becomes a pharmakon, since "elle vient guarir la sedition et en est pleine... (1018).²²

If the themes of sculpture and gridding (via *pastissage* and *esmailler*) describe the inventive wit of the writing, an "equipollent" distribution of terms is also being heralded. Similar groups of signifiers are found everywhere in the paragrammar of the text, but all the while a central area or textual meridian is established through

word. On the depth of meaning of *plaire* in the French Renaissance, see Ullrich Langer, *Divine and Poetic Freedom in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 156.

²¹ The cartographical implications of Montaigne's art of folding are obvious: a composite creation of a text-image, like a folio-page printed from a copper-plate engraving of a topographical map on one side and a body of text on the other (as in the first national atlas Maurice Bouguereau's *Theatre françoys* [Tours, 1594]) is not far away. Montaigne, however, folds the image and text into one form in a fashion analogous to the overlaid design of the mythic and historical faces. Notably, Gilles Deleuze (*Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* [Paris: Minuit, 1988]) argues that Baroque art, understood roughly as most creation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is above all that of folding and bending.

²² The expressions are everywhere: Certain sciences, "sous tiltre de nous guerir, nous empoisonnent..." (1015); "monstrueuse guerre" (1018); "nous ne sommes cheus de guerres haut" (1023), etc.

reference to the essay's poetics. Set in the body of the chapter, the comparison of writing to forging or drawing a weave of lines tends to fold the upper and lower ends of the essay back upon its inner surface. Thus the "traicté de phisionomie" resembles something of a peace-treaty that is put forth in a time of *guerre*, a figure that signifies at once a cause (war and plague) and its effect (calamity).

The essay implies that the mediations of meaning visible in both the overall form and the griddings of vocables constitute the dynamics of its allegory. The *traicté* inflects what Montaigne soon calls the "traict et façon de visage," that becomes an area where several images are imprinted on the same—metallic sculptural, or paginal—surface. In recounting the second story that tells of his mishap while traveling, the author describes an adventure that took place during a recent truce. "Me fiant à je ne sçay quelle treve qui venoit d'estre publié en nos armées, je m'acheminai à un voyage, par pays estrangement chatouilleux" (1039). He was taken prisoner "dans l'espais d'une forest voisine," felt doomed, but took heart when he saw a sudden and unexpected change of destiny. The leader of the brigands returns: "Je vis revenir à moy le chef avec paroles plus douces" (1040, stress added). Because the highwayman found traits of honesty and generosity in Montaigne's face, the author was led to peace, whose effects concur with the number of the chapter (xii) and are thus folded into the reported words of the leader.

The context is so Baroque that the anecdote implies the recent "truce" could have been that of the essay itself, and that the voyage the author is taking out of his castle is as chimerical as Don Quixote's peregrinations about the Spanish countryside. The interlocking effects of the two concluding fables (that resemble the two "contes" or contrary tales that end II, 37) suggest that the demarcation between war and peace in the essay and in the reality being described would be difficult to ascertain. Yet the parable states that since the author was taken to be someone with traits betraying a credo *other* than his own, and because his own face bore a variety of signs, he was able to save himself.

The last words of the essay show how money is made of the incident. Deprecating his simplicity but praising the good fate that his character has had, Montaigne sums up by saying that, even if they risk being ineffective, his actions are moderate. The figure that he applies to himself projects the principal lines of the facial allegory

toward the imaginary view of a nation at peace. "Moy, [je] ne suis qu'un escuyer de trefles" ([1041] 1588: *valet de trefles*), more than identifies the author as a jack of clubs. *Trefles* takes up the adjacent *treve*, that in turn is linked to *trait* and *traicté* (or both line and "treaty" that issue from the physiognomy of mediation), and designates a decorative shape, the trefoil or trilobed circle, that frames the various portraits. It might even recall the tricephalus that had initially united the faces of Natura, Socrates, and Montaigne.

If seen in three dimensions, the figure would leave an invisible side available for the emplacement of Henry IV or the memory of Etienne de la Boétie. Perhaps the emblem of the trefoil serves both to emblemize the iconic dimension of the essay and to make a case for the author's talents as a mediator. If the latter option is possible, then the cartographical and visual models show that the essay is crafted to produce double and triple signs and recondite allegories that argue for prudent action. They beg the reader to prepare for unforeseen changes that may take place in the policies of leadership. The strange shapes make talismanic objects out of the raw material of Montaigne's daily chronicle of life in Bordeaux and its surroundings in 1584-85. The mix of text and figure yields something of an artful *résumé*, or *vita*, that displays talents that might be useful for future leaders of the French nation.

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Cites and Stones: Montaigne's Patrimony

William E. Engel

Let that which I borrow be survaied, and then tell me whether I have made good choice of ornaments, to beautifie and set forth the invention, which ever comes from mee. For I make others to relate (not after mine owne fantasie, but as it best falleth out) what I cannot so well express, either through unskill of language, or want of judgement. I number not my borrowings, but I weigh them. And if I would have made their number prevaile, I would have had twice as many. They are all, or almost all of so famous and ancient names, that me thinks they sufficiently name themselves without mee. If in reasons, comparisons and arguments, I transplant any into my soile, or counfound them with mine owne, I purposely conceale the Author, thereby to bridle the rashnesse of these hastie censures....¹

This celebrated passage from Montaigne's essay "Of Books" raises some important questions about the Renaissance practice of

¹ *Montaigne's Essayes* (II, 10, 93). Unless otherwise noted the English translations from Montaigne follow *The Essayes...of Lord Michael de Montaigne*, by John Florio (1603; rpt. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1965), 3 vols., and will be identified by book, chapter, and page number. I have elected to cite from Florio because this article aims to recover some of the commonplaces of Renaissance rhetorical and compositional practices. Florio's idiosyncratic embellishments (typically, using doublets and strings of words where a single word might have sufficed) often provide, at a glance, the range of meanings associated with key terms during the late sixteenth century. Cf. F. O. Matthiessen, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), pp. 125-30, 143, 151; and Tom Conley, "Institutionalizing Translation: On Florio's Montaigne," *Glyph Textual Studies* 1 (New Series, 1986), 45-60, pp. 47-8, 56.

collecting and citing wise words culled from venerated texts. The main issue is not how many quotations one can allege, but the quality and appropriateness of those quotations with respect to one's purpose. And what was Montaigne's purpose? Often it is interpreted, as he claims in that same essay, to "endeavor not to make things knowne, but my selfe" (II, 10, 93). But mine is not another study of "the self" in Montaigne; rather it is an examination of the seed which precedes, engenders, and kills it—and of the essayist's gradual awareness of its fatal presence which is at once subtle and overwhelming.

* * *

An essential aspect of rhetorical training in the Renaissance was to maintain a digest of one's reading and studies.² In practice this could range from marking selected passages in exemplary texts like Seneca's *Epistles* or Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, to copying out those memorable sentences or notable deeds into one's enchiridion or commonplace notebook. Print technology made available neatly arranged anthologies and thesauri of commonplaces—whether notable passages or handy phrases culled from classical texts. Somewhere in between the private and the printed systems of collecting and preserving "sentences worthy of Memory" was John Foxe's *Pandectae locorum communium* [*Comprehensive Collection of Commonplaces*] (1572), a fill-in-the-blank workbook with printed topical headings and a few typical examples to suggest a pattern for the book's owner to follow.³ Like other introductions to such textual repositories arranged by commonplace headings and which included an exhaustive index, Foxe's cautions against relying exclusively on the entries in the collection. The owner of the book is urged to read the original from which the passage is excerpted, and then to judge for himself what is, or should be deemed, worthy of recording,

² See Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces* (New York: Pageant Press, 1962); and with special reference to Montaigne, see Edwin M. Duval, "Rhetorical Composition and the 'Open Form' in Montaigne's Early *Essais*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 43, No.2 (1981), pp. 269-87.

³ John G. Rechten, "John Foxe's *Comprehensive Collection of Commonplaces*: A Renaissance Memory System for Students and Theologians," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, No.1, (1978), 83-89, p. 84.

preserving, and transmitting. This same caveat informs Montaigne's handling of citations and quotations as well (for example II, 12; II, 17; III, 5). The absorption into his *Essais* of countless voices of authority and their counter-claims long has attracted the attention of careful scholars.⁴ It is now a modern critical commonplace that Montaigne's practice of alleging authorities, seen as the reinscription of voices of "the other," contributed in large measure to his novel fashioning of the "self" in the early modern period.⁵ In what follows, therefore, I want to look closer at a series of familiar assumptions about Montaigne's relation to his source materials in general, by considering the categories of those assumptions in a matrix of corresponding relations (see Appendix). Doing so will enable us to remark on some yet undetected, and quite curious, connections.

The main thematic headings under which my inquiry is carried out are also those things which Montaigne inherited respectively from his culture, from his ancestors, and from his father: (1) his language, literature and selected *sententiae*; (2) the château, including the tower which contained his library where he composed his essays, and which led to the composition of his "character" in a way that differs from the familiar humanist interpretation; (3) his kidney stones. The conclusion toward which my analysis points was suggested by Walter Benjamin's analogy, that "allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things."⁶ Accordingly this excursus on *sententiae* (wise words culled from earlier texts) and *exempla* (recorded deeds worthy of memory—and of being digested into one's own being) is grounded in the compound comparison: what allegories are to the realm of thought, these

⁴ See Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 42-47; Jean-Yves Pouilloux, *Lire les "Essais" de Montaigne* (Paris: François Maspero, 1969), pp. 20-25; Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 275-79; Antoine Compagnon, *La Seconde main ou le travail de la citation* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), pp. 288-332; André Berthiaume, "Pratique de la citation dans les *Essais* de Montaigne," *Renaissance et Reforme* 8, New Series, No.2 (May 1984), pp. 91-105, esp. pp. 94, 97, 101.

⁵ See for example Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Destruction/Découverte: Le Fonctionnement de la Rhétorique dans les "Essais" de Montaigne* (Lexington: French Forum, 1980); and John O'Neill, *Essaying Montaigne: A Study of the Renaissance Institution of Writing and Reading* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), especially chapter five, "Writing and Embodiment," pp. 82-99.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), p. 178.

fundamental units of Montaigne's discourse of "the self" are to the realm of language what ruins are to the realm of things.

The initial terms of this study become clear when we consider why ruins are an apt point of comparison for scrutinizing *sententiae*. Many popular mottoes and sententious words from the classical world were known to men and women in the Renaissance through inscriptions on monuments and tombs. Preserved as inscriptions and extant fragments then, *sententiae* and *exempla* conveyed information which, it was hoped, would endure despite the ravages of time.⁷ However, because these etched sentences often survived only as so much rubble and fragile parchment rolls, in general they were seen as tokens of man's vanity (intimating the folly of the desire to endure) rather than serving their more specific capacity as authentic records of the past.⁸ When brought together in a central place—say a museum or catalogue—, such ruins and fragments are like so many anthologized *sententiae* culled from diverse sources and books. In their new locations ruins, like abstracted *sententiae* and *exempla*, invariably are accorded a context different from their original setting. The intellectual play associated with unhitching *sententiae* and *exempla* from their textual moorings evidently appealed to Montaigne. M.A. Screech has observed: "a special feature of Montaigne's style and meaning is his refusal (normally) to state his sources and authorities. This is quite deliberate: he likes the ideas to be weighed *in vacuo*."⁹

By comparison, the same may be said of Robert Burton in his learned pastiche on early modern psychology, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (published in its first form in 1621). Like Montaigne, Burton spent the last decades of his life writing and revising his magnum opus—a process accorded therapeutic value. Both writers claimed they sought through their writing a kind of mental equilibrium; Burton, says he sought to ease his mind by writing

⁷ For a clear account of the inscription's evolution and its role in Renaissance works of art, see John Sparrow, *Visible Words: A Study of Inscriptions in and as Books and Works of Art* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 5-100.

⁸ See, for example, Joachim Du Bellay, *Antiquitez de Rome* and *Les Regrets* LXXX, both published in 1558.

⁹ M.A. Screech, "Commonplaces of the Law, Proverbial Wisdom and Philosophy: Their Importance in Renaissance Scholarship," in *Classical Influences on European Culture: 1500-1700*, ed. R.R. Bolgar (Cambridge, 1976), p. 131.

because he had, metaphorically speaking, "a kind of imposthume in my head, which I was very desirous to be unladen of, & and could imagine no fitter evacuation than" writing.¹⁰ Montaigne recounted that, at the time when he decided to resolve his studies and live his remaining years in tranquility, he noted rampant chimeras were engendered within him (I, 8, 44). Parallel to this fantastic and monstrous growth is the rather more substantial and poignantly real kidney-stones that took shape over the years since he began writing his essays (II, 37; III, 13).

The growth thus characterized by Montaigne, and which his essays describe, is less an index to spiritual progression than it is a reflection on the necessary conditions of his mortality. Further, the unruly chimeras, like his stones, come to full presence at their own pace and ultimately, like the essayist's use of *sententiae* and *exempla*, they take on a kind of parasitic life of their own within the host's body. Thus, if we are to maintain the interpretation that his essays are an emerging self-portrait done "to the life" (II, 37, 520),¹¹ we need to consider as well that the picture that comes into focus is a portrait of passage, in the face of death.¹² My assessment accords with the by now familiar layered interpretation of a "portrait of passage," only insofar as the image of the "character" portrayed can be read as an allegory of death sublating life. The resulting text is like an after-image of the author, a reflection of a subject in the process of passing away even as he writes (and revises what he writes) about that passage. His is a subject conveyed over time, piece meal, all the while that that very subject is slowly receding from his view (III, 9). How then to depict both the sense of loss and also what is gained through this intimate textual exercise?

The answer resides in Montaigne's attempts to digest and dispose *exempla* and *sententiae*—those commonplace rhetorical devices

¹⁰ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. A. R. Shilleto, 3 vols. (1893; rpt. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1926), vol. I, p. 18.

¹¹ See Dorothy Gabe Coleman, *Montaigne's "Essais"* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 132-37; and Richard Regosin, *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne's "Essais" as the Book of the Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 193-97.

¹² Cf. Georges Poulet, *Studies in Human Time*, trans. Elliot Coleman (1956; rpt. New York: Harper, 1959), pp. 39-49, and Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 173-84.

which are to the realm of language and the body of Montaigne's text what his kidney-stones are to his material body. Such is the grounding, the ground-work, *la matière*, of the essays—such is the subject of Montaigne's essays in a doubled sense.¹³ Therefore I would have us consider more closely the double direction of this movement by exploring the extent to which his stones found their way into the body of Montaigne's text, just as *sententiae* and *exempla*, which typographically make up the bulk of his essays,¹⁴ are absorbed, ingested and made a part of the fabric of the essayist himself. His stones, like *sententiae* in general, are convenient emblems of decay and ruin. As such they signify within his body, being, and text a kind of furtive growth that both reflects and heralds the passing away of "the self" so often celebrated by readers of Montaigne.¹⁵

One last observation is in order before we turn a critical eye toward Montaigne's literary activity: Montaigne himself was among the first readers of the published *Essais*. He became a reader of his book—and thus of his life—which, paradoxically, the industrial process of printed publication distanced from him. As Martin Elsky has observed in this regard, instead of automatically endowing the book with the authority of closure, the process of revisions makes print into a technology that can measure psychological change, even growth.¹⁶ To this I would add only that the imputed growth is legible to anyone who takes the book in hand—even, and especially, the essayist. But be warned: the growth described is "mortal" in all senses of the term: it is fatal, and it is typical.

* * *

¹³ Cf. *Essais* (I, 1, 1), "je suis moy-mesmes la matière de mon livre"; and Florio's rendering, "Thus gentle Reader myself am the groundworke of my booke...."

¹⁴ See Mary McKinley, *Words in a Corner: Studies in Montaigne's Latin Quotations* (Lexington: French Forum, 1981), pp. 13, 103, 111-12.

¹⁵ Here, and in what follows, my treatment of the notions of "man" and "character" are of a different order from the humanist theme of "the self" traditionally spoken of in Montaigne scholarship—for example in Donald Frame's "Self-Discovery and Liberation" in *Montaigne's Discovery of Man: The Humanization of a Humanist* (1955; rpt. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 74-95.

¹⁶ Martin Elsky, *Authorizing Words: Speech, Writing, and Print in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 212.

"Homo sum, humani a me nihil alienum puto." ["I am a man, I consider nothing human foreign to me."] This sentence from Terence, was adapted by Montaigne and used in II, 2, "De L'Yvrogerie," ["Of Drunkenness"].¹⁷ It appears in between lines from Lucretius and Virgil that support and, owing to its original context, also complicate the contention that a sage, or hero, after all is mortal and therefore vulnerable. Wisdom does not overcome our natural limitations. This same sentence, without being linked to its source in Terence's *Heauton Timorumenos* [*The Self-Tormentor*], also shows up as one of the fifty-seven moral sentences inscribed on the beams of Montaigne's library.¹⁸ Hugo Friedrich, among others, has explained that the *sententiae* on the fifty-four beams "outline, in the manner of mnemonics, the skeptical main themes of the first two books of the *Essais*, in which a part of them is repeated."¹⁹ Further, as I have adduced elsewhere, the very structure of this room constituted a material "Enchiridion"; thus Montaigne composed his *Essais* as if from within his own commonplace book—a commonplace book, literally, writ large.²⁰ Furthermore, because his practice of writing tended to expand on commonplace themes and, even then, toward revision of these amplifications, Montaigne revisited the anecdotes of his earlier writings and thoughts. Thus, for Montaigne *sententiae* were both a means and an end: they were repositories of ancient wisdom, and they provided a way to discover anew profitable information.

But *sententia* hardly stand alone in the storehouse of exemplary techniques available to literate men and women in the Renaissance.

¹⁷ *Œuvres complètes de Montaigne*, eds. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1962), p. 328.

¹⁸ For a catalogue of the *sententiae* decorating Montaigne's library and brief comments on where they appear in the *Essais*, see Grace Norton, *Studies in Montaigne* (New York: Macmillan, 1904), pp. 165-88; and Jacques de Feytaud's "Une Visite a Montaigne" in *Le Château de Montaigne*, Société des Amis de Montaigne (1971), pp. 36-43, 53-62.

¹⁹ Cf. Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, French trans. Robert Rovini (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1968), p. 22, and the English translation by Dawn Eng (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 12.

²⁰ William E. Engel, "The Art of Memory and Montaigne's Scene of Writing," *The Order of Montaigne's "Essays,"* ed. Daniel Martin (Amherst: Hestia Press, 1989), 33-49, p. 43.

In fact *exempla* and similitudes are discussed along with *sententiae* as the chief rhetorical strategies in Erasmus's *De Copia*, as "the eleventh method of enriching" which "depends on the copious accumulation of proofs and arguments."²¹ Although the history of these devices was ancient and yet still-developing, by the late-sixteenth century fairly standard uses were assigned to the *exemplum* and *sententia*: generally, they were interpolated deeds or sayings serving as an illustration, and which then were elaborated or embellished toward a didactic end.²² Insofar as they were rudimentary units of discourse and integral parts of rhetorical operations from the first through the seventeenth centuries, it may be useful to think of them as "mnememes." I borrow this term, mnememe, from Daniel Martin who has analyzed its general properties as a relationship between image and place in Montaigne, as the *imagines agentes* and *loci* of classical rhetorical theory discussed in the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* and later by Quintilian. The image and place, each in its own right, to use the language of structuralist linguistics, is a sign with "signifiants" and "signifiés."²³ Further, each mnememe brings into relation signs which function as discursive prompts or mnemonic cues. These signs in turn reflect a special kind of knowledge associated with a highly developed sense of visualization, like that required when using topical or artificial memory schemes.²⁴

Conceived of as mnememes then, the *exemplum* and the *sententia* encapsulate and express an historical anecdote or a saying deemed worthy of memory—whether to preserve it from oblivion, to resituate it in a novel context, or to validate and authorize another related point. The *exemplum*, like the *sententia*, is a discrete and

²¹ Desiderius Erasmus, *De Utramque Verborum ac Rerum Copia*, eds. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1963), p. 66.

²² Cf. Richard Regosin, "Le miroüer vague: reflections of the example in Montaigne's *Essais*," in *Œuvres & Critiques VIII*, 1-2 (1983), 73-86, p. 78; and Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 78-80.

²³ Daniel Martin, "Pour une lecture mnémonique des *Essais*: une image et un lieu," *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, 5th series, No. 31-32 (1979), 51-58, p. 55. See also Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 65-68.

²⁴ See Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London, 1966; rpt. Penguin, 1978), p. 43.

condensed elocutionary element capable of being augmented or glossed according to one's aim. But, irrespective of the end toward which they were used, *exempla* and *sententiae* needed to be stored and arranged in a repository, in some container or framework—whether a textual or imagined one. Among the many textual repositories of selected *sententiae*, *exempla*, and similitudes was Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia*, aptly subtitled *A Treasurie of Divine, morall, and phylosophicall similes, and sentences, generally usefull*. In a series of strained similes of his own and while using scores of *exempla*, Meres expounded the *sententia* "tria sunt omnia" ["All things in Three"].²⁵ I cite Meres at length and terrace the following citation because his copious rendering of the three fundamental mnememes displays quite explicitly what, as I will argue, remains implicit in Montaigne's text.

...all the force of wit may flow within three channels,
 and be contrived into three heads;
 into
 a Sentence, a Similitude, & an Example

...Carolus Quintus sayd, that warres were maintained with

vituals, money and souldiers: so wit is nourished with

Sentences, Similitudes, and Examples.
 Sentences, similitudes, & Examples are as necessary to uphold wit.

...so he that would write or speake
 pithily, perspicuously, and persuasively
 must use to have at hand in readinesse,
 three kind of ornaments and effectual motives,

Sentences, Similitudes, and Examples.

And in truth what can I desire more,
 then to see the naked Truth

arrayed in Sentences fitted the taste of Phylosophers;
 invested in Similitudes loved of Oratours; and

²⁵ Francis Meres, *Wits Commonwealth* (London, 1634), sigs. A2-A3v; the text cited is substantially the same as the 1598 edition.

approved by Examples, the rule and levell of the unstayed and
raging multitude?

...so haue I long desired to see three things;

Trutthes	soundnesse in	Sentences,
her	elegancie in	Similitudes,
and	approbation by	Examples

...so I judge him a happie wit who is

profound and substantiall in	Sentences,
eloquent and ingenious in	Similitudes;
and rich and copious in	Examples.

Despite his somewhat grandiloquent excursus on what he terms the "trinity" of sentences, similitudes, and examples in the pursuit of Truth, Meres nonetheless rehearses what passed for a basic understanding in the Renaissance of the value of such intertextual digests. Further, Meres' three-fold characterization of true wit as being predicated on a good digest of sentences, similitudes, and examples, implies a far more sophisticated point than his florid prose might suggest at first glance. In his blustering similitudes and examples we can glimpse an underlying model of the tripartite pattern of human understanding, one which was discussed explicitly by Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* and which was grounded in medieval "faculty psychology."

Bacon used this model more for convenience than as a serious means to discover absolute truths based on a series of analogical correspondences.²⁶ He explained that "the parts of human learning have reference to the three parts of Man's Understanding, which is the seat of learning: History to his Memory, Poesy to his Imagination, and Philosophy to his Reason."²⁷ Accordingly (as

²⁶ See Harry Levin, "Bacon's Poetics," in *Renaissance Rereadings: Intertext and Context*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz, Anne J. Cruz, and Wendy A. Furman (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 1-17, p. 6: "Bacon took little interest in the material basis of the mental processes that he delineated.... Bacon was content to draw his conceptual triad from the ancient apparatus of faculty psychology: Memory, Imagination, and Reason."

²⁷ *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, R.L. Ellis and D.D. Heath (Boston: Brown & Taggard, 1861-65), vi, p. 182.

outlined on the chart appended to this essay), the faculties of mind—Memory, Imagination, and Reason—corresponded to specific intellectual arts or domains: History, Poetry, and Philosophy, each of which had a corresponding unit of discourse which encapsulated the types of knowledge proper to it. For example, *exempla* were used for the compact storing and arranging of historical narratives, great acts and deeds; they served (and depended on) the faculty of Memory.²⁸ Because Poesy uses feigned histories, the similitude was the rhetorical trope usually associated with the faculty of Imagination. And finally, the precepts of philosophy can be collapsed into and expressed through pregnant sentences, or *sententiae*. Using each of the three faculties according to its proper end is, for the high-minded Bacon as for more popular-minded Meres, instrumental to anyone wanting to be an effective writer or speaker. Thus *sententia*, *similitudo*, and *exemplum*—as mnememes—as compacted units used to express the content of larger topics, and also as tropological categories in their own right, each according to its own domain yielded precepts, concepts (or conceits) and examples. When used by those trained in, and who worked out of the commonplace book tradition (like Montaigne), these most rudimentary units of discourse can be seen as the constituent parts of a mnemonically oriented principle of composition.

Despite Montaigne's claim to forget authors, places, and words, the seeds of the imported messages—in the form of mnememes—remained lodged within him, and were easily transplanted into his essays; even though, as he says, he was likely to forget his own "writings and compositions" (II, 17, 378). Arguably Montaigne could refer to his writings and compositions, review and revise them, and see in them a kind of "artificial memory." He relates that "for want of naturall memory I frame some of paper" (III, 13, 356).²⁹ His collected writings, over time, which he used to frame a memory of

²⁸ On "history" in medieval epistemology, as pertains to memory's role in ethical decision-making and recreating the past for the present, see Janet Coleman, "Late Scholastic Memoria et Remiscentia: Its Uses and Abuses," *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1986), pp. 22-44.

²⁹ Cf. *Œuvres complètes*, eds. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 1071, and Donald Frame, *The "Essays" of Montaigne* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 837: Florio translates as "frame" Montaigne's verb "forger," which Frame renders as "make."

and for himself, by virtue of the novel disposition of select *sententiae*, similitudes, and *exempla*, constituted the literary digest of Montaigne's reading and his judgments concerning that reading.

Thus Montaigne's literary evocation of his body, and of bodies within his body, mirror the way his essays function as a complex textual body; they supply him with a structure, a treasury in which to house anecdotes, reflections, citations, and his judgments concerning them. It is here that we can glimpse a folding over, a doubling back, in the fabric of Montaigne's textual patchwork; one that preserves the trace of a remarkable double movement. First, we have his literary movements within the body of his text to examine the movements within his own material body. At the same time we have also a movement outside the text to explore the body of literature that supplied the seeds for his own literary *corpus*. By way of interrogating this double movement I would call attention to a later addition in the 1588 essay "Of Experience."³⁰

Composer nos meurs est nostre office,
 non pas composer des livres,
 et gaigner, non pas des batailles et provinces,
 mais l'ordre et tranquillité à nostre conduite.
 Nostre grand et glorieux chef-d'oeuvre, c'est vivre à propos.
 Toutes autres choses,
 regner, thesauriser, bastir
 n'en sont qu'appendicules et adminicules pour le plus.

"Have you knowne how to compose your manners? You have done more then he who hath composed bookes." Have you known how to take rest? you have done more than he, who hath taken Empires and Citties. "The glorious master-piece of man, is, to live to the [purpose]": All other things, as to raigne, to governe, to horde up treasure, to thrive and to build, are for the most part but appendixes and supports therunto.

³⁰ I cite from three versions because, as indicated in Note 1, my concern is primarily with the broader semantic implications of such passages. The first citation comes from *Œuvres Complètes*, eds. Thibaudet & Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 1088; the second Florio (III, 13, 376); and finally Donald Frame, *The "Essays" of Montaigne* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), pp. 851-52.

To compose our character is our duty, not to compose books, and to win, not battles and provinces, but order and tranquility of our conduct. Our great and glorious masterpiece is to live appropriately. All other things ruling, hoarding, building are only little appendages and props, at most.

"Ruling, hoarding, building" is how Donald Frame translates Montaigne's "regner, thesauriser, bastir." Florio, using the tell-tale doublets of his ebullient prose, gives a more complete sense of the semantic field of these terms in the late sixteenth century: "to raigne, to governe," "to hoarde up treasure," and "to thrive and to build." In addition to "thesauriser" implying the accumulation of wealth, it also signified the hoarding of linguistic capital.³¹ The three categories which serve as headings to "all other things"—reminiscent of headings in a commonplace notebook—, whether by accident or by conscious design, provide us with a pattern for scrutinizing the composition of Montaigne's "character"—in all senses of that term. (Again I would call attention to the appended chart.)

These "appendixes" (as Florio translates "appendicules") echo textually and thematically Montaigne's characterization of his text as grotesque—as so many "monstrous bodies, patched and huddled up together of divers members" (I, 29, 195). We would expect no less from a man who, in his retirement from the world, wanted to settle his thoughts but found he had to keep a register of them because, if left on their own they spawned "so many extravagant *Chimeras*, and fantastical monsters, so orderlesse...one huddled upon the other" (I, 8, 44). These monstrous and seemingly alien bodies engendered by and inhabiting his imagination have a very real counterpart in his kidney stones. The curious relation between Montaigne's stones and his melancholy chimeras can best be explained by my remarking on an analogical sequence that emerges from within the body of Montaigne's text. Therefore, in what follows I will elaborate this pattern, and demonstrate how it constitutes a kind of macabre mnemonic device integral to Montaigne's program to "endight and enregister these my humours, these my conceits" (III, 3, 49). My aim in doing so is to indicate the extent to which Montaigne's attention to

³¹ See Randle Cotgrave, *English and French Dictionarie* (1611) sig. 4H6v: "Thesorise" is translated "hoarded as treasure"; and "Thezoriser," "to hoard, or gather threasure; to threasure up, to lay up threasure."

meurs, which constitutes his "character," is constructed because of, rather than despite, his claim that ruling, hoarding, and building are mere appendices to "the glorious master-piece of man." His text bears out that these appendices are the most one could hope for, and Montaigne's self-conscious construction of his character within and by virtue of the composition of his essays is unthinkable without the body of his book. "[M]y book and my selfe march together, and keepe one pace. Else-where one may commend or condemne the worke, without the workman; heere not: who toucheth one toucheth the other" (III, 2, 24). More particularly, it was ruling, hoarding, and building that enabled Montaigne to compose his character through the composition of his book. The author's body—and by extension "the self"—is that which would be governed; his reading and reflections, he would hoard and arrange in his essays, in his storehouse, in his artificial memory; and the building in question is both his text and where it was composed, his ancestral *château*. All of these elements converge, among other places in his text, in the following citation from the essay "On some verses of Virgil."

Plutarch saith, that he discerned the Latine tongue by things. Here likewise the sense enlightneth and produceth the words: no longer windy or spongy, but flesh and bone. They signifie more than they utter. Even weake one shew some image of this....[Plutarch] can no sooner come into my sight, or if I cast but a glance upon him, but I pull some legge or wing from him. For this is my dissignement, it much fitteth my purpose, that I write in mine own house. (III, 5, 101-4)

In recalling the scene of Montaigne's writing in his "own house," we recall also his Library of Memory and that it was likely indeed for him to cast a glance upon Plutarch's works and texts: he was surrounded by his books and by literary and visual mnemonic aids which inspired his inventions. Thus his special room provided him with a privileged and enhanced view—both materially and metaphorically.

At home I betake me somewhat the oftener to my library, whence all at once I command and survay all my housholde; It is seated in the chief entrie of my house, thence I behold me my garden, my base court, my yard, and looke even into most of my house. ... It hath three bay-windowes, of a farre-extending, rich and

unrestricted prospect...[there I] seclude my selfe from companie,
and keepe incrochers from me: there is my seat, there is my throne.
I endeavour to make my rule therein absolute. (III, 3, 49)

As can be seen at a glance on the appended chart, all three "appendages" unite in this site (and cite): building, both his ancestral home and the construction of his text; ruling, of his home, his leisure, and "self"; and hoarding, of his books, his words, and the larger-than-life words of the ancients painted on the beams overhead. But building, ruling, and hoarding can also be seen as corresponding conveniently to three domains of Montaigne's life and text: the Domestic, Private, and Linguistic. We can see this more clearly when we elaborate further the ramifications of this interplay of his body and his text as it pertains to the triplex principle of building, ruling, and hoarding. In the Domestic realm we have the stones of his ancestral home, to which he retired to "settle his thoughts" and "keepe a register of them" (I, 8; II, 18); the Private, his kidney stones, also which he says he inherited from his father (II, 37, 496); and regarding the Linguistic realm, the words from the classical fathers quarried from now-ruined civilizations, his select *sententiae* were the building blocks of his essays (I, 24). The analogical strata of the Domestic, Private, and Linguistic in the body of Montaigne's essays provide a convenient way to conclude our analysis of the curious relation among patrimony, kidney stones, and writing.

Montaigne describes the interior of his body with the same perspicacity as when he probes and tests his mind and imagination, without sparing the reader his painful recognition that his life is passing away, piece by piece, as he urinates. This is especially poignant when he records that he is prone to

sweate with labour, to grow pale and wanne, to waxe red, to quake and tremble, to cast and vomit blood, to endure strange contractions, to brooke convulsions, to trill downe brackish and great teares, to make thicke, muddy, blacke, bloody and fearfull urine, or have it stopt by some sharpe or rugged stone, which pricketh and cruelly wringeth the necke of the yarde. ... Consider but how artificially and how mildly she [death] brings thee in distaste with life, and out of liking with the world...."If thou

embrace not death, at least thou shakest her by the hand once a moneth." (III, 13, 354-56)³²

The pain which brings him in touch with his mortality (and, of course, his subsequent joy and relief after passing a stone) also provides an occasion for meditating on, not only his body and his transience, but also on his body with respect to his lineage.

What monster is it that this teare or drop of seed, wherof we are ingendered brings with it; and in it the impressions, not only of the corporall forme, but even of the very thoughts and inclinations of our fathers? ...It may be supposed, that I am indebted to my fater for this stonie quality; for he died exceedingly tormented with a great stone in his bladder.... Where was al this while the propension of inclination to this defect, hatched? And when he was so far from such a disease, that light part of his substance wherewith he composed me, how could it for her part, beare so great an impression of it? And how so closely covered, that fortie five yeares after, I have begunne to have a feeling of it? (II, 37, 496)

Where the composition of his character is concerned, in the end—and in the process of his writing—the citations from the classical fathers are, Montaigne claims, "wholly digested" (II, 10), even as they are placed in the body of his text; whereas his kidney stones, passed onto him from his father, are what is wholly indigestible.

None but fooles will be perswaded, that this hard, gretty and massie body, which is concocted and petrified in our kidneis may be dissolved by drinks [potions]. And therefore after it is stirred, there is no way, but to give it passage; For if you doe not, it will take it himselfe. (III, 13, 359)

What emerges here is a more subtle declaration of the maxim that one's principal duty is to make sense out of the diverse workings of one's inheritance—whether they materialized as diseases, or buildings, or language. After all, in addition to having the stones of his château and the stones of his kidneys passed onto him from his

³² Cf. Thibaudet and Rat, pp. 1069-70 and Frame, pp. 836-37.

father (incidentally whose name, *Pierre*, means rock, or stone),³³ so too were the building blocks of his discourse, Latin sentences, made a part of his experience before he could judge whether or not he wanted them to become a part of his being. And, if we believe Montaigne's claim that he was taught Latin before he knew French, then his mother-tongue was that of the fathers *par excellence* (I, 26, 185); likewise his kidney stones emblemize the transfer of paternal substance into the body of his being.

These familiar, yet seemingly alien, bodies within his body enabled him to feel and to represent his sense of life. The stones reminded him, as they passed out of him, that a little bit of his life had passed away as well. Thus he exorcised and expressed in his textual movements all that had had a role in forming the "self" as he understood it, as a self in passage: the stones making up the tower of his site for writing, the stones backed up within his urinary track, and the back-log of lapidary words from the books upon which his education was based and which in turn provided the foundation for the composition of his essays. Montaigne seems to have recognized, metaphorically if not existentially, this play of *pierres* and the attending lapidary connections, for he compared his escalating bodily decay, emblemized through his stones, to the ruin of an old building.

Now I entreate my imagination as gently as I can, and were it in my power I would cleane discharge it of all paine and contestation. A man must further, help, flatter and (if he can) cozen and deceive it. My spirit is fit for that office. There is no want of appearances every where. Did he perswade, as he precheth, hee should successfully ayde me. Shall I give you an example? He tels me, it is for my own good, that I am troubled with the gravell: That the compositions of my age must naturally suffer some leake.... (III, 13, 353)

This last, and richly suggestive phrase, is given in the original as: "que les bastimens de mon aage ont naturellement à souffrir quelque goutiere" (1068). Florio's rendering of "bastimens" as "compositions" retains the connoted doubled sense of an artificial construction, both with respect to one's character (those appended

³³ See Antoine Compagnon, *Nous Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), pp. 170-93, the section titled "Tel père, tel fils: une ontologie de la semence."

accomplishments of one's life) and also an aged edifice. Thus, in the *Essais*, as in the general usage of the day, these two senses illumine one another; "bastimens" was taken to mean "a building, frame, house, or edifice"; also "a composition, or compaction of many things together."³⁴ Not only is there a parallel between Montaigne's composition of his character and the composition of his book, but the semantic sense implied here can be thought of as the mortar which runs throughout, and holds together, the various building-blocks of Montaigne's discourse, and thus of his literary life-work and self-portrait. His château was composed out of the stones of the region and owed its construction to the labor of others; his body owed its being to his parents and the labor of his mother; and his book he composed out of the words of others.

Each part so far discussed then—château, body, and book (corresponding to the domains of Domestic, Private, and Linguistic)—can be understood more comprehensively when we see them as corresponding as well to the headings CONTEXT, SEX, and TEXT. The context for his writing, ostensibly, is his retreating from the world, and recollecting his experiences and readings; his body is known to him through his various members and their "unruliness" (I, 21), a knowledge which comes to presence in and through the memory and textual recollections of SEX (III, 5); and his book, of course, is the master's TEXT, and the master-text of the "self"—and that which he seeks to master. The château is his dwelling; his body, the casing of his humors; and the book, the repository which encased and gave a form to his thoughts experiences, and judgments.

The activity of composing his essays, no less than the themes they investigated, enabled Montaigne to compose his character (*meurs*). We recall from "Of Experience," this is our primary duty; not to rule, hoard, or build, which are mere appendages or members tacked onto the body of our life-work. And in Montaigne's case, this applies to his literary life-work as it does to the composition of his character—which brings together and culminates his effort to rule, hoard, and build. With this in mind, we can see in a new light a key passage usually read as the author's most cogent statement of his union with his book:

³⁴ Cotgrave, *Dictionarie*, sig. I3v.

In framing this pourtraite by my selfe, I have so often been faine to frizle and trimme me, that so I might the better extract my selfe, that the patterne is therby confirmed, and in some sort formed.....I have no more made my booke, then my book hath made me. A booke consubstantiall to his Author: Of a peculiar and fit occupation. A member of my life. (II, 18, 392)

It may well imply a union, but one that refers to the constitution of the character created as result of the essays—seen as they are as a composite element tacked onto the essayist's being and having a power over it. The resulting image he saw of himself was a fractured body which, like his book, was a pastiche of disparate apothegms and appendages expanded from mnememes—from *sententiae*, *exempla*, and similitudes.

To the end I may in some order and project marshall my fantasie, even to dote, and keepe it from loosing, and stragging in the aire, there is nothing so good, as to give it a body, and register so many idle imaginations as present themselves unto it. I listen to my humours, and harken to my conceits because I must enroule them....I never studie to make a booke; Yet have I somewhat studied, because I had already made it (if to nibble or pinch, by the head or feet, now one Authour, and then another be in any sort to study). (II, 18, 392-93)

Montaigne recognized aspects of himself in the books he read and in the book he spent the last part of life writing and rewriting. He tried to represent all of the fragments and divisions, the sinews, bones and stones of his being. It is in this sense that knowledge for Montaigne—and the very discourses of knowledge available to him which were predicated on the mnememes *exemplum*, *similitudo*, and *sententia*—can be said to be based on re-collection. His literary endeavor to compose his character, "to register so many idle imaginations as present themselves" (II, 18, 392), reflected his epistemological quest, quite literally, to re-member, and thus to give a body to—which is to say "to digest"—the *membra disjecta* of his experience.

related headings	contextual	textual	sexual
categories of "appendicules et adminicules" [III, 13, 376]	THESAURISER [to hoard]	BASTIR [to thrive & to build]	REGNER [to reign & govern]
DOMAIN FOR MONTAIGNE	LINGUISTIC	DOMESTIC	PRIVATE
SITE/CITE AT CHATEAU	books/his book	character/his essays	home & leisure/"moi"
COMMONPLACE HEADINGS Meres, <i>Palladis Tamia</i>	SENTENCES	SIMILITUDES	EXAMPLES
RHETORICAL STRATEGIES Erasmus, <i>De Copia</i>	<i>sententiae</i>	<i>collatio/similitudo</i>	<i>exempla</i>
CORRESPONDING "FACULTY"	REASON	IMAGINATION	MEMORY
DOMAIN OF KNOWLEDGE reduced to its most fundamental principle	PHILOSOPHY PRECEPTS	POETRY CONCEITS (CONCEPTS)	HISTORY EXAMPLES
its corresponding role and means	dynamics and consequences of the mind's operations	derives precepts from history's examples and, examples from philosophy's precepts	storage and arrangement of examples for future
illustrations from Florio's <i>Essayes of... Montaigne</i>	"...memorie alone, of all other things, compriseth not only Philosophy, but the use of our whole life, and all the Sciences." [II, 17, 377]	Socrates's sayings are "inductions & similitudes drawen from the most vulgar and known actions of men....Men are puffed up with wind...as Baloons" [III, 12, 290]	"The third, and in my judgement, most excellent man is Epaminondas...." [II, 36, 488]

Vocabularies of Innovation and Repetition in Montaigne, Nietzsche, and de Man

Dudley M. Marchi

A discussion of modernism which sets Michel de Montaigne alongside Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul de Man creates a special intertextual space, one that moves beyond narrow cultural categories to emphasize a problematic dialectic within the modernist project itself. To combine these writers in a discussion of literary modernity, an expanded notion of "modernism" must provisionally be considered, one less a term of literary periodization and more of a flexible paradigm of textual affinity and shared vision reaching across historical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Montaigne's *Essais*, while not commonly defined as a "modernist" text, and in many instances seen even as a reactionary response to the pretensions of novelty and change as it embraces the security of cultural precedent, nevertheless bears the seed of its own upheaval by producing a problematic relationship between the notions of innovation ("nouvelletez,") and tradition, ("la coustume").¹ Montaigne's concerns and vocabulary will resurface in Nietzsche's reception of his work and come into play in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben," a text in which the discussion of the modernist problematic in terms of a dialogical interaction between old and new is a significant event in the history of literary

¹ Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, eds. V.-L. Saulnier and Pierre Villey (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978). All references to the *Essais* appear in the text with indications of book, chapter, page, and layer.

modernism.² This intertextual nexus comes into fuller play in the work of de Man, whose commentary on Nietzsche's work, especially in the essay "Literary History and Literary Modernity," and on Montaigne's in his lesser-known article "Montaigne et la transcendance," helps to demonstrate how the encounter of Montaigne and Nietzsche generates an enhanced perspective in the discussion of literary modernity.³ It is especially in the context of de Man's reception of both Montaigne and Nietzsche that the vocabularies of innovation and repetition developed in the work of all three writers generate important implications for a current understanding of the modernist predicament.

The explicit presence of Montaigne's work in Nietzsche's is minimal, yet its implicit presence is substantial. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche proclaims: "dass ich etwas von Montaignes Mutwillen im Geiste, wer weiss? vielleicht auch im Leibe habe."⁴ What Nietzsche calls Montaigne's playfulness, sportiveness, or even wantonness will surface in his own discussion of the relationship of repetition and innovation. Nietzsche's comparison of himself to Montaigne is not gratuitous. *Ecce Homo* is in a sense Nietzsche's Montaignean self-portrait: his own version of the development and significance of his life and work in which he attempts to capture Montaigne's joyful mastery of human experience as portrayed in the *Essais*. In several places in Nietzsche's work there is an attempt to identify himself with Montaigne and what he considers the essayist's triumphant self-discovery. Self-cultivation, appreciation of the contemplative life,

² See for example John Burt Foster's *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). One would also consider the neo-Nietzschean dimensions of French intellectual thought over the last 30 years—in Foucault and Deleuze for example—as discussed by Vincent Descombes in *Le même et l'autre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979). More recently, Erich Heller's *The Importance of Nietzsche* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), as well as Richard Schacht's "Nietzsche's Coming of Age" in the *German Book Review* (Munich: Goethe Institute, 1991), have convincingly reiterated Nietzsche's pervasive role in intellectual history and literary sensibility in the twentieth century.

³ Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 142-165 and "Montaigne et la transcendance," *Critique* IX, 79 (1953): 1012-1022.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1956), vol. II, p. 1088. All further references appear in text.

confessional sincerity, and radical skepticism are aspects of the *Essais* held in esteem by Nietzsche.⁵ This is the general range of Nietzsche's attraction to Montaigne. He often uses the latter's concrete insights on the human condition to temper abstract metaphysics and draws elements from the *Essais* to help him analyze the individual in relation to his or her cultural context. There are certainly other manifestations of the issues as delineated here found elsewhere in Nietzsche's work. Yet in limiting attention to "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil," a text written at the time when Nietzsche was undertaking an attentive study of Montaigne (Andler, 107), we can perhaps establish a specific instance of Montaigne's role in the development of Nietzsche's thought which helps to explain the latter's later recognition of Montaigne's importance, as expressed in *Ecce Homo*.

A paradigmatic set of lexical oppositions developed by Montaigne throughout the *Essais*, particularly in "De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy receüe" is that of "nouvelletez" vs. "coustume" and "inventeurs" vs. "imitateurs." In Nietzsche's "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" similar terms are used, namely "Neuheit" vs. "Historische" and "kritische" vs. "monumentalische." This oppositional vocabulary is important in that it helps to produce an essential impasse of literary modernism: the awareness (sometimes explicit, often implicit) of the inability to get outside of an aporetic mode of paradoxical dualism.⁶ For, although Montaigne seemingly

⁵ Useful studies on Nietzsche's reception of Montaigne are Charles Andler, *Nietzsche: sa vie et sa pensée* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920), one of the first to address the subject, and Brendan Donellan, "Nietzsche and Montaigne," *Colloquia Germanica* 19 (1986): 1-20 which presents a larger and more textualized perspective of Montaigne's role in Nietzsche's work. Jean Starobinski, in *Montaigne in Motion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), goes as far to claim that "[it] should come as no surprise that, in restoring to appearances the primacy that Montaigne had earlier bestowed upon them, Nietzsche almost simultaneously rediscovered, in the form of what he called 'eternal recurrence,' the 'wheels' that Montaigne believed responsible for the revolving course of history" (303).

⁶ This conceptual opposition goes beyond Eliot's more conservative notion in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "the existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them." *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 38. This problematic has also been developed, relative to receptions of the *Essais*, in Emerson's "Quotation and Originality," and "Self-Reliance," Pater's *The Renaissance* and

conforms to custom while rejecting innovation, he preserves a subjective textual identity by putting into discursive practice the latter term. "De la coustume" begins by underscoring the danger of habit and how it tyrannizes one's personal freedom: "Car c'est à la vérité une violente et traistresse maïstresse d'escole que la coustume [...] [N]ous luy voyons forcer, tous les corps, les reigles de nature. «Usus efficacissimus rerum omnium magister»" (I, 23, 109 C). Yet Montaigne's concluding quotation of Pliny ("Habit is the most effective teacher of all things") contradicts his initial assertion and habit thus quickly changes from a furious and tyrannical mistress into a benevolent master. In the following paragraphs, Montaigne then counters Pliny's opinion, remarking how much habit stupefies the senses: "combien l'accoustumance hebete nos sens" (I, 23, 109 C). Elsewhere in the same essay, Montaigne opposes "accoustumance" to "nouvelletez," telling us that "Je suis desgousté de la nouvelleté, quelque visage qu'elle porte, et ay raison, car j'en ay veu des effets tres-dommageables" (I, 23, 119 B). Montaigne thus simultaneously valorizes two opposing entities. He admits to the detrimental effects of habit ("L'assuefaction endort la veuë de nostre jugement," I, 23, 112 C), yet seeks to avoid the dangers of innovation. Although the principal effect of custom is to "nous saisir et empieter" (I, 23, 115 A), one should obey "l'empire de la coustume" (I, 23, 116 C) since, as he claims in "De la vanité," it is far more dangerous to upset a current system than to conform to its values and exigencies, as well as to its imperfections: "le plus viel et mieux cogneu est tousjours plus supportable que le mal récent et inexperimenté" (III, 9, 959 C). Montaigne thus proposes an equivocal attitude as a means of confronting the interaction of innovation and habit: "le sage doit au dedans retirer son ame de la presse, et la tenir en liberté et puissance de juger librement des choses; mais quant au dehors, qu'il doit suivre entierement les façons et les formes receues" (I, 23, 118 A). He posits reciprocal movement between inner freedom and outward conformity and seeks to maintain, in Hugo Friedrich's terms: "Die Doppelstellung Montaignes zur Überlieferung—Ehrfurcht und Abstand, Liebe und

Gaston de Latour, Woolf's *Orlando* and "Montaigne," and more recently in Michel Chaillou's *Domestique chez Montaigne* and Philippe Sollers' *Portrait du joueur*.

Unabhängigkeit."⁷ The context of Montaigne's argument is, in this instance, political and religious, yet its implications can be extended to his writing project. Beneath the authority of classical antiquity, Montaigne pursues his own idiosyncratic ruminations, conforms outwardly (as seen in the practice of copious quotation and in the founding of his arguments on ancient authority), yet at the same time takes great liberties to produce an original persona embodied in a new genre of eclectic dimensions. He attempts to be simultaneously faithful to both internal and to external demands.

In "De la coustume," habit is at once beneficial and harmful and innovation dangerous yet necessary. Montaigne outwardly adheres to the former, yet preserves his inner space and subjective integrity by putting into practice the latter. Instead of integrating his arguments at key moments in "De la coustume" on both the level of signifier and signified, Montaigne paradoxically attempts to valorize "coustume" while endowing it with various and shifting meanings and allowing these to palpitate in vicissitude. This contradictory nature of Montaigne's essaying is an instance of his own innovative identity. He produces conflicting currents which often render unequivocal understanding of his writing indeterminate. As Montaigne's arguments revolve around the kernel words "coustume" and "nouvelletez," his positions shift constantly in a labyrinth of conflictual meanings. He first charges "coustume" with negative connotations, slowly strips these away, then begins to restore more positive ones. Thus the competing forces of signification render problematic the valorization of one term over the other. Although explicitly valorizing the immutable institutions of his historical moment ("les constitutions et observances publiques et immobiles," I, 23, 121 C), he nevertheless pursues the instability of idiosyncratic eclecticism ("l'instabilité d'une privée fantaisie," I, 23, 121 C). After claiming to conform to "observation et obeissance" (I, 23, 122 B), Montaigne concludes enigmatically and begins to charge innovation with positive value. In considering the relationship between historical repetition and the demands of idiosyncratic freedom in the present, he produces the problematic of modernity and history. The writer is free yet chained, as Nietzsche puts it while discussing the difficulty of overcoming tradition: "es ist nicht möglich, sich ganz

⁷ Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne* (Bern: A. Francke AG - Verlag, 1949), p. 57.

von dieser Kette zu lösen" (I, 230). More than a period code or historical paradigm, modernism in Montaigne's work, and as we will see in Nietzsche's, is rather an impulse which carries the seed of its own upheaval in order to create the possibility for anti-classical *scriptible* interaction.⁸

The similar, yet enhanced dynamic operative in Nietzsche's "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" is embodied in a tripartite scheme of history: "monumentalische" history (the quest for heros), "antiquarische" history (the consolidation of the knowledge of the past), and "kritische" history (one must be a judge and not a slave of history). Nietzsche collapses the monumental and the antiquarian into the category of the historical ("das Historische") which must be judged by critical history ("die *kritische*") which he also calls the unhistorical ("das Unhistorische"). He maintains that a dynamic interrelationship of the historical and the unhistorical is essential for the survival and well-being of a people and its culture: "*das Unhistorische und das Historische ist gleichermassen für die Gesundheit eines einzelnen, eines Volkes und einer Kultur nötig*" (I, 214). Critical history embodies a conflictual impulse toward the past, the desire to interrogate, condemn, and dissolve history, as well as the motivation to cut cultural roots in order to live more fully in the present. It is a dangerous process of creation which subverts its own constructions, since, while in judging and banishing its own past, a society inevitably condemns itself as it is inextricably part of that past. Although the role of cultural repetition is to preserve the inherited knowledge essential to the stability of a civilization, critical history must assert itself in order to establish a present identity. There is, however, a negative affirmation in the process of critical history since the new identity created out of the destruction of the old itself becomes part of the monumental and the antiquarian: "jede siegende zweite Natur zu einer ersten wird" (I, 230). If repetition of

⁸ Is Barthes' definition not in some ways an apt summary of Montaigne's method of reading?: "Pourquoi le scriptible est-il notre valeur? Parce que l'enjeu du travail littéraire (de la littérature comme travail) c'est du faire du lecteur, non plus un consommateur, mais un producteur du texte" (10). Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970) 10. Montaigne is an important antecedent to the notion of readerly reception as seen in his penchant for a paradoxical textual polyvocalism which demands a reciprocal involvement of text and reader in order to respond to his challenge.

the past prevents the assertion of a new beginning, then surmounting it through the struggle of critical history allows for the self-perpetuation of culture and civilization. Yet the later accomplishment ("eine zweite Natur") itself becomes a primary identity ("die erste Natur," I, 230). De Man comments on this situation, maintaining that Nietzsche's position concerning the relationship between past stability and present change is a prevalent one in the modernist temperament: "If history is not to become sheer regression or paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal; but modernity cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process" ("Literary History," 151). Ambivalent toward the spectre of the past, yet skeptical about new beginnings, Nietzsche's modernism can only be considered as a dilemma: how does self-assertion come into being while tied to the past's claims to enforce the present? Nietzsche's articulation of the problem, and the terms he uses to do so, are curiously foreshadowed by Montaigne's.

Montaigne and Nietzsche often use digestive metaphors to describe the process of assimilating one's cultural tradition. In de Man's discussion of the modernist predicament, he reverses the process—instead of the present taking sustenance from the past, the past "swallows up" the present and thus the attempt at assertion of the new fails since the newest new will itself become the tradition from which a future "modernist" dynamic can be initiated. Eating sustains a life which is eaten in its own turn. In "Des Cannibales," Montaigne discusses how the Amerindians alternately eat and are eaten by their enemies. They consume the enemy flesh, not for physical sustenance, but in order to absorb spiritual energy. Eventually, the one who has eaten will be eaten, and can even enjoy being so as he taunts his enemies with the fact that the flesh they ingest was nourished on their own ancestors. Montaigne considers this valor in the face of death a triumphant loss, "des pertes triomphantes" (I, 31, 211 C). Sacrificing one's life becomes a victory; it preserves self-integrity. As de Man maintains, the new is ultimately absorbed into the historical process, yet defiance (the gesture of self-assertion) produces victory in the face of impending death. In the work of Montaigne and Nietzsche, historical reading involves self-sacrifice. One surrenders the unity of subjectivity to commune with dead spirits. This dialogue with cultural tradition thus

leads to a triumphal loss. Modernist textuality as practiced by them is a dialogical process engendering uncertainty with which the reader must interact in his or her critical enterprise.⁹ They see no way out of the impasse and produce tantalizing paradoxes which call forth the procreative potential of future engagements of the problem, where in response to their paradoxes, readers must undertake their own struggles to harmonize past (previous writings, cultural traditions) and present (new readings, critical responses, and cultural traditions). Montaigne and Nietzsche lose in the sense that their arguments are not definitively finalized. Both have so often been condemned as irregular and even dangerous writers due to their suggestive complexity which can be read and appropriated in so many different ways. The victory is in the generation of a perpetual engagement of the problems by future readers who continue the life of the texts and actively produce meaning in their particular historical circumstances. It is useful to remember that both Montaigne and Nietzsche are often writing with pedagogical purposes in mind—they were concerned with how their ideas could be extended to the problem of how citizens (and not only the specialized readerships of the academy) should best study history, philosophy, and literature, and then make positive use of that learning.

* * *

Montaigne deals most explicitly with the predicament of past and present, with custom and innovation in a political and religious context—yet the issues also play themselves out in his discursive structures, and in other contexts. In "De la coustume," he first develops the theme that habit creates absurd conventions and enslaves judgement. For Montaigne, the present (Nietzsche's "zweite Natur") *should be* infused with the past (Nietzsche's "erste Natur")

⁹ The term "dialogical," a problematic concept which is used differently among a variety of writers, is defined here according to Jauss's notion of a *dynamic two-way exchange between readers and texts of different historical periods*. This is particularly characteristic of Montaigne's active relationship to his own precursors as well as the manner in which he encourages readers to enter into dialogue with the *Essais*. See Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 3-45.

and whatever deviates from officially recognized culture is generally considered unacceptable: "Par où il advient que ce qui est hors de gonds de coutume, on le croit hors des gonds de raison" (I, 23, 116 C). On the one hand, an individual must respect custom as society's universal law, yet concurrently preserve inner freedom: "La société publique n'a que faire de nos pensées; mais le demeurant, comme nos actions, nostre travail, nos fortunes et nostre vie propre, il la faut prêter et abandonner à son service et aux opinions communes..." (I, 23, 118 A). The individual must assert freedom of judgement while remaining within the confines of custom. Montaigne proposes that the self live in the present yet that the second nature remain true to the first. Present uniqueness is preferred yet past habit is respected. Montaigne goes on to say that any innovation of the old ways must be avoided at all costs: "Il y a grand doute, s'il se peut trouver si evident profit au changement d'une loy receue, telle qu'elle soit, qu'il y a de mal à la remuer..." (I, 23, 119 A). Montaigne is referring specifically to the religious wars of his time. He compares the Protestants to "inventeurs" and the Catholics to "imitateurs" (I, 23, 119 C). In preserving past custom, the imitators have been guilty of evil, yet the inventors have done more harm. Yet if the dynamic of innovation and repetition is extended to Montaigne's writing project, we can see a textual manifestation of the problematic—his quotations are less traditional authorities than as places where he can seek refuge and develop his self-portraiture gradually—it is precisely this active intertextual relationship of the *Essais* to the literary past which provides Montaigne with a sense of his own innovative identity. Yet a simultaneous attitude of resistance to the past counterpoints his aversion to "nouvelleté" in an essay appropriately entitled "Des menteurs," where he claims that his penchant to forget books and places, and then later to remember them, acts as a catalyst in the formation of new dimensions of understanding: "...et que les lieux et les livres que je revoy me rient tousjours d'une *fresche nouvelleté*" (I, 9, 35 B—emphasis added). Which of Montaigne's formulations of repetition and innovation should one believe?

Outwardly, Montaigne plays a politically conservative role, yet he is discursively on the side of the "inventeurs," generating textual structures endowed with innovation and instability. In this sense he weaves surreptitiously into the *Essais* potentially radical aesthetics and politics. Such innovation for Montaigne arises from an over

dependence on critical history: "Toutes sortes de nouvelle desbauche puisent hereusement en cette premiere et foeconde source, les images et patrons à troubler nostre police. On lict en nos loix mesmes, faites pour le remede de ce premier mal, l'apprentissage et l'excuse" (I, 23, 120 B). Innovative reading of the past in the service of reform is harmful: "Mais le meilleur pretexte de nouvelleté est tres-dangereux" (I, 23, 120 B); respect of custom and tradition, although imperfect, is preferable to novelty where uncertainty can only bring on inevitable evil: "Si me semble-il, à le dire franchement, qu'il y a grand amour de soy de presumption, d'estimer ses opinions jusque-là que, pour les establir, il faille renverser une paix publique, et introduire tant de maux inevitables et une si horrible corruption de meurs" (I, 23, 120 B). As Montaigne's argument in "De la coustume" revolves around the kernel words "coustume" et "nouvelleté," he calls for respect to old ways, yet his argument deviates from traditional dogmatic lessons. His terms, criteria, and values shift. His judgements are caught in inevitable flux and "vont coulant et roulant sans cesse" (II, 12, 601 A). The reader who attempts to become his competent reader (*suffisant lecteur*) cannot be passive nor inattentive and must attempt to work through the labyrinth of conflictual meanings, using them as subject-matter for further critical engagement and development, and thereby becoming his ideal student: "Un suffisant lecteur descouvre souvent és escrits d'autruy des perfections autres que celles que l'auteur y a mises et apperceües, et y preste des sens et des visages plus riches" (I, 24, 127 A). The *Essais'* heterogeneous structure produces diverse meanings which increases the reader's participatory role by demanding engaged readings. Montaigne undermines authorial tyranny and provides readers an enhanced role in the discursive contract between text and audience. This quality, characteristic of many "modernist" and "post-modernist" texts, has as well determined many varieties of "reader-response criticism."¹⁰

¹⁰ See Cathleen M. Bauschatz, "Montaigne's Conception of Reading in the Context of Renaissance Poetics and Modern Criticism," *The Reader in the Text*, eds. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 264-292. One could also consider the many other writers who develop the notions of participatory reading and of the open or *scriptible* text in the wake of the *Essais*. Montaigne's importance to such writers as Barthes, Eco, Kristeva, Wittig, and others has been admirably discussed by Réda Bensmaïa in *The Barthes Effect*:

Nietzsche is such a *suffisant lecteur* and appropriates the problematics generated by Montaigne concerning conflictual engagement of the past and redevelops them in an overtly more radical enterprise. He picks up on Montaigne's suggestion by enhancing the *Essais* with new and enriched dimensions ("des sens and des visages plus riches").

Nietzsche encourages yet discourages the effort of creating one's own private space at the expense of the customary attitude toward the past: "Es ist ein Versuch, sich gleichsam *a posteriori* eine Vergangenheit zu geben, aus der man stammen möchte, im Gegensatz zu der, aus der man stammt" (I, 230). The attempt is dangerous, but in the battle of decision-making, there is remarkable consolation ("merkwürdigen Trost") for those who seek the struggle ("die Kämpfenden"). Both Montaigne and Nietzsche mediate between their selves, their own cultural moments, and their respective cultural traditions. They use what they need of history, discard the rest, and weave what remains into their personal visions. Nietzsche maintains that a culture must forget its past at times in order not to repeat the same mistakes, in order not to become paralyzed in false coherence and remain free in controlled disparity. Montaigne's use of the past is more systematic than Nietzsche's. Although he moves into an unhistorical, personalized discourse, he does not fully adopt Nietzsche's solutions of forgetting and producing anew in order to heal cultural decadence. He attempts to bolster his text with the comfort of cherished writers and, while doing so, empties it of reassuring coherence by demonstrating the disturbing inconsistencies of thought, language, culture, and civilization. His answer to cultural decadence is to demand his readers, faced with the incongruities of human existence, to engage themselves in greater individual effort. By offering problematic formulations of the problem and equivocal responses to the questions raised, Montaigne produces "nouvelletez" while not outwardly recognizing that he does so. The flux he sets up in the various polarities of his text is of course a characterization of only one aspect of a modernizing literary impulse. Yet this aspect is central to his relationship with Nietzsche, who uses the *Essais*, not so much to

The Essay as Reflective Text (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

reflect his own concerns, but audaciously, in order to radically recast issues first developed by Montaigne.

Both writers make important pronouncements on modernism and history in the context of education. It is this perspective which provides other significant intertextual correlations between their work. Nietzsche considers an educated person to be the individual who can make cultural decisions, using his or her learned information in a productive way. Yet this educated individual can also be very historically uneducated: "es kann einer sehr gebildet und doch historisch gar nicht gebildet sein" (I, 232). If knowledge is not properly digested, one is overfilled and sluggish, may perish of indigestion ("Unverdaulichkeit zugründe gehe"), and become a walking encyclopedia, unable to transfer what is needed for a healthy individual or cultural life. Montaigne uses a similar digestive metaphor, yet in his case the over-eater is not just overfilled with history, but regurgitates it and is left empty: "C'est tescmoinage de crudité et indigestion que de regorger la viande comme on l'a avallée" (I, 26, 151 A). In both cases inner being must be developed through dynamic interchange with culture. For Nietzsche it is the will to power which must effect this change. Montaigne is less aggressive yet no less tenacious and effective in his quest for a fruitful dialogue with historical culture. The "unhistorical" use of the "historical" produces a circular self-destructive yet self-generating process, continuing the life of the past while enlarging its existence through the development of the self in the present.

For Nietzsche, inner being ("unser Inneres") must be strong enough to develop influential models into personal response; a culture is weakened when it absorbs too much of its history: "der moderne Mensch leidet an einer geschwachten Personlichkeit" (I, 236). Too much non-subjectivity turns modern men into Montaigne's laughable pedants ("les lourdes testes"). Nietzsche complains about the mechanized attitudes of his intellectual contemporaries: "Sind das noch Menschen, fragt man sich dann, oder vielleicht nur Denk/, Schreib/, und Redesmaschinen" (I, 240)? Both writers berate dogmatic academics and call for the strong expansive personality to overcome the "kalten Dämon der Erkenntnis" (I, 244): "Qu'il cele tout ce dequoy il a esté secouru, et ne produise que ce qu'il en a faict" (I, 26, 152 C). Both go beyond the confines of the educational context and extend their positions to society in general. In

Montaigne's school of life ("cette eschole du commerce des hommes"), it is the heroic individual, strong enough to absorb the past and regenerate its power through wisdom, who is to be admired: "Comme il n'affiert qu'aux grands poetes d'user les licences de l'art, aussi n'est-il supportable qu'aux grandes ames et illustres de se privilegier au dessus de la coustume" (I, 26, 154 C). The most responsible deployment of monumental history makes possible the heroic expansion of the soul, transcends the paralyzing historical constraints of one's age ("lähmenden Erziehungsbanne der Zeit"), and develops a mature understanding of ourselves through our past.

Immediate engagement with life is what Montaigne recommends over the school of historical knowledge: "Au nostre, un cabinet, un jardin, la table et le lit, la solitude, la compaignie, le matin et le vespre, toutes heures luy seront unes, toutes places luy seront estude" (I, 26, 164 A). Nietzsche counsels his student to follow nature; he should pursue his course of studies in "die einzige Werkstätte der einzigen Meisterin Natur" (I, 278). Montaigne is known for his adherence to the natural in order to preserve intellectual, physical and moral health. Both writers propose to follow *nature* as the way out of what they see as the political strife and aesthetic incoherence of their times. Both are seeking a solution to what they lament as the cultural decline of their historical moments by proposing revisions. Yet the status of this *natural* is ironic since Montaigne and Nietzsche often cultivate a highly stylized, baroque, or manneristic mode in their writing.¹¹ Their own critical history has produced discursive structures which are less coherent and stable than more traditional academic argumentative procedures would allow.

In order to remedy the historical impasse in which culture is trapped, the patient must drink a natural remedy to regain health. Nietzsche's invocation of a hygienic aesthetic, a "*Gesundheitslehre des Lebens*" (I, 282), needed to provoke his student to forget and create his own "neuen und verbesserten Natur" (I, 285), is an affirmation of innovation, yet a gesture needed for survival. It is a

¹¹ See Morris Croll, "*Attic*" and *Baroque Prose Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). Croll helped to "modernize" the baroque and mannerist qualities of Montaigne's writing and thereby open a wider spectrum in which to consider Montaigne as a more central stylistic force in European writing than previously considered.

position shared by Montaigne, who, on the other hand, berates medical cures in "De la ressemblance des enfans aux peres." This is their paradoxical practicality in the service of radical institutional revision. In the face of cultural decline, both attempt to regenerate new life into the disorganized sensibilities of their contemporaries through individual potentiality. The new heroic student "muss das Chaos in sich organisieren" and in accordance with the Delphic teaching "ihre echten Bedürfnisse zurückbesinnen" (I, 284). In the advancement of authentic culture, the student must organize the chaos of the historical and produce culture in harmony with life. Although Nietzsche does not entirely depend on the *Essais* for his ideas, he develops similar concepts in a dynamic way and puts his theory of the creative use of history into practice. In "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil," he maintains that when society consists of non-reflective historical learning, it threatens its own existence and will perish unless it brings itself closer to forming a balance of self-developed culture and dynamic historical understanding. Yet the attempt to pursue such an individualistic path deviates dangerously from customary practice. Both Montaigne and Nietzsche remain cognizant of this paradox throughout their arguments and propose that *natural* inclinations should be strengthened by learning and not dominated by it: "Les inclinations naturelles s'aident et fortifient par institution; mais elles ne changent guere et surmontent" (III, 2, 810 B). Yet the beneficial *natural* as opposed to the harmful *cultured* is continually reversed and puts binary opposition into conflictual play.

Both the prepositional qualifier in Nietzsche's title "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben" and Montaigne's belief that from learning should be extracted a lesson applicable to "la vie" direct their thoughts on the opposition of past and present. Yet the antitheses that they establish are never absolute: Nietzsche qualifies his claim for the unhistorical by maintaining that life must be experienced unhistorically yet only *to a certain degree* ("bestimmten Grade," I, 214) and Montaigne, as has been demonstrated, wishes to preserve history, yet only in a dynamic formulation. The conjunction of incompatible entities, in de Man's terms history and modernity, is an irresolvable paradox since "modernity discovers itself to be a generative power that not only engenders history but is part of a generative scheme that extends back into the past" ("Literary History," 150). Nietzsche and Montaigne define the relationship

between history and modernity as ultimately unresolvable. As Montaigne claims, there are no objective facts, but only interpretations: "Il y a plus affaire à interpreter les interpretations qu'à interpreter les choses" (III, 13, 1069 C). Nietzsche adheres to the attitude that it is impossible to understand a *Welt an sich*: "Gegen den Positivismus, welcher bei den Phänomenen stehn bleibt »es gibt nur Tatsachen« würde ich sagen: nein gerade Tatsachen gibt es nicht, nur *Interpretationen*. Wir können kein Faktum »an sich« feststellen" (III, 903). Both writers direct their readers to evaluate cautiously the galaxy of issues presented in their writings in order to arrive at a new yet provisional understanding. The reactivation of the historical in a *kritische* mode should only be taken in this open interactive sense—and Nietzsche will use Montaigne to insist upon this mode of provisional understanding. In this way he displays Montaigne's most essential importance for his work: as a purveyor of the heuristic nature of truth: "Ja! und Nein!—dass geht ihm [the skeptic] wider der Moral; ungekehrt liebt er es, seiner Tugend mit der edlen Enthaltung ein Fest zu machen, etwa indem er mit Montaigne spricht: »was weiss ich«" (I, 670). Nietzsche uses Montaigne, however surreptitiously, to develop his arguments, especially in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil." He goes beyond Montaigne's notions and thus exposes the conflict between their respective positions and the impossibility of the ultimate convergence of their thought. Yet this conflict highlights how Nietzsche's reception of the *Essais* projects Montaigne's thought into the arena of the question of modernity. The contradictory relationship between history and modernity has come to be understood as an essential predicament of literary modernism. The pursuit to resolve this opposition is not necessarily the modernist identity. It is perhaps the *impossibility* of overcoming this obstacle that is the catalyzing impulse shared by Montaigne and Nietzsche which plays a role in a wide range of modernist writing posing itself as a problematic. They are writers who think and write not only about themselves but against themselves, struggle with problematics and respond to them with ambivalence in the belief that it is the pursuit of ineluctable truth, and not its reduction into an ideal system of thought, which is the *raison d'être* of existence and of their efforts ("essais"—*attempts* or *experiments*) toward anti-dogmatic mobile understanding.

* * *

In this restless movement between past and present, between self-assertion and conformity to the demands of cultural repetition, dynamic constructs which motivate many issues in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" and in the *Essais*, another important oppositional relation is that of *remembering* (adherence to the "Historische") and of *forgetting* (the adventure of the "kritische" enterprise). The act of critical history depends on the ability to forget—to rid oneself of cultural residue in order to participate in a fuller and more immediate present. A comparison of this set of terms uncovers other concurrences of thematic concerns, topical similarities, and lexical choice which point to the Montaignean dimensions of Nietzsche's attempts to explain the confrontation of self-cultivation and historical knowledge. Nietzsche uses the example of a grazing herd of animals who enjoy the immediacy of the present moment, oblivious to any consciousness of the past: "sie weiss nicht, was Gestern, was Heute ist, springt umher, frisst, ruht, verdaut, springt wieder, und so vom Morgen bis zur Nacht und von Tage zu Tage, kurz angebunden mit ihrer Lust und Unlust, nämlich an den Pflock des Augenblicks, und deshalb weder schwermütig noch überdrüssig" (I, 211). Humans, unlike animals, are condemned to live historically with the memory of past events. Even when the former attempt to live in the present, they inevitably remember ("ich erinnere mich," I, 211) and are forced to live with the burden of the past ("grössere Last des Vergangenen," I, 212), forever wishing for the bliss of an elusive presentness enjoyed by the animals ("überseliger Blindheit," I, 212). In "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil," the impossibility of living in an eternal immediacy of experience as do animals must be counteracted by the effort of creative individuals to forget: "an allem Handeln gehört vergessen" (I, 213). Forgetting is what Nietzsche sees as a key to the production of innovative configurations of creative life. In order not to be overwhelmed by the past, Nietzsche exhorts his contemporaries to assimilate then subordinate historical knowledge to their genuine individual needs ("echten Bedürfnisse," I, 284) and thereby create a true culture ("wahren Bildung" I, 285). Bearing in mind Nietzsche's putative wariness of univocal truth as discussed in "Über Wahrheit und Lüge in aussermoralischen Sinne," the choice of such absolute adjectival qualifiers as "echten" and "wahren" (meaning "genuine,"

"true," "pure," or "authentic") makes Nietzsche's claim suspect. The most essential point of his argument is rendered uncertain by virtue of the instability of the chosen term. It is an instability which he established elsewhere in his work and now uses against himself. He "forgets" his own textual history, in the form of what he previously wrote ("Über Wahrheit," written in 1873—"Vom Nutzen," in 1874) thereby allowing himself to say something new which is, however, a paradoxical utterance exposing his ultimate skepticism on solving the problem of modernity even while he is passionately engaged in the articulation of its identity.

Montaigne likewise enlists the example of animals in his attempt to subordinate the multiplicity of cultural material necessary for the sovereignty of his project of self-expression. He also valorizes forgetting as one of the keys to the project of idiosyncratic creativity and uses similar terms and examples to describe his attitude toward self-cultivation. In the "Apologie," he uses examples of animals' many admirable qualities to attack human vanity and to show how all of our philosophy, history, and reason has rendered us inferior to them in many ways. His numerous examples are often hyperbolic and surpass Nietzsche's example in humoristic exaggeration. Yet as his strategies shift from demonstrating the excessive claims of human superiority over animals to a discussion of the limits of human knowledge, he uses animals one final time as he offers his own remedy for a more authentic mode of living: "Voulez-vous un homme sain, le voulez-vous réglé et en forme et seure posture? affublez le de tenebres, d'oisiveté, et de pesanteur. Il nous faut abestir pour nous assagir, et nous esblouir pour nous guider" (II, 12, 492 A, B). The similar choice of lexicon employed by Nietzsche and Montaigne to describe their attitudes toward self-cultivation is striking. In order for one to be healthy ("Gesundheit" and "sain et en forme"), one must achieve the superior historical "blindness" of animals ("Blindheit" and "esblouir"), and thereby obliterate the harmful effects of an overly developed dependence on knowledge and historical understanding. As with Nietzsche, however, Montaigne's inability to find his convincing "assiette" betrays his claim by proposing the very possibility of achieving a true stability ("seure posture"). Even as Nietzsche and Montaigne propose solutions, the terms with which they do so, having been problematized elsewhere in their work, betray the *essayistic* quality

of their propositions. In their attempts to say something unique about what is truly good, they produce triumphant losses since they make great claims but fail to do so unequivocally. They are trapped by their own metaphors and subvert their own positions even as they are victorious in producing an enhanced understanding of the difficulty involved in developing a formula for individual creativeness.

Both the "Apologie" and "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" function on at least one level as indictments of human presumption. Montaigne slowly dismantles all human claims to superiority based on knowledge and arrives at his celebrated pyrrhonist suspension of judgement: "que sçay-je?" He forgets absolutes, condemns reason, and accepts his ignorance as the best position from which to confront all philosophical discussions whose diverse approaches have yet to produce stable and certain knowledge of the human condition. Nietzsche also berates all systematic exclusionist approaches at understanding: neither the historical, unhistorical, or critical, nor the kinds of philosophical consciousness prevalent in Germany at the time (variations of the Hegelian, Darwinian, and Hartmannian) have provided adequate answers to the best way in which individuals should learn, think, and write.¹² Yet neither do Nietzsche and Montaigne escape the problem of developing a stable understanding of the problems with which they are dealing. Nietzsche's terminology to describe historical processes, like Montaigne's permutating opposition of custom and innovation, fails to achieve stable conceptualization. Montaigne's presence in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil," though obviously not explicit, can help us to better understand a text that is extremely "divers et ondoyant," and one which continues to pose interpretive difficulties.

In Montaigne's pyrrhonist strategy in the "Apologie," he condemns his own discourse since doubt, as embodied in his refusal of affirmation, is itself an affirmation. In "Vom Nutzen und

¹² Hayden White, for example, has commented in "Nietzsche: The Poetic Defense of History in the Metaphorical Mode" in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973): "Hartmann's doctrine of the sovereignty of the unconscious is, then, just as dangerous as Hegel's doctrine of the "World Spirit" and Darwin's apotheosized Nature. It represents a hardening of the will to form to the detriment of the will to life. All general schemata must be eschewed, Nietzsche repeated, if history is to serve the needs of living men" (354).

Nachteil," Nietzsche also practices a form of suspension of judgement (Montaigne's "epoché") by never stating exactly what his system of a "history in the service of life" would be, only what it should not be. If, as he claims, all acting requires forgetting ("allem Handeln gehört vergessen"), then he has deployed this premise in his own textual practice by forgetting to tell us what he initially wished to achieve in the essay: the development of a paradigm for the amelioration of his historical moment. As Montaigne does not escape his own circular paradox in the "Apologie" in his proposition of a pyrrhonist solution which by its definition can only be a non-solution, so Nietzsche attempts to resolve the problematic paradoxically since he sees no way out of the circle. He proposes as his "solution" for an "abusive" attitude toward history, history. Yet it is the "Unhistorische," the ability to forget, and the "überhistorische," the search for a stabilizing mode of creativity, which are the best antidotes for the moribund "Historische." This homeopathic remedy has its dangers. Just as one suffers from the dangers of the historical, one will also have to suffer from its antidote, the unhistorical, and make heroic efforts toward a new beginning. As Nietzsche poses as a cultural doctor in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil," (note the medical terminology throughout: "health," "malady," "remedy") it appears that he allows the text's usefulness to rely on his multiple diagnoses rather than on any specific prescriptions. He nevertheless claims that the open and indeterminate quality of his text will be understood by the "suffisant lecteur" and developed in a manner which answers to their personal needs: "Von diesen Hoffenden weiss ich, dass sie alle diese Allgemeinheiten aus der Nähe verstehn und mit ihrer eigensten Erfahrung in eine persönlich gemeinte Lehre sich übersetzen werden" (I, 283). Like Montaigne, he calls for the reader to continue producing his text. This gesture also allows him to abnegate the responsibility for the closure of his arguments.

The concept of the dualistic remedy of unhistorical and superhistorical helps to provide a more essential relation between Nietzsche and Montaigne. Nietzsche's final definitions of the unhistorical: "die Kunst und Kraft *vergessen* zu können und sich in einen begrenzten *Horizont* einzuschliessen" and the superhistorical: "die Mächte, die den Blick von dem Werden ablenken, hin zu dem, was dem Dasein den Charakter des Ewigen und Gleichbedeutenden gibt, zu *Kunst* und *Religionen*" (I, 282) represent one polaristic

construct around which Montaigne's writing project often gravitates. In numerous instances in the *Essais*, Montaigne complains about his poor memory: "Il n'est homme à qui il siese si mal de [...] parler de memoire. Car je n'en reconnoy quasi trasse en moy, et ne pense qu'il y en ay [...] une autre si monstrueuse en defaillance" (I, 9, 34 A). Montaigne claims that he constantly forgets things, admits that he loses track of what he read and where he read it, often to the extent that he develops others' writings as if they were his own. This "forgetting," whether putative or actual, is what allows him to generate his own textual productivity. In order to overcome the accumulation of the historical knowledge amassed in his book, he must "forget" it in order to structure his own writing: "à faute de memoire naturelle j'en forge de papier et [...] je l'escris" (III, 13, 1092 C). Montaigne's impulse toward the unhistorical, his forgetting, is what allows him to produce superhistorical configurations—that of understanding himself and of creating the "stability" of his writing which, however provisionally, orders his existence:

Autant que je m'en rapporte à elle [la memoire], je me mets hors de moy, jusques à essayer ma contenance; et me suis veu quelque jour en peine de celer la servitude en laquelle j'estois entravé, là où mon dessein est de représenter en parlant une profonde nonchalance et des mouvemens fortuites et impremeditez, comme naissans des occasions presentes. (III, 9, 963 B)

Too much memory stifles his efforts at self-expression, puts him outside of his sovereign selfhood. As he forgets, he can live and express himself in the vital present of his mobile and spontaneous textuality. His essayistic writing has no precedent ("impremeditez") and is a spontaneous production of "nouvelletez." It is Montaigne's ability to mediate between the unhistorical and the superhistorical which helps him to "organize the chaos" of his learning and thinking, yet doing so in a manner which allows him to let his lived experience rule over his knowledge ("Leben über das Erkennen," I, 282). What Nietzsche insists on near the end of "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" as this ability to produce a personal doctrine of historical understanding ("eine persönlich gemeinte Lehre"), is very much a mode of textual production as initiated by Montaigne in the *Essais*.

In response to the academic presumption of his age, Nietzsche's categories are so self-contradictory (for even as he proposes the

unhistorical and the superhistorical as remedies, he soon returns to the monumental, antiquarian, and critical as the best methods for engaging history) that one cannot say he has concluded the essay but has left it in suspension to be further developed by his true readership, the "hopeful ones" ("diesen Hoffenden"). Nietzsche maintains that all of his propositions may be teeming with important implications for the study of history ("gefüllt sind," I, 283) yet also that they may be totally devoid of value ("die wohl auch leer sein können," I, 283). His calling into question the value of his own discourse renders his efforts at publicizing his personal feelings ("Ich habe mich bestrebt, eine Empfindung zu schildern [...] indem ich sie der Öffentlichkeit preisgebe," I, 209) void of any definitive value. There is no normative system of historical education that Nietzsche can adequately develop as an alternative, since, in his search for a legitimate mode of historical apprehension toward the amelioration of the sickness of German culture, his categories, even as they admirably draw attention to important intellectual and social problems, reach the point of undecidability. Nietzsche's response to the impasse is to revert to the "Historische" by citing the timeless wisdom of the Delphic Oracle:

Und wie kommen wir zu jenem Ziele? werdet ihr fragen. Der delphische Gott ruft euch, gleich am Anfange einer Wanderung nach jenem Ziele, seinen Spruch entgegen: »Erkenne dich selbst.« Es ist ein schwerer Spruch: denn jener Gott »verbigt nicht und verkündet nicht, sondern zeigt nur hin«, wie Heraklit gesagt hat. Worauf weist er euch hin? (I, 284)

Nietzsche's Heraclitean qualification of the oracle ("sondern zeigt nur hin") points to his belief in the suggestive quality of his argument as well as to the participatory effort needed to engage his work. He backs out of the issues while throwing the ultimate responsibility for their conclusion onto the reader. What Montaigne sees in his examination of the Delphic Oracle, which he also offers as a remedy for the sickness of his historical moment ("un temps malade comme cettuy-cy," III, 9, 993 B) is also paradoxical:

C'estoit un commandement paradoxe que nous faisoit anciennement ce Dieu à Delphes: Regardez dans vous, reconnoissez vous, tenez-vous à vous [...] c'est toujours vanité pour toi, il n'en est une seule

si vuide et necessiteuse que toy [...] tu es le scrutateur sans connoissance. (III, 9, 1001 B)

More self-knowledge as proposed by the oracle leads only to greater futility in understanding since humankind is basically devoid of any positive qualities except the realization of this very emptiness that self-knowledge brings about. Nietzsche's discourse thus empties itself out in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" (it is both "gefüllt" and "leer") as he becomes the investigator without ultimate knowledge ("le scrutateur sans connoissance"). The more he probes and develops his terms, the further he moves away from the "instruction of the age" that he had initially hoped to achieve. He is finally forced to equivocate on his concluding remarks and fails to finalize discussion. In Nietzsche's own vanity of looking into himself and exploring his personal attitudes on the value and function of historical knowledge ("ich mich mit der Naturbeschreibung meiner Empfindung hervorwage," I, 210), he finds that his discourse, as Montaigne warned in "De la vanité" is "vuide et *necessiteuse*." It is "needy" in the sense that, even today, intense critical engagement is required to understand its importance for our own time.¹³

How then does Nietzsche, even if he can't find a way out of the paradox, end the essay? He does so, further problematizing his previous claims, by reverting to the categories of the monumental and the antiquarian as a solution. His final paragraph turns to the example of ancient Greece which he considers to have dealt with the same problematic of how not to perish through too much dependence on the "Historische." Nietzsche fills up his "kritische" void with the monumental example of the Greeks' success at subordinating other cultures and traditions to their own needs. He seemingly "forgets" his previous categories and relies on a return to what he sees as the Hellenic concept of culture as an answer to the problems of his own. The Greeks' ability to organize the chaos ("das Chaos zu organisieren") is what Nietzsche himself fails to achieve in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil," as seen in his continual evaluation and

¹³ Joseph Peter Stern contends that we are still trying to understand the implications of "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" for our own age: "But the help we receive is limited to his insistence that a major problem awaits solution," "Introduction," *Friedrich Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations*, trans. Reginald John Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. xx.

reevaluation of concepts which always circle back on themselves in aporia. What the strong personality must do is to overcome the assimilation of historical models and reproduce it in accord with the creative self: "Seiner Ehrlichkeit, sein tüchtiger und wahrhaftiger Charakter muss sich irgendwann einmal dagegen sträuben" (I, 285). Is this not what Nietzsche so much admires in Montaigne? It is his honesty ("Ehrlichkeit," I, 296) and integral self-sufficiency ("friedliches Für-sich-Sein und Ausatmen," I, 378), which are the very qualities that Nietzsche turns to to find his way out of the argument. Montaigne is the bridge which helps Nietzsche find the way back to ancient greatness.

Nietzsche does not however use Montaigne directly in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil." It is perhaps because Montaigne was so successful in the production of his own text as he attempted to overcome the "burden of the past" and produce what Nietzsche could not quite achieve: a self-sufficient autonomous personality. Perhaps Nietzsche, in his own attempts to reproduce Montaigne's "Muthwillen in Geiste" ("wantonness," "mischievousness," "sportiveness") does so in the *body* of his text ("wer weiss? vielleicht auch im *Leibe*") and therefore must intentionally "forget" him in order to produce his essayistic attempt at the explanation of the value and function of the past. One could object that Montaigne plays no role whatsoever in "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" since he is explicitly absent from the text. On the other hand, Nietzsche's paradoxical essaying of issues important to Montaigne, the concurrence of thematic concerns, topical similarities (education, habit, innovation, presumption, self-knowledge), and lexical choice point again and again to the Montaignean dimensions of Nietzsche's attempts to explain the confrontation of self-cultivation and historical knowledge. Nietzsche far exceeds Montaigne's surreptitious modernism, yet his reception of the *Essais* brings the modernist qualities of Montaigne's writing into greater prominence. By virtue of the Montaignean context, we begin to better understand "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil" as an essayistic text in the Montaignean mode highly important to contemporary discussions of philosophy, history, and literature.

* * *

De Man's "Montaigne et la transcendance" helps to bring together the issues generated by the lexical oppositions innovation/tradition and remembering/forgetting. De Man's strategy in "Montaigne et la transcendance" is another example of a Montaignean approach to a subject in its radical digression from a proposed topic since it is written under the rubric of its sub-heading "Hugo Friedrich: *Montaigne*." Yet out of the eleven page "review," Friedrich's work is merely quoted twice and referred to only briefly as de Man pursues his own understanding of Montaigne's importance to the opposition of "la transcendance" and "l'immanence pure." De Man examines the status of Montaigne's subjectivism ("le reflet d'une subjectivité absolue"—"Montaigne," 1012) as promoted by Friedrich, yet uses Friedrich's position as a springboard for his own essaying of the question of Montaigne's status as a writer. De Man is wary of the normative systematizing of Montaigne's work in the manner of Friedrich and will examine the issues in an open and tentative manner: "on doit toujours se méfier quand on pense pouvoir enfermer dans une formule tranchante" ("Montaigne," 1012). De Man posits that Montaigne's writing is best understood as a dialectical movement between stability, "un équilibre statique" and restless productivity, "réflexions infinies" ("Montaigne," 1012) and sees that the only solution to the presence of opposing entities in the *Essais* is one of problematic ambiguity. He uses the example of the "Apologie" to demonstrate Montaigne's complex encounter of literary, philosophical, religious, and political history as he attempts to develop his own subjectivist response to the *Essais*. Since the spectre of ancient learning ("l'immense masse de sagesse de nos ancêtres"—"Montaigne," 1014) is teeming with paradox and ambiguity ("fourmille de contradictions et de contresens"—"Montaigne," 1014), de Man sees Montaigne as a proto-modernist in his efforts to expose the limits of the rationalist confrontation of absolute understanding. Montaigne's subjectivist project of struggling with the impossibility of the comprehension of immutable truth (whether divine or historical) is an heroic attempt, "un acte dangereux" ("Montaigne," 1015) since he risks the loss of self-identity in carrying out the enterprise. De Man therefore sees Montaigne's undertaking as double and diverse; it is not simply subjectivist, but also a demonstration of the failures of subjectivity: "Montaigne parlant de l'impossibilité de se connaître est en plein

dans la transcendance" ("Montaigne," 1017). On the other hand, Montaigne's ability to confront the problem of the impossibility of subjectivity is carried out in a subjective mode of discourse—his writing is both transcendent (overcoming both the past and the difficulty of being true to oneself) and immanent (he is truly himself).

De Man considers this mobile status of Montaigne's engagement of the past and the ability to personally express this activity in his writing as a dynamic and self-referential modernist force in literature which "s'y nourrit et s'y revitalise, s'élançant de là vers de nouvelles et incessantes démarches que rien ne soutient, hors de sa propre énergie" ("Montaigne," 1018). Yet de Man also realizes the danger of constituting a "modernist" Montaigne in the face of the essayist's impulse to maintain the status-quo in religion and politics. De Man again pursues a dualistic solution by claiming that Montaigne's conservatism is ritualistic, outwardly conforming to his age while ensuring that this ritualistic orthodoxy conforms to his notion of the "exigences de subjectivité" ("Montaigne," 1019). De Man's argument then shifts to a discussion of the paradigm of conformity and subjectivity in the context of the specific political events of Montaigne's time. It is particularly Montaigne's relation to *La Ligue*, the coalition of ultra-conservative Catholics most responsible for the persecution of French Protestants which poses a problem for de Man. Although a moderate Catholic who adhered to a position of tolerance on the question of religious reformation, Montaigne's diatribes against religious and political "nouvelletez" as well as his active role as an advisor and friend of Catherine de Medici and Charles IX who designed and implemented the massacre of over 13,000 Protestants on a single day in March 1572, implicate him in the excesses of the *Ligue*. Montaigne's silence on the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre is bothersome since he is candid on so many other of the important political events pertinent to his life.¹⁴ He was certainly not responsible, nor even an active participant in the atrocities of the *Ligue*, yet his silence on such a profound issue of his time, which

¹⁴ See Géralde Nakam's, *Montaigne et son temps: les événements et les "Essais"* (Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1982), especially pp. 13-38, for a consideration of our still ambivalent understanding of the relationship of the *Essais* to the actual events of Montaigne's life.

roughly coincides with the inception of his writing of the *Essais*, does call forth his moral complicity in such an occurrence. De Man's discussion of Montaigne's ambivalent relationship to the *Ligue* then shifts to events contemporaneous to his own life: "les misérables mythes" and "les loyautés les plus factices—celles du nationalisme et de la race" ("Montaigne," 1020). How to remain true to oneself while answering to the political exigencies of the historical moment is the question with which de Man struggles as he analyzes Montaigne's manner of dealing with the problem. In light of the recent controversies concerning de Man's putative implication in the fascist ideologies prevalent during the Second World War by virtue of his articles published in the collaborationist paper *Le Soir* in Belgium between 1940 and 1942, his choice of discussing Montaigne's struggle with the problematic relationship of political alliance and literary self-expression is a significant moment in understanding how Montaignean textuality continues to play a role in current discussions of literature, history, and politics. De Man's "Montaigne et la transcendance" was first published in 1953 at which time de Man was at Harvard University, struggling with securing a livelihood, the creation of his own identity, and the drama of the relation of his past actions to his role as an emerging scholar in the American academy. Just as we cannot know what de Man suffered after World War II in dealing with his own moral conscience as he moved beyond his past activities and created a new life in the United States, so, he tells us, we cannot know what Montaigne may have experienced at the difficult juncture in his life when he was retiring from public service and beginning to write the *Essais*: "quoique nous ne sachions évidemment pas quelles impulsions aient pu tourmenter Montaigne jeune avant qu'il se fût mis à écrire les *Essais*" ("Montaigne," 1016). There is a striking correspondence between this statement of de Man on Montaigne and Derrida's recent one on de Man: "What could the ordeal of this mutism have been for him? I can only imagine it."¹⁵ De Man uses Montaigne's example as a justifying agent in his own difficult attempts at a balancing act between past and present,

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War," *Responses*, eds. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 150.

between self and history, in de Man's terms "entre la stabilité sereine des objets et la fluidité de la conscience subjective" ("Montaigne," 1021).

The temporal perspective, whether that of the read past or of the lived past, can lead to the immobility of the writing subject unless it is overcome in some way. What is Montaigne's solution to overcome the past in order to write the *Essais* in de Man's terms? It is that of *forgetting*: "le passé tombe aussitôt dans *l'oubli*, parce qu'il se décolle de la subjectivité de l'immédiat; a-t-on assez songé au fait extraordinaire que Montaigne ne se réfère jamais à ses déclarations précédentes? Littéralement, il les a *oubliées*" ("Montaigne," 1021—emphasis added). Nietzsche's exhortation to forget in order to create anew is an essential generative dynamic in modernist literary production—one must confront the past yet negate it through forgetting in order to produce textual articulation. Yet another facet of the will to "forget" has a more problematic, perhaps subversive quality as seen in its more literal application to the question of de Man's Montaigne. Does Montaigne "forget" to write about the fact that he refused to enter the city of which he was mayor during the time of a devastating plague which killed half of the population of Bordeaux in 1585, or that he was a confidant of Catherine de Medici, the principal orchestrator of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre which was equally violent in Bordeaux as it was in Paris? Is it not an "extraordinary fact" that de Man never referred to his "déclarations précédentes," his now controversial war-time articles from his pre-academic period, thereby "forgetting" what it was professionally expedient to suppress from his biography? Does de Man essay the life and writing of Montaigne at a crucial point in his own life, and to his advantage, to ease perhaps his conscience as he constitutes what he chooses to see as the essayist's similar predicament? Are de Man's silence and ability to overcome "history" not founded on the very "tranquille ironie" that he sees as the quality which allows our discussions of Montaigne's work and of his to continue? As he puts it: "C'est la même ironie qu'il doit considérer nos efforts incessants pour le saisir" ("Montaigne," 1022).

The radical impulse that lurks within the *Essais* comes into greater prominence as we read the juncture of Montaigne, Nietzsche, and de Man. Montaigne slowly dissolves the historical armature of the *Essais* as he generates his textual experiments in self-

understanding and also edits the historical events contemporaneous with his life in order to present himself in a more advantageous light. Nietzsche willfully attempts to negate through "forgetting" the panorama of stratified concepts and traditions provided him by the historical education. Years later his insanity will be a literal manifestation of the annihilation of personal and cultural historicity. De Man shuns the historical dimensions of literature, valorizes its hermeneutic uncertainty, and "forgets" his own personal history in the production of a critical enterprise purged of explicit ideological engagement. In all three writers' ambivalence toward history and concomitant embrace of idiosyncratic discourse, there is a productive and perhaps underhanded identity in the modernist enterprise. De Man's commentary on Nietzsche insists on this predicament shared by all three writers: "Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure" ("Literary History," 148). The forgetting of history is also the production of more history whose implications demand to be confronted from a new perspective in the attempt, not to "wipe out the past," but to engage it critically, no matter how irresolvable the predicament. De Man sees Montaigne as an earlier proponent of the "subjectivité de l'immédiat," a quality which is produced by paradoxically engaging and often abnegating the past in the formulation of a unique textuality of the present moment. Yet even as this "new" is produced, it can never be freed from Nietzsche's historical chain: it engenders more history and inevitably produces more problematic efforts toward an understanding of what is at stake in the encounter of cultural foundations and the new identities conflictually generated from them, in Montaigne's terms: "Le centiesme commentaire le renvoye à son suivant, plus espineux et plus scabreux que le premier ne l'avoit trouvé. Quand est-il convenu entre nous: ce livre en a assez, il n'y a meshuy plus que dire" (III, 13, 1067 B)?

One of de Man's lessons concerning the question of modernity, imbedded as it is with the work of Montaigne and Nietzsche, provokes us to consider, not only the difficulty in coming to terms with the dynamics of repetition and innovation in modernist literary production, but also the way in which surreptitious historical and political dimensions may be generated from their encounter. Do

Montaigne, Nietzsche, and de Man "mis-use" history? Does Montaigne's impulse to hide significant aspects of his personal life undermine the presumably impeccable ethics of his sincere humanism? Is Nietzsche's concept of "forgetting" open for subversive misreadings such as the Nazi misappropriations of his work, or in post-1945 Germany's desire to obliterate the memory of its own atrocities? Is de Man's "silence" emblematic of an academic attitude which seems to condone the separation of the worthy public scholar and the private person who may not be so admirable? In such recent collective efforts at understanding de Man's predicament, as seen in *Responses* or *Diacritics* (Fall, 1990), his life and writing have been scrutinized and re-historicized. In this light, one can no longer read innocently de Man's opening remarks in *Blindness and Insight*: "I am not given to retrospective self-examination and mercifully forget what I have written with the same alacrity I forget bad movies—although, as with bad movies, certain scenes or phrases return at times to embarrass and haunt me like a guilty conscience" (12). The concurrent analysis of Montaigne, Nietzsche, and de Man demonstrates the broader textualization of this movement between innovation and repetition over a wider historical and cultural spectrum while helping to understand better Montaigne's presence in various aspects of their work important in the study of modernism.

How the *Essais* are to be read today, as a reassuring text of canonical standing or as a threatening one of avant-garde dimensions, could help to particularize current debates on the literary canon as well as on the consideration of the relationship of past and present in the contexts of political, intellectual and literary history. Montaigne's relationship to these various traditions is interactive and constructive, and we have seen how he sometimes conceals potentially revolutionary projects under the mask of a skeptical conservatism. Nietzsche and de Man are, indeed, two of Montaigne's *suffisant lecteurs* —they engage his surreptitious modernity in their receptions of the *Essais* and reproduce it in their own problematic formulations of the relationship between tradition and innovation. Montaigne proposes that readers continue his writing: "par ces traits de ma confession, on en peut imaginer d'autres à mes depens" (II, 17, 653 A). Nietzsche and de Man have perpetuated Montaigne's essayistic dynamism, and even gone beyond him ("à mes depens"), by developing more explicitly what was suggested in the *Essais* as a

response to their own situations. Montaigne's refusal of textual absolutism points to the essentially mobile character of the confrontation of innovation and repetition. Perhaps it is more than ever useful to consider the *Essais* in this light—as a text which perpetuates readers to evaluate the monuments of tradition and perennial philosophical debates in a constructional relationship to their own particular personal and historical moments, thereby providing a context in which the ancients and the moderns can converge and develop constructive interactive relationships.

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