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Montaigne Handbook: On Reading¹

Montaigne collected books and made extensive use of them in his *Essais*, as he demonstrates by his numerous quotations, translations and paraphrases. Montaigne's practices of reading were a significant part of what made him a great writer. He also writes a great deal about his habits of reading. In addition to this we possess around a hundred of his books with his own annotations in some of them. Consequently we know more about Montaigne's practices of reading and views on reading than for any other sixteenth century author. As important as what he read was what he did with that reading, the way he embodied axioms and narratives taken from his reading in passages of questioning and reflection. At times he seems to read in order to develop and test his own opinions. Nowhere is this more true than in Montaigne's habitual re-reading and emendation of his own text. Most of his writing is formed as a response to what he has already written, often on the basis of his re-reading of his favourite authors. Studying Montaigne's reading gives us a special opportunity to reflect on the differences between his practices of reading and our own and to wonder what Montaigne has to teach us about reading.

This chapter will begin by considering the books Montaigne read and the comments he made on his reading, including the implications of those comments for our reading. Then it will discuss Montaigne's method of building fragments, largely taken from his reading into logical sequences. Finally it will describe the uses which Montaigne makes of quotations taken from his reading in the *Essays*, concluding with a discussion of the use of quotations in *Of vanity* (III, 9).

Montaigne tells us that his own favourite reading was Plutarch, in Amyot's French translation and Seneca, in Latin, an assertion amply confirmed by the quotations and paraphrases from their work. Indeed it is quite possible that Plutarch's *Moralia* and Seneca's *Moral Epistles to Lucilius* were a principal inspiration for the form of the individual chapters, along with the renaissance collections of moralizing materials, such as Pietro Crinito's *De honesta disciplina* (1504), the later editions of Erasmus's *Adagia* (1515 onwards) and Pedro de Mexia's *La Silva di varia leccion* (1542) which Montaigne used in the expanded French translation by Claude Gruget (1552).²

Plutarch is the author whom Montaigne uses most, often in direct (but unmarked) quotation of the French translation, sometimes with light alteration. Isabelle Konstantinovic's valuable *Montaigne et Plutarque* lists 751 borrowings from the *Parallel Lives* and the *Moralia* in the *Essais*. Her tables show that these borrowings are spread across 91 of Montaigne's 107 chapters. The great majority of these borrowings (601 out of her subdivided total of 763) occur in the first published version of each *essai*.³ The greatest number of borrowings are from three less well-known "essays": *Whether Land or Sea Animals are more Intelligent* (46 borrowings), *Spartan Sayings* (38) and *Sayings of Kings and Commanders* (33), collections of quotations Montaigne uses as evidence or as provocations to contradiction. The essays with proportionally large numbers of uses in 1588 and after tend to be ethical treatises (*How to Tell a Friend from a Flatterer* (20 borrowings in 1588 and after), *Tranquillity of Mind* (10), *Why Divine Justice Delays* (8), and *How to Restrain Anger* (7) used particularly in Montaigne's third book. Among the *Lives* only *Alexander*, *Caesar* and *Lycurgus* are much used after the first edition.⁴ These numerical patterns suggest that Montaigne used Plutarch mainly as a starting point. But on the whole the *Moralia* provides general rather than specific models. When Plutarch and Montaigne write essays on similar topics (for example education and friendship) there is usually little

¹ This essay, inspired by reading Terence Cave on "Problems of reading in the *Essais*", in I. D. McFarlane and I. Maclean eds, *Montaigne: Essays in Memory of Richard Sayce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 133-66 and *How to Read Montaigne* (London: Granta, 2007), includes rewritings of sections from my book *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) and two papers given in London in 2014 and Lyon in 2015. I am grateful for permission to reuse this material.

² M. Metschies, *La citation et l'art de citer dans les Essais de Montaigne*, trans J. Brody (Paris: Champion, 1997) pp. 92-3. A. Compagnon, *La seconde main* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), esp. pp. 243-352; John O'Brien, "Montaigne and antiquity: fantasies and grotesques", in U. Langer ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 53-73. Friedrich points out that Montaigne sometimes cites texts from compilations, *Montaigne* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 34.

³ Konstantinovic, *Montaigne et Plutarque* (Geneva: Droz, 1989), pp. 517, 20-23.

⁴ Konstantinovic, *Montaigne et Plutarque*, pp. 26-32.

resemblance between them, but the opening section of *Of anger* (II, 31) makes considerable use of *Moralia* 29, *On Restraining Anger*.⁵

Among the Latin poets Montaigne's favourites, to judge from his comments and quotations were Virgil, Lucretius, Horace, Catullus and Ovid.⁶ He also quotes from Lucan, Martial, Propertius and Tibullus. He made considerable use of the Latin satirists, Juvenal, Persius and Horace. Among the philosophers, Plato, in Ficino's Latin translation, Sextus Empiricus, in Estienne's Latin translation, and (in the final revisions) Cicero were especially important to him.

Montaigne often tells us that history is his favourite reading matter and the kind he would most recommend for the education of others.

The historians come right to my forehand. They are pleasant and easy; and at the same time, man in general, the knowledge of whom I seek, appears in them more alive and entire than in any other place... Now, those who write biographies, since they spend more time on plans than on events, more on what comes from within than on what happens without, are most suited to me. That is why in every way Plutarch is my man.⁷

Among historians he especially likes Plutarch because Plutarch tells him about the internal motivation of the great men of the ancient world.

For I have a singular curiosity, as I have said elsewhere, to know the soul and the natural judgement of my authors... I have regretted a thousand times that we have lost the book that Brutus had written on virtue... But since the preachings are one thing and the preacher another, I am as glad to see Brutus in Plutarch as in a book of his own. I would rather choose to know truly the conversation he held in his tent with some one of his intimate friends on the eve of a battler than the speech he made next day to his army.⁸

Montaigne believes that historians must both report what they discover and offer judgements and conclusions. Contrasting the simple historians who report facts with the truly excellent ones he concludes

The really outstanding ones have the capacity to choose what is worth knowing; they can pick out of two reports the one that is more likely. From the nature and humors of princes they infer their intentions and attribute appropriate words to them.⁹

At the end of *Of the art of discussion* Montaigne writes three discriminating pages of praise and analysis of Tacitus, whose history he has just read through complete, contrary to his normal practice of dipping in and out of books.

I know of no author who introduces into a register of public events so much consideration of private behaviour and inclinations... This form of history is by far the most useful. Public movements depend more on the guidance of fortune, private ones on our own. This is rather a

⁵ *Montaigne et Plutarque*, pp. 410-17.

⁶ II, 10, 298 [410].

⁷ II, 10, 303 [416]: Les historiens sont ma droite bale: ils sont plaisans et aysez; et quant et quant l'homme en general, de qui je cherche la cognoissance y paroist plus vif et plus entire qu'en nul autre lieu... Or ceux qui escrivent les vies, d'autant qu'ils s'amusement plus aux conseils qu'aux evenemens: plus à ce qui part du dedans, qu'à ce qui arrive au dehors: ceux là me sont plus propres. Voylà pourquoy en toutes sortes, c'est mon homme que Plutarque.

⁸ II, 10, 302 [414-15]: Car j'ay une singuliere curiosité, comme j'ay dit ailleurs, de connoistre l'ame et les naïfs jugemens de mes auteurs... J'ay mille fois regretté que nous ayons perdu le livre que Brutus avoit escrit de la vertu... Mais, d'autant que c'est autre chose le presche que le prescheur, j'ayme bien autant voir Brutus chez Plutarque que chez luy mesme. Je choisiroy plustost de sçavoir au vray les devis qu'il tenoit en sa tente à quelqu'un de ses privez amis, la veille d'une bataille, que les propos qu'il tint le lendemain à son armée.

⁹ II, 10, 304 [417]: Les bien excellens ont la suffisance de choisir ce qui est digne d'estre sçeu, peuvent trier de deux rapports celuy qui est plus vray-semblable; de la condition des Princes et de leurs humeurs, ils en concluent les conseils, et leur attribuent les paroles convenables. Ils ont raison de prendre l'autorité de regler nostre creance à la leur.

judgement of history than a recital of it; there are more precepts than stories. It is not a book to read, it is a book to study and learn; it is so full of maxims that you find every sort, both right and wrong; it is a nursery of ethical and political reflections for the provision and adornment of those who hold a place in the management of the world. He always pleads with solid and vigorous arguments, in a pointed and subtle fashion, following the affected style of his time.¹⁰

For different reasons, then, Plutarch and Tacitus are Montaigne's ideal historians: Plutarch because of what he can tell us about the private behaviour and the motivations of great men; Tacitus because of his reflections on, and judgements about, the narrative he tells.

Montaigne is notable for the very wide range of historians he read: all the Roman historians, Herodotus, Xenophon, Diodorus, Arrian and Quintus Curtius, but probably not Thucydides; many historians of the different French regions and the different periods of French history; Bruni, Giovio, Guicciardini, Villani and Giustiniano for Italy; Osorio and Goulard for Spain and Portugal; Chalcondylas, Postel, Giovio, Lebeliski, Porsius and Lavardin for the history of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire; Balbi, Castañeda, Goulart, Osorio and Gonçalez de Mendoza for India and China; and Thevet, de Léry, Benzoni and Lopez de Gomara for the new world. In his *Sources et évolution*, Pierre Villey lists around 90 historians known to Montaigne, though this may be a little optimistic.¹¹

Since Montaigne clearly knew some of these texts very well indeed and had apparently re-read Plutarch and Tacitus several times, I think we would be right to be impressed by the extent of Montaigne's reading in history. According to Pierre Villey's classification of Montaigne's reading, history accounted for approximately a third of the authors Montaigne read, where poetry amounted to roughly a sixth. The fact that so many different historians were translated into French and printed in sixteenth-century France indicates that Montaigne was far from unique in his strong interest in history but he may well have been unusual in the range of the books he studied

Alongside Montaigne's books on history and ancient philosophy, and his Latin poetry, the reconstructed library contains a little theology (Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Ochino, Philo) and rhetoric (Cicero, Isocrates, Quintilian and Victorius's commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*), a good deal of recent poetry and fiction in French (Baïff, Des Périers, Dorat, Du Bellay, Marguerite de Navarre, Pibrac, Rabelais, Ronsard), Italian (Ariosto, Boccaccio, Guazzo, Petrarch, Tasso) and Latin (Bèze, Buchanan, Erasmus, Poliziano, Secundus) and a few modern works on medicine (Arculanus, Joubert, Pichotus), political theory (Blackwood, Bodin, Gentillet, Machiavelli, Sansovino), Law (a commentary on the *Decretals*, Forsterus, Masuer) and philosophy (Cornelius Agrippa, Brues, Cusanus, Leone Ebreo, Ficino, La Boétie, Sebond). In addition there is a considerable category of modern collections of exempla, anecdotes, myths, proverbs and *sententiae* drawn from classical sources (Crinito, Egnatius, Erasmus, Estienne, Fourquevaux, Guevara, Hyginis, La Primaudaye, Lipsius, Mauro, Nizolius, Ravisius Textor and a 1560 French translation of the Byzantine compiler Zonaras).

In *Three kinds of association*, Montaigne paints a delightful picture of the way he lives among his library of roughly a thousand books.¹²

When at home, I turn aside a little more often to my library, from which at one sweep I command a view of my household. I am over the entrance, and see below me my garden, my farmyard, my courtyard and into most other parts of my house. There I leaf through now one book, now another,

¹⁰ III, 8, 718-19 [940-1]: Je ne sçache point d'auteur qui mesle à un registre public tant de consideration des meurs et inclinations particulieres... Cette forme d'Histoire est de beaucoup la plus utile. Les mouvemens publics dependent plus de la conduite de la fortune, les privez de la nostre. C'est plustot un jugement que deduction d'Histoire; il y a plus de preceptes que de contes. Ce n'est pas un livre à lire, c'est un livre à estudier et apprendre; il est si plein de sentences qu'il y en a à tort et à droict: c'est une pepiniere de discours ethiques et politiques, pour la provision et ornement de ceux qui tiennent quelque rang au maniemment du monde. Il plaide tousjours par raisons solides et vigoureuses, d'une façon poinctue et subtile, suyvant le stile affecté du siecle.

¹¹ P. Villey, *Les sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne*, 2nd edn, 2 vols Paris: Hachette, 1930), *Livres d'histoire moderne utilisés par Montaigne* (Paris: Hachette, 1908), I. De Smet and A. Legros, 'Un Manuscrit de François Baudouin dans la librairie de Montaigne', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 75 (2013), 105-111. The library list is in Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Villey-Saulnier (Paris: PUF, 1978), pp. xli-lxii.

¹² III, 12, 808 [1056]. This where he admits to using collections of quotations as well as citing authors directly.

without order and without plan, by disconnected fragments. One moment I muse, another moment I set down or dictate, walking back and forth, these fancies of mine that you see here... If anyone tells me that it is degrading the Muses to use them only as a plaything and a pastime, he does not know as I do, the value of pleasure, play and pastime. I would almost say that any other aim is ridiculous. I live from day to day, and, without wishing to be disrespectful, I live only for myself; my purposes go no further.¹³

Montaigne likes to present his reading as essentially frivolous. "I leaf through books, I do not study them."¹⁴ "I seek in books only to give myself pleasure by honest amusement."¹⁵ "If I encounter difficulties in reading, I do not gnaw my nails over them; I leave them there, after making one or two attacks on them... If this book wearies me, I take up another."¹⁶ But his detailed comments on his reading and the deep enthusiasm we have already seen him express for some favourite authors suggest that this is must be a pose.¹⁷ There is also good evidence in Montaigne's surviving books of the thoroughness and discriminating judgement with which he read.¹⁸ Elsewhere he claims that reading has a special role in stimulating his processes of thought.

Reading serves me particularly to arouse my reason by offering it various subjects to set my judgment to work, not my memory.¹⁹

He insists that a *lecteur suffisant* "often discovers in other men's writings perfections beyond those that the author put in or perceived, and lends them richer meanings and aspects"²⁰ and he evidently includes himself in this category.

I have read in Livy a hundred things that another man has not read in him. Plutarch has read in him a hundred besides the ones I could read, and perhaps besides what the author had put in.²¹

He also hopes for this critical and creative reading from his own readers.²² He fully understands that there is no end to interpretation.

This theory reminds me of the experience we have that there is no sense or aspect, either straight or bitter, or sweet, or crooked, that the human mind does not find in the writings it undertakes to search.²³

¹³ III, 3, 628-9 [828]: Chez moy, je me destourne un peu plus souvent à ma librairie, d'où tout d'une main je commande à mon mesnage. Je suis sur l'entrée et vois sous moy mon jardin, ma basse court, ma court, et dans la pluspart des membres de ma maison. Là, je feuillette à cette heure un livre, à cette heure un autre, sans ordre et sans dessein, à pieces descousues; tantost je resve, tantost j'enregistre et dicte, en me promenant, mes songes que voicy... Si quelqu'un me dict que c'est avillir les muses de s'en server seulement de jouet et passe-temps, il ne sçait pas, comme moy, combine vaut le plaisir, le jeu et le passetemps. A peine que je ne die toute autre fin estre ridicule.

¹⁴ II, 17, 494 [651]: Je feuillette les livres, je ne les estude pas.

¹⁵ II, 10, 297 [409]: Je ne cherche aux livres qu'à m'y donner du plaisir par un honneste amusement. But he continues: ou, si j'estudie, je n'y cherche que la science qui traicte de moy mesmes, et qui m'instruise à bien mourir et à bien vivre.

¹⁶ II, 10, 297 [409]: Les difficultez, si j'en rencontre en lisant, je n'en ronge pas mes ongles; je les laisse là, apres avoir fait un charge ou deux... Si ce livre me fasche, j'en prens un autre.

¹⁷ R. Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), pp. 25-28; J. Supple, *Arms versus Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 240-2.

¹⁸ E.g. in the notes in his copy of Caesar and Lucretius (*Essais*, ed. Balsamo et al. (Paris: NRF, 2007), pp. 1188-1297) or his judgement of Guicciardini (II, 10, 305).

¹⁹ III, 3, 622 [819]: La lecture me sert specialement à esveiller par divers objects mon discours, à embesongner mon jugement, non ma memoire.

²⁰ I, 24, 93 [127]: descouvre souvent ès escrits d'autruy des perfections autres que celles que l'auteur y a mises et aperceües, et y preste des sens et des visages plus riches.

²¹ I, 26, 115 [156]: J'ay leu en Tite-Live cent choses que tel n'y a pas leu. Plutarque en y a leu cent, outre ce que j'y ay sceu lire, et, à l'adventure, outre ce que l'auteur y avoit mis.

²² III, 9, 761 [994-5].

²³ II, 12, 442 [585]: Cette opinion me ramentoit l'experience que nous avons, qu'il n'est aucun sens ny visage, ou droict, ou amer, ou doux, ou courbe, que l'esprit humain ne trouve aux escrits qu'il entreprend de fouiller.

The reading of books promotes the proliferation of more writing. Reading stimulates him to write but reading the very best authors can also be a little intimidating.

When I write, I prefer to do without the company and remembrance of books, for fear that they may interfere with my style. Also because, in truth, the good authors humble me and dishearten me too much.²⁴

Nevertheless the amount of quotation and paraphrase indicates that Montaigne must have had books before him as he composed and revised his *Essais*. While attacking others for indiscriminate borrowing he claims that he uses other authors when they have expressed what he thinks better than he can (“I do not speak the minds of others except to speak my own mind better”).²⁵ While Montaigne rejects the emphasis on rote-learning in humanist education, arguing that the teacher should ask the pupil what he thinks rather than expecting him to repeat what the authors have said,²⁶ he nevertheless believes that readers ought to take over from others the arguments they believe to be true.

For if he embraces Xenophon’s and Plato’s opinions by his own reasoning, they will no longer be theirs, they will be his... Truth and reason are common to everyone, and no more belong to the man who first spoke them than to the man who says them later... The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterward they make of them honey, which is all theirs; it is no longer thyme or marjoram. Even so with the pieces borrowed from others; he will transform and blend them to make a work that is all his own, to wit, his judgement His education, work and study aim only at forming this.²⁷

This comment depends heavily on Plutarch’s *How to Listen to Poetry (Moralia 2)*, which itself draws on Horace and Seneca.²⁸ For all his criticism of humanist educational methods, it seems that Montaigne’s thinking, which he prefers to describe as self-expression, generally forms itself as a response (sometimes appreciative, sometimes critical) to the texts he has been reading.

Montaigne claims that reading provokes him to thought and to the exercise of his judgement. By considering and reacting to what others have written he can develop his own ideas on a topic. Sometimes those ideas will be the same as those he finds in his reading; sometimes the writers of the past will give him more confidence in holding an opinion but the general aim is to read in order to think for himself and to express his own ideas better. And this often implies the move of contradiction. Furthermore he claims that a really good reader will often find in a text meanings beyond what the original writer thought that he was expressing.

This contrasts quite strongly with our normal professed approach to writing about Montaigne. In writing about Montaigne modern scholars want to find meanings beyond previous critics but we always want to claim that what we are discovering is Montaigne’s own view. In his terms we are trying to be learned rather than wise. But perhaps his comment involves us more than we realise, for the decision to write about Montaigne implies a belief that he has something important to tell us about human experience of the world. We write about him because we value what he has to say and we think that by interpreting him in our way we will be able to say something about how we understand the world and we will use the claim that this view is his in order to give it greater expressive force or authority. If that is the way we actually work we may well find that there are times when even while we are in principle interpreting Montaigne’s text we want to correct his views, as for example when modern critics express reservations about his view of love within marriage or about his self-centredness. This might lead us to consider taking his advice on reading more directly to heart:

²⁴ III, 5, 666 [874]: Quand j’escris, je me passe bien de la compagnie et souvenance des livres, de peur qu’ils interrompent ma forme. Aussi que, à la verité, les bons autheurs m’abattent par trop et rompent le courage.

²⁵ I, 26, 108 [148]: Je ne dis les autres, sinon pour d’autant plus me dire.

²⁶ I, 25, 100-01 [136-7], I, 26, 110-12 [150-2].

²⁷ I, 26, 111 [151-2]: Car s’il embrasse les opinions de Xenophon et Platon par son propre discours, ce ne seront plus leurs, ce seront les siennes... La verité et la raison sont communes à un chacun, et ne sont non plus à qui les a dites premierement, qu’à qui les dict apres... Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais elles en font apres le miel, qui est tout leur; ce n’est plus thin ny marjorlaine: ainsi les pieces empruntées d’autruy, il les transformera et confondera, pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien: à sçavoir son jugement. Son institution, son travail et estude ne vise qu’à le former.

²⁸ Horace, *Odes*, IV 2, Seneca, *Epistolae*, 84, Konstantinovic, *Montaigne et Plutarque*, p. 175.

perhaps we should be reading the *Essais* to stimulate our own thinking rather than to try to uncover his.

One further complicating factor here is the issue of changeability. Montaigne accepted change as a fact of human life and he portrayed himself as depicting the mind in motion.

I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this condition, just as it is at the moment I give my attention to it. I do not portray being: I portray passing. Not the passing from one age to another, or, as the people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history needs to be adapted to the moment. I may presently change, not merely by chance, but also by intention. This is a record of various and changeable occurrences, and of irresolute and, when it so befalls, contradictory ideas: whether I am different myself, or whether I take hold of my subjects in different circumstances and aspects.²⁹

We never fully possess Montaigne's chapters. There are always places where more thought can bring us the pleasure of new understanding, to set alongside the growing pleasure of the familiarity of other passages. This changeability may also help explain why such very different people can share the experience of finding themselves in reading Montaigne. Helpfully Montaigne says something similar about his own experience of reading in the *Apology*.

When I pick up books, I will have perceived in such-and-such a passage surpassing charms which will have struck my soul; let me come upon it another time, in vain I turn it over and over, in vain I twist it and manipulate it, to me it is a shapeless and unrecognizable mass. Even in my own writings I do not always find again the sense of my first thought; I do not know what I meant to say, and often I get burned by correcting and putting in a new meaning, because I have lost the first one, which was better.³⁰

Our best chance to understand him lies in following him carefully over short periods. It may be helpful here to introduce the idea of fragments and sequences which I developed in my book *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare*. Montaigne was taught to quarry maxims, stories and quotations from his reading. We find him doing just this in constructing the essays. Since his audience was taught in the same way, it follows that from the renaissance point of view one entirely legitimate way to read Montaigne is to read him for the sake of fragments (such as quotations, stories, fine phrases) which can be stored up and used elsewhere. There are plenty of examples of renaissance authors reading contemporary and ancient texts in this way. But if we want to follow Montaigne's own thought or to state that a particular opinion is his, the meaning of each particular fragment will need to be clarified by reading its immediate predecessors and successors. A comment may be made and then immediately contested and contradicted; indeed some statements seem to be introduced for the sake of the responses which can be made to them. In such cases the initial statement might be a stage of Montaigne's thought (or a provocation to his thought) which we can reuse because it is fruitful for our thinking in other ways but which could not reasonably be claimed to be Montaigne's view. When we look at a sequence of fragments, though, the connections between them will usually give us some indications about the role of each particular fragment. In cases where there is a sequence of argument the meaning of the whole sequence may seem more secure than the meaning of the

²⁹ III, 2, 611 [805]: Je ne puis assurer 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 peinds pas l'estre, je peinds le passage : non un passage d'age 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. Je pourray tantost changer, non de fortune seulement, mais aussi d'intention : C'est un contrerolle de divers et muables accidens, et d'imaginations irresoluës, et quand il y eschet, contraires : soit que je sois autre moy-mesme, soit que je saisisse les subjects, par autres circonstances, et considerations.

³⁰ II, 12, 425-6 [566]: Quand je prens des livres, j'auray apperceu en tel passage des graces excellentes et qui auront feru mon ame; qu'un autre fois j'y retombe, j'ay beau le tourner et virer, j'ay beau le plier et le manier, c'est une masse incogne et informe pour moy. En mes escrits mesmes je ne retrouve pas tousjours l'air de ma premiere imagination: je ne sçay ce que j'ay voulu dire, et m'eschaude souvent à corriger et y mettre un nouveau sens, pour avoir perdu le premier, qui valloit mieux.

fragments considered separately. There will be other cases where the sequence of fragments has the effect of questioning all the ideas which are put forward and this questioning (sometimes relativizing, sometimes setting up contradictions) will be Montaigne's point in that passage. So, while the chapter is evidently made up of fragments, the sequence will usually be more capable of definite interpretation as well as richer in meaning. Equally the meaning of fragments and sequences will alter when new material is added in successive stages. But, as he keeps reminding us, the point of reading is not merely to understand what the writer is saying but much more importantly to use what the writer says as a stimulus for our own thinking.

The fragments are defined as stories and axioms which are largely taken from Montaigne's reading but which he may derive from his own experience and reflection. The sequences are constructed by combinations of a number of logical moves made to connect these fragments or to react to them. Some of the basis for these connecting moves seems to come from the topics of invention. Montaigne may also have studied some dialectic at the Collège de Guyenne, where the more advanced pupils took part in disputations.³¹ These may be summed up as seven basic moves, which are always capable of repetition and combination:

1. In the earliest forms of the chapters maxim and story are connected directly. The story is offered as a particular exemplification of the general proposition encapsulated in the maxim or the maxim is placed after the story as an abstract (and generalizing) summary of its message. The story provides detail, interest and often emotion, where the maxim proposes meaning.

2. The most common move for Montaigne to make after stating a principle, proverb or thought is to provide some justification for it. The justification may take the form of a quotation from philosophy or poetry. Or Montaigne may give an example or a cause. In the later versions of *Of liars* (I, 9, 22) Montaigne says (as one of the advantages of a bad memory) that he talks less than other people because it is harder to think up things to say than to remember them. Later he makes the converse point that his bad memory causes him to think things out more for himself than people with good memories would need to.

3. Another frequent move is to state a principle and then explore its meaning. This may involve distinguishing the particular shade of meaning in which one of the words is employed. Or Montaigne may examine the logical consequence of a statement or look at the effects which arise from some phenomenon. In *Of liars* (23-4), the exclamation that lying is a terrible vice is justified by the larger claim that only language keeps people human and keeps society together. The implication is that since lying corrupts the use of language, it also has the effect of damaging people and society. Clarifying the meaning or consequence of a proposition can be linked to amplification, when something is made to seem more significant by going into detail, by backing it up with more examples, or by repeating the same idea in different words.

4. Much of Montaigne's most important thought is driven by the motive of opposition. This can take the form of questioning a proposition by immediately stating its contrary and backing this up with a further maxim or an example. In *By diverse means we arrive at the same end* (I, 1, 3-5) Montaigne follows his statement that strong noble minds may respond better to bravery by stating the objection, that less magnanimous minds can be moved in the same way and providing an example to illustrate this. The example of Alexander's cruelty to Betis is introduced in 1588 as a contrary to the earlier examples of defiance provoking mercy. In *On the art of discussion* Montaigne gave his own appreciation of the role of contradiction in clarifying and advancing thought:

³¹ The syllabus of the Collège de Guyenne is published in E. Vinet, *Schola Aquitana* (1583), ed. L. Massebieau (Paris: Musée Pédagogique, 1886), disputations at pp. 28-31, 38. De Grouchy's manual of dialectic is also mentioned, p. 26.

So contradictions of opinions neither offend nor affect me; they merely arouse and exercise me. We flee from correction; when we should face it and go to meet it... When someone opposes me, he arouses my attention, not my anger. I go to greet a man who contradicts me, who instructs me.³²

In conversation people learn from each other by testing points of contradiction. The method of contraries is equally important to the internal conversation of the essays. In the *Apology*, Montaigne tells us that when he finds himself arguing a certain position he sometimes puts the arguments for the contrary position as a mental exercise and then finds himself believing those arguments.

Many times (as I sometimes do deliberately, having undertaken as exercise and sport to maintain an opinion contrary to my own, my mind, applying itself and turning in that direction, attaches me to it so firmly that I can no longer find the reason for my former opinion, and I abandon it.³³

His aim in this passage is to illustrate the changeability of human reason using himself as an example but it also provides an insight into the way he directs his mind. Some of Montaigne's most original and stimulating thoughts arise from setting up contrary positions on an issue and trying to work a positive statement out of his objections to both contradictory positions. We do not know exactly where Montaigne studied logic, but it is hard to imagine that he could have pursued his legal career without it.

5. Montaigne's characteristic move from a general statement of an issue to exploring his own experience and opinions is often related to this statement of opposition. Most often his own habits and opinions are contrasted with the generality of other people. In *Of vanity* his habit of being defiant in bad times and prayerful and ready to learn when times are good is contrasted with the general custom, which he mocks. But there are times when his own experience is used to support a position which he has taken in the essay or when he wishes to affirm the community of experience between himself and other men. In *Of repentance* he asserts that every man bears the whole form of the human condition, to imply that his account of his own life has exemplary value for others.³⁴

6. The movement to expressing his own view may be linked to the more general issue of comparison. Montaigne may use comparison at a very local level as a way of illuminating a particular idea or he may juxtapose similar statements or stories with the aim of eliciting difference as well as similarity. Comparisons can have a comic effect, like that with the nobleman in *Of Vanity* who displays his used chamberpots. The comparison a few pages later between those who seek novelty and those who are content with themselves serves to improve the status of vanity with an effective sideswipe at Stoicism.

7. Alongside comparison we may notice moves which Montaigne makes to place a particular occurrence in a wider context, perhaps of the historical time in which it takes place, or perhaps of human experience viewed more generally. The effort to try to understand things as in harmony with their time or as having their value changed by differences between national or temporal customs forms one of Montaigne's most important manoeuvres for questioning received opinions or commonsense reactions. In *Of vanity* Montaigne appeals to the connection between part and whole in order to make a whole series of moves to destabilize the reader's sense of the implication of vanity.

In the *Essais* Montaigne gives his readers three main resources: first, the axioms and narratives which he has derived from his reading and which he provides for us as materials which we can reflect on; second the comments which he himself makes, both narratives from his own life and

³² III, 8, 705 [924]: Les contradictions donc des jugemens ne m'offencent ny m'alterent; elles m'esveillent seulement et m'exercent. Nous fuyons la correction; il s'y faudroit presenter et produire... Quand on me contraire, on esveille mon attention, non pas ma cholere; je m'avance vers celuy qui me contredit, qui m'instruit.

³³ II, 12, 426 [566]: Maintes-fois (comme il m'advient de faire volontiers) ayant pris pour exercice et pour esbat à maintenir une contraire opinion à la mienne, mon esprit, s'appliquant et tournant de ce costé là, m'y attache si bien que je ne trouve plus la raison de mon premier advis, et m'en despars.

³⁴ III, 2, 611 [805].

his own reflections. Montaigne gives particular prominence to his own arguments when he tells us that other people will have to take responsibility for the truth of the narratives he borrows.

I refer the stories that I borrow to the conscience of those from whom I take them. The reflections are my own and depend on the proofs of reason, not of experience.³⁵

As with the first category we as readers can take these over or we can use them as the basis for further thought. The third resource is the method of thinking with the different resources he has inherited. Montaigne takes material from his reading and his experience and uses it to generate more thought and reflection. He is, in effect inviting us to do the same with his writings. His methods of using the material he inherits serve as a model to his readers of the way in which we might use materials from our reading, including the materials he gives us in his *Essais*.

A consideration of Montaigne's employment of material taken from history will give us a start in discussing the way in which he actually uses his reading. In the *Essais* Montaigne used examples taken from history in five main ways. First and most often he gives a name and sometimes a very brief description as a historical example to support a general principle which he has just enunciated. Thus in *Of the custom of wearing clothes* he mentions several generals who wore the same clothes in all seasons on the basis of Plutarch, Suetonius, perhaps via Pedro de Mexia, and Silius Italicus.³⁶

Secondly, and related to this he sometimes uses historians to construct a list of examples which demonstrate the variety of human customs and behaviour. A good example of this would be in the 1588 additions to *Of custom and not easily changing an accepted law* where Montaigne mentions, on the basis of Lopez de Gomara, nations where you greet people by turning your backs on them, where you never look at anyone you honour, where only the family of the king can greet him without using an intermediary and many other scabrous and sexual examples.³⁷

Thirdly Montaigne takes information from histories about exemplary figures, whom he wishes to imitate or repudiate. Thus he frequently collects information about Alexander, Julius Caesar and Suleiman the Great. His discussions of the behaviour and opinions of Socrates should also be considered in this class.

Fourthly Montaigne quite often takes from historians statements by historical figures. These statements are then used like the other axioms employed in the *Essais* but carrying an additional weight because of the fame of the figure he cites. Phocion's comment to the Athenians when they prosper after rejecting his advice, used in *Of repentance*, would be an example of this.³⁸ In this instance the example is taken via Plutarch's collection of the sayings of great princes from the *Moralia* which would serve as a model for the taste for historical quotations of this type.

Fifthly, from time to time Montaigne retells a story from history at length, in order to give particular importance and sometimes particular emotional force to support one of his propositions. A good example here would be the stories of the torture of Amerindian kings in *Of Coaches*.³⁹ Such lengthy retellings are relatively rare. Montaigne much more often tells a story from his own life at length than any stories from history. Furthermore he only uses a few historians in this way, principally Lopez de Gomara, Osorio, Tacitus and Livy.

If we turn from his use of history to his use of his reading more generally, other patterns emerge. Reading provided Montaigne with the starting point for some of his chapters. For example *Of Conscience* (II 5) takes its inspiration and some of its early examples from two pages of *Moralia* 41, *Why Divine Justice Delays*.⁴⁰ *Of solitude* begins its exploration of the contemplative life with some close translations from Seneca's *Epistolae morales*, 7 and 28 and draws material from other

³⁵ I, 21, 75 [105]: Car les Histoires que J'emprunte, je les renvoye sur la conscience de qui je les prens. Les discours sont à moy, et se tiennent par la prevue de la raison, non de l'expérience.

³⁶ I, 36, 166 [226].

³⁷ I, 23, 79-81 [111-13].

³⁸ III, 2, 618 [814], Plutarch, *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, *Moralia* 15.

³⁹ III, 6, 696-7 [911-12]

⁴⁰ Konstantinovic, *Montaigne et Plutarque*, pp. 271-3.

letters and treatises of Seneca as it continues.⁴¹ *A custom of the island of Cea* takes its first examples of suicide as a form of defiance from Plutarch, *Moralia* 16, *Spartan Sayings* before drawing on Stoic sources like Seneca, *Epistolae morales*, 70, 77 and 78 and Cicero, *De finibus*.⁴² The essay begins by citing quotations for and against suicide before developing Montaigne's own view through a discussion of narrative examples mostly taken from his reading.

It seems that sometimes Montaigne decided early on that a chapter would conclude with a quotation or a passage based on quotation. *That to philosophize is to learn to die* ends with a four-page imaginary speech for Nature, based on Lucretius III, 931-62 (several quotations from here and elsewhere in Lucretius III were added in 1588) and translations from Seneca's *Epistolae morales*, 24, 30, 49, 77, 117, 120.⁴³ *Of solitude* ends with a letter constructed out of phrases translated from Seneca's *Epistolae morales*, 7, 22 and 68.⁴⁴ Most strikingly (and wittily) of all Montaigne ends his massive argument about the inability of the unaided human intellect to make theological conclusions in the *Apology* with a long, just about acknowledged quotation from Plutarch's *Moralia* 24, *On the E at Delphi*, in which the pagan Plutarch argues that man should not fear death because man's experience of existence is wholly inadequate in comparison with the full existence of God.⁴⁵

It seems to me likely that Montaigne undertook systematic research for some of his essays, deliberately reading particular texts which he thought might furnish material for particular chapters.⁴⁶ The case of Lucretius provides some indications.⁴⁷ We now know that Montaigne bought a copy of Lambinus's edition of Lucretius soon after its publication in late 1563 or early 1564.⁴⁸ Between the date of this purchase and 16 October 1564 he read the entire work carefully and made many annotations to the text. The pattern of the quotations suggests that he Montaigne must have re-read the work at least twice: at some time between 1572 and 1580 for the first edition and again in the second phase of the composition of the *Essais* in 1585-88.⁴⁹ The likelihood is that he read sections of Lucretius even more frequently since he regarded him as one of his four favourite Latin poets, but the use of Lucretius in the *Essais* is highly concentrated. Of the total of 148 quotations, 98 occur in just three chapters. The 76 quotations in *Apology for Raymond Sebond* form an essential part of the argument of that work. Montaigne takes delight in inverting Lucretius's arguments that unless we believe our senses we have no knowledge, to argue that, because the senses are unreliable, secure knowledge of any kind is unattainable.⁵⁰ Montaigne quotes a series of excerpts from book IV of Lucretius to make this point.⁵¹ It seems that Montaigne had certain pages of Lucretius before him at

⁴¹ I, 39, 175-9 [238-43]. A. Grilli, "Su Montaigne e Seneca", in *Studi di letteratura e filosofia in onore di Bruno Revel* (Florence: Olschki, 1965), pp. 303-11, concentrates on this chapter.

⁴² II, 3, 251-3 [350-1].

⁴³ I, 20, 64-8 [92-96].

⁴⁴ I, 39, 182-3 [247-8].

⁴⁵ II, 12, 455-7 [601-3]; just about acknowledged by "A cette conclusion si religieuse d'un homme payen" (603) at the end of the quotation (whose beginning Montaigne does not mark). He also edits a few references to Apollo out of Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi*, 392A-393B and introduces a quotation from Lucretius, V, 828-31.

⁴⁶ Bernard Weinberg's excellent study of the sources of *Des cannibales* shows that Montaigne supplements the words of his informant with memories and rereading of travel narratives, B. Weinberg, "Montaigne's Readings for *Des Cannibales*", in G. B. Daniel ed., *Renaissance and Other Studies in Honour of William Leon Wiley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 261-79.

⁴⁷ Daniel Ménager, "Les citations de Lucrèce chez Montaigne", in P. Ford et al, *Montaigne in Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 1989), pp. 25-38, Metschies, *La citation*, pp. 126-9, A. Legros, "La Lucrèce de Lambin, annoté par Montaigne, lecteur de commentaires", and P. Boyde, "Sur des vers de Lucrèce", in P. Ford and N. Kenny eds, *La Librairie de Montaigne* (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 2012), pp. 81-102, 215-42.

⁴⁸ M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius* (Geneva: Droz, 1998), pp. 9-10. The annotations are edited by A. Legros in Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. A. Balsamo, M. Magnien and C. Magnien-Simonin (Paris: PUF, 2007), pp. 1188-1250.

⁴⁹ S. Fraisse, *Une conquête du rationalisme. L'Influence de Lucrèce en France au Seizième Siècle* (Paris: Nizet, 1962), pp. 171-2, cited in Screech, *Montaigne's Lucretius*, p. 25; Villey, *Sources et évolution*, I, p. 188.

⁵⁰ Compare Screech, *Montaigne's Lucretius*, p. 149.

⁵¹ II, 12, 443-8 [587-92]; Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, IV, 478-80, 482-3, 486-8, 489-90, 379-80, 499-510, 397, 389-90, 420-4. This series is recalled and concluded in the long quotation (IV, 513-21; 454 [600]) which leads into the sections from Sextus Empiricus and Plutarch which end the *Apologie*.

both stages of writing his longest essay.⁵² The much shorter *That to philosophize is to learn to die* includes 16 quotations from Lucretius in its 19 pages, many of them concentrated in the speech of Nature at the end. The next largest number of quotations (6) occurs in the ten page *Of the inequality that is between us*, where Lucretius and Horace carry much of the argument and Lucretius is used to conclude.

Even though Montaigne knew Seneca's *Epistolae morales* and some of the moral treatises (for example, *De beneficiis*, *De clementia* and *De ira*) well,⁵³ in this case too his borrowings are strongly concentrated. The chapters with the most translations from Seneca's *Epistolae morales*, tend to focus especially on one or two of Seneca's letters: *That to philosophize is to learn to die* (37 borrowings; especially from letters 26, 77); *Of solitude* (33, especially from 7, 28); *A custom of the island of Cea* (16, especially from 70); *Of the inequality that is between us* (15, especially from 76). The relevance of these titles to the philosophical preoccupations of the *Epistolae morales* is clear. Montaigne used Cornelius Agrippa's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* in only two essays but quite heavily in those two.⁵⁴

Furthermore there are particular sections of the *Essais* where one source is used consistently. For example, in the section of the *Apologie* on the rationality of animals a twenty-five page passage depends very heavily on Plutarch, *Moralia* 63, *Whether Land or Sea Animals are more Intelligent* and this is the only place where Montaigne uses this work.⁵⁵ Some crucial sections of the later chapters in book three rely on the more strictly ethical treatises of Plutarch's *Moralia*. Near the end of *Of the disadvantage of greatness* three stories of sycophantic behaviour are taken from *Moralia* 4, *How to tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, an obvious reference for this topic.⁵⁶ In *Of the art of discussion* the crucial move towards accusing oneself of one's faults is made with a saying from Plato (which Montaigne reinforces from the source in the C text) taken from *Moralia* 29, *On restraining anger*.⁵⁷ After 1588 Montaigne adds five Latin quotations and one exemplum from Cicero's *De officiis* to *De l'utile et de l'honneste* (III, 1),⁵⁸ but Cicero's work, in spite of its closely related subject-matter does not seem to have stimulated Montaigne's argument. Either Montaigne chose to re-read this work to enrich his study or his general re-reading of Cicero's philosophy at this point proved especially helpful in embellishing this chapter.

Of vanity is by any standards an exceptionally fine chapter. From its agile jokey prologue which seems to undercut the whole notion of vanity, through its mingling of thoughts on travel, household management, the civil war, death, public life, and writing, this chapter can seem like one conspectus of Montaigne's life and thought. Unlike many of the chapters *Of vanity* begins and ends with a sustained discussion of its notional topic. The chapter even proclaims a conclusion, that vanity is an inescapable part of human life and that to learn lessons from it requires that we acknowledge its ubiquity as well as deploring some of its effects. Its 45 pages, in Frame's translation, include 50 quotations from poetry, chiefly from Virgil, Horace and Ovid, and 28 from prose, mainly from Cicero and Seneca, and mainly added in the final phase. But few of these quotations make much contribution to the development of the argument. In most cases they provide support and amplification for a position which has already been stated. The longest quotation is Montaigne's translation of the 1581 bull granting him Roman citizenship, which he includes as an example of the kind of vanity which gives him great pleasure.⁵⁹ Almost all the quotations from Latin prose serve to back up or generalise a point which the French text made in 1588. The poetic quotations too often serve the purpose of amplification, making the idea more significant by attaching a weightier linguistic flavour. In the earlier phase of the chapter allusion and paraphrase is more important to Montaigne's thought than

⁵² Screech, *Montaigne's Lucretius*, pp. 460-70 notes a series of seventeen quotations from book three (6A; 11B) in a thirteen page section of the *Apology*, II, 12, 405-16 [542-55].

⁵³ Villey, *Sources et évolution*, I, pp. 237-42.

⁵⁴ II, 12 and II, 37. Villey, *Sources et évolution*, I, pp. 61-2.

⁵⁵ II, 12, 333-53 [455-80]; *Montaigne et Plutarque*, pp. 297-334.

⁵⁶ III, 7, 702-3 [919-20]; *Montaigne et Plutarque*, pp. 478-9.

⁵⁷ III, 8, 709 [929]; *Montaigne et Plutarque*, p. 480.

⁵⁸ III, 1, 604(2), 607, 608, 609 [795, 796, 799, 801, 802] (quotations), 608 [800] (example).

⁵⁹ III, 9, 765 [999-1000].

quotation. The allusion to the proverb of Ecclesiastes I:2 “Vanity of vanities said the preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” almost literally sets the chapter in motion.

There is perhaps no more obvious vanity than to write of it so vainly. What the Divinity has divinely told us about it ought to be carefully and continually meditated by people of understanding.⁶⁰

The longest narrative of the chapter is a retelling of the story of Pacuvius Calavius from Livy which Montaigne twists into being a parable against change. Livy had made it clear from the start that Pacuvius’s proposal was a trick intended to give him supreme power in Capua. He persuaded the senate of the city to let him lock them in their chamber by saying that he had a stratagem which would save their position if they left everything to him. Livy calls him a bad man.⁶¹ Montaigne rewrites the story to emphasize the impasse into which the people’s resentment of their rulers gets them and treats it not as a trick but as an example of the folly of attempting to bring about political change. This all serves to develop the point that even though the present state of France is barely tolerable, attempts at reform are bound to worsen the situation.

While most of the poetic quotations in *Of vanity* repeat the ideas of Montaigne’s French text there are some cases in which a quotation moves the argument on in an important way. After a very rich passage on the hypocrisy of judges, Montaigne introduces a tale from Guevara and a quotation from Juvenal, *Satires*, XIV, 233-4, which denounces the viciousness of sons. Montaigne’s response to the story and the quotation drives the essay in a new direction.

“I do not know about their books,” said the courtesan Laïs, “or their wisdom and or their philosophy, but these men knock at my door as often as any others.” Since our licentiousness always carries us beyond what is lawful and permitted, men have often made the precepts and laws of our life strict beyond universal reason.

*None thinks he sins enough unless he sins
A little further than the laws permit.*

It would be desirable that there should be more proportion between the command and the obedience; and a goal that we cannot reach seems unjust.⁶²

Guevara’s story is about hypocrisy and Juvenal’s line is in a passage concerned with boundless vice, but the construction of Juvenal’s line (By so much he exceeds...by how much you allow) alerts Montaigne to the idea of proportionality between rule and behaviour. Rather than regarding the son’s excess as a matter of vice only he sees (in the sentence he places before the quotation) that reciprocally men set rules that are impossible for them to obey, which leads him to the conclusion that impractically strict rules are part of human vanity. Juvenal would not have imagined such a use for his satire in which parents are urged to a strictness that might nevertheless fail to reform their children but Montaigne’s reading against the grain (encouraged by the construction) has a strong point.

When Montaigne turns his attention to fortune a quotation from Horace, *Odes* III 16, 21-3, 42-3 formulates one of the attitudes he might take.

⁶⁰ III, 9, 721 [945]: Il n’en est à l’avanture aucune plus expresse que d’en écrire si vainement. Ce que la divinité nous en a si divinement exprimé devroit estre soigneusement et continuellement medité par les gens d’entendement.

⁶¹ III, 9, 732 [958-9] Livy XXIII, 2-4.

⁶² III, 9, 757 [990]: Je ne sçay quels livres, disoit la courtesane Lays, quelle sapience, quelle philosophie, mais ces gens là battent aussi souvant à ma porte que aucuns autres. D’autant que nostre licence nous porte tousjours au delà de ce qui nous est loisible et permis, on a estressy souvant outre la raison universelle les preceptes et loys de nostre vie.

*Nemo satis credit tantum delinquere quantum
Permittas.*

Il seroit à desirer qu’il y eust plus de proportion du commandement à l’obeyssance; et semble la visée injuste, à laquelle on ne peut atteindre. Il n’est si homme de bien, qu’il mette à l’examen des loix toutes ses actions et pensées, qui ne soit pendable dix fois en sa vie, voire tel qu’il seroit tres-grand dommage et tres-injuste de punir et de perdre.

I owe much to Fortune in that up to this point she has done nothing hostile to me, at least nothing beyond my endurance. Might it not be her way to leave in peace those who do not trouble her?

*The more a man himself denies
The more to that man Heaven supplies.
Since I am naked, I aspire
To join the men who nought desire...
For they lack much who much require.*

If she continues, she will send me hence well contented and satisfied.

For nothing more do I annoy the gods.

But beware the crash. There are thousands who are wrecked in port.⁶³

Horace's rather complacent assertion of a link between moderated desires and happiness offers Montaigne a rational explanation for the safety from disaster which he had previously noted. He embraces the idea long enough to hope that it may continue (and to find another supporting quotation from Horace (*Odes* II 18, 11-12)). But then his experience intervenes. Many have thought themselves safe from disaster and then foundered. Gratitude to fortune (which carries with it an awareness of future calamity) is here wiser than a rationalising which might encourage a dangerous sense of security. Here the quotation states a point of view which Montaigne wants to hear but which he decides to reject.

At the end of the chapter, having generalized his discoveries to date he resolves that the choice between looking outside (the common preoccupation) and looking inside must be resolved in favour of trying to know oneself, and amplifies this Delphic command using Plutarch's *On the E at Delphi* and proverbs discussed in Erasmus's *Adagia*.

The common attitude and habit of looking elsewhere than at ourselves has been very useful for our business. We are an object that fills us with discontent; we see nothing in us but misery and vanity. In order not to dishearten us, Nature has very appropriately thrown the action of our vision outward. We go forward with the current, but to turn our course back towards ourselves is a painful movement: thus the sea grows troubled and turbulent when it is tossed back on itself. Look, says everyone, at the movement of the heavens, look at the public, look at that man's quarrel, at this man's pulse, at another man's will; in short, always look high or low, or to one side, or in front, or behind you. It was a paradoxical command that was given us of old by that god at Delphi: "Look into yourself, know yourself, keep to yourself; bring back your mind and your will, which are spending themselves elsewhere into themselves: you are running out, you are scattering yourself; concentrate yourself, resist yourself; you are being betrayed, dispersed and stolen away from yourself. Do you not see that this world keeps its sight all concentrated inward and its eyes open to contemplate itself? It is always vanity for you, within and without; but it is less vanity when it is less extensive. Except for you, O man," said that god, "each thing studies itself first, and, according to its needs, has limits to its labors and desires. There is not a single thing as empty and needy as you, who embrace the universe: you are

⁶³ III, 9, 763-4 [998]: Je dois beaucoup à la fortune dequoy jusques à cette heure elle n'a rien fait contre moy outrageux au moins au delà de ma portée. Seroit ce pas sa façon de laisser en paix ceux de qui elle n'est point importunée?

*Quanto quisque sibi plura negaverit,
A Diis, plura feret. Nil cupientium
Nudus castra peto...
...Multa petentibus
Desunt multa.*

Si elle continue, elle m'en envoyera tres-content et satisfait,

Nihil supra

Deos lacesso.

Mais gare le heurt. Il en est mille qui rompent au port.

the investigator without knowledge, the magistrate without jurisdiction, and all in all, the fool of the farce.⁶⁴

One can read that climax as a revisiting of both his own *Apologie* and Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*. Montaigne made himself a great writer by being a great reader. At the key climaxes of his work he could turn to his reading which furnished him with a language beyond what he could achieve himself. Yet it is the sequence of logical processes, the apparently endless reconsidering, objecting, rephrasing and reacting which make the *Essais* what they are. Montaigne stimulates his readers to thought through the depth, persistence and changeability of his own reflections on what he has written and read. We could learn from him to be more overt in the ways that we reject and refine his ideas even as we are grateful for the way that his expressions stimulate us to recognition and rejection. Montaigne urges us to be wise rather than learned and the desire to know the world and ourselves better through reacting to his ideas may be what keeps us reading him, together with his wit and his astonishing breadth of response. We should find a way to acknowledge this more directly, even if our own pursuit of wisdom is not the task of literary scholarship.

Abstract

Montaigne's wide and critical reading contributed enormously to his writing. His habit of quoting and paraphrasing earlier writers, the survival of around a hundred of his books, some of them annotated, and his reflections on his own reading mean that we know more about Montaigne's reading than any other renaissance author. This chapter begins by discussing the books Montaigne read and the comments he made on his reading. It argues that we should take seriously his advice to read in order to become wise, by discovering one's own views, rather than to become learned, by summarising the views of others. It describes Montaigne's method of writing in reaction to his reading (especially the re-reading of his own text) by building fragments, such as axioms, proverbs, narratives and comparisons into logical sequences, using seven basic types of logical connection. It describes the ways in which Montaigne uses quotations taken from history and poetry in the *Essays*, concluding with a discussion of the use of quotations in *Of vanity* (III, 9).

Key words

Renaissance reading, dialectic, Plutarch, Seneca, Tacitus, Lucretius, López de Gómara, Juvenal, vanity, revision, Erasmus

⁶⁴ III, 9, 766 [1000-1]: Cette opinion et usance commune de regarder ailleurs qu'à nous a bien pourveu à nostre affaire. C'est un objet plein de mescontentement; nous n'y voyons que misere et vanité. Pour ne nous desconforter, nature a rejezté bien à propos l'action de nostre veue au dehors. Nous allons en avant à vau l'eau, mais de rebrousser vers nous nostre course c'est un mouvement penible: la mer se brouille et s'empesche ainsi quand elle est repoussée à soy. Regardez, dict chacun, les branles du ciel, regardez au public, à la querelle de cettuy-là, au pouls d'un tel, au testament de cet autre; somme regardez tousjours haut ou bas, ou à costé, ou devant, ou derriere vous. C'estoit un commandement paradoxe que nous faisoit anciennement ce Dieu à Delphes: Regardez dans vous, reconnoissez vous, tenez vous à vous; vostre esprit et vostre volonté, qui se consume ailleurs, ramenez la en soy; vous vous escoulez, vous vous respandez; appelez vous, soutenez vous; on vous trahit, on vous dissipe, on vous desrobe à vous. Voy tu pas que ce monde tient toutes ses veues contraintes au dedans et ses yeux ouverts à se contempler soy-mesme? C'est tousjours vanité pour toy, dedans et dehors, mais elle est moins vanité quand elle est moins estendue. Sauf toy, ô homme, disoit ce Dieu, chaque chose s'estudie la premiere et a, selon son besoin, des limites à ses travaux et desirs. Il n'en est une seule si vuide et necessiteuse que toy, qui embrasses l'univers: tu es le scrutateur sans connoissance, le magistrat sans jurisdiction et apres tout le badin de la farce.