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‘Une forme d’écrire
douteuse et irresolue’:
Seneca and Plutarch
in Montaigne’s *Essais*

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Abstract

What are the relationships between doubt and truth, thinking and writing in Montaigne's *Essais*? We usually see Montaigne's doubt through the lens of ancient schools of Scepticism and yet he notes that the Pyrrhonians 'ne peuvent exprimer leur generale conception en aucune maniere de parler': these philosophers describe their doubtful thought in negative affirmations but these are affirmations – 'propositions affirmatives' – all the same. This thesis approaches Montaigne's doubt differently: I investigate the *Essais* not as an attempt to indicate or describe doubtful, 'double et divers' thought but as a tool for thinking doubtfully in writing. Montaigne's literary use of language is therefore central to my analysis. Irony, ambiguity, the practices of rewriting and overwriting, the 'polyphony' of cited authors who advocate different positions: these afford ways of thinking that sustain duality and doubt.

I focus on Montaigne's engagement with Seneca and Plutarch, ancient authors who are, superficially, unrelated to doubt: the *Essais* constitute a particular form of humanistic engagement with ancient texts, concerned with practices and forms of writing as much as, if not more than, with philosophical concepts. These 'dogmatic' authors – they defend philosophical positions of certainty – were, counter-intuitively, seen by Montaigne to have a 'forme d'ecrire douteuse et irresolue'. This doubtful 'forme' shaped Montaigne's own and it was, I argue, in working with and on these authors – reading, writing, and thinking with them – that he constructed a way of writing doubtful in both form and thought: a text that is double, unresolved, ambiguous, and yet 'truthful' in its capacity to perform and make legible the complex, multiple nature of his thought and his thinking.

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Introduction

At some point after 1588, Michel de Montaigne returned to the introduction of his chapter ‘De l’institution des enfans’. As it stood, the printed text described a disavowal of learning paired with a paternal affection for the poorly formed and under-nourished thoughts and writings he had produced: he sees better than anyone else, he claims, ‘[A] que ce ne sont icy que resveries d’homme qui n’a gousté que la crouste premiere, en son enfance, et n’en retenu qu’un general et informe visage’ (I.26.146). He goes on to note his appreciation of history and of poetry, though the point he is making is clear: neither he nor his writing is ‘bookish’, or at least not in the way of the pedants who were the subject of the preceding chapter. He does not spend his time grappling with Plato or Aristotle: ‘ce n’est pas mon occupation’.¹ When he came back to this passage after 1588, he crossed out the reference to Plato, leaving Aristotle alone as ‘[C] monarque de la doctrine moderne’ (I.26.146), and, in a passage written in the left-hand margin of this page in the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, he turned to a rather different pair of classical authors:

[C] Je n’ay dressé commerce avec aucun livre solide, sinon Plutarque et Senèque, où je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse. J’en attache quelque chose à ce papier; à moi, si peu que rien.²

Here, Montaigne tells us negatively and with the endless, infernal task of the Danaïdes as his analogue that the only ‘solid’ books he has any dealings with are those of Seneca and Plutarch.

¹ ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 53v. A facsimile of the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ is available at <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k11718168?rk=21459;2>> [Accessed: 11th January 2017].

² Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, 2004 [1965]), I.26.146. Unless otherwise stated, all further references to the *Essais* will be to this edition and will be given in parentheses.

This thesis examines Montaigne's engagement with these two figures, their texts, and their ways of writing. Their invocation, often as a pair, runs throughout the *Essais*, in every book and at every stage of composition, and they are afforded a privileged place in Montaigne's (thoughts about) writing.³ But why Seneca and Plutarch? What do they offer Montaigne? What does he do with them and, perhaps more importantly, what do they allow him to do? In answering these questions, this thesis reveals a previously neglected aspect of the role they play in the *Essais*. In doing so, it presents a new approach to Montaigne's enterprise of thinking and writing as a whole: one which takes Seneca and Plutarch as both a key to understanding and as a foundation stone for his practice of writing doubtfully.

When I say that Montaigne writes 'doubtfully', I mean that he develops a form which is provisional and open-ended, tentative rather than resolved, '[A] enquerant plustost qu'instruisant' (II.12.509). But I also mean that his writing is 'double' and ambiguous, multifaceted and capable of maintaining (for the author) or revealing (for the reader who includes Montaigne reading his own text) multiple perspectives at once. It is a way of writing that moves and shifts as it develops – both through the discourse as we read it and through its several stages of composition and re-writing – and in this sense it is doubtful both in its irresolution (it is without conclusion, constantly changing) and in its propensity for duality (it proposes discrete ideas often from distinct moments of writing but proposes them together and at once). Even at the level of the sentence or phrase, Montaigne's writing expresses and calls for a plurality of perspectives and pushes us as readers to hold multiple positions – both on the text and on the things it examines – simultaneously. For reasons which will be set out fully in Chapter One, my analysis frames the *Essais* in terms of 'doubtfulness' and 'doubtful

³ See, for instance, II.10.413, II.12.509, III.12.1040, and II.32 ('Defence de Sénèque et de Plutarque').

writing’ rather than ‘Scepticism’ or ‘Sceptical writing’. This preference might be explained briefly by noting that ‘to doubt’ or ‘to be doubtful’ describe practices of thinking or qualities of writing: these terms, in addition to admitting a broader intertextual approach, less confined to assessing Montaigne’s engagement or otherwise with ancient Sceptics, serve to highlight my focus not on the matter or substance of the essayist’s thought, on the positions he does or does not take, but on the form(s) of both his thinking and his writing.

In presenting Seneca and Plutarch as figures of doubtful writing, I resituate our understanding not only of these two ancients, who have long been seen as central to the writing of the *Essais* (albeit for reasons quite different to those I make in this study), but also of Montaigne’s relationship with doubt (both as a philosophical concept but, more significantly, I feel, as a practice of doubting), doubtfulness (as a quality of thought or of writing), and Scepticism: I argue that it is with these two ‘dogmatists’ that Montaigne attempts to write his thought truthfully; to make the writing itself – rather than simply the thoughts it describes – doubtful. Working with and on Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne constructs a ‘forme d’écriture’ which is, like that practised by the authors of the *Epistulae ad Lucilium* and the *Œuvres morales et meslees*, ‘douteuse et irresolue’.⁴ And yet, at the same time, it is a form both of thinking and writing which is precise and exact: Montaigne’s ‘doubtful’ form is not characterised by confusion – either on the part of author or reader – nor by obfuscation but rather by a lucid and specific way of thinking. The thought is often ‘double’ – he thinks in unusual ways, maintaining contradictory positions simultaneously – and yet this is not a muddled or blurry way either of thinking

⁴ ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 213r. All references to Seneca’s *Epistles* are to the Loeb edition (*Epistles*, ed. and trans. by Richard M. Gummere, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917-25)) and will be given in footnotes after the abbreviation ‘Ep.’. Quotations from Plutarch’s *Moralia* are, unless otherwise stated, from *Œuvres morales et meslees*, trans. by Jacques Amyot (Paris: Vascosan, 1572).

or of writing thought. Montaigne thinks and writes ‘doubtfully’ and he does so with clarity.

Returning to the passage in the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ with which I began, we see Montaigne’s attempts, erasures, and second-thoughts as he tries to express this relationship between himself, Seneca and Plutarch, and his book (see *fig. 1*). Close analysis of these layers of writing and over-writing forms a central part of my analysis: I propose that Montaigne thinks with and in writing – as opposed to thinking and then writing down or recording his thoughts – and the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ provides unparalleled access to Montaigne’s textual and philosophical ‘workings’. In its first iteration, his account of his ‘commerce’ with Seneca and Plutarch lacked several of what now seem to be its most significant features: ‘[C] Je n’ay commerce aveq aucun livre materiel que par secousses, tantost a Plutarque tantost a Seneque parvenues, reiterees: ~~car ce que je lis qu’une fois je le lis pour neant~~ en faveur de ma maudite memoire. Et y puise come les Danaïdes remplissant et versant sans cesse. J’en attache quelque chose a ce mien livre. A moi, si peu que rien.’⁵

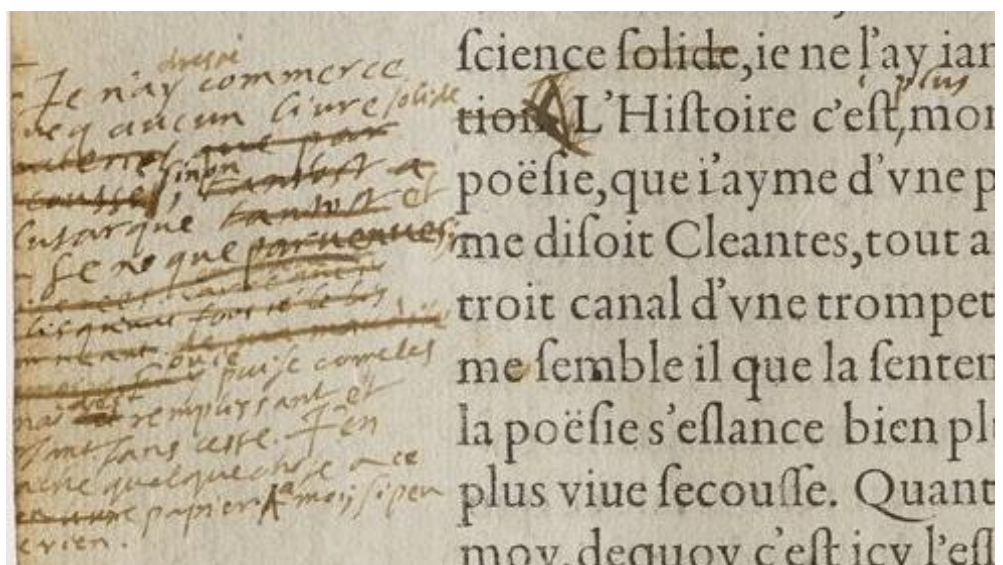


Fig.1. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 53v.

⁵ ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 53v.

There are some relatively minor changes: what, for instance, is the difference between ‘livre materiel’ and ‘livre solide’? What might we make of this latter term’s migration from describing the ‘science solide’ that Montaigne, unlike the scholarly readers of Aristotle and Plato, does not chase after to describing in the ‘final’ version his own endless engagement with the books of Seneca and Plutarch?⁶ And how does this hard physicality correlate with the watery image with which this handwritten passage concludes? Montaigne frequently employs the motif of an individual attempting to grasp water – an image taken from Plutarch – to describe problems of knowledge and this movement from ‘solide’ to liquid, a movement effected by Montaigne’s ‘commerce’ of reading and writing, seems telling: these books may be solid to begin with but, in Montaigne’s hands, they quickly become something else.⁷ A more significant shift is found in his choice of conjunction: in the earliest version of this passage, Montaigne addresses Seneca and Plutarch as examples of his sporadic and irregular reading of such ‘materiel[s]’ books. They may be key examples but ‘tantost [...] tantost’, unlike ‘sinon’, admits additional, unnamed authors of substantial, solid books. What determined this change and how do we understand Seneca and Plutarch’s shift from serving as examples to being held as exceptions? How do we interpret the sentence which situates this discussion of Montaigne’s reading within the context of his (poor) memory and – a

⁶ When I describe the text as we have it as the ‘final version’, I do not mean that it is the definitive or completed version but simply that it is the last version (that we know of and have access to) left by Montaigne before his death. The ultimate status of the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ remains problematic, however, and its place must be understood in the context of Marie de Gournay’s 1595 edition which was possibly based on a different working copy of the 1588 edition or, perhaps, on a ‘fair copy’ based on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’. The ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ is a partial record of what would eventually be sent to the printer to become the 1595 edition and yet it is, for my purposes, a particularly valuable record: it provides us with unparalleled access to Montaigne’s textual practices, his equivocations and hesitations, and his mode(s) of thinking on the page. On the status of the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ in modern critical approaches to the *Essais*, see John O’Brien, ‘Are We Reading What Montaigne Wrote?’, *French Studies*, 58 (2004), pp. 527-532.

⁷ See, for instance, II.12.601: ‘[A] si, de fortune, vous fidez vostre pensée à vouloir prendre son estre, ce sera ne plus ne moins que qui voudroit empoigner l’eau: car tant plus il serrera et pressera ce qui de sa nature coule par tout, tant plus il perdra ce qu’il vouloit tenir et empoigner’. Cf. Plutarch, ‘Que signifioit ce mot EY’, fol. 356v.

question that is more difficult to answer – how do we interpret its erasure (or, rather, double erasure for it is rewritten before being crossed out again)? What does it mean for Montaigne’s endless engagement with Seneca and Plutarch to *not* be governed by his poor memory or to *no longer* be governed by it? And, finally, what is the difference between attaching some of that which he draws from Seneca and Plutarch to, on the one hand, ‘ce mien livre’ and, on the other, ‘ce papier’? Working with the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ allows us to ask these sorts of questions while allowing us to see Montaigne thinking through these options, thinking in writing, and using language – juggling terms and concepts and manipulating them on the page – to explore what it is that he thinks.

A great deal has been written on Montaigne’s reading habits, his use of his reading, and his relationship(s) to other authors and other books. Seneca and Plutarch are, in this regard, no exception. Some of these studies are now very old and have a tendency to approach these sorts of relationships in a reductive way, tracing borrowings and identifying sources though without attending to the effects of these intertextual practices. Villey’s *Les Sources et évolution des Essais*, for example, is more concerned with determining which edition of Seneca or Plutarch Montaigne used than with how he used them. This is a product of Villey’s famous ‘evolutionary’ theory which posited a rather strict relationship between the date of Montaigne’s reading of a philosopher, that philosopher’s school of beliefs, and Montaigne’s own position: for Villey, Montaigne’s use of his reading serves more as evidence than as the subject of its own enquiry.⁸ Similarly, Joseph de Zangroniz’s *Montaigne, Amyot, et Saliat: étude sur les sources des Essais* traces and identifies Montaigne’s borrowings from Amyot’s translations both of Plutarch and Diodorus of Sicily as well as from Pierre Saliat’s 1556 translation of

⁸ Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et évolution des Essais* (Paris: Hachette, 1908).

Herodotus though he does this without studying what might be called the literary aspect of such borrowings.⁹

Camilla Hill Hay's thesis, published in 1938, marks a turning point where studies of Montaigne and his classical authors began to focus less on the identification of sources or of instances of borrowing and rather on style: suggesting that the influence of Seneca's philosophy was sporadic – an argument which seems to function in opposition to Villey's – Hay claims that it is in Montaigne's stylistic brevity and concision that we see the imitation of this Roman model.¹⁰ We see a similar emphasis on style and, more specifically, shared imagery in Carol Clark's studies, while Alberto Grilli's article 'Su Montaigne e Seneca' examines Montaigne's use of Seneca primarily in one chapter, 'De la solitude'.¹¹ Robert Aulotte's study of Amyot and Plutarch touches on Montaigne and he makes frequent comparisons and allusions in his footnotes though his focus is resolutely not the work of the essayist but that of Plutarch's translator. Nevertheless, Aulotte's study provided a sustained analysis of Amyot's labour and legacy: he notes that Amyot's version of the *Moralia* had helped to 'développer dans un large public un goût pour l'analyse morale et psychologique' before concluding that '[l]e mérite d'Amyot est d'avoir rassemblé dans une seule œuvre et fait connaître à un vaste public un vocabulaire très étendu, relatif à toutes les sciences et à tous les arts dont Plutarque avait traité.'¹² Seneca and Plutarch are both considered in Hugo Friedrich's synoptic study, first printed in German in 1949, and, again in opposition to the argument made famous by Villey, these figures are not seen as emblematic of a periodic

⁹ Montaigne, *Amyot, et Saliat: étude sur les sources des Essais* (Paris: Champion, 1906).

¹⁰ *Montaigne lecteur et imitateur de Sénèque* (Poitiers: Société française, 1938).

¹¹ Carol E. Clark, 'Seneca's Letters to Lucilius as a Source of Some of Montaigne's Imagery', *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*, 30 (1968), pp. 249-266; Alberto Grilli, 'Su Montaigne e Seneca', *Studi di letteratura, storia, e filosofia in onore di B. Revel* (Florence: Olschki, 1965), pp. 303-311. See also Clark's *The Web of Metaphor: Studies in the Imagery of Montaigne's Essais* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1978).

¹² Robert Aulotte, *Amyot et Plutarque: la traduction des Moralia au XVIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1965), p. 265.

subscription to one philosophical school or another: ‘On ne doit pas tenir pour preuve d’une phase ou couche stoïcienne chez Montaigne les fréquentes références des *Essais* à Sénèque’, he asserts.¹³ Rather, they are seen both as stylistic or formal models – ‘C’est le style ouvert de Sénèque, style de pensée et de forme’ which appeals to Montaigne;¹⁴ ‘Il apprécie les *Œuvres morales*, comme les Lettres de Sénèque, pour leur qualité de *pièces déconsues* que l’on peut ouvrir où l’on veut et où se sent la vivacité de la parole’¹⁵ – and, more importantly for Friedrich, as models of a form of writing capable of writing about and understanding character and *mœurs*: ‘Montaigne lit le Romain, non pas pour son éthique normative, mais pour sa psychologie’;¹⁶ Plutarch is ‘le peintre subtil de toutes les combinaisons de destinées humaines, [...] l’artiste de la vie’.¹⁷ His comments and comparisons are general and his insight that Montaigne’s use of an ancient philosopher does not mean that he ascribes to a particular school is tempered by a tendency to sideline philosophy altogether: to say that Montaigne’s engagement with Seneca does not make him a Stoic is not to say that his engagement with Seneca is unphilosophical.

In the final third of the twentieth century and in the wake of Julia Kristeva’s post-structuralist approaches to ‘intertextuality’, studies of Montaigne and his authors – or, rather, of the *Essais* and their intertexts – proliferated and diversified.¹⁸ Antoine Compagnon’s work on ‘le travail de la citation’ is the most theoretical in its methodology and has little by way of close textual analysis.¹⁹ His study covers a vast period, from antiquity to modernity, providing a ‘généalogie’ of conceptualisations of citation. Arguing that the early modern period experienced a ‘crise d’autorité’, he

¹³ Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, trans. by Robert Rovini (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 72.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 82.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 77.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 83.

¹⁸ See, in the first instance, Julia Kristeva, ‘Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman’, *Semiotikè: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp. 82-112.

¹⁹ Antoine Compagnon, *La Seconde main, ou le travail de la citation* (Paris: Seuil, 1979).

presents Montaigne as a figure caught between a tradition of citing ‘auctoritates’ and an emergent desire to speak as a subject. ‘Pourquoi ne pas les [i.e. ses citations] omettre, s’ils ne représentent pas le sujet ni n’ont d’autre valeur? Je cite,’ he suggests, ventriloquizing Montaigne, ‘parce que je ne peux pas faire autrement, parce qu’il y a en moi une compulsion inébranlable de citation’.²⁰ The place of Montaigne’s ‘citations’ was similarly central to Christine Brousseau-Beuermann’s study where her focus is primarily on how readers, ourselves included, react and have reacted to Montaigne’s use of Latin (and, specifically, verse) quotations. Beginning with Marie de Gournay’s reluctant concession to provide translations of Montaigne’s Latin quotations for her 1617 edition, Brousseau-Beuermann studies the ‘diverses manières dont les citations des *Essais* ont été reçues, traitées, traduites, ignorées, supprimées, bref, de la relation qu’elles entretiennent avec les autres aspects [...] de l’œuvre’.²¹ Her analysis touches on certain effects of Montaigne’s use of quotation – the ways in which they create a sense of dialogue and polyphony; the sense of rupture caused by linguistic and typographic discontinuity – as well as noting ‘les distorsions que Montaigne fait subir aux passages qu’il cite’²² though these are dealt with indirectly and in service of her investigation of how readers, editors, and interpreters of various kinds have responded to these quotations.

Brousseau-Beuermann’s broad thesis – that the quotations are inextricable from Montaigne’s meaning – is encapsulated in her passing observation that Montaigne, like Erasmus, collapses the distinction between ‘argumentative’ and ‘decorative’ quotation.²³ This position is shared by Floyd Gray and Mary McKinley in their respective studies of

²⁰ Ibid. pp. 296-297.

²¹ Christine Brousseau-Beuermann, *La Copie de Montaigne, étude sur les citations dans les Essais* (Paris: Champion, 1989), p. 8.

²² Ibid. p. 143.

²³ Ibid. pp. 164-165.

Montaigne's verse quotations.²⁴ Gray's analysis is somewhat more schematic than that of McKinley – he provides seventeen 'fonctions de la citation' – though, particularly in the second half of his study, he conducts some detailed analysis of citation at work, insisting on the interlocking relationship (which is not to say that it is always harmonious or continuous) between Latin and French in Montaigne's text. His argument is that the *Essais* are bilingual and that '[i]l est inconcevable que l'on puisse lire Montaigne sans lire les citations [...]; les supprimer, c'est enlever au corps du texte quelques-uns de ses attributs fondamentaux'.²⁵ Concluding, he notes: '[o]n parle volontiers de l'influence de tel ou tel Ancien sur Montaigne, mais il est rare que l'on s'intéresse à son influence sur tel ou tel Ancien'.²⁶ McKinley similarly focuses on the sense that the quotations are simultaneously dislocated and integrated: speaking of the verse quotations, she notes that they 'announce their foreign nature both linguistically and typographically' while insisting that these Latin phrases serve as 'verbal clues', 'words in corners [left by Montaigne] to prevent the diligent reader from getting lost'.²⁷ This emphasis on the relationship between textual integration and dislocation, between fusion and rupture, remains a valuable insight into the *Essais*. This notion was central to André Tournon's contemporaneous work and has some echoes in my own study, particularly in Chapter One.²⁸ McKinley focuses on Montaigne's use of three Roman poets – Virgil, Horace, and Ovid – to suggest that '[e]ach italicised Latin fragment invites the reader to make a detour temporarily from the *Essais* and to sojourn in the text of its origin before moving on'.²⁹ In doing so, however, her analysis side-steps the

²⁴ Floyd Gray, *Montaigne bilingue: le latin des Essais* (Paris: Champion, 1991); Mary McKinley, *Words in a Corner: Studies in Montaigne's Latin Quotations* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1981).

²⁵ Gray, *Montaigne bilingue: le latin des Essais*, pp. 143-144.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 143.

²⁷ McKinley, *Words in a Corner*, p. 11.

²⁸ *Montaigne: la glose et l'essai. Edition revue et corrigée précédée d'un Réexamen* (Paris: Champion, 2000). First published as *Montaigne: la glose et l'essai* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983). All references are to the second edition.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 103.

complex intertextual practices of dislocation and/as conjunction found in the more varied use of prose authors.

In a study first published in 1982, Terence Cave examined ‘the ways in which sixteenth century writing defines or imagines the reader, the ways in which the figure of the reader emerges in textual practice’.³⁰ Of the *Essais*, he notes that ‘the reader is personified, not only through Montaigne’s often ironic, second-person asides, but through the writer’s self-personification as a reader of other texts and of his own’³¹ before going on to examine Montaigne’s ‘rephrasing’ of a line taken from Seneca’s sixteenth epistle.³² He suggests that the essayist’s ‘constant enactment of reading as appropriation or displacement obliges the reader to imitate the writer’s gesture’.³³ Thus, ‘[i]n order to be properly read, the *Essais* must be misread, contested, dismantled, deformed and reformed in the name of a new subject.’³⁴ Cave calls this ‘generative reading’ and this model, which posits that intertextuality in the *Essais* is founded on a process of asserting ownership over foreign texts, will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two.³⁵ Cave’s analysis in his book-length study, *The Cornucopian Text*, similarly touches on ideas of reading and imitation and he sees in Montaigne’s use of the Danaïdes an inversion of his central and titular focus of ‘copia’: describing the ‘gesture of transference’ between Montaigne’s ‘papier’ and the ‘solide’ books he reads as ‘an empty mime’, he argues that ‘[t]he paper on which the text of the *Essais* appears [...] allows the rewriting and naturalisation of foreign texts; it thereby permits the search for the identity of a *moi* in contradistinction from what it “other”; but at the same time it

³⁰ ‘The Mimesis of Reading in the Renaissance’, *Mimesis: From Mirror to Method, Augustine to Descartes*, ed. by John D. Lyons and Stephen G. Nichols (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1982), pp. 149-165 (p. 151).

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 154.

³² ‘Quicquid bene dictum est ab ullo, meum est’, *Ep.* 16.7.

³³ ‘The Mimesis of Reading’, p. 158.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 159.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 163.

defers any final access to the goal of the search'.³⁶ His point of focus is not Seneca and Plutarch but rather the inversion of the image of the horn of plenty, the leaky vessel of the Danaïdes, and how this relates to and unveils Montaigne's problematic attempts to write as a subject. He turns then to the problem of similarity and difference: 'the exact convergence of what "Montaigne" is said to think and what "Plutarch" or "Seneca" is said to have thought threatens' – in spite of Montaigne's claims to have reached these thoughts independently – 'to erase the signs of Montaigne's identity. Hence,' Cave argues, 'the insistent reversion to the mechanics of a deictic discourse'.³⁷

To group these studies as products of late twentieth-century literary theory would erase their significant differences, both with regard to their methodologies and their conclusions. But it is certainly tempting and perhaps not entirely inaccurate. We see, for instance, a parallel response to questions of authoring and what it means to be an author: Cave, Compagnon, and McKinley's analyses of Montaigne's attempts to write as a subject might be productively contrasted with Gray's tendency to construct a systemised, structural, perhaps even mechanistic view of how citation works or, alternatively, with Brousseau-Beuermann's step away from the figure of the author altogether. This is not to say that these critics set out to answer these questions of authorship – their concerns are diverse – but rather that we can look back on these studies, their methodologies, and their lines of enquiry as we shape our own, identifying their shared conceptions and assumptions: in Chapter Two, I return to a number of these studies in my reassessment of the place and understanding of authorship in the *Essais*. This period, broadly defined, is conveniently book-ended by the work of Michael Metschies whose 1966 thesis, *Zitat und Zitierkunst in Montaignes Essais*, stands as an early, if somewhat rigorously taxonomic and not especially incisive, study of the tradition of

³⁶ Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 272.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 279.

quotation from antiquity through to humanistic practices followed by an account of the various functions of quotation in the *Essais*.³⁸ Translated into French by Jules Brody in 1997,³⁹ this work, which had been referenced as a precedent or starting point by most of these studies I have described (Cave is, I think, the exception), along with the timing of its translation, seems to reflect not only a broader interest among Montaigne scholars in citation and intertextuality but also a particular view of intertextuality: one that is centred on the question of how quotation works, how it functions; one concerned, to various extents, with categorising techniques and establishing, in formal terms, the relationship(s) between citing text and cited text, citing author and cited author. This was a period of scholarship concerned, it seems, with the formal mechanics (and their implications) of quotation and, as such, stands in clear distinction from earlier critical contexts which privileged the notion of an intellectual tradition capable of passing down ideas, philosophies, and genres. While my own approaches to the role of Montaigne's intertexts, to his place as 'author', and to methodological issues such as the distinction between verse citation and other forms of textual borrowing are significantly different to those of these critics, my work shares their focus on the form of quotation and on quotation as a formal technique and, in this regard, the studies of this period retain an important place in my own thinking about the *Essais*.

A small number of studies from this period took a different tack, considering Seneca and Plutarch as sources. Most significant among these was Isabelle Konstantinovic's *Montaigne et Plutarque*, an invaluable resource which collated and expanded previous works of source identification.⁴⁰ Her introductory analysis highlights several affinities or similarities between Montaigne and Plutarch – particularly with

³⁸ *Zitat und Zitierkunst in Montaignes Essais* (Geneva: Droz, 1966).

³⁹ *La Citation et l'art de citer dans les Essais de Montaigne*, trans. by Jules Brody (Paris: Champion, 1997).

⁴⁰ *Montaigne et Plutarque* (Geneva: Droz, 1989).

regard to their use of dialogue, contradiction, images – while also commenting on how Montaigne uses particular images or stories from Plutarch though by far the larger part of the study is dedicated to a systematic presentation of Montaigne’s borrowings from Amyot’s translations both of the *Vies* and the *Œuvres morales* arranged following their order in the *Essais*. The value of this study, for my purposes at least, lies more in its utility as a work of source identification than in its prefatory analysis. Seneca’s role as an intermediary for Epicurean ideas was considered in a brief article by Patrick Henry⁴¹ while Catherine Magnien-Simonin examined the unusual case of ‘Le profit de l’un est dommage de l’autre’, a chapter which was left unchanged after the first edition and which is largely a paraphrase of chapter 38 of book six of Seneca’s *De Beneficiis*. Noting that Montaigne ‘pratique très peu le *De Beneficiis* dont il n’a extrait par ailleurs qu’une unique citation’,⁴² Magnien-Simonin considers the possibility that Montaigne’s translation of this notoriously difficult passage⁴³ may witness the influence of a 1560 French translation.⁴⁴ Her focus, however, is the way in which Montaigne translates Seneca, how he modifies the order of Seneca’s examples, his ‘suppressions et ajouts’:⁴⁵ ‘les qualités de finesse, et de sympathie avec l’auteur à traduire, s’expriment dans le choix de termes.’⁴⁶ Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani considered Plutarch not as a source of textual snippets but as a text and as a form to be plundered, reworked, and recast in Montaigne’s own image.⁴⁷ She argues that Montaigne ‘choisit de lire dans la *Vie* [plutarquienne] comme une première forme de l’essai, mettant en lumière les

⁴¹ ‘Sénèque, source d’idées épicuriennes de Montaigne en 1580?’, *Bulletin de la société des amis de Montaigne*, 1-2 (1980), pp. 57-60.

⁴² ‘Montaigne, lecteur d’un Sénèque français?’, *French Forum*, 13 (1988), pp. 277-285 (p. 277).

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 279.

⁴⁴ Sauveur Accurat, *Sept Livres de Senèque, traitant des bienfaits. Avec la vie dudit Senèque* (Paris: Benoist Prevost, 1560).

⁴⁵ ‘Montaigne, lecteur d’un Sénèque français?’, p. 280.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ ‘Les Dépouilles de Plutarque: l’écriture de l’histoire et l’essai’, *Montaigne: l’écriture de l’essai* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), pp. 63-89.

similitudes, et négligeant [...] les aspects spécifiques du discours historien'.⁴⁸ For Mathieu-Castellani, Montaigne remoulded Plutarch's historical writing and, in the process, shifted the author's relation to his text – Montaigne is 'à la fois le sujet et l'objet' and the result is not a 'vie' but an 'essai'.⁴⁹ While I make the case throughout this thesis that Montaigne's Plutarch is precisely that – a 'model' only in as much as he is recast in the essayist's likeness; an 'antecedent' when seen and shaped by what came later – I do not share Mathieu-Castellani's view that Plutarch's role was that of providing the 'vie' as a sort of proto-essay, waiting to be made reflexive. I make this case fully in my final chapter, suggesting that this reflexive dimension fundamentally reshapes the nature of Montaigne's writing, particularly with regard to its relationships with introspection and truth.

More recent work in this area has much more in common with this second group – studies which consider Seneca and Plutarch as sources of one kind or another – and, speaking generally, recent scholarship has been less interested in developing a global view of the mechanics of textual borrowing.⁵⁰ Rather, critical focus has attended primarily to the role of Seneca and Plutarch either as a source of ideas, concepts, or a philosophical language or, on the other hand, as authors of 'décousus' texts which stand as a model for the 'essai'. The latter is seen most clearly in the articles on Seneca and Plutarch in the *Dictionnaire de Montaigne* by Alexandre Tarrête and Olivier Guerrier respectively. For Guerrier, 'la plasticité du texte de Plutarque, où la science "est traictees à pieces décousues"', convient à l'humeur de Montaigne, en même temps qu'elle favorise

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 74.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 83.

⁵⁰ An exception to this is found in Victor Hugo Velazquez's 'Resistance to Appropriation: Citation and Circulation in Montaigne's *Essais*', *Utah Foreign Language Review*, 17 (2009), pp. 54-65. Velazquez, following Philippe Desan's reading of Montaigne as a 'literary capitalist' (Velazquez, p. 54), argues that Montaigne's textual 'larrecins' might be interpreted not within a framework of appropriation but rather one of credit, circulation, and exchange.

le travail de détissage et de recomposition'.⁵¹ Plutarch 'fournit à la fois une source et un modèle, d'une inépuisable richesse';⁵² it is through Montaigne's engagement with Plutarch 'que se définit la forme de l'essai'.⁵³ Tarrête's study focuses somewhat more on establishing Montaigne's relationship to Seneca's Stoicism – he looks at Montaigne's comments on Seneca's death, notes that 'l'adhésion qu'il accorde éventuellement aux thèses de Sénèque n'est jamais définitive',⁵⁴ and argues that Montaigne's Seneca is 'débarrassé des défauts de son école'⁵⁵ – though this is encapsulated by Tarrête's broader point that 'la raison pour cette préférence est moins à chercher dans la doctrine du philosophe romain que dans sa manière: Montaigne trouve chez [Sénèque] une philosophie traitée "à pieces décousues, qui ne demandent pas l'obligation d'un long travail"'.⁵⁶ While I do not disagree with Guerrier's argument that Montaigne's form was defined in reading, thinking with, and writing with Plutarch, it is telling that the same evidence is cited in Tarrête's study of Seneca. It seems that it would be most fruitful to consider these two figures, so often aligned in the *Essais*, together. Floyd Gray goes some way towards such an analysis in *Montaigne et les livres* though the points he makes are repetitive and general: 'Pourquoi Plutarque et Sénèque? C'est que la science qu'il cherche est traitée par eux "à pieces décousues"'.⁵⁷ He notes that Seneca and Plutarch 'lui ser[ven]t de point de départ'⁵⁸ before going on to state that it was 'l'homme derrière le livre qui l'intéresse' and that Montaigne saw style as a means of uncovering this character.⁵⁹ Marie-Claire Couzinet has also highlighted this quotation from 'Des livres' ('à pieces décousues'): situating Montaigne's appreciation of Seneca and Plutarch within

⁵¹ 'Plutarque', *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Paris: Champion, 2004), pp. 795-798 (p. 796).

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 795.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 796.

⁵⁴ 'Sénèque', *Dictionnaire de Montaigne*, pp. 904-908 (p. 905).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 906.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 905.

⁵⁷ *Montaigne et les livres* (Paris: Garnier, 2013), p. 46. Cf. p. 49 and p. 62.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 46.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 59-60.

a context of miscellany, Couzinet underlines the ‘mêlée’ nature of the texts of these two ancients to show that Montaigne ‘établit une véritable correspondance entre une philosophie et un style’.⁶⁰

Sharing commonalities with Mathieu-Castellani’s study, Alison Calhoun’s *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers* argues that it is in engaging with the life-writing of Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius that Montaigne developed his style and, through this, his sense of a ‘transversal’ self: a self defined and understood negatively and in opposition to others.⁶¹ The syncretic practice employed by Plutarch at the end of each pairing of lives has been the focus of both Cara Welch and Claire Couturas. For Couturas, ‘ce que Montaigne découvre dans les *Vies* de Plutarque, c’est cet outil de comparaison propre à s’adapter à une recherche toujours en mouvement, cette technique d’écriture et ce mode de pensée [...] fondé sur la distinction’.⁶² Cara Welch’s study II.35 and III.1 argues that, for Montaigne, ‘Plutarch’s manner of comparison teaches us virtue’.⁶³ She notes Montaigne’s use of Plutarch’s technique in conjunction with material taken from Seneca in II.35 and traces a shift between the two chapters wherein Montaigne moves from a position of favouring public interest to one prioritising ‘an individualistic form of constancy’.⁶⁴ These works have stressed the ethical dimension of Plutarch and of Montaigne’s engagement with his texts and, in this, they develop Friedrich’s view. A product of such an approach is a focus on Plutarch’s

⁶⁰ ‘Les *Essais* de Montaigne et les miscellanées’, *Ouvrages miscellanées et théories de la connaissance à la Renaissance*, ed. by Dominique de Courcelles (Paris: Ecole de chartes, 2003), pp. 153-169 (p. 169).

⁶¹ *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers: Life-Writing and Transversality in the Essais* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015).

⁶² ‘Une pratique de transfert dans les *Essais* de Montaigne: les *Vies parallèles* de Plutarque’, *Camenae*, 3 (2007), pp. 1-11 (p. 7).

⁶³ ‘Beyond Stoicism: Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* and Montaigne’s Search for a New Noble *Ethos*’, *Revelations of Character: Ethos, Rhetoric, and Moral Philosophy in Montaigne*, ed. by Corinne Noirost-Maguire and Valérie M. Dionne (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 99-118 (p. 102).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 117.

Vies, perhaps – and counterintuitively – at the expense of his *Œuvres morales et meslees*. These ethical concerns are certainly important and, as I have already noted, I address the relationship between the ‘vie’ and the ‘essai’ in Chapter Four though my view of Montaigne (and the same can be said of Seneca and Plutarch) is not one which sees him as a historian of character so much as figure engaged in the problems of tracing, exploring, and writing his thought.

Welch’s analysis unites the study of Seneca and Plutarch as formal models with an investigation of Montaigne’s relationship with and use of their philosophical positions. Recent studies which can be characterised as intellectual history have pursued a number of different lines of inheritance and influence between Montaigne and Seneca and Plutarch, both as a pair and individually. Sébastien Prat, in his study of Montaigne’s understanding of notions of constancy and inconstancy, has shown how the essayist moves away from and reformulates both the Senecan and the neo-Stoic uses of ‘constantia’.⁶⁵ He notes, however, that this is not ‘[une] approche par affiliation doctrinale’ but is rather ‘une approche des *Essais* par notions’:⁶⁶ his objective is not to say whether or not Montaigne was a Stoic but rather to follow Montaigne’s interaction with and manipulation of this idea, often in striking contrast not only to the Stoics of antiquity but also to his contemporaries. This analysis usefully situates Montaigne’s disparate thoughts on constancy within their intellectual and historical context though this is often done without siting these comments within their textual and discursive context: Montaigne’s thoughts and writings on inconstancy are, fittingly, inconstant and Prat’s study works to resolve rather than examine these instabilities. Similarly, Emiliano Ferrari has touched on the role of Senecan ideas of ‘tranquillitas animi’ in Montaigne’s

⁶⁵ *Constance et inconstance chez Montaigne* (Paris: Garnier, 2011).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 12-13.

thoughts about passion⁶⁷ while Zahi Zalloua has suggested that Seneca ‘is Montaigne’s main interlocutor in his mediations on the use and abuse of self-mastery’ in analysing his ‘adoption and adaptation of Senecan practices’ regarding ‘the vices of curiosity and nonchalance’.⁶⁸ In her study of Montaigne’s ‘classical inheritance’, Felicity Green describes the author of the *Essais* ‘not as the architect and exponent of a distinctively modern interiority but as a classical moralist deeply indebted to ancient patterns of thought and language’.⁶⁹ Her argument is that Montaigne’s ethics and the linguistic motifs of self-ownership with which he expounds this ethical position are taken from Seneca and Plutarch. These studies tend to present Montaigne as much, if not more, as a thinker than as a writer: they situate Montaigne’s ideas within a philosophical and intellectual context and, as such, attend less to his formal and literary practices.

This survey is by no means exhaustive. There are a number of studies which do not fit neatly into my categorisation – Peter Mack on Montaigne’s use of his reading as a starting point or as a source of axioms with which to test his judgement;⁷⁰ Olivier Guerrier’s analysis of Plutarch’s accounts of ‘pratiques prophétiques’ with which Montaigne ‘s’approprié le pouvoir de révélation’;⁷¹ Jean-Yves Pouilloux’s pair of studies on Montaigne’s use Plutarch’s ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’ and ‘De la vertu morale’;⁷² Alain Legros’ account of Montaigne’s peculiar and peculiarly Plutarchan understanding

⁶⁷ *Montaigne: une anthropologie des passions* (Paris: Garnier, 2014), pp. 237-240.

⁶⁸ ‘Montaigne, Seneca, and “le soing de la culture de l’âme”’, *Montaigne Studies*, 21 (2009), pp. 155-168 (p. 156).

⁶⁹ *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. Chapter 2, ‘Languages of the Self: Montaigne’s Classical Inheritance’, pp. 45-88 (p. 45).

⁷⁰ *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), see esp. p. 24 and p. 172.

⁷¹ *Quand les poètes feignent: ‘fantasie’ et fiction dans les Essais de Montaigne* (Paris: Champion, 2002), pp. 460-480 (p. 469).

⁷² ‘Plutarque et Montaigne I: sur le *Ei* de Delphes’, pp. 245-262 and ‘Plutarque et Montaigne II: de la vertu morale’, pp. 263-282, both of which are in Pouilloux’s *Montaigne: une vérité singulière* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

of δεισιδαιμονία⁷³ – as well as a significant body of work on Montaigne’s reading of other authors which has obvious implications for my own research.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this survey does, I hope, convey the broad outlines of our current understanding of the place of Seneca and Plutarch in the *Essais* along with a view of past and present methodological approaches to the interpretation of Montaigne’s intertextuality in general and his use of Seneca and Plutarch in particular. It might be said, in summary, that the current critical view of Seneca and Plutarch’s position in the *Essais* is one where these figures either stand as a model for the ‘essai’, offering Montaigne an informal, ‘décousue’ form with which to write about himself or, alternatively, as philosophical antecedents from whom Montaigne drew ideas and concepts which could then, to various extents, be remoulded. In addition to these two comprehensive approaches to this triad of authors are those studies which investigate specific instances of borrowing, often attending to these issues philologically and drawing significant but local conclusions.

In the chapters which follow, I approach this relationship quite differently. My argument is that Montaigne uses Seneca and Plutarch to construct a new way of writing; a form which is doubtful and unresolved and which is, like his ‘[B] entendement’, ‘double et divers’ (III.11.1034). In this, I build on previous studies of Montaigne’s form – both those noted above by Tarrête, Gray, Guerrier and others which focus on Seneca and Plutarch but also more global studies such as those by Tournon and Pouilloux, all of which privilege rupture, fragmentation, and comparison⁷⁵ – and suggest that these

⁷³ ‘Plutarque, Amyot, Montaigne et la “superstition”’, *Moralia et Œuvres morales à la Renaissance*, ed. by Olivier Guerrier (Paris: Champion, 2009), pp. 275-291.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, *La Librairie de Montaigne*, ed. by Philip Ford and Neil Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 2012).

⁷⁵ In addition to *Montaigne: la glose et l’essai*, see Tournon’s *Route par ailleurs: le ‘nouveau langage’ des Essais* (Paris: Champion, 2006). For Jean-Yves Pouilloux’s work, see *Lire les Essais de Montaigne* (Paris: Maspero, 1969), reprinted in *Montaigne: l’éveil de la pensée* (Paris: Champion, 1995), as well as his more recent study, *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*.

take on a dramatically new significance when considered from the perspective of doubtfulness. In drawing a focus on form and writing alongside an investigation into doubt, I address the concerns and interests exemplified by those intellectual-historical works discussed above while showing how these, in return, are not simply illustrated by but in fact depend on close attention to the literary and textual mechanics of the *Essais*: '[B] Mon humeur est de regarder autant à la forme qu'à la substance,' wrote Montaigne (III.8.928). We must attend to Montaigne's form and substance simultaneously not simply because they are equally important but because they are one and the same: if we are to understand Montaigne's form, we must understand his relationship with doubt – this point is widely acknowledged – but we must also practise the reverse; we must understand Montaigne's form to understand his doubtfulness. Methodologically, my work is grounded in close textual analysis, examining the essayist's literary and formal techniques as intrinsic to and expressive of his complex, often paradoxical, and yet precise patterns of thought. I examine his thought as it shifts and is rewritten, using the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' to follow as he thinks on the page and in writing, tracing his hesitations and second thoughts, '[B] de jour en jour, de minute en minute' (III.2.805). This seems particularly opportune given that recent investigations of the place of Seneca and Plutarch in the *Essais* have privileged their status as antecedents, focusing either on the general and large scale parallels between their forms, or on points of philosophical – and often more strictly ethical – inheritance. With my study, I intend to redress this balance. Attending closely to the details of Montaigne's engagement with and use of these authors, examining the textual mechanics and functions of this interaction, reveals a more complex picture: one which testifies not only to parallels of thought or style but also to a very different point of philosophical connection centred not on ethics but on epistemology; not on understanding character but on writing thought.

But what does doubt have to do with Seneca and Plutarch? Seneca, especially in the neo-Stoic environment of the late sixteenth century, embodies the dogma of his school and, though he is somewhat more eclectic, Plutarch's reputation was that of an educator and an instructor.⁷⁶ Surely it would seem that, if we are to integrate and synthesise our understandings of Montaigne's doubtfulness and his form, we ought rather to investigate his use of Sextus Empiricus, epitomiser of Pyrrhonism, or – perhaps – of Cicero's *Academica*, his digest of the Academic school of Scepticism. And yet it is my argument that it is not with these Sceptics but – paradoxically and counter-intuitively – with the two dogmatists that Montaigne finds a 'doubtful and unresolved' form. In making this case, then, I am not only reassessing the affinities between the *Essais* and the *Epistles* or the *Œuvres morales et meslees* and I am not simply showing how Montaigne engages with ancient philosophical schools. Rather, in bringing together these diverse fields – Senecan and Plutarchan influence; Montaigne's relationship to doubt and Scepticism; his literary and formal practices – I intend to show how each changes the other as they are put into contact and combination. I do not suggest that Montaigne makes Seneca and/or Plutarch 'Sceptical' nor do I argue that Montaigne makes Scepticism 'Plutarchan' or 'Senecan': the result is a hybrid; a '[C] fantastique bigarrure' (III.9.994) which is neither one nor the other. I call this 'doubtful writing' and I maintain that it is in working with and on Seneca and Plutarch – actively engaging with them as opposed to passively receiving from them – that Montaigne forges his own manner of writing his 'doubtful' thought and making this thought visible on the page. In approaching Seneca and Plutarch as figures of doubtfulness, I present a distinctly new approach to Montaigne's philosophical and literary enterprise: one which privileges writing (and re-writing) as an instrument of doubtful thinking and one which reframes

⁷⁶ Cf. the widely held belief that Plutarch was the tutor to Trajan. Speaking of Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne describes them as '[A] tous deux precepteurs de deux Empereurs Romains' (II.10.413).

our understanding of what is involved in the question of doubt that takes it beyond the widely investigated field of Montaignean Scepticism.

Chapter One asks why Seneca and Plutarch hold their privileged place in Montaigne's reflections on his own writing and particularly why they are so frequently considered as a pair. Beginning with a distinction between Scepticism and doubtfulness – between reading the Sceptics and doubtful reading – this chapter moves on to its central focus of combination, showing first that Seneca and Plutarch are seen by Montaigne to be figures of plurality, capable of accommodating multiple perspectives, before demonstrating how and to what ends Montaigne combines these two authors in his own text. Focusing at length on a central passage from the 'Apologie', I show how Montaigne reworks the introductory sequence from Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* to surprising ends, ascribing the ability to speak and write with irresolution not to the Pyrrhonians but to Seneca and Plutarch: it is from this passage that I take my title and it is in working with this page from the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', covered with layers of addition and textual insertion, that we see Montaigne's double act of, on one hand, attributing qualities of doubtfulness to the writing of Seneca and Plutarch and, on the other, performing the actions and exemplifying the qualities with which he has imbued his 'models'. This sense of duality and doubleness is a thread which runs through my reading of Montaigne. Chapter One goes on to explore this doubleness in Montaigne's combination(s) of Seneca and Plutarch showing how these figures are at once united and equated and, on the other hand, opposed and antithetical: in combining these authors, he fuses them together such that they become an interlocking pair, united in their complementary opposition to one another. They fit together not because they are the same but because they are different and yet, in coming together, they become one. From here, I explore the way in which Montaigne capitalises on the dual nature of

combination: in adjoining disparate points and perspectives, he highlights the fault-lines and fractures within his text which serve simultaneously as seams. In combining Seneca and Plutarch and in combining their texts, he creates a productive tension; a tension which is left unresolved both for the author and the reader and which allows Montaigne to write – and allows his text to be read – ‘[C] tantost d’un visage, tantost d’un autre’ (II.12.509).

Having examined in Chapter One Montaigne’s construction of this hybrid pair, Chapter Two investigates the place of Montaigne. Where does Montaigne fit in relation both to Seneca and Plutarch and to his own text? And how are we to interpret the apparent contradiction that Montaigne is ‘[C] consubstantiel’ with his book (II.18.665) while his book is ‘[C] massonné purement de leurs [i.e. Sénèque et Plutarque] despouilles’ (II.32.721)? I examine Montaigne’s use of textual borrowings, predominantly though not exclusively from Seneca and Plutarch, which are ambiguously identified – if they are identified at all – in light of his meta-textual comments on his willingness for his reader to be misled in recognising these ‘emprunts’. In doing so, I make the case that Montaigne actively sustains this ambivalence of authorship in order to relocate the place of authoring to the page itself: I show that the *Essais* exhibit what I call ‘in-between authorship’ and that this is an authorial mode which serves Montaigne as a tool with which to think with texts and to think in writing, thinking on the page. This is a form of authorship which forces us as readers to suspend our judgement not only regarding the content of that which is written but also the status of the writing, its provenance, and its authority. This is, however, a ‘painful’ form of suspension and one which coaxes us to engage actively and endlessly, thinking with a shifting and multiple text which often seems to be spoken with two voices at once or to be spoken by different voices depending on how we approach it. ‘In-between authorship’ is doubtful

not just for the reader but also for Montaigne: it is, I claim, in introducing these texts but without assimilating them that Montaigne thinks with these extraneous writings within his own textual environment. He thinks with these texts in such a way that multiple, distinct authorial identities are able to occupy the same textual space, creating a place for active, continuous, and exploratory thought.

Chapter Two investigates Montaigne's conception of authorship in relation to those authorial figures with whom he thinks and writes and I conclude that it is with 'in-between authorship' that Montaigne imbues his text with a plurality. Making his authorial position double, moving, and uncertain is an important aspect of this mode of writing capable of tentative and temporary expression. Chapter Three takes this further, suggesting that these intertextual mechanisms for writing doubtfully are partnered with a 'double et divers' form. I begin with an analysis of Montaigne's use of this phrase – 'double et divers' – to argue that 'double' signifies that this is not simply a shifting and changing way of thinking but is rather one wherein multiple perspectives are maintained simultaneously: for Montaigne to think in writing, it is not enough for his writing to present a series of divergent positions; it must instead be capable of expressing itself 'doubly'. I suggest that Montaigne achieves such a form through a radical reworking of Senecan and Plutarchan modes of writing irresolution – modes which rely on a (hypothetically) endless sequence such as the serial letter or the Plutarchan method of progressing through a succession of opposing positions – in which he removes their sequential linearity. He collapses these modes, disordering his compositional chronology and overlaying diverse perspectives, and the result is a form which is more, not less, doubtful; one which is not only 'diverse' but also 'double', which is to say capable of expressing multiple positions at once.

In my final chapter, I investigate the purpose of this form of writing: why does Montaigne labour to write doubtfully? Once again, we find that Seneca and Plutarch are central and, again, for reasons which have previously been neglected. Chapter Four claims that Montaigne writes doubtfully because he seeks to write truthfully though we must recognise that the essayist's understanding of truthfulness is idiosyncratic: attending carefully to his comments on truth, particularly in 'Du démentir', I suggest that, for Montaigne, to speak or write truthfully is to make one's language perform the mechanics, movements, and form of thought; it is to think in language and to make language as 'double' and inconstant as thought. I propose that this view of the relationships between truth and language and between truth and doubtfulness is the result of an engaged and productive reading of Plutarch's writings on truth-telling (specifically his opusculum 'Comment on pourra discerner le flatteur d'avec l'amy') in combination with a similarly active reading of Seneca on constancy. Montaigne reaches a view of truth-telling wherein truth is compatible with doubt. This is a view which embraces the paradoxes of self-knowledge, revealing a moving plurality within Montaigne's 'entendement' or 'esprit', precluding Plutarchan and broadly classical notions of achieving a way of speaking which reveals an inner 'self'. This is a form of truth-telling which is neither Senecan nor Plutarchan and yet it emerges through a sustained engagement with their texts, providing Montaigne with a way of writing his doubtful thought and a means of writing truthfully.

This thesis, then, returns to the old question of Senecan and Plutarchan influences on Montaigne's writing and yet it does so from a new perspective which, I suggest, yields significant conclusions. In recognising that Seneca and Plutarch are, for Montaigne, figures of doubtful writing, we come to recognise not simply that these two ancients were integral to Montaigne's thoughts on uncertainty and irresolution but

instead that they are a key to his great innovation of writing doubtful thought in a doubtful form.

Seneca and Plutarch: A ‘Doubtful’ Combination

‘Douter, c’est niaiser et fantastiquer’

In ‘Coustume de l’isle de Cea’, Montaigne briefly outlines his understanding of that key verb, ‘philosopher’: ‘[A] Si philosopher c’est douter, comme ils disent, à plus forte raison niaiser et fantastiquer, comme je fais, doit estre doubter’ (II.3.350). Rather than starting, like the anonymous ‘ils’, with philosophy, he inverts the commonplace: Montaigne, playing the fool and constructing fantastic, chimeric ways of thinking, must surely be said to ‘doubt’. That link back, however, from doubt to philosophy is left unstated: Montaigne structures his argument such that doubt, rather than philosophy, is at the centre; he associates his practice of playing the fool with that of those who ‘philosophise’ – they both ‘doubt’ – and yet he does not explicitly equate his action with theirs. In juggling these terms, Montaigne redirects our focus away from ‘philosophising’ and towards a practice of doubting but this is not the doubt of the ‘philosophes’. That ‘niaiser’ is equivalent to ‘philosopher’ is implied but the way in which Montaigne constructs these equivalences – x is equal to y ; z is, we might say, more equal to y – pushes us to consider doubt not as a philosophical position but instead as something to do with ‘fantasticating’.

This thesis contends that the essayist’s use of Seneca and Plutarch allows for and facilitates what might be called a ‘literary’, ‘textual’, or ‘writerly’ doubtfulness; a way of making the movement and mechanics of doubtful thinking visible on the page. In the quote above, we see a shift of emphasis which is emblematic of Montaigne’s text more broadly: doubt is disassociated from the ‘philosophes’, becoming less a philosophical

position and more a practice or activity – something which is done by an individual rather than something which is maintained and affirmed by a school – and, significantly, this is an activity imbued with the characteristics of imagination, creation, the counterfactual, the fantastical, perhaps even the monstrous. In short, doubt – ‘niaiser et fantastiquer’ – is pulled away from the doctrines of philosophy and towards the textual practices of the literary.

In reading, writing, and thinking with Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne constructs a ‘double et divers’ text capable of writing doubtful thought rather than simply describing it. In this chapter, I address the question of what ‘Scepticism’ or ‘doubt’ might mean for Montaigne and how these ideas relate to Seneca and Plutarch, two figures who are almost universally overlooked in discussions of the essayist’s Scepticism.⁷⁷ These two authors hold a privileged position in the *Essais* and the author repeatedly tells us that theirs are the only texts he could not be without.⁷⁸ But what is it that he recognises and appreciates in them? What do they allow him to do which makes them so indispensable? We have, moreover, become accustomed to this pairing, taking Seneca and Plutarch to be natural bedfellows and yet we need only look at Plutarch’s extensive attacks on the Stoics and on Stoic doctrine – ‘Les Contredits des philosophes stoïques’, for example, or the opusculum which follows, ‘Des communes conceptions contre les stoïques’ – to see that this combination is more unusual than we tend to

⁷⁷ A notable exception, which will be discussed shortly, is found in Nicola Panichi’s ‘Montaigne and Plutarch: A Scepticism that Conquers the Mind’, *Renaissance Scepticisms*, ed. by Gianni Paganini and José R. Maia Neto (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), pp. 183-211.

⁷⁸ Montaigne’s methods of selecting poetry are clearly distinct from his thought on the selection of prose texts and, as such, fall beyond the remit of this chapter and, indeed, thesis: he often describes his relationship with poetry as a kind of pleasurable rapture (see, for example, I.32.232: ‘[C] Elle ne pratique point nostre jugement: elle le ravit et ravage’), though prose authors are discussed separately and according to a very different framework of aesthetic and literary judgement. On Montaigne’s relationship with poetry, see, in the first instance, Olivier Guerrier, *Quand les poètes feignent*, Floyd Gray’s *Montaigne bilingue: le latin des Essais*, and Mary McKinley’s *Words in a Corner: Studies in Montaigne’s Latin Quotations*. See also Ullrich Langer, *Penser les formes du plaisir littéraire à la Renaissance* (Paris: Garnier, 2009).

think.⁷⁹ Why, then, are they so frequently considered together, in spite of the clear differences between them, differences to which Montaigne draws our attention?

As Emmanuel Naya's numerous studies have shown, 'doubt' and 'Scepticism' were not, as is frequently asserted in treatments of the essayist's Scepticism,⁸⁰ restored to Western philosophy as a result of Henri Estienne's 1562 Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Largely in the wake of Richard Popkin's theory of a sixteenth century 'crise pyrrhonienne', Naya questions two assertions which have become commonplace in studies of early modern Scepticism: first, that Scepticism is a 'position philosophique mettant en doute le caractère adéquat ou exact des preuves susceptibles de justifier une proposition'.⁸¹ Such a definition, he argues, 'finit par annuler toute diversité interne à la philosophie sceptique'.⁸² Naya then critiques the view that 'le "moteur" de la crise sceptique a finalement été la critique luthérienne du dogme apostolique. [...] Une telle présentation réduit le pyrrhonisme renaissant à un phénomène motivé par une crise ecclésiologique dans laquelle il intervient comme un simple outil dialectique'.⁸³ Naya suggests that this instrumentalisation of Scepticism is the product of a failure to account for 'l'éparpillement considérable des témoignages antiques [...] redécouverts et imprimés dès le dernier tiers du XVe siècle'.⁸⁴ In privileging and prioritising the role of Estienne's edition of Sextus' *Outlines*... (and, to a lesser extent, Gentian Hervet's 1569 edition of another Sextusian text, *Adversus mathematicos*),

⁷⁹ On Plutarch's relationship with Stoicism, see Daniel Babut, *Plutarque et le stoïcisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969) and, more recently, Jan Opsomer, 'Plutarch and the Stoics', *A Companion to Plutarch*, ed. by Mark Beck (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2014), pp. 88-103.

⁸⁰ This argument is closely associated with the work of Richard Popkin, particularly his *History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). First published as *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960).

⁸¹ Emmanuel Naya, 'Le Scepticisme au XVI^e siècle: l'ombre d'un doute', *La Lettre clandestine*, 10 (2001), pp. 13-29, (p. 20). By the same author, see 'Renaissance Pyrrhonism: A Relative Phenomenon?', *Renaissance Scepticisms*, pp. 15-32, and his doctoral thesis, *Le Phénomène Pyrrhonien: lire le scepticisme à la Renaissance*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Université Stendhal Grenoble 3 (2000).

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 21-21.

we have, Naya argues, underplayed the important roles played by Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Ancient Philosophers* (particularly his 'Life of Pyrrho'), Cicero's *Academica*,⁸⁵ the *Attic Nights* of Aulus Gellius, Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*, Pseudo-Ammonius' commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, and Augustine's *Contra academicos*. The result is a much narrower understanding of early modern doubt as Pyrrhonian, and more specifically Sextusian, Scepticism. Sixteenth century doubt was, as Naya makes clear, founded upon the practice of reading across and between texts, most of which are by no means Pyrrhonian and, indeed, few are what might be considered 'Sceptical'.

This diversity of sources, which reaches far beyond the Sextusian corpus, reveals that 'Sceptical' or 'doubtful reading' was much more than 'reading the Sceptics'. Clearly, texts which position themselves in opposition to the Pyrrhonian or Academic schools of Scepticism – Augustine's *Contra academicos*, for example – provide a useful source for anecdotes, teachings, and other such information though, as Renzo Raghianti has argued, texts unrelated to debates between classical schools were also included in this porous, ill-defined corpus.⁸⁶ 'Sceptical reading' consists, then, in an intertextual dialogue between many disparate texts and is, as Naya argues, 'avant tout une affaire de lecture'.⁸⁷ Neither the text nor its author needs to be 'Sceptical' to qualify for inclusion in this

⁸⁵ On the *fortuna* of the *Academica*, its use as a source of information on classical Scepticisms, and its influence on Renaissance doubt, see Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Springer, 1972). Though this study shifts the focus away from Sextus to highlight Cicero and, briefly, Diogenes Laertius, Schmitt maintains that 'by far the most important of the three are the substantial treatises of Sextus Empiricus, which contain most of what we know of ancient scepticism' (p. 12). Schmitt's thesis sits somewhere between those of Popkin and Naya, arguing that a small wave of interest in Sceptical ideas as transmitted by Cicero's *Academica*, centred around Paris in the middle third of the sixteenth-century, preceded a larger, more significant return to Scepticism inaugurated by the Latin editions of Sextus. See also Luis Eva, 'Montaigne et les *Academica* de Cicéron', *Astéris: philosophie, histoire des idées, pensée politique*, 11 (2013), pp. 1-45. Eva argues that the presence of the *Academica* can be felt in the first edition of the *Essais* and that, for Montaigne, the two schools of Academic Scepticism and Pyrrhonism were close and even compatible.

⁸⁶ Raghianti has directed our attention to *Ecclesiastes* as a source of Scepticism particularly pertinent to the *Essais*. See 'Montaigne, lecteur sceptique de l'Ecclésiaste', *Montaigne Studies*, 21 (2009), pp. 137-153.

⁸⁷ Naya, 'Le Scepticisme au XVIe siècle', p. 22.

category; rather, one needs to identify the Scepticism or doubtfulness within and apply it to Sceptical ends, whatever that might entail. This may be information about Sceptics or Scepticism, a tendency towards doubt expressed by an author whom we would not call a Sceptic (Ragghianti's analysis of Ecclesiastes demonstrates this well), or, as I intend to show is the case in Montaigne's reading of Seneca and Plutarch, a characteristic which means that the text is liable to being used to express or demonstrate uncertainty.

In framing our discussion with the terms 'Pyrrhonian' and 'Sceptic', we have a tendency to limit ourselves to questions regarding philosophical positions, assertions, and other such matters of doctrine: the debate approached from this perspective privileges the disarticulated 'thought' – past tense – expressed or contained by the text in which we find it. This methodology, exemplified by Elaine Limbrick's 1977 article, 'Was Montaigne really a Pyrrhonian?' though still to be found in recent work,⁸⁸ results in a history of ideas rather than a history of thinking and writing; it encourages us to see the text as a vessel of philosophical meaning rather than an inextricable and crucial element in the making of philosophical meaning: we must, like Montaigne, '[B] regarder autant à la forme qu'à la substance' (III.8.928). Further, as I hope to make clear, the arenas of doubtful thinking and writing are, in the *Essais*, shaped not by Sextus Empiricus, the writer of epitomes which are resolved stylistically and formally even while they advocate irresolution and the suspension of judgement, nor by Pyrrho, a philosopher who left no written trace, no model of how to speak or write in a way that is, in itself, uncertain, but rather by figures completely detached from and even opposing the schools of

⁸⁸ 'Was Montaigne Really a Pyrrhonian?', *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*, 39 (1977), pp. 67-80. See also Marcel Conche's 1974 article, 'Le Pyrrhonisme dans la méthode', reprinted in *Montaigne et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), pp. 27-42. Regarding this approach in more recent studies, see, for instance, Sylvia Giocanti's *Penser l'irrésolution. Montaigne, Pascal, La Mothe Le Vayer. Trois itinéraires sceptiques* (Paris: Champion, 2001) or Frédéric Brahami's *Le Scepticisme de Montaigne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), both of which constitute excellent and authoritative studies of Montaigne's reception and remoulding of Sceptical thought though both have a tendency to privilege dislocated quotations as capsules expressing a philosophical idea over an analysis of textual manifestation and expression.

Scepticism.⁸⁹ It is for this reason that I prefer to speak of doubt, doubtful thought, and doubtful writing, reserving ‘Scepticism’ and its derivatives to describe the Hellenistic schools and their afterlives.

Montaigne was certainly well-acquainted with the revived Sextus Empiricus and borrows not only his ideas, arguments, and dialectical techniques but also, on numerous occasions, paraphrases and translates his text very closely.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Montaigne was – at least in this respect – much like his contemporaries: his interest in philosophical doubt drew from a broad survey of texts, engaging in precisely the practice of cross-textual reading outlined by Naya. There are, however, two texts which, though they have both long been recognised as crucial to the construction and development of Montaigne’s thought and writings, have almost entirely escaped consideration from this perspective of philosophical Scepticism, doubt, and ‘Sceptical reading’. These are Seneca’s epistles and Plutarch’s *Moralia*.

There has been a tendency among scholars to view these two ancients as Montaignean antecedents, providing models either for the genre of the ‘essai’ or for the thoughts contained within. In spite of Francis Bacon’s distinct – and distinctly unMontaignean – understanding of the meaning of an ‘essai’, his famous conclusion that

⁸⁹ This description of Sextus applies not only to his *Outlines...* but also to the ‘applied’ texts which present Sceptical arguments against dogmatic positions in a discourse which is monovocal, ordered, and in no way attempts to represent the ambiguity and dubiety of ‘doubtful’ thought. See, for instance, the opening to the first chapter of *Adversus mathematicos*: ‘Atque quae apud Philosophos quidem fuit dissensionem de eo quod est discere, cum magna sit & varia, non est praesentis temporis diiudicare. Satis est autem statuerem quod si sit ulla disciplina, & fieri possit ut homo discat, oportet prius quatuor confiteri, nempe rem quae docetur: eum qui docet: eum qui discit: modum discendi,’ *Adversus mathematicos...*, ed. and trans. by Gentian Hervet (Paris: Martinum Juvenem, 1569), I.2.

⁹⁰ Note, for example, the similarity between Montaigne’s loved words which ‘[B] amollissent et moderent la temerité de nos propositions’ (III.11.1030) and the *phonai skeptikai*. For a study of these phrases from a linguistic perspective, see Kirsti Sellevold, *J’aime ces mots...’: expressions linguistiques de doute dans les Essais de Montaigne* (Paris: Champion, 2003). We might also note the presence of *phonai skeptikai* painted on the beams of his ‘librairie’; see Alain Legros, *Essais sur poutres: peintures et inscriptions chez Montaigne* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000).

‘*Senecaes Epistles to Lucilius*, yf youe marke them well, are but *Essaies*’⁹¹ has been echoed and often cited as evidence by countless critics who point to Seneca and Plutarch as the real source of this nascent genre.⁹²

More recently, however, there has been a focus on the influence of Seneca and Plutarch as philosophical, rather than generic, antecedents. Felicity Green’s study approaches the *Essais* as a case-study in early modern self-examination, self-regulation, and human freedom and her analysis convincingly demonstrates that the ‘sense of familiarity’ we feel when we read Montaigne – the sense that his concerns and ways of thinking are very much like our own; that he is our precursor – is ‘illusory – a projection of our own preoccupations and expectations on to Montaigne’s text’.⁹³ In her chapter on Seneca and Plutarch, she argues that we are afforded a new perspective on the *Essais* when we place Montaigne within the context of his past rather than his future: Seneca and Plutarch are, she suggests, a model for self-study and provide him with a ‘language’ with which to frame and describe this introspection. She identifies two key ‘patterns of discourse’ inherited from these classical figures: ‘a rhetoric of inwardness, urging us to look or withdraw *into* ourselves, and a rhetoric of self-possession, calling for us to *own* or

⁹¹ Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. by Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 317.

⁹² Such claims have been made frequently over the course of the last century: Douglas Bush, for instance, felt this to be so self-evident that he wrote, without recourse to any evidence, that ‘the classical prototypes [of the early essay] are the moral works of Seneca and Plutarch’, *English Literature in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p. 193. Floyd Gray provides another instance of this argument though he expands the pool of influences and prototypes, noting that ‘the essay began to take form in the epistolary writings of Cicero and Seneca, Plutarch’s *Moralia*, the compilations of *sententiae*, *exempla*, and *lectiones* of late antiquity and their humanist counterparts’, ‘The Essay as Criticism’, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 3, The Renaissance*, ed. by Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 271-277 (p. 271). More recently, in *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers*, Alison Calhoun has focused on Plutarch’s role as a generic model. It might be suggested that this critical tendency is a product of viewing Montaigne’s title as referring to what we call ‘an essay’, describing a genre rather than the process or act of ‘essaying’. On this, see Tournon’s frequently asserted distinction between Montaigne’s title (*Essais de Michel, Seigneur de Montaigne*) and the posthumous 1595 title (*Les Essais de Michel, Seigneur de Montaigne*), *Route par ailleurs*, pp. 12-13.

⁹³ Felicity Green, *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom*, p. 1.

belong to ourselves’,⁹⁴ before arguing that, for all three writers, ‘we should withdraw into ourselves [...] not to realise our most individual and truthful being, but to achieve tranquillity and wisdom’.⁹⁵ In this chapter, and in this thesis more broadly, I want to approach this trio differently. Rather than thinking of Seneca and Plutarch as philosophical antecedents, as figures who provide a model for ethical thought and practice, as a ‘classical inheritance’,⁹⁶ I present them as authors with whom Montaigne works to create a particular form of writing. This form of writing is a textual practice capable of expressing the moving, unresolved nature of Montaigne’s doubtful philosophical thought.

An approach similar to that taken by Green is found in the work of Nicola Panichi who has suggested that, while Socrates, Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, and others are typically seen as sources for the essayist’s doubtful thought, ‘another path, less explored that may contribute towards the definition of [his] scepticism is in fact Plutarch’s *Moralia*’.⁹⁷ Highlighting Montaigne’s criticism of ‘classical scepticism’,⁹⁸ Panichi compares the moderated, mitigated *epoché* of Plutarch with the essayist’s own practice: noting that ‘the method of contradictory discussion, together with the suspension of judgement, is typical of the New Academy’,⁹⁹ Panichi argues that, as with Montaigne, ‘Plutarch’s method contains the principle of “opposed forces” [...]: true education comes about “better by counter-example than by example”’ (III.8.1044).¹⁰⁰ Reminding us that Plutarch described himself as a ‘member of the Academy’, Panichi’s article elucidates a broadly convincing parallel between these two authors, though her primary focus seems

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 46.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 45.

⁹⁷ Nicola Panichi, ‘Montaigne and Plutarch: A Scepticism that Conquers the Mind’, p. 186.

⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 186-187.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 197.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 189.

to lie in demonstrating that Plutarch, rather than Montaigne's Plutarch, was more Sceptical than we might think.

Seneca and Plutarch are, then, frequently taken as models, parallels, and antecedents when considered in light of the *Essais*; they are presented as referential, rooted figures against which we might interpret and define Montaigne's own practices. In this chapter, I want to show that they are much less stable than we typically assume, constantly on the move, being redefined and redefining each other. They are, moreover, understood by Montaigne to be authors capable of writing doubtfully, an ability which is noticeably absent in Sceptical and Pyrrhonian writers as described by Montaigne. In these two authors, and particularly in their combination, we have emblems of doubtful writing being presented doubtfully. Montaigne shapes Seneca and Plutarch just as much as they shape him. In coupling Seneca and Plutarch, he synthesises them; 'fantastiquant', Seneca and Plutarch become, in the *Essais*, hybrid, uncertain. We will begin, then, by asking not only why he chooses these two authors, but also why and how he combines them.

Doubt as Combination/Combination as Doubt

1. 'Une forme d'écrire douteuse en substance et un dessein enquerant'

In the 'Apologie', Montaigne outlines three types of philosophers:

[A] Quiconque cherche quelque chose, il en vient à ce point: ou qu'il dict qu'il l'a trouvée, ou qu'elle ne se peut trouver, ou qu'il en est encore en quête. Toute la philosophie est départie en ces trois genres. Son dessein est de rechercher la vérité, la science et la certitude. Les Peripateticiens, Epicuriens, Stoiciens et autres, ont pensé l'avoir trouvée. Ceux-cy ont establi les sciences que nous avons, et les ont traitées comme notices certaines. Clitomachus, Carneades et les Academiciens ont desespéré de leur quête, et jugé que la vérité ne se pouvoit concevoir par nos

moyens. La fin de ceux-cy, c'est la foiblesse et humaine ignorance; ce party a eu la plus grande suyte et les sectateurs les plus nobles. Pyrrho et autres Skeptiques ou Epechistes – [C] desquels les dogmes plusieurs anciens ont tenu tîrez de Homere, des sept sages, d'Archilochus, d'Eurypides, et y attachent Zeno, Democritus, Xenophanes – [A] disent qu'ils sont encore en cherche de la verité. (II.12.502).

Following Sextus exactly,¹⁰¹ albeit with some additions, Montaigne divides the philosophers and their schools according to their relationship with truth: first, the dogmatists who think they have found it; secondly, the Academic Sceptics who assert that they have not and thus find themselves to be in the paradoxical situation of knowing that nothing can be known; and, finally, the 'Skeptiques ou Epechistes' who are still looking. He then argues that, regarding the dogmatists, 'il est aysé à descouvrir que la plus part n'ont pris le visage de l'assurance que pour avoir meilleure mine' (II.12.507), before praising at length the way of writing practised by the dogmatists who have, over the course of his exposition, swapped places and become 'ce tiers genre': '[A] Ils ont une forme d'escrire douteuse en substance et un dessein enquerant plustost qu'instruisant, encore qu'ils entresement leur stile de cadances dogmatistes. Cela se voit il pas aussi bien [C] et en Seneque et [A] en Plutarque? [C] Combien disent ils, tantost d'un visage, tantost d'un autre, pour ceux qui y regardent de prez' (II.12.509).

Seneca and Plutarch, along with a handful of others, are seen here to have a prose style, 'une forme d'escrire', which is pregnant with doubt; an enquiring and doubting 'dessein' which welcomes the doubt and deliberation of those 'qui y regardent

¹⁰¹ 'Quicumque rem aliquam quaerunt, eos huc tandem devenire consentaneum est, ut aut eam inveniunt, aut à se inventam negent: & vel à se comprehendi non posse fateantur, vel in eius investigatione perseverent. Quamobrem fortasse in iis etiam quae circa Philosophiam quaeruntur, alii quidem verum se invenisse dixerunt, alii autem id esse eiusmodi quod comprehendi non posset, pronuntiarunt, alii vero quaerere pergunt. Invenisse sibi videntur ii qui peculiari nomine Dogmatici appellantur, ut Aristoteles, Epicurus, & Stoici, & alii quidam. Negarunt autem comprehendi posse, Clitomachus, Carneades, & caeteri Academici. At Sceptici etiamnum quaerunt. Unde merito tres esse generalissime philosophandi rationes existimantur, Dogmatica, Academica, Sceptica.' *Pyrrhonianum hypotyposeon*, trans. by Henri Estienne in *Adversus mathematicos...* (Paris: Martinum Juvenem, 1569), I.1.405. Unless otherwise noted, references to Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* will be to this edition.

de prez'. It is 'doubtful', then, from both the perspective of the author and that of the reader while also being doubtful not only in its 'substance' but also in its form and method. Even though they may mix in a few dogmatic phrases, Montaigne lauds their ability to speak 'tantost d'un visage, tantost d'un autre'. As he notes at the beginning of 'De l'experience', '[B] La consequence que nous voulons tirer de la ressemblance des evenemens est mal seure, d'autant qu'ils sont tousjours dissemblables: il n'est aucune qualite si universelle en cette image des choses que la diversite et varieté' (III.13.1065). The writing of the third genre embraces this diversity. Mirroring lived experience if not truth itself, Montaigne sees in this way of writing an ability to sustain plurality, to maintain multiple perspectives, and to suspend judgement.

How are we to interpret this mode – perhaps even model – of writing, which has all the hallmarks of Scepticism, in relation to the tripartition of philosophers which governs this section of the 'Apologie'? Montaigne said that '[A] les philosophes Pyrrhoniens [...] ne peuvent exprimer leur generale conception en aucune maniere de parler: car il leur faudroit un nouveau langage. Le nostre est tout formé de propositions affirmatives, qui leur sont du tout ennemies' (II.12.527). Emmanuel Naya has sought to argue that this assessment of the Pyrrhonians as aphasic is a positive one: he refers to this section of the 'Apologie' as a 'promotion de l'aphasia pyrrhonienne' and as an 'éloge paradoxal du silence au sein d'un texte prolix'.¹⁰² His argument is that we have misunderstood Pyrrhonian suspension: 'Le scepticisme a parfois été compris au seizième siècle comme un refus de s'exprimer, une réticence volontaire: les premières traductions de Diogène tendent ainsi à faire de la suspension de l'assentiment (*retentio assentionis*) une suspension de l'assertion (*retentio assertionis*) [...]'. Pourtant, le pyrrhonisme n'est ni une

¹⁰² 'Les Mots ou les choses: le "nouveau langage" à l'essai', *La Langue de Rabelais – La Langue de Montaigne*, ed. by Franco Giacone (Geneva: Droz, 2009), pp. 325-349 (p. 326).

abstention ni une extinction du langage.¹⁰³ Naya's study proceeds to read Sextus closely, showing how he employs the term 'catachresis' to describe a particularly Pyrrhonian understanding of using language 'approximately'; of tying language to a particular usage and a particular user. It must be recognised, however, that, while this is a convincing argument regarding Sextus' use of and understanding of a Pyrrhonian language, it bears little resemblance to the account given by Montaigne in this key explication of the problems inherent in speaking doubtfully. The author of the *Essais* makes it clear, rightly or wrongly, that he sees the Pyrrhonians as unable to speak in a way which correlates with their thought.

It seems, however, that he has found precisely this 'new language' in the 'dogmatic' way of writing: one simply has to 'regard[er] de prez'.¹⁰⁴ If dogmatists are only Sceptics in disguise,¹⁰⁵ what is it about this way of writing which draws Montaigne's attention? If their dogmatism is only a pretence and they are really Sceptics after all, why does he follow Sextus' categorisation? The answer surely lies not in the content of their philosophical systems, in the beliefs they hold, but rather in the way they express themselves. Montaigne seems to be distinguishing between, on the one hand, dogmatic thinkers, whom he frequently rails against in his criticisms of pedants, grammarians, logicians, lawyers, Aristotelians, and other such figures and, on the other, those who only *write* 'dogmatically' in this 'tiers genre'.¹⁰⁶ This 'tiers genre', exemplified by Seneca, Plutarch, and a handful of other ancients, seems to describe authors who make assertions, statements of philosophical position, and truth-claims and yet, at the same time, are somehow capable of instilling these statements with a provisionality which in

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 348.

¹⁰⁴ Compare Montaigne's similar description of his 'emprunts', which '[C] sonnent à gauche un ton plus délicat [...] pour ceux qui regardent de prez', I.40.251.

¹⁰⁵ II.12.507.

¹⁰⁶ The most obvious source for such criticisms is 'Du pedantisme' (I.25) and the opening pages of 'De l'expérience' (III.13).

turn reflects an ability to see things from multiple perspectives. Thus, on the surface, their writing is ‘dogmatic’ but it is, surprisingly, capable of revealing a fluid, moving, and non-dogmatic way of thinking. This association of Plutarch and particularly Seneca with notions of doubt and irresolution is very surprising: these are archetypically dogmatic figures and Seneca especially is usually seen not as a writer of irresolution but as an emblem of resolution itself. This can be seen most clearly in the prefatory epistle of the *Epistres de L. Annae Senecae, Philosophe tres-excellent* as translated by Montaigne’s brother-in-law, Geoffroy de Pressac. Addressing the king, Pressac asserts that, ‘entre tous les discours de la Philosophie il n’en est point, que les grands doivent estudier avec plus d’emulation, & de jalousie, que ceux, qui engendrent en l’ame une ferme, & absoluë resolution contre la mort, & la fortune.’¹⁰⁷ This is ethical rather than discursive resolution though it is clear that Seneca is seen not as a figure of accommodating doubt but instead of dispelling it: his works are ‘plus nobles, & plus eslevés’ than those which ‘sont attachées à la sensualité, & ne s’employent és choses douteuses’.¹⁰⁸ Seneca’s writings engage with such doubts only ‘autant qu’il y a esperance d’en eschapper’.¹⁰⁹ It is, Pressac argues, precisely this resolution by which ‘les hommes obtiennent une entiere, & souveraine jurisdiction sur toute façon de force, & de puissance, qui les exempte de rien souffrir, & de rien craindre, & qui les tient tousjours assurés parmy les choses non assurées’.¹¹⁰

Assurance, resolution, and certainty are the distinctive features of Seneca, both in his life and in his writing. And yet it is clear that Montaigne is approaching things quite differently: this last quotation from Pressac, in which he sees resolution and Stoic

¹⁰⁷ *Epistres de L. Annae Senecae, Philosophe tres-excellent, traduites en François* (Paris: G. Chaudière, 1582), fol. A4v. On Pressac, see Jean Balsamo, ‘Deux gentilshommes “nécessiteux d’honneur”’: Montaigne et Pressac’, *Montaigne Studies*, 13 (2001), pp. 131-173.

¹⁰⁸ *Epistres de L. Annae Senecae*, fols. A4v.-A5r.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* fols. A5r.-A5v.

fixity as a gateway to a godlike ‘souveraine jurisdiction’, can be seen in contradistinction to the closing words of ‘De la vanité’ in which the essayist sees our lot as that of ‘[B] le magistrat sans jurisdiction et apres tout le badin de la farce’ (III.9.1001). In placing Seneca, Plutarch, and other ‘dogmatistes’ in this group of writers capable of a ‘forme d’escrire’ not only ‘douteuse’ but also, as we will see, ‘irresolue’, Montaigne seizes our attention with this highly unusual, even paradoxical, assessment which turns standard conceptions on their head. This surprising appraisal of the prose styles of Seneca and Plutarch becomes much clearer if we look at the significantly different 1580 text, asking how Montaigne uses the Sextusian tripartition and to what end he fills the margins of the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’.

The 1580 text, devoid of the ‘allongails’ included in later editions, allows us to follow this tripartition much more closely. The first mention of this categorisation occurs in the passage quoted above in which Montaigne follows the Sextusian original. This passage remains largely unchanged with the exception of the claim that most of the teachings of the Pyrrhonians are taken from ‘Homere, des sept sages, d’Archilochus, d’Eurypides, et y attachent Zeno, Democritus, Xenophanes’. Here, we see the first point – provided that we read the text sequentially, according to its final form, rather than approaching the passage according to its compositional chronology – at which the distinctions between these philosophical genres begin to collapse. The addition, in which the diversity of authors coupled with the break in the list, ‘y attachent’, gives the impression that it may be extended even further, testifies to Naya’s argument that early modern Scepticism was founded upon a much broader corpus of texts than those expressly of the Pyrrhonian School. Montaigne then discusses the Pyrrhonians and ‘leurs refrains’,¹¹¹ a key term which occurs only twice in this long chapter and which will come

¹¹¹ *Essais de Messire Michel seigneur de Montaigne...* (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1580), p. 264.

in again shortly, this time attached to Plutarch. Having done this, he restates his tripartition, though this time it has changed:

Voilà comment, des trois generales sectes de philosophie, les deus premiers font expresse profession de dubitation et d'ignorance, et, en celle des dogmatistes, qui est troisieme, il est aysé à descouvrir que la plus part n'ont pris le visage de l'assurance que par contenance.¹¹²

The tripartition has not only been reordered; it has collapsed into a bipartition: there may be three sects, but the first two – Pyrrhonism and Academic Scepticism rather than, as we saw in the first instance, the dogmatists and the Academics – are essentially the same. The initial criterion for categorisation – what the philosophers say about truth – has been replaced by their relationship with doubt.

This new bipartition, however, collapses almost as soon as it has been established: dogmatists are, under their masks of certainty, Sceptics after all. This is not to say that Montaigne adopts Sextus' schema, collapses its distinctions and then abandons it: he continues to refer to the 'tiers genre', though the criterion governing the structure has changed yet again. The groups are no longer distinguished according to their epistemologies but rather according to the 'visages' under which they practise this doubt. In other words, what distinguishes these groups is not the content of their philosophical systems, their beliefs, or their methods of philosophical enquiry but rather the form of their discourses; what they have to say about what and how they think and how this thought is rendered in their writings. It seems that these groups all think the same thing; what differentiates them is how they express this thought. In reworking this passage in this way, Montaigne forges a subtle though significant link with the passage quoted above in which he notes the aphasia of the Pyrrhonians in want of a 'nouveau langage': the focus of the essayist's version of this categorisation is this issue of a

¹¹² Ibid. p. 266.

doubtful ‘forme d’écrire’, a focus which is almost entirely absent from the Sextusian text upon which it is based.

It is the ‘tiers genre’ which is able to speak ‘tantost d’un visage, tantost d’un autre’. In the 1580 text, their description is much more concise and notably different at certain key points:

Au demeurant, les uns ont estimé Plato dogmatiste; les autres, dubitateur et ne rien établissant; les autres, en certaines choses l’un, et en certaines choses l’autre. Il est ainsi de la plus part des auteurs de ce tiers genre. Ils ont une forme d’écrire douteuse et irresolue, et un stile enquerant plus tost qu’instruisant: encore qu’ils entresement souvent des traitz de la forme dogmatiste. Chez qui se peut voir cela plus clairement que chez nostre Plutarque? combien diversement discourt il de mesme chose? combien de fois nous presente il deus ou trois causes contraires de mesme sujet, et diverses raisons, sans choisir celle que nous auons a suyvre? que signifie ce sien refrain: En un lieu glissant et coulant, suspendons nostre creance? Car, comme dit Euripides:

*Les oeuvres de Dieu en diverses
Façons nous donnent des traueses.*¹¹³

As André Tournon has noted, Plutarch, ‘en dépit de ses attaches platoniciennes et aristotéliennes, est pris pour exemple du *pseudo-dogmatisme*’ (my emphasis).¹¹⁴ We see in ‘ce sien refrain’ one of the ‘refreins’ of the Pyrrhonians: *epoché*, ‘suspendons nostre creance’. Here, Plutarch alone exemplifies doubtful, unresolved writing, capable of presenting multiple facets of a ‘glissant et coulant’ experience: God’s creation is full of diversity and here we have a way of writing about it. This is a ‘forme d’écrire’ which is doubly hybrid, however: Plutarch combines perspectives, but he also combines the ‘forme irresolue’ with the ‘forme dogmatiste’.¹¹⁵ This is, then, a discourse capable of

¹¹³ Ibid. pp. 268-269.

¹¹⁴ André Tournon, ‘Le Doute investigateur: métamorphoses d’un “refrain” de Plutarque dans les *Essais*’, *Nouveau bulletin de la société internationale des amis de Montaigne*, 50 (2009), pp. 5-22 (p. 7).

¹¹⁵ Note Montaigne’s preference for combinations, the middle ground, and the hybrid: ‘[C] Les mestis qui ont dedaigné le premier siege d’ignorance, et n’ont peu joindre l’autre (le cul entre deux selles, desquels je suis, et tant d’autres)’, I.54.313.

making assertions, but always under the refrain of *epoché*; a refrain which precludes conclusion and definitive arrest.

In the subsequent additions, and primarily those made on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, Montaigne hammers a series of textual wedges into this section, rupturing it entirely.¹¹⁶ After the various views on the extent of Plato’s dogmatism, the [C] text introduces an extended anecdote, occupying the majority of the right-hand margin, about Socrates and midwifery, rendering the subsequent ‘[A] Il est ainsi de la plus part des auteurs de ce tiers genre’ almost unintelligible (see *fig. 2*). The section involving Plutarch is rewritten to include Seneca, though this is then followed by a discussion of the exemplar of absolute dogmatism: ‘nos parlemens’.¹¹⁷ The result is that Plutarch is separated from his ‘refrein’ to such an extent that ‘sien’ is dropped altogether: ‘Que signifie ce refrein’ goes from being rhetorical to simply perplexing; it becomes a ‘question douteuse’ introducing a dislocated saying which, having lost its speaker, seems to express confusion, rather than suspension of judgement, in the face of ‘[C] la volubilité et incompréhensibilité de toute matiere’ (II.12.510). These are only two of the most potent examples though we ought to note a [B] text addition which is found immediately before this discussion of the ‘tiers genre’: ‘Pourquoi non Aristote seulement, mais *la plus part des philosophes ont affecté la difficulté*, si ce n’est pour faire valoir la vanité du subject et *amuser la curiosité de nostre Esprit*, luy donnant où se paistre, à ronger cet os creux et descharné?’ (II.12.508, my emphasis). And, similarly, we might note Montaigne’s seemingly paradoxical claim to like speech which is ‘[A] simple et naïf, [...] plustost difficile qu’ennuieux’ (I.26.171-172). As Montaigne/Sextus make plain in that

¹¹⁶ See Tournon’s article, ‘Le Doute investigateur: métamorphoses d’un “refrain” de Plutarque dans les *Essais*’, which traces this process of textual addition in detail.

¹¹⁷ The dogmatism of *parlemens* is frequently used as a parallel for doubtful and unresolved discourse. See, for instance, ‘Des boyteux’, III.11.1030.

first tripartition, the purpose of philosophy is to *seek out* truth, knowledge and certainty and these difficulties keep our appetite amused since it cannot be satisfied.

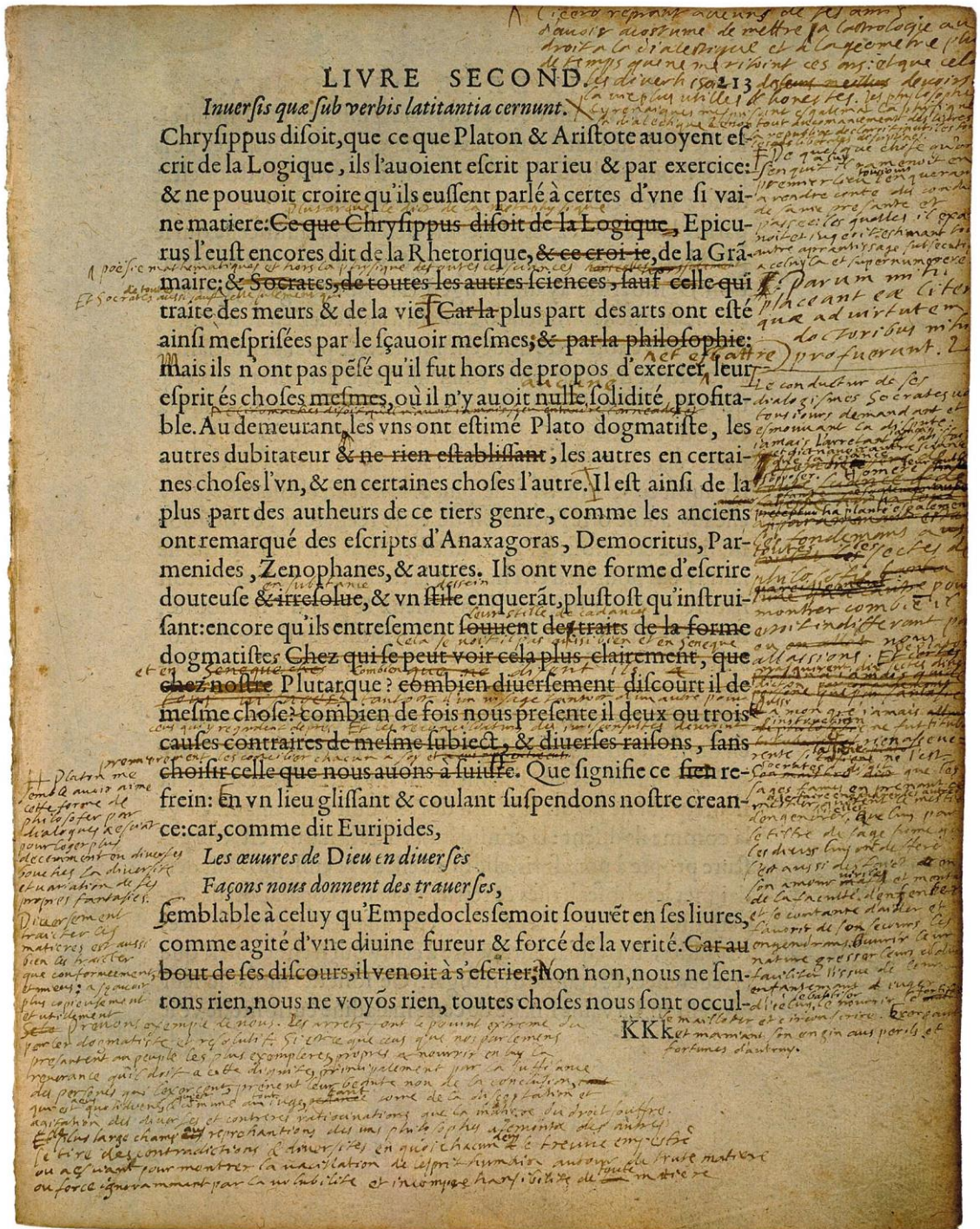


Fig. 2. 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 221r.

In the 1580 text, Montaigne describes those features which he finds attractive in Plutarch's way of writing, features which he will later ascribe also to Seneca. After 1588, he goes much further, showing us their influence on his own prose. His discussion of the three types of philosophers has the appearance of being assertive and affirmative, relying on 'cadances dogmatistes', but, 'regard[ant] de prez', we realise that the classic, Sextusian tripartition is 'glissant et coulant': the groups are simultaneously distinct and indistinct, depending upon one's perspective. The original connections within his appraisal of the 'tiers genre' are subsequently and deliberately broken, rendering his text not only 'douteu[x]' in subject matter but also in 'substance' and form. As Tournon recognises, Montaigne 'n'insiste ici sur les désaccords entre les philosophes (source inépuisable d'arguments contre les dogmatistes de tout bord), mais sur les contradictions internes du discours de chacun d'eux'.¹¹⁸ Even in the process of describing these contradictions within others, Montaigne not only embraces but actively constructs such oppositions, breaks, and conflicts within his own text. This exposition of philosophical schools is, then, in spite of first appearances, 'more enquiring than instructing': this is not the conclusion of his thought; here, we see thought itself unfolding on the page.

In 'Du repentir', Montaigne describes his own 'forme d'écriture':

[B] 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. (III.2.805).

The parallels with the writing of the 'tiers genre' are plain to see: a diversity of perspective is mirrored not only in a diversity of opinion but also in irresolution.¹¹⁹ We see similar parallels in 'Des prières' – '[A] Je propose des fantasies informes et irresoluës,

¹¹⁸ 'Le Doute investigateur: métamorphoses d'un "refrain" de Plutarque dans les *Essais*', p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Dialogues such as Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*, for example, may contain a diversity of opinions but we would not call them 'irrésolus'.

comme font ceux qui publient des questions douteuses [...]: non pour établir la vérité, mais pour la chercher' (I.56.317) – and in 'De l'inconstance de nos actions' – '[B] Je donne à mon ame tantost un visage, tantost un autre, selon le costé où je la couche. Si je parle diversement de moy, c'est que je me regarde diversement' (II.1.335). The nature of 'doubtful writing' is a theme which Montaigne returns to throughout the *Essais* and, in drawing these extracts together, we can see some of the links forged between Montaigne's thoughts on his own writing and his discussion of Plutarch, Seneca, and the 'tiers genre'. Like Plutarch, Montaigne's writing is 'douteuse et irresolue', wearing now one mask, now another. As is often the case, the *Essais* show as much as they tell: in this section of the 'Apologie', we see the influence of this hybrid genre, capable of mixing dogmatism with suspension of judgement, juxtaposing one perspective with another. Most surprisingly, we see an unusual relationship between dogmatic, affirmative writing and doubtful writing: the Pyrrhonians, who sought to expel all affirmative language, are seen to be unable to say anything in spite of their reliance on self-purging affirmations while 'doubtful dogmatists' like Seneca and Plutarch, allowing themselves a few 'dogmatic cadences', find a way of writing that is 'doubtful and unresolved'. While this may not be the 'nouveau langage', divorced entirely from a position of unavoidable and necessary affirmation, the writing of the 'tiers genre' – at least as it is constructed, presented, and performed by Montaigne – certainly seems to be a step in the right direction.

The 'tiers genre' as a stylistic model, however, is only part of the relationship between Montaigne and these authors. Seneca's late inclusion in this section, with its introduction of the idea of shifting, morphing 'visages', is perhaps one of the key elements in this development from a discussion of a way of writing to a performance of textual hybridity and irresolution. Rather than solely representing models of

combination and diversity, Seneca and Plutarch are, in the *Essais*, combined themselves and, in being combined, become part of Montaigne's own unique 'douteuse et irresolue' discourse.

2. Vies parallèles des auteurs; ou, 'un traict à la comparaison de ces couples'

'[C] Quelle matiere, quel œuvrier!' wrote Montaigne of Plutarch's *Vies parallèles des hommes illustres*. Lamenting the loss of Plutarch's lives of Epaminondas and of Scipio, he writes: '[C] O quel desplaisir le temps m'a faict d'oster de nos yeux à point nommé, des premieres, la couple de vies justement la plus noble qui fust en Plutarque, de ces deux personages, par le commun consentement du monde l'un le premier des Grecs, l'autre des Romains!' (II.36.757). Before considering Montaigne's combination of Seneca with Plutarch, this chapter will now explore a further variation of this technique of combination as doubt. We have seen Seneca and Plutarch as a model for combining perspectives, capable of saying now one thing, now another; here, we see authors themselves being combined, juxtaposed, and synthesised. With 'De la solitude' as my case study, I will show how Montaigne uses Seneca and his text to play the role of Plutarch.¹²⁰

Towards the end of I.39, Montaigne introduces the first of two couples, modelled after the Plutarchan fashion: '[A] Or, quant à la fin que Pline et Cicero nous proposent, de la gloire, c'est bien loing de mon compte. La plus contraire humeur à la retraicte, c'est l'ambition' (I.39.246). Immediately, the dynamics of opposition and assimilation are apparent: Cicero and Pliny are not only – or, rather, not *even* – compared but instead unified in contrast to Montaigne's 'je'. The essayist has broken the

¹²⁰ Approaching the idea of Montaigne as the author of Plutarchan comparisons somewhat differently, Alison Calhoun has recently argued that Plutarch's *Vies*... allow Montaigne to negatively construct a sense of 'self' through comparisons between himself and others. See 'Montaigne's Two Plutarch's', *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers*, pp. 13-48.

Plutarchan formula of one life then another, followed by comparison and conclusion; his authorial voice has come in too early.¹²¹ This authorial voice is swiftly replaced, however, by the voice of Seneca and Epicurus,¹²² both of whom go unnamed: '[A] Mettons au contrepois l'advis de deux philosophes et de deux sectes tres differentes, escrivains, l'un à Idomeneus, l'autre à Lucilius, leurs amis, pour, du maniemet des affaires et des grandeurs, les retirer à la solitude' (I.39.247). The comparison is no longer between Greek and Roman but between one Plutarchan couple and another.

All four of these 'philosophes' are 'escrivains', writers of letters, though only the latter couple is described as such. Here again, Montaigne is manipulating and adapting the Plutarchan model: where Plutarch compares men of action, Montaigne considers men of letters. This is, to some extent, perhaps due to the subject matter of solitude though, more significantly, this repurposing of the Plutarchan couple fits into a much broader enterprise of blurring the distinction between word and deed, *res litteraria* and *res gesta*. In the closing pages of Book II, he gives an extended account of his own relationship with literary industry: '[A] 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. J'ay mis tous mes efforts à former ma vie. Voylà mon mestier et mon ouvrage. Je suis moins faiseur de livres que de nulle autre besoigne' (II.37.784). This statement has often been viewed from a perspective of Montaigne's claim to 'nobilité',¹²³ with critics suggesting that – sincerely or not – the

¹²¹ On the use of *synkresis* in the *Vies des hommes illustres* and its influence on the *Essais*, see Cara Welch, 'Beyond Stoicism: Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* and Montaigne's Search for a New Noble *Ethos*', pp. 99-118. Welch argues that Plutarch's *synkresis* is 'innovative' in that he is 'using it to examine the character of men, which allows him to draw forth and explore the relative nature of virtue.' Welch notes that Montaigne, in disagreeing with Bodin in II.32, 'positions himself in terms of Plutarch's "comparisons" themselves, his *synkresiseis*', rather than the 'choice of men' or the historical content, p. 101.

¹²² 'Voice' is deliberately singular. I will consider this shortly.

¹²³ See, for example, George Hoffmann, *Montaigne's Career* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and James Supple, *Arms versus Letters: The Military and Literary Ideals in the Essais of Montaigne* (Oxford:

writer was seeking here to distance himself from commerce and trade. We might, however, approach this issue by suggesting that Montaigne is no ‘faiseur de livres’ which have only words without action also as their end-point.

Montaigne is not, it seems, attempting to balance the military and literary ideals as James Supple contends;¹²⁴ rather, he collapses the binary altogether. At the end of Book II, he is not renouncing the role of making books but the definition as a ‘faiseur de livres’. In collapsing this distinction between word and deed, he gives a potency and an actuality to words which, I argue, allows him to engage almost physically with his prose, reworking it, re-ordering it, and manipulating it as he thinks in writing: writing becomes the on-going activity of thought, still moving and changing, rather than a static account of the thoughts which have come to a conclusion. ‘[A] On recite de plusieurs chefs de guerre, qu’ils ont eu certains livres en particuliere recommandation [...] mais le feu Mareschal Strossy, qui avoit pris Caesar pour sa part, avoit sans doubte bien mieux choisi’ (II.34.736). Here, Caesar, the quintessential man of action, is shown to be powerful not on the battlefield but in his texts: ‘[A] Cette mesme ame de Caesar, qui se faict voir à ordonner et dresser la bataille de Pharsale, elle se faict aussi voir à dresser des parties oysives et amoureuses’ (I.50.302).¹²⁵ Montaigne’s overwhelming interest in the lives, characters, and dispositions of the philosophers he reads shows how this works in the opposite direction: just as military men of action are seen as men of letters, his philosophers and ‘escrivains’ are presented as men of action and men of the ‘real world’. ‘[C] Mon humeur est de regarder autant à la forme qu’à la substance, autant à l’advocat qu’à la cause’ (III.8.928); ‘[A] C’est sans doute une belle harmonie quand le faire et le

Clarendon Press, 1984). Hoffmann argues that a literary career was quite the opposite of an impediment to nobility and power while Supple suggests that Montaigne embraced the military ideal of the *noblesse d’épée* more than we typically assume.

¹²⁴ Supple, *Arms versus Letters*, passim. Especially ‘Chapter Three: Arms and Letters’, pp. 62-105.

¹²⁵ On Montaigne’s portrait(s) of Caesar, see Margaret M. McGowan, ‘The Diverse Faces of Caesar: Fabrication and Manipulation in the *Essais*’, *Le Visage Changeant de Montaigne*, ed. by Keith Cameron and Laura Willett (Paris: Champion, 2003), pp. 121-135.

dire vont ensemble, et je ne veux pas nier que le dire, lors que les actions suyvent, ne soit de plus d'autorité et efficace' (II.31.716). As Philippe Desan has argued, the convention of printing engraved portraits of philosophers along with their histories – a convention established in the 1583 J. de Guy edition of Amyot's *Vies...* and confirmed the following year with André Thevet's *Portraits et vies des hommes illustres grecs, latins et payens* – introduced philosophers into the company of kings and army captains, further blurring this line between arms and letters, words and deeds.¹²⁶

Plutarch's men of action become, in the *Essais*, men of letters, but men of letters are, for Montaigne, men of action, provided that 'le faire' and 'le dire' correspond. We might note a parallel hybridity in Epaminondas, whose lost Plutarchan history Montaigne lamented in 'Des plus excellens hommes': in the first chapter of Book III, Epaminondas is said to have '[B] une ame de riche *composition*. Il *marioit* aux plus rudes et violentes actions humaines la bonté et l'humanité, voire la plus delicate qui se treuve en l'escole de la Philosophie' (III.1.801, my emphasis). Returning to 'De la solitude', we see that this conspicuously unusual choice of comparing literary men is made even more unusual when we consider the individuals themselves. In spite of Seneca's frequent use of quotations from Epicurus, this coupling of the archetypal Stoic with the holotype of Epicureanism is unusual and surprising. We need only remember the evolutionary theory of Villey which, though now discredited, shows how Stoicism and Epicureanism are, generally speaking, distinct and discrete in the *Essais*, or at least appear to be so. As John O'Brien has shown, however, we need to make a distinction between 'Montaigne's reaction to Epicureans and Epicureanism in general, and his attitude towards Epicurus

¹²⁶ Philippe Desan, 'Montaigne et les philosophes de bonne mine', *Nouveau bulletin de la société internationale des amis de Montaigne*, 45 (2007), pp. 29-41.

in particular'.¹²⁷ Epicurus may not represent Epicureanism, then, though the question of what he does represent in this section remains to be answered.

Significantly, the closing comparison of Cicero and Pliny with Seneca and Epicurus, which comes at the end of a long discussion of the public versus the private realms and glory versus solitude, is prefaced by an altogether different ethical problem: the role of pleasure. '[A] Au menage, à l'estude, à la chasse et tout autre exercice, il faut donner jusques aux derniers limites du plaisir, et garder de s'engager plus avant, où la peine commence à se mesler parmy' (I.39.246). Pleasure in moderation is advocated by the authorial voice which is soon to agree with Seneca and Epicurus. '[A] Les gens plus sages,' writes Montaigne, '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' (ibid.). Opposing philosophical strength with his own personal weakness, Montaigne is unwilling to dictate; a point of parallel with Plutarch whose form is 'enquerant plustost qu'instruisant' (II.12.509). Nevertheless, his position regarding pleasure seems to be entirely Epicurean in its disposition. Ann Hartle has studied what she has called Montaigne's 'circular dialectic' wherein the ordinary and familiar are made unusual and surprising, thereby challenging our presumptions regarding whatever it is that the author's focus is directed at.¹²⁸ It seems that something of this sort is happening here: in connecting his own opinion not only with notions of (Epicurean) pleasure but also with the paired figures of Seneca and Epicurus, he seems to be challenging us to consider 'Stoic pleasure'. Moderation is certainly key, in Montaigne's view, though his aim is not virtue but pleasure itself. This is neither Senecan nor Epicurean – Montaigne even introduces them as being from 'deux sectes tres differentes' – but rather

¹²⁷ "'O Courbes, méandre": Montaigne, Epicurus and the Art of Slowness', *Pre-histories and Afterlives: Studies in Critical Method*, ed. by Anna Holland and Richard Scholar (Oxford: Legenda, 2009), pp. 81-93 (p. 82).

¹²⁸ Ann Hartle, *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. pp. 106-120.

somewhere in-between: the teaching of Seneca-Epicurus. In combining Seneca with Epicurus, then, the stability of this referential figure becomes ‘glissant et coulant’ (II.12.510).

This combination becomes significantly more ‘douteuse’ when we look at what Seneca-Epicurus says:

[A] Vous avez (disent-ils) vescu nageant et flotant jusques à present, venez vous en mourir au port. Vous avez donné le reste de vostre vie à la lumiere, donnez cecy à l'ombre. Il est impossible de quitter les occupations, si vous n'en quittez le fruit: à cette cause, défaites vous de tout soing de nom et de gloire. Il est dangier que la lueur de vos actions passées ne vous esclaire que trop, et vous suive jusques dans vostre taniere. Quittez avecq les autres voluptez celle qui vient de l'approbation d'autruy; et, quant à vostre science et suffisance, ne vous chaille, elle ne perdra pas son effect, si vous en valez mieux vous mesme. Souvienne vous de celuy à qui, comme on demandast à quoy faire il se pénoit si fort en un art qui ne pouvoit venir à la cognoissance de guiere de gens: J'en ay assez de peu, respondit-il, j'en ay assez d'un, j'en ay assez de pas un. [...] Voylà le conseil de la vraye et naïfve philosophie, non d'une philosophie ostentatrice et parliere, comme est celle des deux premiers. (I.39.247).

I have quoted here only one quarter of this long monologue, almost all of which is made up of translated *sententiae* taken from Seneca's letters.¹²⁹ The one exception to this Senecan source, introduced in the [C] text, is a brief quotation not from Epicurus but from Cicero: '[C] *observentur species honestae animo*'.¹³⁰ Cicero is, of course, one of the ‘deux premiers’ philosophers and his introduction here, provided we recognise the reference, troubles the whole comparison of these two couples. Furthermore, where before we saw Seneca become Epicurean, we now see Epicurus not only becoming Stoic but speaking Seneca's words themselves.

¹²⁹ The letters which serve as Montaigne's sources are epistles 7, 19, 21, 22, 25, and 68. See the notes in the Villey-Saulnier edition of the *Essais* for precise identification, p. 1234.

¹³⁰ Montaigne in fact reworks this phrase which, in the original, reads: ‘*Observentur species honestae viro*’, *Tusculan Disputations*, ed. and trans. by J. E. King (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), II.22.52.

Seneca's text, then, is disarticulated and recombined, but this textual combination as mosaic is only part of this process of doubtful hybridity. In ventriloquizing Seneca and Epicurus simultaneously ('disent-ils'), Montaigne goes further than the 'tiers genre' who speak using 'visages', 'tantost l'un, tantost l'autre': in this couple, Seneca and Epicurus are amalgamated rather than compared; he does not wear the mask of Epicurus and then the mask of Seneca but instead wears this hybrid 'visage' of Seneca-Epicurus. There is, moreover, a further level in this ventriloquized nest when Montaigne/Seneca/Seneca-Epicurus ask us to remember the man's response when asked why he laboured so much for a task which would have little, if any, audience: turning to epistle seven, we see that Seneca is here giving Lucilius 'dicta [...] tria' (*Ep.* 7.10). The first of these sayings comes from Democritus and the last, notably, from Epicurus, but it is the second which is seized upon by Montaigne: 'Bene et ille, quisquis fuit, ambigitur enim de auctore, cum quaereretur ab illo, quo tanta diligentia artis spectaret ad paucissimos perventurae, "Satis sunt," inquit, "mihi pauci, satis est unus, satis est nullus"' (*Ep.* 7.11). Montaigne may well have taken the third saying – the quotation from Epicurus expresses precisely the same message; "Haec," inquit, "ego non multis, sed tibi, satis enim magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus,"" (*Ep.* 7.11) – and, in doing so, he would have resolved the tension inherent in making Seneca and Epicurus speak together. And yet he chooses instead to place a saying of unknown origin, 'ambigitur enim de auctore', in his own intensely ambiguous creation, Seneca-Epicurus.

In 'Sur des vers de Virgile', he tells us that, rather than creating new words, he prefers to stretch language, '[B] la remplissant de plus vigoureux et divers services, l'estirant et ployant' (III.5.873). Here, he stretches and bends the figures of Seneca and Epicurus: this is not a process of comparing one position with another, or one of taking a bit from Seneca and a bit from Epicurus. Rather, both positions, both figures, are

fundamentally changed. To borrow a phrase from Rabelais' Trouillogan, we might say that Seneca-Epicurus is 'ne l'un ne l'autre et tous les deux ensemble'.¹³¹

Adopting and adapting the Plutarchan model, Montaigne forces together pairs of authors in surprising, unexpected ways, often across different schools and philosophical principles. This practice introduces a whole series of doubts: what are we to make of these combinations? What happens to their constituent parts when they are combined? What happens when authors and texts which do not traditionally go together are forced into one of these couples? It is in this sense that this might be called an 'essayistic' practice: Montaigne is putting things together and seeing what happens; he is experimenting with text(s), 'enquerant plustost qu'instruisant'. These awkward combinations and the hybridity which is produced serve not only as vehicles for Montaigne's doubt, but also invite the doubt of the reader.

'Il nous guide, l'autre nous pousse': Seneca and Plutarch

In his *Ad Senecae lectionem proodopoeia* (1586), Henri Estienne, responding to 'reprehensoribus sermonis Senecae', writes: 'multum adjumenti lectionis Senecae studiosis, sed in ea novitiis, allaturus mihi viderer, si quandam velut Proodopoeiam ad eam scriberem.'¹³² 'Seneca talem adhibet orationi suae structuram,' he asserts, 'ut non animadversa obscuritatem locis qui alioqui clari sunt afferre possit.'¹³³ Focusing on the subject 'de mimetica orationis forma, quae saepe apud Senecam occurrit [...] praesertim

¹³¹ François Rabelais, *Tiers Livre* in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mireille Huchon (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), chapter 35, p. 465. This chapter is a further example of those texts printed before the publication of Estienne's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* which provide a source for 'sceptical reading'. On Trouillogan and Scepticism see Emmanuel Naya, "'Ne sceptique ne dogmatique, et tous les deux ensemble": Rabelais "on Phrontistere et escholle des pyrrhoniens"', *Études Rabelaisiennes*, 35 (1998), pp. 81-129.

¹³² Henri Estienne, *Introduction à la lecture de Sénèque*, ed. and trans. by Denise Carabin (Paris: Champion, 2007), p. 32.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p. 154.

quum ex abrupto plerunque ad eam descendat’,¹³⁴ Estienne unpicks the dense *brevitas* of Senecan prose:

Est igitur ex capite XXXI libri De ira III, *Tanta tamen importunitas hominum est ut quamvis multum acceperint, injuriae loco sit plus accipere potuisse. Dedit mihi praeturam: sed consulatum speraveram.* Nam ante haec verba, *Dedit mihi praeturam*, ab alio scriptore expectassemus, *Adeo ut sit qui dicat. Vel, Audies enim qui dicat. Vel, Non raro est enim invenitur qui dicat.* Aut certe alia hujusmodi.¹³⁵

The ‘expressions modalisantes’, to use Sellevold’s terminology,¹³⁶ are absent though, if we follow Estienne, implied in the text: to recover them, Estienne argues, we must situate the isolated phrases within their larger textual environment, studying the relations and connections between them, trying to work out what is being compared and how: ‘[...] sed quum illic *comparat* de comparatione personarum dici videatur, hic ad rerum comparationem respicere manifestum est.’¹³⁷ Estienne seems to be in accordance with Montaigne: like Plutarch, Seneca uses ‘cadances dogmatistes’ but, if we look a little closer, we see that these phrases are placed within a bracket of tentative, hypothetical moderation, spoken not as affirmations but as points which could be made by someone.

As in Seneca’s text, the connections which operate within Montaigne’s combinations, parallels and oppositions need to be teased out, and this is particularly true of the connection between Seneca and Plutarch. That they are combined in some way is clear: when talking about Seneca or Plutarch (rather than using their texts), we rarely find one without the other. Exactly how or why these two figures are put together is less immediately apparent. In highlighting three key instances in which these authors are brought together in the *Essais*, I hope to show that Montaigne identifies in Plutarch and Seneca a similarity – though non-equivalence – of ‘façon’ which allows them to

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 280.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Kirsti Sellevold, *J’aime ces mots...* By the same author, see also: ‘Phônai skeptikai et expressions modalisantes: ressemblances et différences’, *L’Ecriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne*, ed. by Marie-Luce Demonet and Alain Legros (Geneva: Droz, 2004), pp. 25-37.

¹³⁷ *Introduction à la lecture de Sénèque*, p. 286 (author’s italics).

move, arrest, and reposition their reader. In placing these two authors together, he shows how they are at once similar and different, equivalent and opposed: this is a relationship which seems to pull apart as much as it pulls together and the result is a pairing full of potential energy and productive tension. Once again, we will see how difficult it is to divorce what Montaigne tells us about the influence of these authors from what he shows us.

1. 'Or oyez!': Seneca, Plutarch, and 'Hoc age'

In 'Des livres', Montaigne criticises, with Cicero as his example, '[A] l'ingenieuse contexture de parolles et d'argumentations': '[A] je veux qu'on commence par le dernier point; [...] qu'on ne s'amuse pas à les anatomizer: [...] je veux des discours qui donnent la premiere charge dans le plus fort du doute: les siens languissent autour du pot' (II.10.414). Noting that '[A] Les Romains disoyent en leur religion: "Hoc age"', Montaigne writes: '[A] Je ne veux pas qu'on s'employe à me rendre attentif et qu'on me crie cinquante fois: Or oyez!' (ibid). At the end of this long critique, he returns to the subject he had previously been discussing, his appreciation of Seneca and Plutarch: '[A] Les deux premiers [Sénèque et Plutarque], et Pline, et leurs semblables, ils n'ont point de "Hoc age"; ils veulent avoir à faire à gens qui s'en soyent advertis eux mesmes' (ibid). Like Montaigne, who blames the '[C] indiligent lecteur' (III.9.994) for failing to '[C] regard[er] de prez' (II.12.509), Seneca and Plutarch teach their reader to recognise things for themselves or, at least, expect them to be able to do so. Montaigne wants to become '[A] plus sage, non plus sçavant' (II.10.414) and these texts use textual exegesis as a training ground for philosophy: the absence of a textual 'Attention!' is a refusal to gloss one's own text, highlighting the key teachings to be extracted; the absence of dislocated

teachings instructs us in instructing ourselves in *l'art de bien vivre* just as much as it instructs us in *l'art de bien lire*.

‘Hoc age’, as is clear from Montaigne’s comparison with ‘Or oyez!’, is an imperative calling for the attention of the audience. Its literal meaning – ‘do this’ – highlights even further this connection between modes of writing and ways of practising philosophy. In a dated though informative article, John C. Rolfe has studied the use of this phrase in classical texts, arguing that there is almost no evidence that it originated in or was connected with religious acts. He states that it ‘occurs repeatedly in Plautus and Terence [...] in the sense of “mind this”’, though he notes one key exception: Plutarch and particularly his lives of Numa and Coriolanus.¹³⁸ The ‘Vie de Coriolanus’ shows clearly enough the religious context of this phrase as well as its figurative meaning, ‘Or oyez!’: ‘le Roy Numa institua sagement toutes autres choses appartenantes au service des Dieux, & mesmement ceste coustume qu’il establit pour rendre les citoyens attentifz aux ceremonies de la religion: car toutefois & quantes que les magistrats, les presbtres & ministres de la religion font quelque chose appartenante au service divin & à l’honneur des dieux, il y a tousjours un heraut qui marche devant, criant à haute voix, Hoc age.’¹³⁹ Montaigne asserts without any doubt that ‘hoc age’ is what the Romans said ‘en leur religion’ and this seems to reveal the influence of Plutarch: the essayist is, it would appear, using Plutarch as a source with which to describe and outline the Greek writer’s own style and, significantly, to do so negatively, identifying in Plutarch a way to describe a way of writing opposed to that of Plutarch himself.

The ‘hoc age’, for Montaigne at least, calls attention to the imperative that follows: it alerts us to the ‘[A] ordonnances logiciennes et Aristoteliques’ (II.10.414). Texts which work in this way, employing this technique, are dogmatic and imperative

¹³⁸ ‘On *Hoc Age*, Plautus Capt. 444’, *Classical Philology*, 28 (1933), pp. 47-50.

¹³⁹ *Vies des hommes illustres* (Paris: Vascosan, 1559), fol. 155v.

but also one-sided and, in Barthes' terms, 'lisible': the reader is directed to the key passage which contains the teaching which is to be received.¹⁴⁰ For Montaigne, '[A] il ne me faut point d'alechement ny de sause: je menge bien la viande toute crue; et, au lieu de m'eguiser l'apetit par ces preparatoires et avant-jeux, on me le lasse et affadit' (ibid.).¹⁴¹ We can compare this digestive metaphor with the [B] text addition studied earlier in the 'Apologie' in which Montaigne says that philosophers deliberately make their texts difficult, avoiding the pre-digested 'hoc age', to 'amuser la curiosité de nostre Esprit, luy donnant où se paistre, à ronger cet os creux et descharné' (II.12.508). The 'hoc age', in both senses, precludes this collaboration and interaction between author and reader and it is precisely this opportunity for collaboration which he finds in Seneca and Plutarch.

Immediately after telling us that Seneca and Plutarch 'n'ont point de "Hoc age"', however, Montaigne qualifies and moderates his initial claim: '[A] ou, s'ils en ont, c'est un "Hoc age" substantiel, et qui a son corps à part' (II.10.414). This qualification performs a number of functions. First, it aligns Montaigne's practices with those he admires in Seneca and Plutarch: he resists the easily identifiable, readily extracted message of the sort that we find in those who use 'hoc age' and instead produces a moderated, 'glissant et coulant' statement. He modifies his own text so that it reflects and performs the practice he is admiring and describing. More significantly, it changes the role of 'hoc age'. The 'hoc age' of Seneca and Plutarch – 'substantiel et qui a son corps à part' – is not a preface or introduction to a teaching which will follow; it is not one of 'ces preparatoires et avant-jeux' used by orators and lawyers. Rather, the instruction to 'pay attention', both textually and philosophically, is the teaching itself: it

¹⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

¹⁴¹ On metaphors of imitation as transformative, combative, and digestive, see G. W. Pigman, 'Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33, 1 (1980) 1-32. Pigman notes that 'the metaphors which theorists of imitation use do not appear as incidental ornaments; they usually carry the burden on what the theorist has to say and come at the crucial moments of his argument', p. 9. Montaigne's 'viande', which is entirely undigested and 'toute crue', stands in opposition to standard humanist tropes of transformation, preparation, and digestion.

alerts us to the necessity of being ‘advertis’. As such, the ‘hoc age’, understood in this new sense, is used to achieve that aim which Montaigne initially gives as the reason for not using ‘hoc age’: ‘avoir à faire à gens qui s’en soyent advertis eux mesmes.’ Seneca and Plutarch do not use this explicit call to attention as a means of instruction but rather teach the necessity of paying attention through the construction of the text itself and the requirements it imposes on the reader. ‘[P]lus enquerant qu’instruisant’ (II.12.509), the ‘hoc age’ as a philosophical practice is taught indirectly by pushing the reader to masticate and digest their ‘viande toute crue’.

The discussion of the ‘hoc age’ as one of the ‘subtilitez grammairiennes’ is long, repetitive, and loaded with [C] text additions. Beginning with Cicero’s ‘[A] prefaces, definitions, partitions, etymologies, [qui] consument la plus part de son ouvrage’ (II.10.413) – a ‘façon d’escrire’ which he describes as ‘ennuyeuse’ (ibid.) – Montaigne’s hypotactic prose accumulates clauses, possibilities, alternatives, stretching out the passage almost indefinitely:

[A] Pour moy, qui ne demande qu’à devenir plus sage, non plus sçavant [C] ou eloquent, [A] ces ordonnances logiciennes et Aristoteliques ne sont pas à propos: je veux qu’on commence par le dernier point; j’entens assez que c’est que mort et volupté; qu’on ne s’amuse pas à les anatomizer: je cherche des raisons bonnes et fermes d’arrivée, qui m’instruisent à en soustenir l’effort. Ny les subtilitez grammairiennes, ny l’ingenieuse contexture de parolles et d’argumentations n’y servent; je veux des discours qui donnent la premiere charge dans le plus fort du doute: les siens languissent autour du pot. Ils sont bons pour l’escole, pour le barreau et pour le sermon, où nous avons loisir de sommeiller, et sommes encore, un quart d’heure apres, assez à temps pour rencontrer le fil du propos. Il est besoin de parler ainsin aux juges qu’on veut gagner à tort ou à droit, aux enfans et au vulgaire à qui il faut tout dire, voir ce qui portera.

Montaigne may insist that ‘[il veut] qu’on commence par le dernier point’ but his prose works to the opposite end, delaying his conclusion with caveats, with ‘preparatoires et avant-jeux’. In the first three sentences quoted above, he begins by telling us what he

does not want, taking his time to reach a positive assertion while coming close to concealing that assertion within its surrounding preludes.

The effect of this hypotaxis is particularly clear in the long [C] text addition which immediately precedes the return to Seneca and Plutarch and closes the digression:

[C] La licence du temps m'excusera elle de cette sacrilege audace, d'estimer aussi trainans les dialogismes de Platon mesmes et estouffans par trop sa matiere, et de pleindre le temps que met à ces longues interlocutions, vaines et preparatoires, un homme qui avoit tant de meilleures choses à dire? Mon ignorance m'excusera mieux, sur ce que je ne voy rien en la beauté de son langage. Je demande en general les livres qui usent des sciences, non ceux qui les dressent. [A] Les deux premiers, et Pline, et leurs semblables, ils n'ont point de Hoc age [...].

'Ces longues interlocutions, vaines et preparatoires', coupled with Montaigne's profession of 'ignorance' reveals the irony at play here: he is parodying the schoolmaster, the barrister, the preacher, all of those who write discursive discourses which rely on the punctuating abilities of the 'hoc age'. The 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' shows that he extended this addition even further (see *fig. 3*): having written 'Mon ignorance m'excusera [...]' after 'estouffans par trop sa matiere', he crosses this out, expands the first sentence to include the 'interlocutions, vaines et preparatoires', and proceeds to rewrite the sentence he had crossed out. Montaigne's text, like those of Seneca and Plutarch, does not provide us with an explicit call to attention though the culmination of this long digression does follow the model which is soon to be described as that of '[c]es deux premiers'.

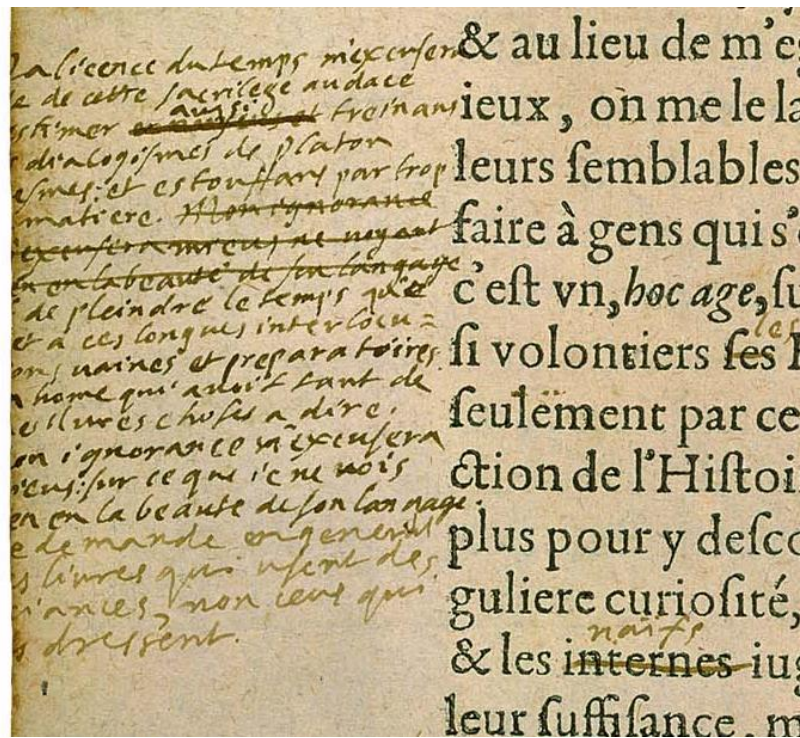


Fig. 3. 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 172v.

In what seems to be a different ink, Montaigne added this final sentence of the [C] addition to the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux': 'Je demande en general les livres qui usent des sciences, non ceux qui les dressent.' This isocolic conclusion cuts through all of the preceding discursivity to introduce Seneca, Plutarch, and their "Hoc age" substantiel'. Maxims such as these seem to oppose ideas of Scepticism, doubt, and irresolution. Asking 'pourquoi Montaigne a-t-il eu recours au type de phrase qui emblématise avec le plus d'acuité le drame d'un langage nécessairement assertif[?]', Nicolas le Cadet suggests that 'loin d'être le talon d'Achille d'un "nouveau langage" inventé pour réveiller la pensée, la maxime pourrait bien être sa clef de voute'.¹⁴² Montaigne's maxims act, argues le Cadet, like 'leurs de vérité qui jonchent le parcours de la pensée et rythment la quête jamais terminée du savoir. Sans ces [...] repères, la pensée tomberait dans l'ineptie d'un

¹⁴² 'La Maxime et le "nouveau langage" des *Essais*', *Nouveau bulletin de la société internationale des amis de Montaigne*, 46 (2007), pp. 85-109 (p. 93).

relativisme général et stérile'.¹⁴³ Here, the [C] text maxim provides this rhythm, but this is a rhythm which not only describes Montaigne's 'quête' but also the rhythmical reading of the audience. Regarding the extensive changes to the punctuation on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', André Tournon has argued that 'les retouches qui accentuent la segmentation du texte travaillent [...] à détacher l'énoncé formulaire [et] à l'objectiver comme sentence susceptible d'être considérée pour elle-même'.¹⁴⁴ These detached elements – aphorisms, maxims, *sententiae*, and even Montaigne's own sentences isolated by his radical punctuation – create an 'arrêt', though, unlike the 'arrêt' of the courts, these are only temporary: in almost any other context, such pointed moments might have the appearance of resolution and conclusion; in the context of the *Essais*, they function as a momentary pause, a 'cadance dogmatiste' which allows for consideration and reflection before opening up again as a new starting point for the flow and 'branle' of Montaigne's discursive discourse.

Rather than telling us 'Or oyez!', he structures his text in such a way that we might recognise its movements ourselves; rather than instructing, he uses 'forme' and 'dessein' to arrest the reader, positioning him/her so that s/he might identify the 'hoc age' latent in the text. As he says regarding his own text, '[B] J'entends que la matiere se distingue soy-mesmes. Elle montre assez où elle se change, où elle conclud, où elle commence, où elle se reprend, sans l'entrelasser de paroles, de liaison et de cousture introduictes pour le service des oreilles foibles ou nonchallantes, et sans me gloser moymesme' (III.9.995). In Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne identifies a discourse which is 'enquerant plustost qu'instruisant' and which has the 'hoc age' as a lesson to be learned through reading; in his *Essais*, he adopts this practice but also takes it further, aligning it much more microscopically with the textual techniques at play. The Senecan-

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 103.

¹⁴⁴ 'L'Essai: un témoignage en suspens', *Carrefour Montaigne* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1994), pp. 117-145 (p. 121).

Plutarchan ‘hoc age’ is a lesson taken from reading: in reading these authors, who do not provide us with pre-selected extracts other than the broad imperative to pay attention, we learn to make ourselves ‘advertis’. In the *Essais*, this becomes a lesson in reading: Montaigne does not tell us when to pay attention and, indeed, often makes the connections within his text obscure but he uses these textual techniques to place and position us so that we might ‘[C] rencontr[er] [s]on air’ (I.40.251). Where Seneca and Plutarch expect us to be able to read philosophy well and attentively as a propaedeutic to philosophy proper, the *Essais* seem to make engaging with these textual difficulties the action of philosophy itself.

2. ‘Celuy là, cestuy-cy’: Two Sides of the Same Coin

We have seen that, regarding the use of ‘hoc age’, Seneca and Plutarch are unified by Montaigne such that they begin to become indistinguishable as he describes them together, at once. We have also seen how, using this single figure of Seneca *and* Plutarch, he adopts and develops their technique. Their ability to move and reposition the reader – which he demonstrates as he describes and ascribes the same technique to the two ancients – is a recurrent element in his discussion of these authors. Turning now to two key examples, one in ‘De la phisionomie’ and one in ‘Des livres’, I intend to show that when he examines and details this relationship more closely, this unification of Seneca with Plutarch ceases to be a process by which they become alike and identical. Rather, they become antithetical and yet matching, producing one of Montaigne’s many ‘[A] corps monstrueux’ (I.28.183). The result is a productive tension of interlocking and partnering difference rather than one of difference-as-dissimilarity. This is neither a tension which can be resolved exegetically nor a difference which can be collapsed through compromise: for Montaigne, this is a combination which endlessly rewards labour and interaction; a combination which will always be unresolved.

Discussing '[B] les efforts que Seneca se donne pour se preparer contre la mort,' he argues that one's teachings must correspond to the way one lives: 'j'eusse esbranlé sa reputation s'il ne l'eut en mourant tresvaillamment maintenüe' (III.12.1040).¹⁴⁵ '[B] La façon de Plutarque,' he continues:

d'autant qu'il est plus desdaigneuse et plus destendue, elle est, selon moy, d'autant plus virile et persuasive: je croyois aysément que son ame avoit les mouvements plus asseurez et plus reiglés. L'un, 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. Celuy là ravit nostre jugement, cestuy-cy le gaigne.

Having opened this comparison with a discussion of Seneca's ethical and philosophical labour at the moment of his suicide as a most extreme exertion that is as much physical as mental ('à le voir suer d'ahan pour se roidir et pour s'asseurer'), Montaigne continues this personification and incarnation when he considers Plutarch's soul: 'son ame avoit les mouvements plus asseurez et plus reiglés.' As he says in 'De la colere', '[A] [l]es escrits de Plutarque, à bien savourer, nous le descouvrent assez, et je pense le connoistre jusques dans l'ame' (II.31.716). For Montaigne, the teachings and writings of a philosopher may be a way into knowing them on this profound and intimate level and, significantly, the language with which these inner workings are described is one of movement.

Turning from author to reader, he maintains the same imagery of movement: 'L'un, plus vif, nous pique et *eslance en sursaut*, touche plus l'esprit. L'autre, plus rassis, nous informe, *establit* et conforte constamment, touche plus l'entendement' (my emphasis). Both writers are able to 'move' their readers, though in entirely antithetical ways: Seneca's texts send us spiralling into a somersault, while Plutarch stills us, tethers us down, stopping us in our tracks. Each of these movements only makes sense when it

¹⁴⁵ As I noted earlier, Montaigne's focus on the lives and lived experiences of philosophers demonstrates a blurring of the distinction between 'le dire' and 'le faire'.

has its opposite; a point which the constant use of ‘l’un [...] l’autre’ structures makes clear. Further, this alternating structure, which jumps from violent agitation in one clause to comforting assurance in the other, allows him to mirror in his own text the stop-start effect he experiences in reading theirs. When viewed up close, the essayist sees the relationship between Seneca and Plutarch less as a similarity but rather as symbiosis: from Montaigne’s/the reader’s perspective, Seneca needs Plutarch to ‘establi[r]’ the reader before he can be sent spinning and vice versa.

Though unmarked in the Villey-Saulnier edition, three key changes were made to this vocabulary on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’: ‘d’autant plus forte’ became ‘d’autant plus virile’; ‘[l]’un plus aigu’ became ‘vif’; and ‘[l]’autre plus solide’ became ‘rassis’ (*fig.* 4).¹⁴⁶ Richard Scholar has studied Montaigne’s use of physical imagery in his description of the act of essaying in ‘De Democritus et Heraclitus’, noting that ‘the writing is remarkable for the physicality with which it describes abstract processes, an effect it achieves by restoring, to the metaphors it uses, their literal sense’.¹⁴⁷ With these changes, we see Montaigne exploiting such metaphors, projecting the physicality identified by Scholar as characteristic of the *Essais* onto these anterior texts. Here, as elsewhere, Seneca and Plutarch are thought of in physical terms, but, in reviewing this section, his intuition found clearer expression: for the essayist, these authors were felt to be alive and moving; in a state of movement, certainly, but also moving the reader. The physical imagery identified by Scholar is employed here such that these authors are, for Montaigne, not simply physical bodies but bodies moving in space. Most importantly, however, these movements are not simply different but antithetical: he brings together these two ‘divers moyens’, tessellating them, and, in doing so, he creates a hybrid

¹⁴⁶ ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 460v.

¹⁴⁷ *Montaigne and the Art of Free-Thinking* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 73.

experience in which reading Seneca and Plutarch has the power not only to move but also to arrest us.

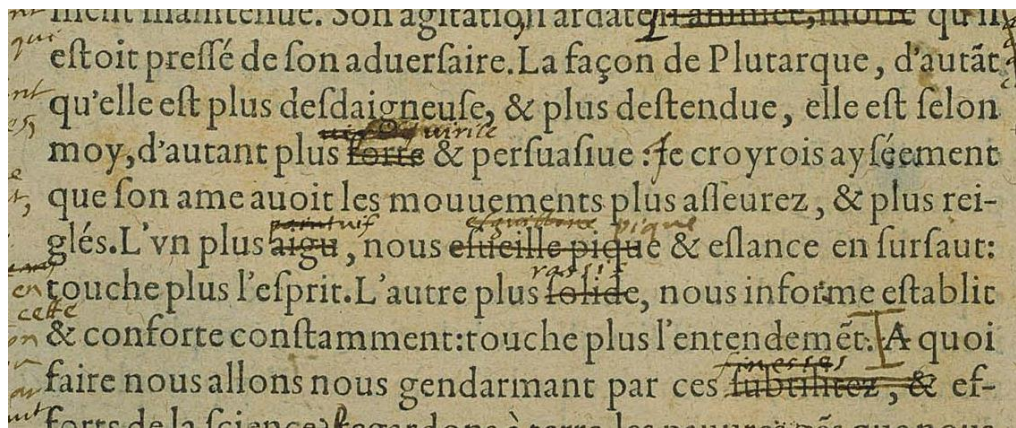


Fig. 4. 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 460v.

We see a very similar assessment in 'Des livres': '[A] Quant à mon autre leçon, qui mesle un peu de fruit au plaisir, [...] les livres qui m'y servent, c'est Plutarque, depuis qu'il est François, et Seneque' (II.10.413). He begins this section equating Seneca and Plutarch, highlighting their similarities, both textually and contextually: '[A] Ils ont *tous deux* cette notable commodité pour mon humeur, que la science que j'y cherche, y est traictée à pieces décousues'; '[A] Ces autheurs se rencontrent en la plus part des opinions utiles et vrayes; comme aussi leur fortune les fist naistre environ mesme siecle, *tous deux* precepteurs de deux Empereurs Romains, *tous deux* venus de païs estrangier, *tous deux* riches et puissans' (ibid., my emphasis). This congruency culminates in the ambiguous term, 'façon', which seems to encompass not only prose style and but also their approach to 'philosophy' and philosophical writing: their teachings are 'présentée[s] d'une simple façon et pertinente'. In the 'Au lecteur', Montaigne writes: '[A] Je veus qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire' ('Au lecteur', p. 3), drawing yet a further connection – intentional or otherwise – between his own project and the qualities he ascribes as Senecan and Plutarchan. 'Façon', capitalising on its broad range of meanings, is introduced at the centre of this long comparison, drawing together the

various points at which Seneca and Plutarch are said to be similar: genre/style; approach to and presentation of philosophical practice; way of life. The ‘simple façon et pertinente’ is, then, a conclusion but only a temporary one: the ‘façon’ itself becomes Montaigne’s subject and it becomes clear that this similarity is, once again, founded upon opposition and combination.

Foreshadowing the ‘l’un/l’autre’ syntactical structures of ‘De la phisionomie’, Montaigne outlines a long series of parallels and antitheses:

[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 les opinions Platoniques, douces et accommodables 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. Il nous guide, l’autre nous pousse. (II.10.413).

Again, Montaigne begins with a description of Seneca and Plutarch before moving towards their effects on the reader and, again, both are figured as movements. Plutarch is still and constant; Seneca rippling and undulating; Seneca labours while Plutarch is unwilling to quicken his pace. Their ways of practising philosophy pass onto their opinions, though this is placed within a real-world context and links to their own socio-political contexts: the relationship between word and deed is, as we have seen, ‘glissant et coulant’. Finally reaching the issue of style and textuality – Seneca’s text is full of *sententiae* and adages; Plutarch’s with *res*, stories, ‘choses’ – he considers their impact on the reader: Seneca’s text warms us up and ‘moves’ us, while Plutarch’s contents us; Plutarch gently ‘nous guide’ while Seneca ‘nous pousse’, perhaps violently.

For Montaigne, Seneca and Plutarch are opposing though fundamentally interlocking authors: they both have this ‘façon’ which allows them to ‘move’ their readers – a ‘façon’ which he not only appreciates but seems to aspire to – and these respective movements, while they are clearly not the same, are complementary. This pairing, in which Seneca pushes us and drives us perhaps a little too hard only for Plutarch to comfort and console us, produces a hybrid figure in the *Essais*. It is this hybrid ‘façon’ which can push the reader at one moment and arrest him/her at another which Montaigne constructs in forging his own way of writing. He is ‘imitating’ neither Seneca nor Plutarch but rather, in combining these figures, creating his own model.¹⁴⁸ These ancients, whose ‘pieces décousues’ make ‘the job of disassembly and reassembly easier’,¹⁴⁹ are seen by Montaigne to fit together and tessellate perfectly. In fitting them together in this way, however, the lines of unity and the points at which they meet serve also, necessarily, as points of disintegration: ‘[B] La ressemblance ne faict pas tant un comme la difference faict autre’ (III.13.1065). This tension between similarity as unification and correspondence as antithesis is evident throughout the discussions of these authors and testifies to this double conception of, on the one hand, Seneca and Plutarch as interlocking though fundamentally different, even opposed, authors and, on the other, the newly constructed figure of Seneca-Plutarch.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani who has suggested that Montaigne has reformed and reshaped the Plutarch of the *Vies*... in using this form of history as a model: ‘Montaigne lecteur de Plutarque construit un Plutarque lecteur de Montaigne: il “montaignise” Plutarque plus qu’il ne “plutarquise”’, *Montaigne: l’écriture de l’essai*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁹ Nicola Panichi, ‘Montaigne and Plutarch: A Scepticism that Conquers the Mind’, p. 209.

'D'une fantastique bigarrure': A Ruptured Intertextuality

Seneca and Plutarch, as authors of the 'tiers genre', are presented by Montaigne not only as combinatory but also as combinable authors. Their discourses mix enquiry and the suspension of judgement with dogmatic cadences; they bring together diverse opinions and speak with changing 'visages'. This model of internal combination is then applied to these authors as he highlights their similarities only to show their irreconcilable differences; differences which allow him to place them in conjunction with a whole series of other authors though primarily with each other. Balancing and sustaining this similarity and difference, he forges a model of movement and stasis, a pattern of complication and resolution (though not necessarily in that order and almost always with a subsequent complication of any provisional resolution that may have been achieved). These authors are so often invoked as a couple in the *Essais* not because Montaigne is taking a little from Plutarch and a little from Seneca but rather because he has invented his own 'douteuse et irresolue' discourse which has the combination of the combinatory Seneca and Plutarch as its source. This chapter will close by looking at two examples in which we see Montaigne's practice of intertextual combination, asking how he puts these authors together, with each other and with other texts, to discuss topics which are not those authors themselves; that is, when he is using their texts rather than writing about them.

This stop-start movement which he ascribes to Seneca-Plutarch has been noted as a central feature of Montaigne's own prose style. In the *Essais*, combination is, paradoxically, fragmentation, a point which André Tournon has shown in numerous studies. Describing the *Essais* as 'un livre que son auteur lui-même tient pour désordonné',¹⁵⁰ Tournon examines the 'énumération[s] d'exemples, de sentences,

¹⁵⁰ *Montaigne: la glose et l'essai*, p. 124.

d'arguments de sens voisin' in which there is an 'ordre logique dans lequel la succession des énoncés est indifférente'.¹⁵¹ In the process of accumulation, the meaning of the text becomes fragmented, non-linear, and multiple. Combination, rather than functioning as synthesis, is heterogeneous and composite. Taking this further in *Route par ailleurs*, Tournon argues that 'dédoublement' – the self-reflexivity of the 'essai' – is one of its central features: doubling back on itself, its detours and digressions contradict what came before, collapsing their own foundations, and 'mettant en lumière des significations restées virtuelles dans son agencement initial'.¹⁵² According to the 'logique de l'essai, plus souple et plus complexe, [...] la discontinuité est de règle'.¹⁵³

Connections within Montaigne's prose reveal discord and contradiction. Tournon's editorial work, along with that of Alain Legros,¹⁵⁴ has brought this study of combination and rupture to a more microscopic level. In restoring Montaigne's punctuation, which was dramatically revised in the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', Tournon's 1998 Imprimerie Nationale edition of the *Essais* reinstates what Richard Scholar describes as 'a succession of clipped phrases bristling with capital letters, full stops, colons, commas, and the like'.¹⁵⁵ The prose of the *Essais* is founded upon combination, correspondence, and accumulation but also segmentation, instability, and fracture. The perceived importance of punctuation in effecting this rupture is not only to be read in the painstaking labour undertaken by Montaigne as he reworked these seemingly insignificant details upon the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux'; he makes their case explicitly in

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 116.

¹⁵² *Route par ailleurs*, p. 183.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁵⁴ *Essais*, I, 56 "Des Prières", *Edition annotée des sept premiers états du texte avec étude de genèse et commentaire par Alain Legros* (Geneva: Droz, 2003).

¹⁵⁵ *Montaigne and the Art of Free Thinking*, p. 79. Cutting against his argument for fidelity to the punctuation choices as we find them on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', Tournon replaces some of Montaigne's colons, specifically those which he has determined to function as a modern semi-colon, with a Greek midpoint or 'point en haut', '·'. Tournon also instates modern orthography.

his instructions to the printer, written on one of the fly-leaves to this copy: ‘regarder de pres aus pounts qui sont en ce stile de grande importance [...] C’est un langage coupé qu’il n’y espargne les pounts & lettres majuscules. Moimesme ai failli souvant a les oster & a mettre des comma ou il faloit un point’ (‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. Ai-v.). Mirroring his description of Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne’s prose stops and starts; bringing his textual components together, he highlights their diversity.

Similar attempts to restore these tensions of combination and difference have been conducted by Kirsti Sellevold, who suggests that linguistic polyphony allows Montaigne to sustain contradiction,¹⁵⁶ Richard Regosin, who investigates the way in which the ‘reader changes register, stops, starts and picks up again, [supplying] his own transitions’,¹⁵⁷ and Marie-Luce Demonet in her study of the essayist’s ‘serré’ syntax.¹⁵⁸ These studies of Montaigne’s prose style all contribute to our understanding of his ‘[C] marqueterie mal jointe’ (III.9.964), though the role played by allusions to and uses of other prose authors remains to be determined. This closing section will extend these studies of combination as rupture to investigate the ways in which Montaigne’s fragmented prose functions in relation to the textual extracts that he incorporates into his own writing.

I began this chapter with the opening of ‘Coustume de l’isle de Cea’, asking how Montaigne places ‘doute’ and the ‘fantastique’ in combination with philosophy. Returning to this passage, we see an exemplary instance of how he combines Plutarchan and Senecan texts. As he says in ‘Des livres’, ‘[A] Seneque est plein de pointes et saillies; Plutarque, de choses’ (II.10.413) and this passage seems to accord with this

¹⁵⁶ *J’ayme ces mots’: expressions linguistique de doute dans les Essais de Montaigne*, passim.

¹⁵⁷ *Montaigne’s Unruly Brood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 103. Regosin’s argument is centred on the idea of an imperfect and impossible dialogue between ‘Author’ or ‘text’ and the ‘obtrusive reader’, incapable of uncovering the intended meaning.

¹⁵⁸ *A plaisir: sémiotique et scepticisme chez Montaigne* (Orléans: Paradigme, 2000), p. 192.

division. After aligning ‘niaiser’ and ‘fantastiquer’ with doubt and noting that it is his role ‘à enquerir et à debatre’, not to ‘resoudre’, he turns to two stories taken from Plutarch’s ‘Les dictz notables des Lacedemoniens’:

[A] Philippus estant entré à main armée au Peloponese, quelcun disoit à Damidas que les Lacedemoniens auroient beaucoup à souffrir, s’ils ne se remettoit en sa grace: Et, poltron, respondit-il, que peuvent souffrir ceux qui ne craignent point la mort? On demandoit aussi à Agis comment un homme pourrait vivre libre: Mesprisant, dict-il, le mourir. (II.3.350).

Damidas and Agis both provide what Montaigne then calls ‘propositions’ as he notes that these and ‘mille pareilles qui se rencontrent à ce propos, sonnent evidemment quelque chose au-delà d’attendre patiemment la mort quand elle nous vient’ (ibid.). These ‘propositions’ are moral and ethical *sententiae*, ‘pointes et saillies’ which would not look out of place in a Senecan epistle though, in Plutarch’s text and, significantly, in Montaigne’s reworking of it, these sayings are fleshed out, given a narrative as they are attached to military and political figures in moments of crisis, and shown not in the abstract but in application.

These contextually embedded sayings are glossed by the essayist: they are taken as examples of a much larger, unspoken pool (‘Ces propositions et mille pareilles’) and the result is a subtle though not insignificant erasure of the distinction between assertion and evidence; these seem to be both universally applicable sayings and particular instances; sayings to which one might attach examples which, simultaneously, perform that exemplary role themselves. They are both *sententia* and *exemplum*, abstract statement and specific, historical evidence.¹⁵⁹ Further, Montaigne’s gloss works to generalise what

¹⁵⁹ On the status of early modern exemplarity more broadly, see the special issue of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59, 4 (1998), and especially Michel Jeanneret’s contribution, ‘The Vagaries of Exemplarity: Distortion or Dismissal?’, pp. 565-579. Jeanneret argues that Montaigne reverses the role of exemplar and writer: the exemplar is no longer a model to be followed, stylistically or morally. Rather, if the example conforms with Montaigne’s own view, it serves as a ‘reference that helps me establish my thought’ (p. 576). See also John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

are already awkwardly general and specific ‘propositions’. This is then extended when he returns to Plutarch, using the same opusculum, though for a different purpose: where before he extracted ‘propositions’, he now seeks evidence and testimony. ‘T’esmoing’, he writes, ‘cet enfant Lacedemonien pris par Antigonus et vendu pour serf [...]: Tu verras, dit-il, qui tu as acheté; ce me seroit honte de servir, ayant la liberté si à main; et ce disant se precipita du haut de la maison’ (ibid.). He relates a similar story regarding Antipater, to whom the Spartans said: ‘Si tu nous menasses de pis que la mort [...] nous mourrons plus volontiers.’ Once again, these stories turn around pithy sayings – not surprising given their provenance – though these instances, and particularly the former, are notably more specific, less universal. In this patchwork of Plutarchan stories, we see the intermingling of proposition and evidence: in siting these sententious phrases within their contexts, in aligning them strictly to person and place, the passage subtly destabilises and multiplies the status of these ‘dicts’.

The passage then turns to Seneca where we see an absolute reversal of this practice. What follows is a long string of borrowings, primarily from epistle seventy though he also makes use of epistles sixty nine, seventy seven and seventy eight. The Latin of Seneca’s text has, however, become French and, in contrast to the abundance of names referenced in the Plutarchan passage, this mosaic of quotations is introduced with, ‘C’est ce qu’on dit’ (ibid.). Seneca’s role as an authority is put into doubt: on the one hand, his sayings become almost proverbial, slipping into a common, communal discourse; on the other, the text obscures and diminishes the rhetorical impact of an appeal to the Stoic.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, this accumulation of borrowings is interrupted by a direct quotation not from the prose of the epistles but rather from Seneca’s *Phoenissae*:
‘Ubique mors est: optime hoc cavet Deus, | Eripere vitam nemo non homini potest; |

¹⁶⁰ On Montaigne’s use of actual proverbs, and particularly his use of vernacular proverbs, see Bénédicte Boudou, ‘La Langue des proverbes dans les *Essais*’, *La Langue de Rabelais – La Langue de Montaigne*, pp. 463-480.

At nemo mortem: mille ad hanc aditus patent' (II.3.350).¹⁶¹ As such, Seneca's prose slips not quite into Montaigne's prose – it is still 'ce qu'on dit' – but into this in-between, shared, perhaps even universal space where its sentiments can be spoken by and applied to anyone while the verse quotation works to emphasise this shift.

And yet, if we acknowledge the punctuation changes made on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', we see that this potential universality does not imply a strict or steadfast adoption of these claims:

C'est ce qu'on dit, que le sage vit tant qu'il doit, non pas tant qu'il peut: Et que le present que nature nous ait fait le plus favorable, & qui nous oste tout moyen de nous pleindre de nostre condition, c'est de nous avoir laissé la clef des champs. Elle n'a ordonné qu'une entrée à la vie, & cent mille yssuës. [...] Pourquoy te plains tu de ce monde? il ne tient pas: Si tu vis en peine, ta lâcheté en est cause: A mourir il ne reste que le vouloir: [...] Et ce n'est pas la recepte à une seule maladie, la mort est la recepte à tous maux: C'est un port tres-asseuré, qui n'est jamais à craindre, & souvent à rechercher[.] (fol. 143v).¹⁶²

The passage continues in this way, dividing its Senecan sayings with colons which serve simultaneously to atomise and isolate each assertion while giving the sense that this is a potentially endless list. The authority of these *sententiae* is reduced through this process of translation and punctuation to that of a presentation of one possible perspective among an implied many: rather than using these sharp points of condensed assertion to advocate for his own position (this is still 'ce qu'on dit'), Montaigne, neutralising their rhetorical potency, prompts us to consider and study, rather than to be convinced by,

¹⁶¹ Seneca, *Phoenician Women in Tragedies, Volume I: Hercules. Trojan Women. Phoenician Women. Medea. Phaedra*, ed. and trans. by John G. Fitch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), I.1.151-153.

¹⁶² The first ellipsis in my quotation covers an insertion made in the 1588 edition which borrows silently from Tacitus. The second ellipsis marks the verse quotation from Seneca. For a study of segmentation and the changes made to the punctuation in this passage across the different editions of the text, see André Tournon, 'Les Palimpsestes du "langage coupé"', *La Langue de Rabelais – La Langue de Montaigne*, pp. 351-369. Tournon argues that Montaigne makes his text increasingly 'coupé', segmenting its phrases so that it might reflect 'une pensée non pas indécise, mais "enquêteuse" [...] et soucieuse de dérégler autant que possible les automatismes de l'argument', p. 368.

these claims. And yet this moderating action has a rhetorical impact of its own: these are, after all, intensely heterodox sentiments but, in translating pagan Seneca and in placing his sayings in ‘our’ mouths, the essayist highlights the otherness of heterodoxy in the very act of suppressing it. As such, the colons push us in one direction, asking us to give these sayings a fair hearing, while the act of translation prompts us to experience and then examine our response to these foreign ideas reframed and relocated to our interior space, expecting us to reject the statements as pagan heterodoxy but also expecting us to grapple with our dogmatic and prejudicial reflexes. With this use of colons, he precludes all sense of argument and, instead, pushes us to consider each of these statements in turn, examining them as they pass by in a sequence which moves without progressing, while, with translation, he encourages us to turn this unresolved, non-dogmatic style of interrogation upon ourselves.

We can now see how Montaigne’s use of these two authors fits together. Under the claim to enquire and debate, to doubt rather than to resolve, he takes the standard intertextual techniques of argument and persuasion and reworks them, applying them to an entirely opposed end. Seen from a distance, it might appear that Plutarch provides the stories from which the Senecan principles can be drawn though, provided we can ‘regarder de pres’ and that we are capable of engaging with a text without a self-glossing ‘hoc age’, it becomes clear that these ‘cadances dogmatistes’ are imbued with contingency and uncertainty. The text is initially loaded with seemingly exemplary stories from Plutarch though these are stories which turn around words rather than deeds. They seem to pre-empt exegetical distillation with the first two stories performing this auto-transformation from narrative to moral teaching so fully that the text is able to return to the Plutarchan source for ‘témoign[ages]’ of these narrative precepts, only for this to happen again. The Senecan phrases which follow seem, at first glance, to gloss these

stories, turning the specific details of historical narrative into a generalised teaching though, as I have shown, the affirmative nature of these pronouncements is undermined, in part through the introductory comments made at the head of the chapter, but also as a result of the finer workings of translation and punctuation. The colons diminish the weight of sententious sayings while translation warns against a dogmatic response in either the affirmative or the negative. The ‘cadances dogmatistes’, resituated in the *Essais*, become conditional. We noted earlier Estienne’s advice to readers of the *Epistulae*: we have to fill in the gaps, providing what is unspoken though implied; ‘Nam ante haec verba, *Dedit mihi praeturam*, ab alio scriptore expectassemus, *Adeo ut sit qui dicat.*’¹⁶³ Similarly, Montaigne’s practices of combination – the series of translated quotations put together in a list, the relationships of explication and demonstration which become increasingly complex when placed under examination – ask us to read an implied equivocation, an unwritten question mark hanging over the whole passage. In writing in this way, Montaigne makes his text doubtful and unresolved, capable of positing a statement or position without definitively affirming it.

‘De ne contrefaire le malade’ will serve as our second example. This chapter changed very little in subsequent editions, receiving only two short [C] text interpolations, neither of which contains a reference to an author or text. This process of simultaneous combination – as opposed to diachronic combination, combination across the chronological strata of composition – allows us to study the relationships between these allusions and the effects of these relationships more clearly, asking how and why the author purposefully constructs a textual admixture. It allows us to interrogate this diversity as a deliberate network of connections and contrasts rather than as a product of digression, expansion, or a change of perspective. This short

¹⁶³ *Introduction à la lecture de Sénèque*, p. 32.

chapter, which Tournon calls a '[b]el exemple de "bigarrure" avouée',¹⁶⁴ consists of seven examples or testimonies: Martial's 'histoire de Coelius', Appian's 'pareille histoire', a story from Froissart, common opinion in the form of an old wives' tale ('Les meres ont raison de tancer leurs enfans quand ils contrefont les borgnes [...]'), Montaigne's personal experience,¹⁶⁵ Pliny on blindness, and, finally, a (substantially longer) 'histoire voisine de ce propos' taken from Seneca (II.25.688-690).

This 'bigarré' characteristic is claimed by the author not at the outset of the chapter but instead somewhere around the middle of the text, coming in as he introduces the penultimate story: '[A] Mais alongeons ce chapitre et le bigarrons d'une autre piece' (II.27.689). In spite of the late inclusion of the verb 'bigarrer', these examples are presented as continuous, corroboratory, and unanimous in their support of the titular claim that one ought not 'contrefaire le malade' as such pretence will result in real sickness. Montaigne has drawn together Greeks, Romans, poets, prose-writers, common opinion, personal opinion: all seem to support the essayist's case. He places himself at the centre of these gathered witnesses: his account of his own experience is introduced approximately half-way through the chapter¹⁶⁶ and three of the first four stories – those which precede his own account – feature Montaigne's 'je' at their core. '[A] J'ay veu en quelque lieu d'Appian, [C] ce me semble, [A] une pareille histoire,' he writes (II.25.688). '[A] Lisant chez Froissard,' he tells us, '[...] je me suis souvent chatouillé de ce pensement' (ibid.). In the final clause of his section on the old wives' tale, he says: '[A] et j'ay ouy reciter plusieurs exemples de gens devenus malades, ayant entrepris de s'en feindre' (II.25.689). The sense of similarity and concordance between

¹⁶⁴ *Montaigne: la glose et l'essai*, p. 135.

¹⁶⁵ This is the only [C] text addition, with the exception of the similarly personal insertion of 'ce me semble' which refers to the perceived similarity between the stories of Martial and Appian.

¹⁶⁶ '[C] De tout temps j'ay apprins de charger ma main, et à cheval et à pied, d'une baguette ou d'un baston, jusques à y chercher de l'elegance et de m'en sejourner, d'une contenance affettée. Plusieurs m'ont menacé que fortune tourneroit un jour cette mignardise en necessité. Je me fonde sur ce que je seroy tout le premier gouteux de ma race', II.25.689.

these stories identified in the description of Appian's 'histoire' as 'pareille' is echoed not only in these 'plusieurs exemples' referred to above but also in the verb which partners 'bigarrer' in introducing Pliny: '[A] Mais alongeons ce chapitre et le bigarrons d'une autre piece' (ibid.).

A similar, though subtly and importantly different, verb is used to introduce the closing Senecan 'histoire': '[A] Adjoutons encore un' histoire voisine de ce propos, que Seneque recite en l'une de ses lettres' (ibid.). We might remember the famous declaration: '[B] J'adjouste, mais je ne corrige pas' (III.9.963). 'Ajouter', in its various forms, is much more common in the essayist's vocabulary, occurring sixty-eight times in the text while 'allonger' is used only thirty-six times. To stretch something out, expanding it, may dilute it but its essence will not change. The same is true if we think of 'allonger' as lengthening something by adding more of the same. The same cannot be said of 'ajouter': at what point does this process of addition – that is, combination, – fundamentally change the original material? Montaigne, in introducing one of his prized *auctores*, becomes an *auctor* (literally, an 'increaser') himself: he 'increases' his text though no longer through elongation but through addition. It seems, then, that 'bigarrer', this verb of admixture, plurality, diversity, and difference, ought to be attached to 'adjoutons' rather than, as is the case, the story with Pliny by which we 'alongeons'.

The 'bigarré' effect of this Senecan addition is stressed not only in its introduction, in which Montaigne is quite clear that this is only 'un' histoire *voisine* de ce propos' (my emphasis), but also in its conclusion: '[A] Voylà ce que dit Seneque, qui m'a emporté hors de mon propos; mais il y a du profit au change' (II.25.690). After highlighting the coherence of the previous examples, all of which seem to support the opening argument that feigned sickness will result in real sickness, he tells us that the story from Seneca has pulled him away and taken him to an altogether different

territory. It is 'voisine' and tangentially related, though fundamentally detached and perhaps even contradictory. Seneca relates to Lucilius the story of Harpaste who 'a subitement perdu la veue. Je te recite chose estrange, mais veritable: elle ne sent point qu'elle soit aveugle, et presse incessamment son gouverneur de l'en emmener par ce qu'elle dit que ma maison est obscure' (II.25.689). Seneca's argument is that we are all like Harpaste: we are sick without knowing it and continue to act as though we were well: 'Ne cerchons pas hors de nous nostre mal, il est chez nous, il est planté en nos entrailles. Et cela mesme que nous ne sentons pas estre malades, nous rend la guerison plus mal-aisée' (ibid.). Placed at the end of Montaigne's text, Seneca's argument is not only 'hors de [son] propos'; it is entirely contradictory. How are we to interpret this 'ajout' which seems to break the extended continuity which precedes it? Montaigne's concluding words tell us that there is profit from change, but what sort of profit is this?

This jump from apparent intertextual coherence to a story from Seneca which is, at best, pursuing a different train of thought if not directly contradicting what comes before, ruptures the text and our understanding of Montaigne's position and, in doing so, draws our attention, not only to the Senecan passage, but to its relationship with all that precedes it. The reference to an unidentified 'profit' sends us looking for it and, when we look, we find that there is no sudden jump at all. Seneca's lesson is an inversion of the title and, indeed, the 'epigramme en Martial' with which the chapter opens: 'Tantum cura potest et ars doloris, | Desiit fingere Coelius podagram.' The opening argument, 'do not imitate sickness or else you will become sick', has metamorphosed into its opposite: 'recognise the symptoms of your sickness or you will not be cured'. These two opposing, inverted positions are, however, united by the stories which come between them: the chapter follows a much more gradual, meandering movement through its topic than Montaigne's language of coherence,

elongation, and exemplarity suggests. In spite of the author's conspicuously ill-supported claim, 'j'ay ouy reciter plusieurs exemples de gens devenus malades, ayant entrepris de s'en feindre', only the first two of his stories – those taken from Martial and Appian – support his case. Even here, however, the [C] text casts some doubt with the qualifying phrase, 'ce me semble'.

The story from Froissart, in which young English soldiers covered one eye as an act of courtesy to their mistresses only to uncover it once they had performed chivalrously in the battlefield, lends no support to Martial's epigram. It is Montaigne, rather than Froissart, who is tickled by the idea that a misfortune such as losing the sight in this eye *might* have befallen them: 'je me suis souvent chatouillé de ce pensement, qu'il leur eut pris comme à ces autres, et qu'ils se fussent trouvez tous éborgnez au revoir des maistresses pour lesquelles ils avoyent faict l'entreprise' (II.25.689). Montaigne's own example takes us even further from the original claim as we see him failing to heed his own advice and even displacing this advice onto unnamed others:

[C] De tout temps j'ay appris de charger ma main, et à cheval et à pied, d'une baguette ou d'un baston, jusques à y chercher de l'elegance et de m'en sejourner, d'une contenance affettée. Plusieurs m'ont menacé que fortune tourneroit un jour cette mignardise en necessité. Je me fonde sur ce que je seroy tout le premier gouteux de ma race. (ibid.).

Finally, with Pliny's story, we move even closer to Seneca's lesson based on Harpaste: it was not the man's imitation of the blind which made him so but rather his dream of being blind which was itself caused by his internal movements: 'les mouvemens que le corps sentoit au dedans, desquels les medecins trouveront, s'ils veulent, la cause, qui luy ostoient la veue' (ibid.). Though this is not the same argument as the one we find in Seneca, Pliny's story elicits Montaigne's discussion of an inner sickness which finds its external, physical manifestation, providing us with a link to the closing story that is much stronger than is immediately apparent.

This chapter has as its subject the classic *topos* of appearance and reality, a standard subject for Scepticism from Sextus to Descartes.¹⁶⁷ Once again, however, subject and form become difficult to separate: Montaigne's argument and his evidence *appear* to defend the claim that perceptible symptoms of sickness result in real sickness but, having taken account of the 'profit' which comes from the Senecan addition, we see that, in reality, the argument is quite different. This is not to say that Montaigne's argument moves from one extreme to the other in this chapter: Martial and Seneca may oppose each other, but the essayist values Seneca's story for its variation and deviation from the story he began with rather than finding any intrinsic value in its argument. The 'profit' here is 'au change' rather than in Seneca's story itself; the value lies not in the content of Seneca's text but rather in the way it fits and combines with other stories; rather than a dialectical *pro et contra*, the key element for Montaigne is the form, movement, and 'dessein' of his own enquiring text. This is, then, a textual manifestation, a performance of, rather than a pronouncement explaining, equivocation, uncertainty, the Sceptic's *ou mallon*: no more one than the other. Though he concludes with Seneca, he makes no evaluative judgement, saying only that this story is 'hors de [son] propos'. His use of translation rather than quotation in retelling the story of Harpaste blurs the distinction between Montaigne's thoughts and Seneca's, while also allowing the essayist greater freedom: skipping over the introductory address to Lucilius, he translates the opening section of epistle fifty closely though the final sentence of the version we find in the *Essais*, 'Si avons nous une tres-douce medecine que la philosophie: car des autres, on n'en sent le plaisir qu'apres la guerison, cette cy plait et guerit ensemble', comes from the very end of Seneca's epistle.¹⁶⁸ Montaigne silently excerpts the central section of the

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, *Pyrrhoniatarum hypotyposeon*, trans. by Henri Estienne in *Adversus mathematicos...*, I.10.409: 'Apparet nobis mel dulcare: dulcedinem enim ipsam sensu percipimus: sed an dulce sit quod ad rationem & intelligentiam attinet, ambigimus.'

¹⁶⁸ Such metaphors comparing philosophy with medicine have often been associated with Sextusian and Pyrrhonian Scepticism, principally with Sextus' comments in the final section of

letter, excluding all of Seneca's instruction and didacticism, leaving him – or, rather, making him – ‘enquerant plustost qu'instruisant’.

The Senecan extract retrospectively changes everything which came before it, not by providing a new, superior argument, but by challenging and disrupting the apparent coherence of Montaigne's various testimonials. This, then, is an intertextual incarnation of what Tournon calls the ‘dédoublement’ of the *essai*: it doubles back on itself, razing its own foundations. There are connections and ruptures in ‘De ne contrefaire le malade’, but not necessarily the ones the author tells us about; rather, he ‘[B] le montre au doigt’ (III.9.983). A similar argument has been made about ‘Des cannibales’ and, while this instance is not intertextual, it does, nevertheless, help us to establish and clarify some of the effects of rupture and/as combination that we have so far been dealing with.¹⁶⁹ This chapter closes with an account of his meeting with three Tupinamba from Brazil: having asked them what they found ‘plus admirable’ about Europe, Montaigne notes that, ‘[A] Ils respondirent trois choses, d'où j'ay perdu la troisieme, et en suis bien marry; mais j'en ay encore deux en memoire’ (I.31.213). There is an absence, a break in the continuity which is not only admitted but highlighted by Montaigne. Here, as in ‘De ne contrefaire le malade’, the author presents us with a

his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. ‘Scepticus, eo quod sit humanus, Dogmaticorum arrogantiam & temerariam insolentiam pro viribus sanare vult ratiocinando. Quemadmodum igitur corporalium morborum medici diversae potentiae habent remedia: & iis quidem qui vehementi morbo laborant, eorum vehementissima quaeque adhibent: iis qui leviter aegrotant, levia,’ *Pyrrhonianum hypotyposeon*, III.32.542. As this borrowing from Seneca makes clear, however, aspects of Montaigne's text which are typically seen in the light of Pyrrhonian Scepticism reveal otherwise unseen characteristics when we open up the conceptual and intertextual field to include other ‘doubtful’ writers. On Scepticism as a ‘drogue médicale’, see John O'Brien, “‘Si avons nous une tres-douce medecine que la philosophie’”, *L'écriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne*, pp. 13-24.

¹⁶⁹ See, for instance, André Tournon's argument that ‘le “retournement” opéré à la fin du chapitre [...] a pour effet de donner pour étranges les conventions européennes [...] et de laisser en attente d'une autre anomalie qu'auraient remarquée ces gens du Nouveau Monde, jetant ainsi le soupçon sur tous les usages de l'Ancien’, *Route par ailleurs*, p. 177. He notes that we ought to ‘prendre le silence pour ce qu'il est: une lacune marquée à dessein, qui incite le lecteur à considérer n'importe quelle coutume française selon la perspective de ces Indiens à la “naïveté” dévastatrice’. See also George Hoffmann, ‘Rites romains et autres dans l'essai “Des cannibales”’, *D'une fantastique bigarrure: le texte composite à la Renaissance*, ed. by Jean-Raymond Fanlo (Paris: Champion, 2000), pp. 156-166.

pattern, a structure, or some other notion of coherence but then, in the make-up of this combination of things, shows its fundamental instability. This gap – the feeling that there is something left unspoken which, in the terms established by Montaigne in III.9, seems to bear the full weight of his pointing finger – is then made even more apparent in the last line of the chapter: '[A] Tout cela ne va pas trop mal: mais quoy, ils ne portent point de haut de chausses.' Montaigne is joking, of course, though the effect of this perspectival jump remains: can this sudden shift from a sensitive, if contrarian, account of cultural difference to haughty dismissiveness really change our reading of what came before? The author might not be serious in making this claim but, 'niais[ant]', he allows himself and asks his reader to look back over what has been said from a different perspective; from a position of doubt and uncertainty. With this line, he deliberately undermines the argument he has sustained at length though he does so with a smile which seems to remove all potency from this retrospective dismissal, forcing us to reassess a form of writing which appeared overwhelmingly to be one of argument and advocacy as instead perhaps – and the 'perhaps' is key – no more than a perspective to be adopted only so that its qualities and characteristics might be examined; a 'visage', a 'persona' not to hold up or hide behind but to 'speak through' (*personare*) in order to test out how such a speech might sound.

Montaigne's Fantastic Masks

'[B] L'homme,' according to Montaigne, 'en tout et par tout, n'est que rapiessément et bigarrure' (II.20.675). Combination, for the essayist, is not a process of identifying correspondences or similarities but rather one of monstrous creation in which the seams and connections which build up these patch-work creatures simultaneously reveal relations and oppositions. As he says in 'De l'expérience', '[B] La ressemblance ne fait

pas tant un comme la difference faict autre. [C] Nature s'est obligée à ne rien faire autre, qui ne fust dissemblable' (III.13.1065).

This quality of Montaigne's text has often been recognised and approached through the metaphor of dialogue. While Regosin has argued that the *Essais* initiate a dialogue with their reader,¹⁷⁰ Eva Kushner has focused on intratextual dialogue, breaking up Montaigne's seemingly unified though often contradictory authorial pronouncements as she details the conversation between the [A], [B], and [C] voices of the various editions.¹⁷¹ In Montaigne's treatment of Seneca and Plutarch, however, we see a process in which voices and seemingly distinct *personae* become difficult to disentangle: not blurry, exactly, for we see these points of connection and rupture with clarity, but monstrous, chimeric, and double. Seneca and Plutarch, according to the essayist's description, are at once distinct, opposing, antithetical but also interlocking, matching, and unified.

Depending on our perspective, we see either a unified whole or a miscellany of discrete parts. Perspective, a crucial *topos* not only for Montaigne but for Scepticism and doubt more generally, is of particular importance in understanding the roles of Seneca and Plutarch in the *Essais*. Viewed as members of the 'tiers genre', we see them speaking 'tantost d'un visage, tantost d'un autre' and, in doing so, they provide a model for sustaining tension between diverse positions. This ability to embrace contradiction allows them to represent this hybrid genre of philosophy with its own hybrid discourse, representing a 'third way' between resolved and affirmative dogmatism and the aphasia of the Pyrrhonian philosophers who lack a 'nouveau langage'. These two ancient writers are emblems of combination as they present multiple, diverse perspectives: it is this

¹⁷⁰ 'The Imposing Text and the Obtrusive Reader', *Montaigne's Unruly Brood*, pp. 80-118.

¹⁷¹ 'Montaigne et le dialogue', *Le Dialogue à la Renaissance* (Geneva: Droz, 2004), pp. 177-188.

ability to combine multiple viewpoints without resolution that makes their forms of writing doubtful.

Considered with regard to the way in which they are 'coupled' in the *Essais*, however, we see that Montaigne takes this propensity towards diversity in each of these authors and forces their opposing 'façons' into an interlocking structure based on opposition. In doing so, he creates a fantastical figure which, like every man, is a patchwork of contradictions. When we look at Seneca and Plutarch as they are used in parts of the text which have a focus other than the authors themselves, we see that the essayist, imitating Seneca-Plutarch (his own creation), forges connections which, when recognised, highlight disconnections, contradictions, and breaks. These polyvalent nodes force the movement and repositioning of the reader, pushing us around but also pushing us back, prompting us to reconsider what we have already read, changing the perspective from which the text is viewed. More than philosophic or generic models, then, Seneca and Plutarch are rendered 'douteux' in the *Essais*, in every sense. Montaigne takes from them their stylistic techniques of doubt and irresolution which he would then employ when using and discussing their works (which is not to say that these techniques, derived from his engagement with Seneca and Plutarch, are only used when dealing with texts by these authors). He uses them to doubt and to enquire, employing their discursive techniques as well as extracts from their texts, but he also prompts us to doubt and interrogate these figures and their situation within the *Essais* ourselves.

The 'visages' of Montaigne's Seneca and Plutarch change as we change our perspective, but the central, unifying feature is this hybridity in which combination is rupture, apparent certainty is bound up with enquiry and doubt, and in which one mask is entwined with another. Montaigne forces these two authors into an uneasy, seemingly precarious combination in which they exaggerate each other's 'doubtful' qualities though

it is in working with and on this hybrid creature that he takes his first steps towards his own 'forme d'écriture douteuse et irresolue'.

In-Between Authorship: Authoring the *Essais*

‘[C] Je n’ay pas plus faict mon livre,’ wrote Montaigne, ‘que mon livre m’a faict, livre consubstantiel à son auteur’ (II.18.665). This relationship has, it seems, always held a central position in our understanding of the *Essais*: Montaigne is, in one way or another, bound up with his text; he is its author, its originator and its running header bears his name at the top of every page. At the same time, it is the book which has made him: the two are, he insists, ‘consubstantiel[s]’. How, though, are we to understand – and what does Montaigne mean by – this term ‘auteur’?

Montaigne’s problematic relationship with those intimately connected notions of authoring, authority, and *auctoritates* is well known: he rejects out of hand the pedantic dogmatism of those who repeat, incant, and channel the great *auctores* – ‘[C] Ce n’est non plus selon Platon que selon moy’, he asserts, adapting a commonplace adage, ‘puis que luy et moy l’entendons et voyons de mesme’ (I.26.152) – and yet, at the same time, he cites, translates, alludes to, and silently ‘borrows’ from classical authors relentlessly.¹⁷² Similarly, his own place as ‘author’ of his text is repeatedly problematized and, in ‘Sur des vers de Virgile’, he seems to contradict himself from one line to the next: ‘[B] tout le monde me reconnoit en mon livre, et mon livre en moy. Or j’ay une condition singeresse et imitatrice’ (III.5.875). Here, the book is a true representation of Montaigne but Montaigne himself has, it seems, a propensity towards looking like someone else. Regarding Seneca and Plutarch, he claims that his book is ‘[C] massonné purement de

¹⁷² On the phrase, ‘ce n’est non plus selon Platon que selon moy’, see Richard Scholar, “‘J’aime Michel, mais j’aime mieux la vérité’: Creative Reading and Free-Thinking in Montaigne,” *Nottingham French Studies*, 49, 3 (2010), pp. 39-51.

leurs despoilles' (II.32.721) and yet, by the same token, he states absolutely in the 'Au lecteur', '[A] je suis moy-mesme la matiere de mon livre' (p. 3).

How, then, are we to understand and conceive of Montaigne as the 'consubstantiel [...] auteur' of his text? I have shown in Chapter One that Seneca and Plutarch, the figures from whom he draws endlessly ('[C] je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse' I.26.146), are a doubtful, hybrid creature: interlocking, inextricable and yet, in many ways, opposed. Where is Montaigne's place in relation both to this pair and to the book he constructs (while asserting repeatedly that its construction would have been impossible without them)? What sort of authorship does Montaigne engage in? And what does this patently unusual conception of 'authoring' allow him to do?

In 'Nous ne goustons rien de pur' (II.20.673), Montaigne, writing in the margins of the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', inserts a quotation from Livy's *Ab urbe condita*: 'Labor voluptasque, dissimillima natura, societate quaedam naturali inter se sunt juncta.'¹⁷³ He crossed this out, however, and replaced it with the following (see *fig. 5*): '[C] Le travail et le plaisir, tres-dissemblables de nature, s'associent pourtant de je ne sçay quelle jointure naturelle.' Having decided against citation in favour of translation, Montaigne makes no reference to the fact that this phrase is taken from Livy. How are we to make sense of this hesitation, this graphic trace of Montaigne changing his mind, choosing not to present this idea in the Latin 'voice' of Livy but instead to erase – or at least minimise – this difference and distance, placing it in the much more 'Montaignean' French prose? What is at stake when Montaigne is deciding whether to quote Livy's Latin or to translate his words into French? What does this reconsideration reveal, not only about the nature of intertextuality and the status of quotations and borrowed texts in the

¹⁷³ *History of Rome*, ed. and trans. by B. O. Foster (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 5.iv.12.

Essais but also about the status, nature, and conception of what it means to ‘author’ something? It might be argued – and instances such as this have often been met with such arguments – that this is simply a case of Montaigne assimilating his sources. In this chapter, I suggest that this is in fact part of a complex and pivotal rethinking of the meaning and function of authorship: I show that Montaigne thinks with and through these texts, embracing and exploring their ability to speak with two voices while encouraging us as readers to sustain this duality. It is a way of making his text, along with the complex thought done with and in the text, multiple and diverse. I argue that authorship in the *Essais* takes place not within the figure of ‘Montaigne’ nor under his signature but on the page and that this ‘in-between authorship’, which functions between Montaigne and those authors he thinks and writes with, is part of what allows him to write doubtfully.

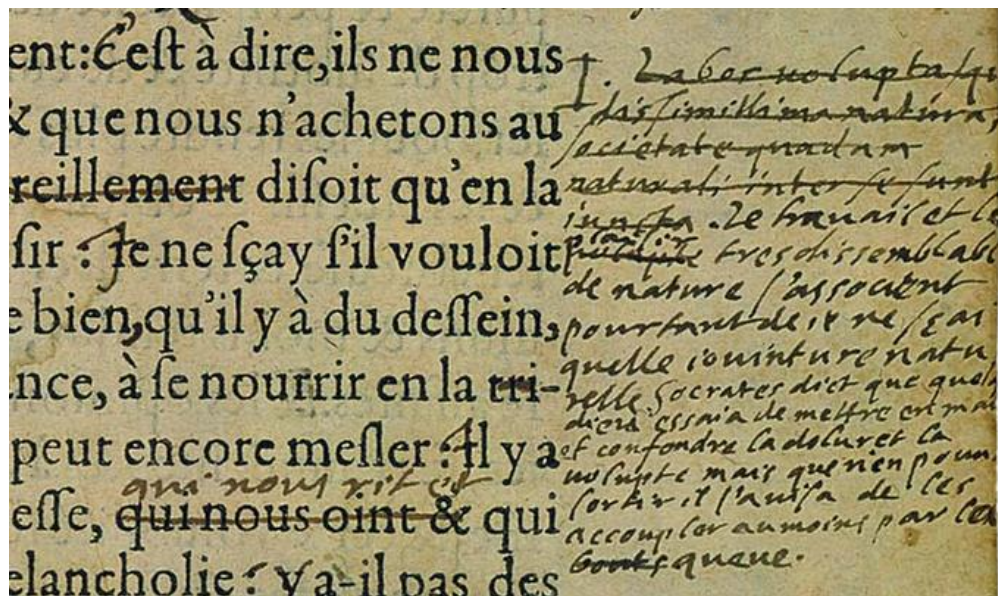


Fig. 5. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 289r.

'Mon frère, mon frère, me refusez-vous doncques une place?': Intertextual Approaches to Montaigne's Place in the *Essais*

The nature of Montaigne's authorship in relation to the role(s) of those authors whom he cites and borrows from has been the focus of numerous studies and these have tended to fall into one of two broadly defined groups. The first is typified by ideas of dialogue, both according to its commonplace understanding and also its more precise meaning as theorised by Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva. Kristeva, who introduced the term 'intertextuality' in her exposition and development of the ideas of Bakhtin, argued that 'la structure littéraire n'est pas, mais [...] elle s'élabore par rapport à une autre structure. Cette dynamisation du structuralisme n'est possible qu'à partir d'une conception selon laquelle le "mot littéraire" n'est pas un *point* (un sens fixe), mais un *croisement de surfaces* textuelles, un dialogue de plusieurs écritures'.¹⁷⁴ Kristevan intertextuality, in choosing text and textuality as its lens, stands as an early instance of the broader movement within post-structuralism and post-modernism in which the role of the author – and, indeed, the notion of an 'author' – was increasingly marginalised: 'A la place de la notion d'intersubjectivité', Kristeva notes, 's'installe celle d'*intertextualité*'.¹⁷⁵ This network of texts, constructing and understanding itself through itself,¹⁷⁶ is understood to be the generator as well as the locus of meaning and it is in the notion of dialogue itself that the *dramatis persona* of the 'author' exits the stage: 'L'interlocuteur de l'écrivain est donc l'écrivain lui-même en tant que lecteur d'un autre texte. Celui qui écrit est le même que celui qui lit. Son interlocuteur étant un texte, il n'est lui-même qu'un texte qui se relit en se réécrivant'.¹⁷⁷ Within Montaigne studies, this

¹⁷⁴ Julia Kristeva, 'Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman', *Semeiotike: recherches pour une sémanalyse*, pp. 82-112 (p. 83).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 85.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 106.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 109.

approach is seen most clearly in Jules Brody's philological readings¹⁷⁸ or in Compagnon's attempt to 'situer la citation de Montaigne, ou plutôt, d'ensemble hétéroclite de ses citations, par rapport à la problématique de signe au seizième siècle': Compagnon, placing Montaigne within a context in which 'l'intrusion de A₂, le citateur ou le sujet de la citation [...] était théoriquement banni du symbole et de l'indice', suggests that Montaigne's quotations 'sont justement [...] ce dont il est absent'.¹⁷⁹

Beginning with Bakhtin's focus on dialogue, though often without sharing his specific, 'textual' understanding of this term, a number of critics have suggested conversation, jousting, or duelling metaphors, along with the Socratic precedent as a means of restoring this absent authorial presence, allowing us to hear Montaigne's voice as part of the polyphony of authors heard in the *Essais*.¹⁸⁰ Scott Francis, for example, reads 'De l'art de conférer' as a conversation itself, engaging, jousting, and debating with Plutarch's 'Comment on pourra discerner le flatteur d'avecques l'amy'.¹⁸¹ Similarly, Yves Delègue suggests that Montaigne 'met discrètement en scène nombre d'interlocuteurs fictifs, désignés le plus souvent par des pronoms indifférenciés (tu, vous, ils, on, nous), parmi lesquels il se situe à l'occasion, mais auxquels il oppose aussi le "je" du moment'.¹⁸² Also starting with 'cette manière vraie et philosophique qu'est la "conference"', Marcel Conche argues that, for Montaigne, 'La discussion est, de tous les

¹⁷⁸ See, for example, 'Montaigne: Philosophy, Philology, Literature', *Philosophy and Literature*, 22 (1998), pp. 83-107.

¹⁷⁹ Antoine Compagnon, *La Seconde Main ou le travail de la citation*, pp. 291-292.

¹⁸⁰ A number of studies on Montaigne and 'dialogue' do not fit into this category: works looking at Montaigne's dialogue with La Boétie (G. Defaux's *Montaigne et le travail de l'amitié* (Orléans: Paradigme, 2001)), Montaigne's dialogue with the reader (Richard Regosin's *Montaigne's Unruly Brood*), or Montaigne's dialogue with himself and Rome as a means of self-censorship (Patrick Henry's *Montaigne in Dialogue: Censorship and Defensive Writing, Architecture and Friendship, The Self and the Other* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1987)) all view dialogue as a relationship which extends beyond text and texts, beyond the covers of the *Essais*. The approach I am discussing here, however, sees dialogue as the governing mechanism behind the intertextuality at play *within* the *Essais*.

¹⁸¹ Scott Francis, 'The Discussion as Joust: *Parrhesia* and Friendly Antagonism in Plutarch and Montaigne', *The Comparatist*, 37 (2013), pp. 122-137.

¹⁸² *Montaigne et la mauvaise foi: l'écriture de la vérité* (Paris: Champion, 1998), p. 195.

exercices de notre esprit, le plus “naturel” [...] (III.8.922): qu’est-ce à dire sinon que la solitude est contraire à l’essence même du penser, que le penser, selon son essence, est toujours un penser-ensemble? On pense avec, ou contre, donc ensemble, dialectiquement’.¹⁸³

That Montaigne appreciated conversation and enjoyed reading dialogues is clear¹⁸⁴ though we might question the ready equation of Montaigne’s customs in society and his reading habits with his own writerly practices. To see the *Essais* as in some way a dialogue requires us to use this term metaphorically: Montaigne’s text is not ‘dialogic’ in the same way as Erasmus’ *Ciceronianus* or Plutarch’s ‘Propos de table’, for example. Is this an apt metaphor? It is certainly an appealing one: Yves Delègue’s study, ‘Du dialogue’, reminds us that ‘le dialogue dans la littérature est en théorie, donc en priorité, en dignité, né du questionnement, c’est-à-dire de *l’ironie* socratique’.¹⁸⁵ He draws our attention to Rabelais’ Trouillogan, stressing the link between dialogue and doubt. ‘Dialogue’, however, implies two or more distinct voices engaging in a dialectical ‘to-and-fro’ though, as we have seen in the previous chapter, even apparently stable voices are, in the *Essais*, hard to pin down and difficult to disentangle. Similarly, ideas of polyphony in the text, while more adept at accounting for multiple, ambiguous voices, have a tendency to deprive Montaigne-the-author of any special agency or action beyond the basic notion of composition, particularly when such an approach is applied

¹⁸³ ‘Montaigne me manque’, *Montaigne et la philosophie*, p. 144.

¹⁸⁴ Montaigne’s description of Plato’s dialogues is often cited: ‘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. Diversement traicter les matieres est aussi bien les traicter que conformement, et mieux: à sçavoir plus copieusement et utilement’, II.12.509. See also his description of Plato’s *Phaedrus*: ‘J’ay passé les yeux sur tel dialogue de Platon mi party d’une fantastique bigarrure, le devant à l’amour, tout le bas à la rhétorique. Ils ne creignent point ces nuances, et ont une merveilleuse grace à se laisser ainsi rouler au vent, ou à le sembler’, III.9.994. It is, however, the ‘bigarrure’ quality, rather than their status as dialogues, which is highlighted by Montaigne.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Du dialogue’, *D’une fantastique bigarrure: le texte composite à la Renaissance*, pp. 145-156 (p. 146).

to the early chapters.¹⁸⁶ It is perhaps this tendency which has led to the many comparisons between the *Essais* (either in part or in their entirety) and commonplace books which, again, encounter the problem of establishing Montaigne's 'place' within the text: his voice is seen as one in a crowd of cited voices or as the distanced, muted voice of the compositor.

An alternative to this approach centred on notions of dialogue is found in studies which share little with Kristeva, Bakhtin, and the post-modern movement away from a central, unifying author. In *Montaigne bilingue: le latin des Essais*, Floyd Gray asks, though does not explicitly answer, a key question: 'Où se situe-t-il parmi tant d'emprunts?'¹⁸⁷ 'La citation chez lui', notes Gray, 'a une autre fonction que de reprendre et de redire les mots d'autrui, [il] n'hésitait pas [...] à les détourner de leur voie première pour les faire siens' (my emphasis).¹⁸⁸ Montaigne's method of combining texts with each other creates, Gray argues, 'une citation qui n'est désormais ni de l'un ni de l'autre, mais qui est unique et appartient ainsi au Montaigne des *Essais*'.¹⁸⁹ This is an argument, shared by a number of scholars, which I will return to later in this chapter. For the moment, Gray's analysis will serve as my exemplar of this approach which places Montaigne as a central, assimilating author who re-writes – re-authors – his quotations. His role, according to this line of thought, is that of marshalling his authors, transforming them through a digestive process so that they look distinctly 'Montaignean'. One of the principal aims of this chapter is to show that this hierarchy, with Montaigne above his cited authors, is destabilised, collapsed, and made uncertain.

¹⁸⁶ Most famously in Villey's description of the early chapters as 'Les Essais impersonnels'. For a revision of Villey's two triads (Stoic, Sceptic, Epicurean; 'Les Essais impersonnels', 'La Conquête de la Personnalité', 'Les Essais personnels'), see G. Defaux, 'Montaigne, la vie, les livres: naissance d'un philosophe sceptique – et "impremedité"', *MLN*, 117 (2002), pp. 780-807.

¹⁸⁷ *Montaigne bilingue: le latin des Essais*, p. 76.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 39.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 41.

These approaches present two starkly opposed impressions of authorship in the *Essais*: on the one hand, Montaigne's text is dialogic and polyphonic, affording little space to Montaigne-the-author; on the other, Montaigne himself assimilates his borrowings, asserting control over them as he asserts control over the rest of his text. Neither of these models seems capable of conceptualising Montaigne's place in his text in a way that accords with the issues outlined at the head of this chapter. Readings which see these issues through the lens of assimilation underplay the significance of Montaigne's repeated claims that his book is made from the works and words of others while implying a hierarchy in which Montaigne presides over his text and the texts which he brings under his sphere of influence: this is not the mutual relationship in which the author makes the book only as much as the book makes the author. The dialogic model similarly struggles to account for Montaigne's claims to be 'consubstantiel' with his book – it reduces his role significantly, denying him any special agency – while also struggling to engage with the sorts of textual, graphic hesitations (such as Montaigne's shift from quotation to translation when citing Livy) which testify to a sense of movement and authorial instability or slippage: if Montaigne's purpose was to engage in an intertextual dialogue, why does he make this interlocutor invisible? And why, crucially, does he so clearly hesitate about the degree of visibility?

In what follows, I present a way of conceiving authorship in the *Essais* as a practice of thinking with texts and thinking in writing. Some of the implications of this approach have already been gestured towards and its advantages, both for Montaigne and for us as readers of the *Essais*, will become clearer as I continue. This argument makes use of some of the insights afforded by the recent 'cognitive turn' in the humanities and particularly the 'extended mind' hypothesis as developed by Andy Clark and David Chalmers. Before I detail these arguments and ideas, it should be understood

that I use these cognitive theories as a tool, bending their methodologies, vocabulary, and conclusions to accommodate my own purpose: I use these ideas approximately and locally. My work repurposes these theories of how we think and, in doing so, develops them in ways that are perhaps unexpected; at certain points, I highlight these developments, noting how they might take these cognitive theories in new directions, though this is not my primary focus.

A good deal of work has been undertaken to historicise cognitive approaches to early modern literature and cognitive readings of Montaigne have yielded fruitful results.¹⁹⁰ A survey and synthesis of the fields of cognitive science, cognitive literary studies, and twentieth-century cultural and literary theory (with a natural emphasis on psychoanalysis) has been conducted by Miranda Anderson.¹⁹¹ Anderson's study historically situates cognitive approaches even further by showing not simply how cognitive readings can be applied to early modern texts but also revealing contiguities, parallels, and shared ways of thinking in modern cognitive approaches and Renaissance discussions of thought, thinking, and the mind.

My analysis in this chapter takes especially from the 'extended mind' theory of Clark and Chalmers. Noting a 'general tendency of human reasoners to lean heavily on environmental supports', Clark and Chalmers argue that we ought to include external,

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, Mary Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also the special issue of *Paragraph* edited by Terence Cave, *Paragraph: Reading Literature Cognitively*, 37 (2014) as well as Terence Cave's *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For cognitive approaches to Montaigne, see Terence Cave, *How to Read Montaigne* (London: Granta, 2007) and James Helgeson, 'Lexical and Conceptual Arguments and Historical Reading: On the History of SELF', *Paragraph: Reading Literature Cognitively*, pp. 126-142.

¹⁹¹ *The Renaissance Extended Mind* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Anderson's first two chapters provide an invaluable summary of research in the fields of cognitive science and its application to literary studies though, while her final two chapters on Shakespeare succeed in coupling cognitive approaches to close textual analysis, there is a tendency in the central three chapters – 'Renaissance Subjects: Ensouled and Embodied', 'Renaissance Language and Memory Forms', and 'Renaissance Intrasubjectivity and Intersubjectivity' – to prioritise a synoptic synthesis of sources over sustained close reading.

embodied processes in our understanding of the cognitive sphere of the mind.¹⁹² They provide an example of this ‘active externalism’ which has, I think, clear commonalities with Montaigne and his intertextual practices:

One can explain my choice of words in Scrabble, for example, as the outcome of an extended cognitive process involving the rearrangement of tiles on my tray. Of course, one could always try to explain my action in terms of internal processes and a long series of “inputs” and “actions”, but this explanation would be needlessly complex. [...] In a very real sense, the rearrangement of tiles on the tray is not a part of action; it is a part of *thought*.¹⁹³

This relationship between the biological brain and these physical, embodied, though certainly cognitive processes is described as a ‘coupled system’ in which ‘[a]ll the components in the system play an active causal role, and they jointly govern behaviour in the same sort of way that cognition usually does’.¹⁹⁴

An example used by Andy Clark may help to make plain the sort of way in which this might be applied to a text like Montaigne’s. Clark relates an anecdote regarding Richard Feynman in which he tells an interviewer, ‘I actually did the work on the paper’. ‘Well,’ the interviewer responds, ‘the work was done in your head but the record of it is still here.’ Feynman insisted, however, that ‘it is not a record, not really, it is working. You have to work on paper and this is the paper.’¹⁹⁵ This fine distinction is one I would like to make in working with the *Essais*. We often think of Montaigne’s workings and thought processes being recorded and represented on paper; indeed, he frequently uses the language of ‘contreroller’ and ‘mettre en rolle’.¹⁹⁶ While there is

¹⁹² Andy Clark and David Chalmers, ‘The Extended Mind’, *Analysis*, 58 (1998), pp. 7-19 (p. 8).

¹⁹³ Ibid. pp. 9-10.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ Andy Clark, *The Extended Mind* (2014). URL: <<http://www.hdc.ed.ac.uk/seminars/extended-mind>> [Accessed: 11th January 2017].

¹⁹⁶ There are many instances of these sorts of statements within Montaigne studies. For a recent study taken from this perspective, see Nicolas Russell, *Transformations of Memory and Forgetting in Sixteenth-Century France: Marguerite de Navarre, Pierre de Ronsard, Michel de Montaigne* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

certainly a great deal of truth in this, it can lead us to think of the text as a vessel of static thoughts or rather, perhaps, temporarily static thoughts, fixed and completed before being written down, awaiting the next round of editing before regaining their potential energy. In 'De l'oysiveté', one of the key instances in which Montaigne uses this language of registering or recording, his long and rambling sentence, imitating 'le cheval eschappé' of his imagination, concludes by giving this process of 'mettre en rolle' a double purpose: '[A] que pour en contempler à mon aise l'ineptie et l'estrangeté, j'ay commencé de les mettre en rolle, esperant avec le temps luy en faire honte à luy mesmes' (I.8.33). Montaigne may hope to distance himself from these thoughts eventually, but the primary reason – in both senses – for this act of inventory is so that he can think through these ideas in writing. Writing becomes the instrument of thought – this is Montaigne doing the cognitive 'work' on the paper – and he is using the activity of writing to 'contempler': this is not a record of thought to be returned to as a historical document but is, rather, a cognitive process; he is thinking with written language and thinking on the page.

Though this is not necessarily or always the case, this particular example shows Montaigne using the cognitive tool of language to think about the ways he thinks and this is by no means an isolated incident of metacognition extended in writing in the *Essais*. He does not simply use the activity of writing to think through what he thinks about, for example, divergent views on the immortality of the soul (though he certainly does engage in this sort of extended thought): here, we see him thinking in writing as he thinks through his experiences of diverse, endlessly proliferating, and monstrous thought and through his attempts, past, present, and future, to think them through. Written language is employed to perform complex thought, self-reflective thought. It is with this in mind that we might note that 'extended mind' theorists have tended, in their

expositions of their claims, to focus on more instrumental, ‘information processing’ forms of thought: one thinks with scrabble tiles to find a word which will fit on the board; ‘Otto’, who has Alzheimer’s Disease, thinks with his notebook which is part of his memory; David Chalmers’ phone has, to some extent, taken over the roles of memory and computation.¹⁹⁷ Montaigne’s relationship with writing, with texts, and with his *Essais* is similar to these other relationships and yet it appears already to be more complex: Montaigne not only thinks on the page; he thinks on the page about thinking (on the page).

My approach is closely aligned with recent work by Terence Cave on how we might broach what he calls a ‘cognitively inflected’ literary criticism: for Cave, ‘literature is both an instrument and a vehicle of thought. The kind of thinking it affords may in some cases be close to philosophical, ethical, or political thought, but it is never reducible to those modes. [...] Literature is a special *object* of thought and hence of knowledge.’¹⁹⁸ It is my contention that Montaigne thinks with the *Essais* and that, in thinking with this text and thinking through writing, this thought is not contained by the text but is instead ingrained in its formal practices, its manner, and its literary, textual techniques. We have long known that we must ‘[B] regarder autant à la forme qu’à la substance’ (III.8.928) but, in privileging the place of the text as the place of active, continuous thinking, we can see that writing is not destined always to trail behind thought, attempting to set in stone the conclusions and processes which are anterior to

¹⁹⁷ Andy Clark and David Chalmers, ‘The Extended Mind’, pp. 12-16; David Chalmers, ‘Foreword’, in Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. ix-xvi (p. ix).

¹⁹⁸ Terence Cave, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism*, p. 12. Cf. p. 105: ‘A cognitive approach to literary studies would agree with relevance theorists – against the doxa of recent literary theory – that language is the instrument of thought, the most flexible, self-generating instrument ever invented by humans. Yet it would also agree that language is not adequate for every purpose, that it is indeed perhaps fundamentally and constitutionally inadequate.’ I will return to this inadequacy, and Montaigne’s attempts to circumvent it, later in this chapter.

it, but rather that writing is a particular form of thought and, significantly, a form which requires a literary, textual analysis and not simply a philosophical one.

Thinking of Montaigne and his text as a coupled cognitive system allows us to see the *Essais* as a thinking process rather than a product of thought.¹⁹⁹ Viewing the *Essais* in this light, we can rethink Montaigne's 'consubstantiality' with his book. Rather than thinking of the essayist as, in some way, the 'same' as his book or of the *Essais* as a mirror or portrait of his 'Self', we can suggest that the author and his text are linked in a system such that thought occurs along this 'in-between' space – the space between Montaigne and the texts he reads (which includes his own text), between Montaigne and the objects he assays (which includes himself). This is the space of the page: the space in which he does his thinking, employing language not to express his thoughts but to do the thinking itself. The text is 'consubstantial' with Montaigne because it is part of his cognitive process.

But Montaigne does not only think with his text; he also thinks with the texts of others. Seneca, Plutarch, and the other authors he uses are his 'scrabble tiles': he moves them around, placing one next to another and placing one or more next to his 'own' scrabble tile which is his own writing, past and present. He thinks with these authors, combining them with each other and with himself, at times highlighting and stressing points of difference and at others making the distinctions between authors, including himself, invisible. When he thinks with these authors, the text becomes the 'in-between' space: one which is simultaneously, multiply, and fluidly occupied by Montaigne and Seneca and Plutarch and anyone else he engages and thinks with (and this may include the reader). Authorship in the *Essais*, then, functions in-between authors and this in-between space is the space of the book: the place of writing and thinking. I argue that it

¹⁹⁹ This position has been advocated by Terence Cave in *How to Read Montaigne*.

is in thinking with and in writing that Montaigne creates a text which is moving, ‘glissant et coulant’.

‘Tantost elle dissipe, tantost elle rassemble: elle vient et puis s’en va’

The closing pages of the ‘Apologie’, famous as an extreme example of Montaigne’s habit of silently borrowing from his reading, will serve as a case-study with which to interrogate these key ideas of authoring ‘in-between’. At the end of this notoriously long chapter on the impossibility of human knowledge, Montaigne reaches something of a conclusion:

[A] Finalement, il n’y a aucune constante existence, ny de nostre estre, ny de celuy des objects. Et nous, et nostre jugement, et toutes choses mortelles vont coulant et roulant sans cesse. Ainsin il ne se peut establir rien de certain de l’un à l’autre, et le jugeant et le jugé estans en continuelle mutation et branle. (II.12.601).

Everything, he asserts, is in a constant state of flux and this movement is not limited to the physical world but is extended also to our faculties of judgement: it is not simply that we cannot judge because what we observe is unstable; we too are subject to this same lack of fixity and this includes our mental processes and thoughts. ‘Coulant et roulant’ might remind us of the Plutarchan ‘refrein’ from earlier in the chapter (‘glissant et coulant’), but what follows makes this connection much more palpable. Without acknowledgement, the following four pages in the 1588 edition²⁰⁰ consist of an extended transcript of the closing sections of Plutarch’s ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’.

Montaigne does make some changes – additions, elisions, suppressions, and substitutions – and, though these are typically not substantial, they are undoubtedly significant. André Tournon has studied the effect of Montaigne’s punctuation: where

²⁰⁰ Approximately two pages in the Villey-Saulnier edition.

Amyot renders Plutarch's developing, logical argument in long phrases, punctuated gently and unobtrusively with 'virgules, qui jalonnent les corpures syntaxiques', Montaigne employs 'ponctuations fortes' – full-stops and majuscules – to segment the text and to rupture its easy flow.²⁰¹ There are a number of word substitutions – 'communication' for 'participation' (II.12.601, 'Que signifioit ce mot E'i', fol. 356v.), 'De façon' for 'De manière' (II.12.602, fol. 357r.), 'espece' for 'sorte' (ibid., ibid.) – as well as instances where Montaigne curtails Amyot's periphrastic tendencies, replacing, for example, Amyot's 'la mesme forme & figure de visage, ny le mesme sentiment' with 'le mesme sentiment' (fol. 357r., II.12.603). Some suppressions, however, are more significant: in the list of rhetorical questions regarding personal inconstancy or change, Montaigne chooses to leave out a question which would seem to have significant implications for the practice of transcription he is currently engaged in as well as for the issues regarding translation which underpin his use of Amyot-Plutarch: 'comment usons nous d'autres & differents langages?' (fol. 357r.). One would think that this question of changing languages would be seized upon and its absence is conspicuous.

There are also additions: four lines from Lucretius and a development of Plutarch's reference to Heraclitus' statement on the impossibility of stepping into the same river twice. Here, Montaigne expands the doxography to include Plato (who speaks the words of Socrates), Homer (whose words are spoken first by Socrates and then Plato), Parmenides, Pythagoras, the Stoics, Epicharmus, 'tous les Philosophes' (II.12.601-602). As Pouilloux has noted, most of these references are taken from other opuscles by Plutarch: the exception is the reference to Plato, Homer, and Parmenides which is taken from the *Theaetetus* (152 d-e) – though Pouilloux argues that this was one

²⁰¹ André Tournon, 'Les Palimpsestes du "langage coupé"', *La Langue de Rabelais – La Langue de Montaigne*, pp. 351-369 (pp. 355-356).

of Plutarch's source texts for this passage.²⁰² Isabelle Konstantinovic has commented that Plutarch echoes Plato's reference to Homer in 'Les Opinions des philosophes', fol. 440r.²⁰³ Konstantinovic has also suggested that the reference to Pythagoras is taken from Plutarch's 'Les Opinions des philosophes' itself, refuting the suggestion found in Villey that this is the product of Montaigne having misremembered Sextus' ascription of this idea to Protagoras in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.²⁰⁴ The references to the Stoics and to Epicharmus are from 'Des communes conceptions contre les Stoïques' (fols. 586r.-v.) and 'Pourquoy la justice divine differe quelque fois la punition des malefices' (fol. 264v.) respectively. With this doxographic compilation, Montaigne seems to be pulling away from Plutarch, reworking his text and introducing a cacophony of disagreeing voices, amplifying and augmenting the chorus, incorporating – particularly in the case of Homer, Socrates, and Plato – ambiguous voices that seem to bleed into one another. The problem of authorship – who wrote this? Montaigne or Plutarch? (or Amyot?) – becomes more complicated as this apparent diversion is, broadly if not absolutely, a return to Plutarch. These changes compound the issues raised by the act of extended transcription: how are we to respond to the opposed practices of faithful copying and free-roaming divergence? How do these changes impact on our understanding of the 'authorship' of this passage? And if, as I suggest, Montaigne expected most of his readers not to easily, readily identify the provenance of this passage from the outset, how are we to gauge the (intended) reception not only of the act of transcription but also of the changes made to the source-text?

²⁰² J.-Y. Pouilloux, 'Montaigne et Plutarque I: sur le *Ei* de Delphes', *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*, pp. 245-262 (pp. 253-255.)

²⁰³ Konstantinovic, *Montaigne et Plutarque*, p. 370.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Cf. Amyot's rendering of the Plutarchan passage, 'Les sectateurs de Thales & de Pythagoras, & les Stoïques, disent que ceste matiere est variable, muable, alterable & glissante', fol. 444r. See also the Sextusian passage in Hervet's edition, I.32.440: 'Dicit ergo vir ille [Protagoras], Materiam fluxilem esse, ipsa autem assidue fluente, adiunctione pro ablationibus fieri, & sensus transmutari ac variari & pro aetatibus & pro aliis corporum constitutionibus.'

It is only after having transcribed this extended passage that it is made apparent that what preceded was, in some way, ‘emprunté’: ‘[A] A cette conclusion si religieuse d’un homme payen je veux joindre seulement ce mot d’un tesmoing de mesme condition’ (II.12.603). What follows is a translated quotation from Seneca and while this is also anonymous, as is often the case in Montaigne’s Senecan borrowings, we recognise it to be ‘emprunté’ from the outset. The Plutarchan ‘emprunt’, however, is much less clearly delineated and it is by no means apparent that an early modern reader, perhaps more familiar with the Plutarchan text, would immediately and confidently recognise this source. We might note the presence of part of this passage in *L’Esprit des Essais de Michel, Seigneur de Montaigne*, an abridged and reworked version of the *Essais* first published in 1677. These abridgements claim to excise the essayist’s quotations (though they were produced largely to circumvent the issue of the *Essais* having been placed on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* in 1676): nevertheless, the concluding movement of this passage is included and, notably, the text does not include the line which follows in which the words are ascribed to the ‘homme payen’ (II.12.602).²⁰⁵ My argument is not necessarily that the editors of this edition would have been unaware of the Plutarchan provenance – though they may well have been – but rather that this epitome of Montaigne’s *Essais*, a distillation of all that is his and is unique to him, presents this passage in such a way that shows a contemporary or early reader would not have encountered this and known immediately, without thinking, that these are words taken from Plutarch. Amyot’s Plutarch was certainly widely read though, while a specialist reader – a Gournay or a Goulart, perhaps²⁰⁶ – might have identified this conclusion to

²⁰⁵ *L’Esprit des Essais de Michel, Seigneur de Montaigne* (Paris: Charles de Sercy, 1679), p. 127. First printed in 1677.

²⁰⁶ On Simon Goulart as a reader and editor of Montaigne and Plutarch, see *Simon Goulart, un pasteur aux intérêts vastes comme le monde*, ed. by Olivier Pot (Geneva: Droz, 2013), particularly Neil Kenny, “‘Rendre commode ce qui pourrait nous nuire en beaucoup de sortes’: le détournement des textes et de la curiosité chez Simon Goulart”, pp. 57-73, Marie-Dominique Legrand, ‘Simon Goulart, éditeur de Plutarque: exploration de ses notes et de ses commentaires à la traduction de

the ‘Apologie’ as the conclusion to the Plutarchan text, it seems unlikely that this would have been the case for most readers.

Let us return to the passage itself and particularly the moment at which Montaigne shifts from transcription to composition. Upon reaching this point in the chapter, it becomes clear that an undefined portion of what we have just read was, in some way, not written by Montaigne. His intertextual practices here are unusual, even by his own standards. We might compare this to other passages in which he transcribes or translates extended portions of ancient texts: at the end of II.35, for instance, he translates a long portion of Seneca’s epistle 104 though this is introduced clearly and explicitly when he writes, ‘[A] En l’une des lettres qu’il escrit à Lucilius’ and its terminal point is similarly demarcated with ‘Voilà ses mots’ (II.35.750).²⁰⁷ Alternatively, we may look to one of the many instances in which Montaigne’s borrowings are left unannounced: I have already highlighted an example of this in Chapter One where the essayist ventriloquizes the figure of Seneca-Epicurus, a passage which is made up from translated sentences lifted from the *Epistles* (I.40.247-248). But these are *sententiae*, lifted from their original context and re-combined. At the end of the ‘Apologie’, Montaigne is doing something quite different: he transcribes with a high degree of fidelity an argumentative, sequential discourse all while respecting its order. This is not a patchwork of sayings but a sustained argument and, significantly, one with ambiguous perimeters. Montaigne’s reference to ‘cette conclusion’ prompts us to look back over what we have read. The preceding sentence – the last sentence of the ‘emprunt’ – begins: ‘Parquoy *il faut conclurre* que Dieu seul est, non point selon aucune mesure du

Jacques Amyot’, pp. 111-124, André Tournon, ‘Le Diable de Delphes: commentaires prophylactiques de Simon Goulart’, pp. 237-253, and Philippe Desan, ‘Simon Goulart, éditeur de Montaigne’, pp. 289-303. See also Daisy A. Aaronian, *Simon Goulart and the Calvinist Edition of Montaigne’s Essais (1595)*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University (2009).

²⁰⁷ Cf. I.33.218 where Montaigne again cites, in translation, an extended portion of Seneca (*Ep.* 22) with a clearly demarcated beginning and ending.

temps, mais selon une éternité immuable et immobile, non mesurée par temps, ny subjecte à aucune déclinaison’ (my emphasis). This lexical echo highlights this sentence, differentiating it from what came before: it seems that Montaigne is leading his reader to assume that this, and only this, is the ‘conclusion si religieuse’.

This extract has, on occasion, been highlighted as an exemplar of Montaignean plagiarism.²⁰⁸ Few scholars have seen this as an example of Montaigne’s ‘emprunts’ which are ‘[C] si fameux et anciens qu’ils [...] se nomm[ent] assez’ (II.10.408): in a study from 1906, Joseph de Zangroniz made the case (which does not seem to have been defended in recent years) that ‘les auteurs qu’il citait étaient tous de noms fameux et anciens, puisque tout le monde connaissait alors le Plutarque d’Amyot.’²⁰⁹ Most frequently, it is seen as evidence of Montaigne’s process of assimilating, digesting, or asserting ownership of his reading. This passage benefits, however, from a dual perspective, looking at Montaigne’s textual practice of transcription through the lens of what is being transcribed. Noting that these pages are ‘souvent évoquées et rarement analysées’,²¹⁰ Pouilloux’s brief study is one of a very small number to approach this extract while remembering Montaigne’s crucial assertion that ‘[B] les paroles redictes ont, comme autre son, autre sens’ (III.12.1063). Pouilloux’s religious, rather than

²⁰⁸ See, for example, Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, *Montaigne: l’écriture de l’essai*, p. 75, Bernard Sève, *Montaigne: des règles pour l’esprit* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), p. 269, and Marilyn Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit, and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 114-5, 128. On ‘plagiarism’ in an early modern context, see *Emprunt, plagiat, réécriture aux XV^e, XVI^e, XVII^e siècles*, ed. by M. Couton et al. (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2006) and *Borrowed Feathers: Plagiarism and the Limits of Imitation in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Hall Bjørnstad (Oslo: Unipub, 2008).

²⁰⁹ *Montaigne, Amyot, Saliat: étude sur les sources des Essais de Montaigne*, p. viii.

²¹⁰ J.-Y. Pouilloux, ‘Autour du *Ei* de Delphes’, *Moralia et œuvres morales à la Renaissance*, pp. 293-308 (p. 295). A slightly reworked version of this study, referenced above, was included as an annex in Pouilloux’s *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*. Pouilloux also discusses this extract, albeit more briefly, in ‘Comment commencer à penser véritablement?’, *Montaigne: l’éveil de la pensée*, pp. 131-146 (pp. 136-137). Again, Pouilloux’s focus rests firmly with shared ideas, without considering the semantic – and, by extension, ontological/philosophical – impact of this transcription: for Pouilloux, ‘le texte de Plutarque a pour effet de définir un nouvel objet de connaissance (les phénomènes tels qu’ils apparaissent), et une nouvelle manière de concevoir la vérité: vérité relative, rapportée au moment où elle est énoncée’, p. 137.

(inter)textual focus, leads him to the broadly convincing conclusion that ‘Montaigne ne s’autorise à *conclure* un discours sur Dieu’, and that, in these words of Plutarch’s/Amyot’s, he finds ‘un véritable réconfort dans la solitude et un soutien dans l’audace de penser’.²¹¹ But where does this leave Montaigne as the ‘author’ of this passage? I suggest that, rather than seeing this as a problem which needs to be resolved, we ought to instead allow for a model of authoring which can sustain plurality, duality, and simultaneity. Rather than attempting to determine who – Montaigne or Plutarch – is the ‘real’ author of this passage, I argue that the text and, indeed, Montaigne’s reflections on his own practice push us to consider the implications of doubtful and unresolved authorship: a mode of authorship which is capable of writing positively without falling into assertive dogmatism and a means of displacing the act of authoring into what we will see is an ambiguous, uncertain, and in-between space.

The passage begins by noting that ‘[A] Nous n’avons aucune communication²¹² à l’estre’ before suggesting that ‘si, de fortune, vous fichez vostre pensée à vouloir prendre son estre, ce sera ne plus ne moins que qui voudroit empoigner l’eau: car tant plus il serrera et pressera ce qui de sa nature coule par tout, tant plus il perdra ce qu’il vouloit tenir et empoigner’ (II.12.601). This water metaphor leads to the famous teaching of Heraclitus, ‘que jamais homme n’estoit deux fois entré en mesme riviere’ (II.12.602). This Heraclitean philosophy of movement and flux – both in the world and within the individual – is developed at length, taking examples and metaphors from nature, before focusing more specifically on the changing nature of the individual.²¹³

²¹¹ Ibid. pp. 307-308 (cf. *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*, pp. 261-262).

²¹² Amyot has ‘participation’, *Les Œuvres morales et meslees*, fol. 356v. Where minor, one word differences occur, I follow Montaigne’s text.

²¹³ A significant body of scholarship has been dedicated to Montaigne’s relationship to ideas – and particularly Heraclitean ideas – of movement. See, principally, Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), Patrick Henry, ‘Montaigne and Heraclitus: Pattern and Flux, Continuity and Change in “Du repentir”’, *Montaigne Studies*, 4 (1992), pp. 7-18, Michel Jeanneret,

These lines from Plutarch look as though they could be the *Essais* in microcosm: stressing the need to see the folly in fearing death and to ‘apprendre à mourir’, they go on to foreshadow Montaigne’s claim, ‘[B] Je ne peints pas l’estre[,] Je peints le passage’ (III.2.805), highlighting the ungraspable change not only of the external world but also of the personal and internal. And yet they are not, at least according to an everyday, commonplace understanding, authored by Montaigne.

The closing section of the Plutarchan passage turns then to its final question: ‘Mais qu’est-ce donc qui est véritablement?’ The answer is God, the eternal, ‘c’est à dire qui n’a jamais eu de naissance, ny n’aura jamais fin; à qui le temps n’apporte jamais aucune mutation’. The gulf between, on the one hand, the eternal and, on the other, impotent, temporally fixed human language is drawn out, returning us to the theme of mankind’s inability to achieve knowledge through reason highlighted earlier in this Plutarchan passage²¹⁴ and, indeed, throughout this chapter. Language is deceptive:

[...] à qui appartiennent ces mots: devant et apres, et a esté ou sera, lesquels tout de prime face montrent evidemment que ce n’est pas chose qui soit: car ce seroit grande sottise et fauceté toute apparente de dire que cela soit qui n’est pas encore en estre, ou qui desjà a cessé d’estre. Et quand à ces mots: present, instant, maintenant, par lesquels il semble que principalement nous soustenons et fondons l’intelligence du temps, la raison le decouvrant le destruit tout sur le champ: car elle le fend incontinent et le part en futur et en passé, comme le voulant voir necessairement desparty en deux. [...] ces termes là sont declinaisons, passages ou vicissitudes de ce qui ne peut durer ny demeurer en estre. (II.12.603).

This almost sophistic word-play approaches the language of the paradox, with Montaigne’s/Plutarch’s bisection of time into future and past recalling the famous paradoxes of Zeno: this is a conception and application of language which is deliberately difficult and deliberately slippery. Language, as this passage makes clear, attempts to

‘Montaigne et l’œuvre mobile’, *Carrefour Montaigne*, pp. 37-62 and, by the same author, *Perpetuum mobile: métamorphoses des corps et des œuvres de Vinci à Montaigne* (Paris: Macula, 1997).

²¹⁴ See, for example, II.12.601: ‘la raison, y cherchant une réelle subsistance, se trouve deceue, ne pouvant rien apprehender de subsistant et permanent.’

temporally fix not only the unknowable eternity of God but also the fluctuating, constantly moving nature of all things. Words give us the illusion of (temporary) stasis, leading us into the ‘grande sottise et fauceté’ of thinking that we might be able to get a grip on something, some aspect of ‘l’estre’. Our folly in thinking that language might be static, or capable of giving some stability to the world, is implicitly gestured towards throughout the source text for this section: Plutarch’s treatise is primarily not about the slippery nature of ‘things’ but of one, polysemous, polyvalent word.

This linguistic, semantic issue is further highlighted by Amyot’s rendering: he uses the key term ‘declinaisons’ twice in quick succession to translate two different words: the final line of the passage quoted above finds its echo in the following sentence where he notes that God’s eternity is ‘immuable & immobile, non mesurée par temps, ny subjecte à aucune declinaison’ (fol. 357v.). In Greek, we read: ‘ταῦτα γὰρ ἐγγλίσεις τινές εἰσι καὶ μεταβάσεις καὶ παραλλάξεις; ἀκίνητον καὶ ἄχρονον καὶ ἀνέγγλιπτον’ (my emphasis).²¹⁵ In the first instance, a more literal translation might be ‘for these things are certain *inclinations/deviations*, changes, and alterations’; in the latter, ‘[the eternity of God is] unmoved and timeless and unchanging’. In translating these as ‘declinaisons’, Amyot retains the sense of deviation, as evidenced by the triplet which includes ‘passages & vicissitudes’, while affording a further link to this problem of language, particularly as he places a stress on ‘ces termes’ rather than the ontological states to which they refer (Plutarch’s text reads ‘ταῦτα γὰρ’, ‘for these’). In the original Greek, it seems that Plutarch is thinking about movement and change with regard to physics, temporality, and ontology (‘we cannot say that what is “was” or “will be” because “was” and “will be” describe *states* of change and movement’) while Amyot shifts the emphasis or rather broadens its implications, pushing us to think about language as temporal and

²¹⁵ Plutarch, *Moralia*, ed. and trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), vol. V. p. 244.

perspectival: these words ('ces termes la') are part of a grammar which takes person, number, and tense as its foundation; they are taken from a linguistic apparatus which is built on principles entirely opposed to those of the eternal, unchanging state of divine being. Amyot's translation, then, blurs the linguistic problem with the problems of ontology.

Further, as Wes Williams has shown, the opening line of this 'emprunt' – 'Nous n'avons aucune communication à l'estre, par ce que toute humaine nature est tousjours au milieu entre le naistre et le mourir' – 'turns around a further, peculiar, resonant coupling – "estre/naistre" (being/being born) – the better to argue their relational non-identity'.²¹⁶ This couple is returned to a few lines later: 'ce qui commence à naistre ne parvient jamais à perfection d'estre, pourautant que ce naistre n'acheve jamais' (II.12.602). As Williams argues, 'estre' and 'naistre' 'sound the same in French, but for the "n"; but it's the extra "n" that makes the negative, but never quite conclusive, difference in our nature'.²¹⁷ Language, like everything in this fluctuating, Heraclitean world, may superficially appear stable, but if we look carefully it quickly becomes apparent that we have taken 'ce qui apparait pour ce qui est' (II.12.603).

How are we to read the concluding passages of the 'Apologie' from the perspective of authorship? And where is Montaigne's place amid all this uncertainty and movement? It seems that we read this long 'emprunt' assuming it to have been written by Montaigne and, at the end, are surprised to see that it was not (or, at least, some of it was not).²¹⁸ Are we to assume that we were tricked into thinking this was written by Montaigne when, in reality, Plutarch (or, perhaps, Amyot) was the 'real' author? Or has

²¹⁶ Wes Williams, 'Being in the Middle: Translation, Transition and the Early Modern', *Paragraph*, 29 (2006), pp. 27-39 (p. 36).

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ann Hartle has said that this 'creates a jarring break in the conversational flow of his writing' though Hartle leaves aside the question of whose writing might be described as being 'conversational'. *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher*, p. 75.

Montaigne, in selecting this text and integrating it so subtly into his own work, somehow become the author himself? Perhaps, rather, it is both of these and, of course, neither of these.²¹⁹ In an extract on the constantly changing nature of all things, in which seemingly static language is shown to be no more than a deceptive illusion, taken from a text on the plurality of meanings contained simultaneously in one word and inserted into a text on the impotence of human reason, can these words written by Plutarch, rewritten by Amyot, rewritten by Montaigne really ‘mean’ the same thing?

Flicking Noses: Montaigne’s Challenge to the Reader

In ‘Des livres’, Montaigne writes: ‘[C] Je veux qu’ils donnent une nazarde à Plutarque sur mon nez et qu’ils s’eschaudent à injurier Seneque en moy’ (II.10.408). Elsewhere, in the ‘Apologie’, he restates this playful antagonism towards his source-hunting reader though, this time, the issue is inverted: ‘[B] j’en laisse plus librement aller mes caprices en public: d’autant que, bien qu’ils soyent nez chez moy et sans patron, je sçay qu’ils trouveront leur relation à quelque humeur ancienne; et ne faudra quelqu’un de dire: Voylà d’où il le print!’ (II.12.546). Montaigne seems to give this anonymous ‘quelqu’un’ some credibility when, on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, he inserts – ironically, of course – a line taken from Cicero’s *De divinatione* before his own statement, giving his comment the appearance of a gloss on this ancient source: ‘*Nil tam absurde dici potest quod non dicatur ab aliquo philosophorum.*’ He is collapsing the notion of precedence and authority: his ideas may have antecedents, waiting to be revealed by the work of the pedant, but they are still his ideas. Except for when they are not and we as readers find ourselves to have been tricked into criticising the classical authorities hiding behind Montaigne.

²¹⁹ We might think again of Trouillogan: ‘ne l’un, ne l’autre, mais tous les deux ensemble’, François Rabelais, *Tiers Livre*, chapter 35, p. 465.

The acknowledgement that we are almost inevitably bound to repeat old ideas does not, however, fully account for his desire to actively lead his reader – perhaps only the ‘[C] indiligent lecteur’ (III.9.994) – into flicking Plutarch on Montaigne’s nose and into burning himself in criticising Seneca in his text. He engages in a game of deliberately concealing provenance, hiding his sources, and – occasionally – unmasking his ‘emprunts’ at the last minute, revealing to us precisely whose arguments we have been mocking: ‘[B] Nous produisons trois sortes de vent: celui qui sort par embas est trop sale; celui qui sort par la bouche porte quelque reproche de gourmandise; le troisieme est l’estrenuement; et, parce qu’il vient de la teste et est sans blasme, nous luy faisons cet honneste recueil. Ne vous moquez pas de cette subtilité; elle est (dict-on) d’Aristote’ (III.6.899). Here, Aristotle, ‘[C] monarque de la doctrine [A] moderne’ (I.26.146), is unmasked and we recognise the heterodoxy of our thought though, even here, the rhetorical effect of Aristotle’s authority is complicated by the parenthetical ‘dict-on’: does this suggest that the provenance of this tripartite account is in question or that this piece of *auctoritas* is common knowledge?²²⁰ The authority under which Montaigne makes this claim to *auctoritas* – a claim which is, itself, undermining Aristotle’s authority – is destabilised and rendered deeply suspect.

The Aristotelian provenance is, in any case, deliberately withheld: this is not an instance in which Montaigne has encountered his own idea in his reading but rather a deliberate deception. ‘[C] Parmi tant d’emprunts,’ he writes, ‘je suis bien aise d’en pouvoir desrober quelqu’un, *les desguisant* et difformant à nouveau service’ (III.12.1056, my emphasis). He not only changes, adapts, or assimilates his ‘emprunts’; he disguises

²²⁰ We may be inclined to lean towards the latter interpretation, though to call this ‘common knowledge’ may be excessive. Balsamo, Magnien, and Magnien-Simonin note: ‘Aristote attribue en effet à l’éternuement “une origine divine” (*Problèmes*, XXXIII, vii et ix; 962 a-b); il est peut-être cité à travers Caelius Rhodiginus, *Antiquarum lectionum libri*, XXIV, xxvii: “*Sternutamentum censerì quandoque ominosum...*”.’ They also note that Antoine du Verdier (1544-1600) dedicates a chapter of his *Diverses leçons* to this question. See *Les Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 1763 n. 1.

them, giving them the appearance of being ‘his’ when they are not. Steven Rendall has suggested that Montaigne ‘wants to deceive the reader into thinking them his own, in order to chasten those inclined to criticise a modern author for writing something they would accept easily enough if it were attached to an ancient and prestigious name’.²²¹ He goes on to suggest, however, that ‘the changes Montaigne makes in the texts that he appropriates from others are intended primarily to conceal this theft rather than to demonstrate his own mastery over the stolen materials’.²²² It appears that Montaigne disguises, deforms, even mutilates²²³ his ‘emprunts’ so as to pass them off as his own, without the threat of detection.

The relationship between the essayist and his text is, however, repeatedly problematized, suggesting that his purpose was other than to take credit for words and ideas extracted from elsewhere. Montaigne’s book is ‘[C] massonné purement de leurs [Seneca and Plutarch] despouilles’ (II.32.721) yet, at the same time, ‘[B] nous allons conformément et tout d’un train, mon livre et moy [...]: qui touche l’un, touche l’autre’ (III.2.806). Montaigne is ‘consubstantial’ with his text, yet the text is built entirely from the spoils of others.²²⁴ He recognises that:

[B] quelqu’un pourroit dire de moy que j’ay seulement faict icy
un amas de fleurs estrangeres, n’ayant fourny du mien que le

²²¹ *Distinguo: Reading Montaigne Differently* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 56. Cf. Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani who suggests that Montaigne’s seemingly contradictory claims – ‘dire tantôt: “Ce n’est non plus selon Platon que selon moi”, et tantôt: “Ce n’est pas moi qui dis cela, c’est Platon (ou Plutarque ou Sénèque)”’ – serve as a ‘caution’ to the ‘indiligent lecteur’, prompting him or her to reflect upon and examine statements without recourse to ‘autorité’, *Montaigne ou la vérité du mensonge* (Geneva: Droz, 2000), p. 129.

²²² *Ibid.* p. 58.

²²³ Erased in the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, Montaigne, in the 1588 edition, compared himself to a horse thief: ‘Comme ceux qui desrobent les chevaux, je leur peins le crin et la queuë, et parfois je les esborgne: si le premier maistre s’en servoit à bestes d’amble, je les mets au trot, et au bast, s’ils servoient à la selle’, III.12.1056.

²²⁴ This imagery echoes the metaphorical language of contemporary theories of *imitatio*. See, for instance, the conclusion to Du Bellay’s *La Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise* (Paris: L’Angelier, 1549): ‘marchez couraigeusement vers cete superbe Cité Romaine: & des serves Despouilles d’elle (comme vous avez fait plus d’une fois) ornez voz Temples, & Autelz’, fol. F5v. I will return to Montaigne’s relationship with early modern models of *imitatio* at the end of this subsection.

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 veut faire montre que du mien, et de ce qui est mien par nature.' (III.12.1055).

Here, Montaigne combines a whole series of different metaphors: his text is a bouquet of flowers made into a patchwork wherein only the thread is his own which is then worn as borrowed embroidery.²²⁵ Semantic fields and diverse imagery are brought together, forming a textual mirror of the 'fantastique bigarrure' he is describing. This is a confused, confusing series of sentences, playing with the clichés of early modern discussions of *imitatio*, before culminating in the claim that, while Montaigne's text consists mainly of 'emprunts' which are 'estrangeres', with only the thread that connects them being truly his own, his purpose is to show *only* what is his own and, particularly, 'ce qui est [s]ien par nature', not 'par étude'.

So far, we have seen that the relationship between Montaigne and his text is problematic: it is little more than a collection of foreign flowers and yet it aims to show nothing that is not his; words and ideas which seem to be his are revealed (either by Montaigne himself or through 'pedantic' source identification) to belong to someone else; indeed, he wants the reader to mistake something which is not his for something which is. At least at some points in the text, it seems that Montaigne wants his readers to be confused about who has authored what within the *Essais*.

This serves a number of functions. First, and most simply, this is a means of destabilising the tradition of *auctoritas*. The example of Aristotle's account of the three

²²⁵ 'Parement' seems to refer quite specifically to textile ornamentation: the *Trésor de la langue française* notes its historical meaning as 'Étoffe riche ou voyante qui ornaît autrefois le bas des manches des habits d'hommes ou les devants d'habits d'hommes ou de femmes'. Similarly, Cotgrave's dictionary gives 'A decking, trickling, garnishing, adorning, a comelie dressing [...], also, Arras, Tapestrie, or any costlie Hangings', *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Adam Islip, 1611). The metaphors seem to move logically in spite of their disconnection: flowers are gathered by thread; thread sews patchwork fabric; textile ornaments are all that are shown.

types of wind, quoted above, is particularly clear on this point: an idea seems foolish until we find out that it was Aristotle's idea, at which point we recognise Aristotle's folly. We might compare this with Montaigne's comments on Aristotle's own practice: '[A] Aristote nous entasse ordinairement un grand nombre d'autres opinions et d'autres creances, pour y comparer la sienne et nous faire voir de combien il est allé plus outre et combien il a approché de plus pres la verisimilitude: car la verité ne se juge point par autorité et tesmoignage d'autrui' (II.12.507). Taking this method of judging an argument without recourse to its originator much further, Montaigne, in revealing the author only after we have scoffed at him, comes upon a fairly simple means of instilling a sense of anti-authoritarian scepticism in the reader.

There is, however, much more to this practice of sustaining ambivalence and ambiguity with regard to who has authored what elements of the text: Montaigne is issuing the reader with a challenge. He frequently refers to his 'emprunts' as 'larrecins'; he tells us that his borrowings are hidden; that 'emprunts' make up the bulk of his text; that he needs to be deplumed.²²⁶ In doing so, he casts doubt on the entirety of his text and his pretence to have 'authored' it: surely, if some of what seems to have been written by Montaigne's hand is, in fact, stolen from Seneca or Plutarch, we risk being burned in assuming any part of the text to be Montaigne's. If we know that an undefined amount of the *Essais* is not his, how are we to establish what is? Indeed, if someone were capable of depluming Montaigne, what exactly would they find? We might think of the tradition, mentioned earlier in this chapter, of abridged versions of the *Essais* which were produced during the second half of the seventeenth-century. These texts not only excise 'les trop frequentes citations Latines, qu'il devoit d'autant

²²⁶ '[C] J'aimeray quelqu'un qui me sçache deplumer', II.10.408.

plus éviter, qu'elles sont inutiles',²²⁷ but also 'toutes les choses Historiques & divertissantes'.²²⁸ A good deal of 'choses Historiques' remain in these abridged versions, however, testifying to the difficulty inherent in trying to establish what is his and what isn't.

Responses to this problem and to Montaigne's sustained, purposeful ambiguity of authorship have typically fallen into one of two camps.²²⁹ A small number of readers have practiced an extreme – though thoroughly unMontaignean – form of doubt suggesting that, as his status as 'author' is in question, 'ses *Essais* ne sont qu'un tissu de traits d'histoire, de petits contes, de bons mots, de distiques et d'apophtegmes'.²³⁰ Malebranche wrote at length of what he saw as Montaigne's compilation of borrowed 'bon mots', judging the text as pedantic in spite of the essayist's claims otherwise: 'tout copiste qu'il est, il ne sent point son copiste'.²³¹ Interpretations of this kind are rare, particularly in modern criticism, though we might suggest that a diminished, diluted version of Malebranche's reading is latent in studies such as Villey's *Les Sources et évolution des Essais*, only in as much as the practice of source-identification takes, as a starting point, the assumption that anything and everything is a borrowing, allusion, or reference.

A much more common reading, however, takes an equally extreme position, asserting that, through a process of textual digestion, Montaigne is the author – and, indeed, owner – of everything within the text. Though he qualifies this by noting that 'Alien discourse cannot be "attached" to the self, is external to it',²³² Terence Cave,

²²⁷ 'Preface', Michel de Montaigne, *L'Esprit des Essais de Michel, Seigneur de Montaigne*, fol. A4v. See also *Pensées de Montaigne propres à former l'esprit et les mœurs* (Paris: Anisson, 1700).

²²⁸ Ibid. fol. A5r.

²²⁹ This dichotomy has been introduced above. Here, my contention is that Montaigne *knowingly* leads the 'indiligent' reader into one of these two 'errors'.

²³⁰ Nicolas Malebranche, *Recherche de la vérité* (1674), in *Œuvres*, ed. by Geneviève Rodis-Lewis and Germain Malbreil (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), Vol. I, p. 275.

²³¹ Ibid. pp. 283-284.

²³² *The Cornucopian Text*, p. 272. Cave has more recently made a similar assertion in *Pré-histoires: textes troublés au seuil de la modernité* (Geneva: Droz, 1999): referring to the passage in which

discussing the Danaïdes metaphor in ‘De l’institution des enfants’, describes ‘the activity of transmission or exchange (“commerce”), by which the textual substance of Plutarch and Seneca is displaced into a discourse bearing the signature “Montaigne”’.²³³ Similarly, Richard Regosin, though keen to differentiate his work from ‘the quest for historical antecedents’, argues that ‘the analysis of sources uncovers strategies, implicit and explicit, which reflect Montaigne’s attempt to impose both his work and the self it articulates as fundamentally his own’.²³⁴ In order to achieve this end, Regosin argues, ‘Montaigne must subordinate his sources’.²³⁵ We saw, in the introduction to this chapter, Floyd Gray’s argument that Montaigne ‘n’hésitait pas [...] à les [i.e. les citations en vers] détourner de leur voie première pour les faire siens’.²³⁶ Olivier Guerrier has suggested that Montaigne’s interweaving of verse and prose requires a mode of reading which considers the verse ‘emprunts’ as fully integrated into the essayist’s own discourse: ‘en refusant de les traduire, Montaigne semble compter sur la compétence du lecteur lettré pour qu’elles soient comprise puis fondues au flux sémantique du discours, par appropriation et digestion’.²³⁷ More recently, Guerrier has approached this question of ownership of words and ideas from a different perspective, suggesting that we ought to ‘faire confiance à l’auteur quand il évoque l’antériorité de sa “pensée”’.²³⁸ Taking Montaigne at his word, Guerrier sees Montaigne as formulating his thought and then encountering it, ‘de façon aléatoire’, resulting in a ‘superposition [qui] permet de parfaire

Montaigne describes his habit of ‘desguisant et difformant’ his ‘emprunts’ (III.12.1056), Cave writes that ‘Montaigne parle plus agressivement que dans 1.26 de son appropriation et même de sa déformation du langage des autres’, p. 125.

²³³ Ibid. p. 271.

²³⁴ ‘Sources and Resources: The “Pretexts” of Originality in Montaigne’s *Essais*’, *SubStance*, 21 (1979), pp. 103-115 (p. 104).

²³⁵ Ibid. p. 106.

²³⁶ *Montaigne bilingue: le latin des Essais*, p. 39.

²³⁷ *Quand “les poètes feignent”: “fantasie” et fiction dans les Essais de Montaigne*, p. 45.

²³⁸ ‘Dans la plupart des auteurs, je vois l’homme qui écrit; dans Montaigne, l’homme qui pense’, *Montaigne Studies*, 27 (2015), pp. 89-98 (p. 93).

la “possession” du déjà-là’.²³⁹ Seen from this perspective, Montaigne seems to be capable of ‘owning’ and assimilating a text before he has read it. The notion that he assimilates, digests, ‘re-signs’ and, in doing so, re-authors the words he incorporates into his text has become something of a critical commonplace though we might note that Montaigne’s use of the standard apian metaphor originating in Seneca’s eighty-fourth epistle does not refer to its standard referent of textual assimilation through *imitatio* but rather is divorced from textuality entirely, referring instead to ‘[C] un ouvrage tout sien: à sçavoir son jugement’ (I.26.152).²⁴⁰

It may be suggested that such a binary way of thinking about textual ownership is unnecessary, even anachronistic: early modern theorists of *imitatio* speak in terms of grafting, of similarity and difference, blurring this distinction between source-author and imitator.²⁴¹ Pigman’s classic study, dividing classical and early modern metaphorical and conceptual approaches to imitation according to three distinct groupings – digestive, dissimulative, and eristic or combative – testifies to a gradual, graduated schema with a variety of paradigmatic relationships between the two ‘authors’: a text may subtly transform and, depending on the degree of success, become more the ‘property’ of the imitating author; the imitating author may attempt to assert ownership over a text which is determined not to be ‘his/her’ work; or it may be that the imitating author asserts independence in aligning him or herself antagonistically to the source author. This suggests that Montaigne was working within a context where these questions regarding the place and status of authorship were often treated with more nuance than the essayist

²³⁹ Ibid. p. 94.

²⁴⁰ ‘Apes, ut aiunt, debemus imitari, quae vagantur et flores ad mel faciendum idoneos carpunt, deinde quidquid attulere disponunt ac per favos digerunt [...]. De illis non satis constat utrum sucum ex floribus ducant qui protinus mel sit, an quae collegerunt in hunc saporem mixtura quadam et proprietate spiritus sui mutant’, *Ep.* 84.3-4.

²⁴¹ See G. W. Pigman, ‘Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33, 1 (1980) 1-32, Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), and Glyn P. Norton, *The Ideology and Language of Translation in Renaissance France and their Humanist Antecedents* (Geneva: Droz, 1984).

would have us think: these early theorists are clearly accustomed to think of authorial ownership as something which can move along the imaginary line between ‘Author A’ and ‘Author B’. As we have already seen in this subsection, however, Montaigne constantly uses absolutes and opposed binaries when talking about the issue of textual ownership as it pertains to his own text and it is such a binary perspective, from which all is seen to be either ‘his’ or ‘not-his’, that we are encouraged – at least for a moment – to adopt.

Montaigne, then, has issued his reader with an exegetical challenge: if his book is entirely his own though made up almost entirely of material which is not, what are we to make of his status as author? Our response to this problem determines whether we might be considered a ‘[A] suffisant lecteur’ (I.24.127) or an ‘[C] indiligent lecteur’ (III.9.994). In ‘De l’art de conférer’, Montaigne provides us with something of a model for how we ought to respond to this issue:

[B] Le subject, selon qu’il est, peut faire trouver un homme sçavant et memorieux; mais *pour juger en luy les parties plus siennes et plus dignes, la force et beauté de son ame, il faut sçavoir ce qui est sien et ce qui ne l’est point*, et en ce qui n’est pas sien combien on luy doibt en consideration du chois, disposition, ornement et langage qu’il y a fourny. Quoy? s’il a emprunté la matiere et empiré la forme, comme il advient souvent. Nous autres, qui avons peu de pratique avec les livres, sommes en cette peine que, quand nous voyons quelque belle invention en un poëte nouveau, quelque fort argument en un prescheur, nous n’osons pourtant les en louer que nous n’ayons prins instruction de quelque sçavant si cette piece leur est propre ou si elle est estrangere; *jusques lors je me tiens tousjours sur mes gardes*. (III.8.940, my emphasis).

We may be inclined to read this extract – and particularly the first half – as a standard account of *imitatio* as assimilation: one ought to consider the use and application of the borrowed material, its ‘disposition, ornement et langage’, when attempting to judge how well an imitating author has made the source material his own. Notably, this model seems to accommodate some of the non-binary approach to authorship held by

contemporary theorists of imitation though Montaigne's summary of this view is rendered in strict terms of ownership – what is 'his' and what is not; how much we 'owe' the second author – which undermine this somewhat. According to the essayist's summation, this paradigm is one where text belongs either to *x* or *y*; the latter may assert ownership or be deemed to be the owner of text written by an earlier author provided he successfully reworks its formal qualities. The result is that an imitating text rests somewhere on a spectrum but this spectrum is not dynamic: one must make a judgement on the success or otherwise of the second author and this entails placing his/her work on an imaginary line between 'ce qui est sien et ce qui ne l'est point'.

There is a key shift in pronouns, however, in which Montaigne makes plain his distance from such models and practices: 'Nous autres, qui avons peu de pratique avec les livres'. We, as readers, are also 'en cette peine', far from the learned *imitatio* of the anonymous 'on'. Leading by example, Montaigne states that, when he does not know what parts of a text belong to whom, he holds himself 'tousjours sur [ses] gardes' or, we might say, he suspends judgement. But this is not a disinterested or tranquil suspension of judgement: he describes this as an alert, problematic, and difficult experience; one of struggle and anxiety rather than of sublimation and *ataraxia*. We are beginning to see that Montaigne's experience and understanding of this intertextual problem is much less stable, less resolved, and less definitive than those of the imitation theorists or, at least, of those anonymous experts he invokes in this passage: he places himself in opposition to 'sçavant[s]' who are capable of making judgements on these matters but the antithesis he proposes is not the absence of judgement but rather the struggle and the inability to determine things definitively one way or another.²⁴²

²⁴² It is unclear whether Montaigne thinks that this ability to judge – which is associated not with 'us' but with 'them' – would be desirable: it seems that Montaigne accepts without consideration that this ability is beyond him and he therefore does not entertain this idea.

Stretching the opening claim of the *Essais* seemingly to breaking point,²⁴³ Montaigne challenges the reader, expecting the ‘insuffisant lecteur’ to fail: he wants a certain kind of reader to burn himself in thinking the text to be entirely written by his own hand, to be entirely ‘his’, or, alternatively, to see no more than a heap of broken images, gathered together loosely by a thread. Montaigne’s text, ‘glissant et coulant’, seems to be contradictory and both of these readings outlined above attempt to resolve this problem, collapsing the difference inherent in the text.²⁴⁴ As he makes clear throughout the *Essais*, however, ‘[A] en un lieu glissant et coulant suspendons nostre creance’ (II.12.510): to doubt is to suspend judgement rather than to adopt a negative position; Montaigne’s position as author is ‘doubtful’, though we ought not to assert – in the shadow of Malebranche – that he has either succeeded or failed in an attempt to assimilate his texts and make them his own. To do so would be to judge him according to the practices of ‘quelque sçavant’; rather, we – ‘nous autres’ – ought to judge him on his own terms.

‘Le Cul entre deux selles’

So far, my argument has been that Montaigne, when discussing the intertextual aspects of his book and their impact on authorship, adopts extremes, occupying seemingly contradictory and antithetical positions. This is, I suggest, his challenge to the reader: if

²⁴³ ‘C’est icy un livre de bonne foy’. See Yves Delègue, *Montaigne et la mauvaise foi*, passim, esp. ‘Chapitre 1: La “bonne foy” en question: l’avis “au lecteur”’, pp. 15-33. Delègue provides a convincing reading of the ‘littéraire[s] et philosophique[s]’ functions (p. 16) of ‘mauvaise foi’ in an attempt to overcome the limitations of (particularly self-referential) language: ‘l’écriture s’est imposée à lui, parce qu’elle lui est apparue comme la seule pratique, le dernier recours, pour expérimenter cette exigence, toute “fantastique” qu’elle était’, p. 19.

²⁴⁴ Montaigne’s capacity for sustaining difference within his text has been highlighted by a number of scholars, though Montaigne’s intertextual practices are typically marginalised in such discussions, being seen as a platform for different voices though always with Montaigne’s authorial voice as a unified and central overseer. See Steven Rendall’s *Distinguo: Reading Montaigne Differently*, particularly ‘Chapter Four: Appropriation’, and Jean-Yves Pouilloux’s *Lire les Essais de Montaigne*, reprinted in *Montaigne: l’éveil de la pensée*.

we are to be ‘suffisant[s] lecteur[s]’, we must resist the desire to collapse this binary, resolving it one way or another. Instead, we must, like Montaigne, engage in this ‘painful’ and unresolved suspension of judgement: we must hold our guard. The next point to consider, then, is the question of why Montaigne would lead his reader to suspend judgement on authorship in this way. What does he achieve in making authorship the focus of this unresolved tension in which we as readers struggle constantly, actively, to work out what belongs to whom?

‘[A] [J]e fusse en continuelle frayeur et frenesie,’ wrote Montaigne. ‘A chaque minute il me semble que je m’eschape’ (I.20.88). Montaigne, his opinions and perspectives, and his relationship to himself: these figures are all constantly on the move. ‘[A] Je m’eschape tous les jours,’ he notes, ‘et me desrobe à moy’ (II.17.642). As Michel Jeanneret argues, ‘Perçue comme une masse amorphe et fluctuante dans laquelle s’assemblent puis se désassemblent des constellations d’humeurs passagères, la vie intérieure ressemble au chaos originel. Si la personne est cette épave flottante, il n’est pas étonnant que la pensée qu’elle produit soit elle aussi inconstante.’²⁴⁵

The printed page is inherently resistant to this inconstancy: type may be movable, but the text it creates is most certainly not. By this, I do not mean to say that the early modern book was seen to be definitive or final; indeed, the printing history of the *Essais* shows clearly enough that a text could grow and change between editions. Rather, my point is that, once one tries to perform in writing the plural, polyvalent, and constantly shifting nature of thought and cognition, it quickly becomes apparent – and this was especially clear to Montaigne – that language, particularly written language (which lacks the temporality and the assistance of gesture afforded to spoken language), is a medium that is inevitably far too fixed and rigid. Written language might gesture

²⁴⁵ *Perpetuum mobile: métamorphoses des corps et des œuvres de Vinci à Montaigne*, pp. 108-9.

backwards or direct us to jump forwards but the discourse itself inevitably moves sequentially and in order; it might employ temporal markers which describe movement and inconstancy but it is, in itself, incapable of this movement and mutation.

With the rhetorical figure of ‘antiperistasis’, that is, when one force heightens or makes felt another opposing force, Terence Cave has shown one of the ways in which linear, static, printed language can, at certain key moments, figure and represent this conceptual mobility and instability. He takes the example of Montaigne’s ‘address to the princess’ in the ‘Apologie’ to show how he aligns and sustains the antithetical pairing of liberty and constraint.²⁴⁶ The logic of antiperistasis, Cave suggests, ‘se trouve donc doublée d’une inquiétude. Elle est aussi et surtout *mouvement*: nous avons affaire ici à une figure foncièrement instable, représentant le travail d’un esprit qui s’efforce de relier les éléments d’une pensée troublante et disparate’.²⁴⁷

Language – words printed on a page – can, as Cave has shown, represent mimetically the twists and turns of thought; though the polyvalency and the simultaneity of thought is rendered two-dimensional, linear, and sequential. Elsewhere, Cave has studied how language and particularly literary language relies on ‘underspecification’ to gesture towards a conception, understanding, or group of implicatures which cannot be expressed fully and explicitly: ‘underspecification is not a local phenomenon [...]. It is literally not possible to “spell everything out” in words.’²⁴⁸ Written language cannot

²⁴⁶ Terence Cave, *Pré-histoires*, pp. 40-44. Cave gives a number of definitions for antiperistasis, including the following from Budé’s *Lexicon*: ‘*mutua cohibitio, compressio undique circumfusa* (contrainte mutuelle, compression exercée de tous les côtés)’, p. 36. See also Floyd Gray’s analysis of ‘le pluriel’, *La Balance de Montaigne: exagium/essai* (Paris: Nizet, 1982), pp. 25-26.

²⁴⁷ Cave, *Pré-histoires*, p. 39.

²⁴⁸ Cave, *Thinking with Literature*, p. 33. He references Robyn Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 28-32 as a demonstration of the ‘*reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that a proposition, given enough words, could be exhaustively articulated’, p. 164 n. 3. This is a central concept in ‘relevance theory’, a theory of communication which asserts that language is offered as evidence of one’s beliefs or thoughts and that this evidence is ‘decoded’ by the listener or reader; the listener or reader makes inferences based on context and relevance and, in doing so, (re)constructs the state of mind and

express the full and rich diversity of thought and this is not because of limitations of time and space but is rather a fundamental, foundational limitation. '[B] J'adjouste', as Montaigne said, 'mais je ne corrige pas' (III.9.963); but even this process of layering and addition struggles to achieve the multiplicity and synchronism required to express thought as it is experienced. As he asks in 'De l'expérience', '[B] Qu'ont gagné nos législateurs à choisir cent mille especes et faicts particuliers, et y attacher cent mille loix? Ce nombre n'a aucune proportion avec l'infinie diversité des actions humaines. La multiplication de nos inventions n'arrivera pas à la variation des exemples' (III.13.1066). Juridical language, the standard of affirmative and resolved discourse against which the essayist often attempts to define his own, is shown here to be capable only of gathering a sequential list of particulars, with the 'variation' and 'infinie diversité' of experience always out of reach.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, as Cave has recognised, the famous metaphor of self-portraiture, 'static rather than dynamic, [...] fails to render the temporal continuity and flux that is essential to his perception of himself and the world'.²⁵⁰ The greatest of these problems, perhaps, is that language '[A] est tout formé de propositions affirmatives' (II.12.527). Our moving conceptions of a moving world are rendered static, definitive, and assertive by language: '[A] toutes fois nous voylà embourbez' (II.12.527). As J.-Y. Pouilloux puts it, 'l'écrit en effet se dépose, se fixe, et cette inscription produit une modification. Quelque chose se perd, une énergie de formuler une attente, des réseaux de bifurcations multiples, des échos et des recoupements qui pouvaient à leur

intentions of the speaker. On relevance theory, see Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). The term 'implicature' is also taken from relevance theory: 'it refers to the intended meanings that can be derived inferentially from a given utterance ("implications", by contrast, are not necessarily intended)', Cave, *Thinking with Literature*, p. 33.

²⁴⁹ In the 'Apologie', Montaigne asserts that 'les arrests font le point extreme du parler dogmatiste et resolutif', II.12.509-510. Compare Montaigne's more favourable response to the less-resolved Roman style of legal affirmation: 'Nous parlons de toutes choses par precepte et resolution. Le stile à Romme portoit que cela mesme qu'un tesmoin deposoit pour l'avoir veu de ses yeux, et ce qu'un juge ordonnoit de sa plus certaine science, estoit conceu en cette forme de parler: Il me semble', III.11.1030.

²⁵⁰ *How to Read Montaigne*, p. 86.

tour proliférer en divers sens, riches d'éclatements et de facettes.²⁵¹ Montaigne, then, is pushing up against the limitations of language, attempting to go 'outré ses forces' (III.13.1068), in order to find a discourse capable not only of representing thought but of actually doing it: '[B] C'estoit ce que je voulois dire; voylà justement ma conception; si je ne l'ay ainsin exprimé, ce n'est que faute de langue' (III.8.937).²⁵²

In challenging his own status as author, questioning the place of 'authority' in the text, Montaigne seeks to destabilise these problems inherent in language; he attempts to find a means of speaking tentatively of provisional opinions and perspectives within static, fixed print. As we have seen, he can – and, indeed, does – assimilate and rewrite the words of others, making them his own: '[A] Je feuillette les livres, je ne les estude pas: ce qui m'en demeure, c'est chose que je ne reconnois plus estre d'autrui; c'est cela seulement dequoy mon jugement a faict son profict, les discours et les imaginations dequoy il s'est imbu; l'auteur, le lieu, les mots et autres circonstances, je les oublie incontinent' (II.17.651). However, this process by which authorship moves from one speaker to another also works in the opposite direction. This quotation from 'De la praesumption' is immediately followed by the following [B] and [C] text interpolations:

[B] Et suis si excellent en l'oubliance que mes escrits mesmes et compositions, je ne les oublie pas moins que le reste. On m'allegue tous les coups à moy-mesme sans que je le sente. Qui voudroit sçavoir d'où sont les vers et exemples que j'ay icy entassez, me mettroit en peine de le luy dire; et si ne les ay mendiez qu'és portes connues et fameuses, ne me contentant pas qu'ils fussent riches, s'ils ne venoient encore de main riche et honorable: l'autorité y concurre quant et la raison. [C] Ce n'est pas grand merveille si mon livre suit la fortune des autres livres et si ma memoire desempare ce que j'escry comme ce que je ly, et ce que je donne comme ce que je reçooy.

²⁵¹ *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*, p. 52.

²⁵² We ought to note the critical context of this quotation: this is Montaigne's imitation of the defence of 'sots' who say 'mots non sots': 'Or, si vous venez à les esclaircir et confirmer, ils vous saisissent et derobent incontinent cet avantage de vostre interpretation[.]' The congruency, however, between this statement and other, similar positions held by Montaigne may allow us to suggest that these are themselves 'mots non sots'.

Here, Montaigne equates his relationship with his own writing with his relationship with all other texts: he reads – and forgets – his compositions as a reader rather than as their author; he places his words in the mouths of others ('on m'allegue') and further abnegates the position of 'author' when he claims that he does not recognise these words, spoken by someone else, to be his. There is an echo of the 'peine' encountered by the reader who tries to determine 'ce qui est sien et ce qui ne l'est point' (III.8.940): he engages with his own text and with his own textual borrowings in precisely the same way as he engages with other texts and other authors ('me mettroit en peine de le luy dire'). The point here is that, just as Montaigne is capable of incorporating and assimilating the words of others, so too is he capable of 'losing' authorial ownership of his own text. We tend to see Montaigne's use of his authors in the same way we see Seneca's use of Epicurus: as an assertion of ownership, as one way traffic from source-author to accommodating-author. 'Quicquid bene dictum est ab ullo, meum est', wrote Seneca (*Ep.* 16.7) but Montaigne troubles this and shows that this movement of textual ownership is multidirectional. Text from other authors moves in to 'his' book, his sphere of authorial ownership, but, in precisely the same way and in contradistinction to the standard model exemplified here by Seneca, his own text – which includes those intertexts which have become 'his' – manages to slip away from his authorial 'signature'.

As Yves Delègue has noted, the *Essais* 'racontent jusqu'à l'obsession l'expérience d'une dépossession de soi', though this is by no means purely an ontological dispossession.²⁵³ Speaking of what he takes from Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne writes: '[C] J'en attache quelque chose à ce papier; à moy si peu que rien' (I.26.146). This phrase is certainly hyperbolic – it forms part of his opening address to Diane de Foix at the

²⁵³ *Montaigne et la mauvaise foi*, p. 64. For a further example of this unfixed ownership of one's writing and the ideas contained within it, see II.12.566: '[B] 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'applicant 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.'

head of 'De l'institution des enfants' in which he professes his lack of learning and makes a number of conventional statements regarding his ignorance and inability to address the topic he will subsequently write expansively upon – though it does nevertheless highlight a way of thinking about text, intertextual incorporation, and textual or intellectual 'ownership' which privileges the space of the page rather than the author as the locus and vessel of thought. Here, we may recall the 'extended mind' understanding of thought processes as functioning within a coupled system. Montaigne's thoughts are not finished and completed before being written down: rather, the cognitive work takes place somewhere between these two points of the author/reader and the text before him/her, attaching now more to this point, now more to the other. His relationship with texts – 'empruntés' or not – might, then, be better thought of as one of association rather than assimilation. The act of thinking is sited in this interaction between Montaigne and his book(s); it is sited in the act of writing and reading and, with the status of authorship made ambiguous and prone to being doubled, this textual thinking is capable of maintaining two authorial voices, two perspectives, in one superficially singular text, passage, or phrase.

Montaigne's 'je' does not stand 'above' the *Essais*, overlapping congruently, assimilating other, foreign texts into his own sphere of authorship. Rather, his text functions in the same way as all other texts: text may become his but it is just as capable of ceasing to be his. We might think, by way of analogy, of the painter in 'De l'amitié': '[A] Il choisit le plus bel endroit et milieu de chaque paroy, pour y loger un tableau élaboré de toute sa suffisance; et, le vuide tout au tour, il le remplit de crottesques, qui sont peintures fantasques, n'ayant grace qu'en la variété et estrangeté' (I.28.183). Along with the authors with whom he engages, he inhabits this peripheral space, moving around the text, now with one author coming closer into contact with the text, now with

another. Focusing on pronouns rather than authors and intertexts, Yves Delègue has shown how the ‘Au lecteur’ places the text rather than its author in this central position with ambiguous pronouns moving around it, relegating Montaigne’s ‘je’ to an object rather than a subject position: ‘[A] *C’est icy un livre de bonne foy, lecteur. Il l’advertit dès l’entrée, que je ne m’y suis proposé aucune fin, que domestique et privée*’ (my emphasis).²⁵⁴ This is not, however, an authorless text such as those we find in traditional, Bakhtinian intertextual readings: the hierarchy and the neat alignment of author and text may have been collapsed, but Montaigne’s presence is still keenly felt as he moves around the text – again, both ‘emprunté’ and his own – viewing it from multiple perspectives; viewing it now as his, now as not-his. Put another way, we might say that the authorial status of a passage may be in doubt – we suspend definitive and final judgement; the issue is unresolved – but the question of authorship is certainly not ‘bracketed’.²⁵⁵

Preferring *astheneia* (‘absence of strength’) to the term listed among the *phonai skeptikai* – *isostheneia* (‘equal strength’, equipollence) – Frédéric Brahami has shown that Montaigne’s sceptical thought does not lead to *epoché*, an absolute suspension of judgement, but rather to weak and temporary judgements: ‘Il n’y a plus, chez Montaigne, d’isosthénie, parce qu’il conçoit l’âme comme un flux.’²⁵⁶ ‘Or, s’il n’y a pas d’isosthénie’, he argues, ‘il ne peut y avoir d’*épokè*, car l’âme ne peut plus rester en équilibre à égale distance de ses représentations. [...] Elle [*isostheneia*] présuppose un arrêt, arrêt des

²⁵⁴ *Montaigne et la mauvaise foi*, pp. 30-33.

²⁵⁵ We might contrast this with Floyd Gray’s analysis of Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron* as a text which employs the roles of narrator and commentator to absent the author from the text. See ‘Reading and Writing in the Tenth Story of the *Heptaméron*’, *Distant Voices Still Heard: Contemporary Readings of French Renaissance Literature*, ed. by John O’Brien and Malcolm Quainton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 123-137.

²⁵⁶ *Le Scepticisme de Montaigne*, p. 68.

représentations, mais aussi arrêt de l'esprit sur ces représentations.²⁵⁷ This is particularly clear in 'De la praesumption':

[B] Et la plus penible assiete pour moy, c'est estre suspens és choses qui pressent et agité entre la crainte et l'esperance. Le deliberer, voire és choses plus legieres, m'importune; et sens mon esprit plus empesché à souffrir le branle et les secousses diverses du doute et de la consultation, qu'à se rasseoir et resoudre à quelque party que ce soit, apres que la chance est livrée. Peu de passions m'ont troublé le sommeil; mais, des deliberations, la moindre me le trouble. (II.17.644).

This may look like Montaigne at his least doubtful: *epoché*, the essence of Hellenistic and particularly Sextusian Scepticism, is here cast aside in favour of the much easier practice of adopting positions and opinions readily, seemingly without examination, determined by chance. Though Sylvia Giocanti's study of how early modern Sceptics attempt to '[p]enser l'irrésolution' focuses primarily on discussions of unresolved thought rather than the presence of unresolved thought evident in text, her analysis of a positive ethics based on moving *with* fortune, learning to 'rouler au vent', highlights the distance between, on the one hand, Montaigne and La Mothe Le Vayer and, on the other, Pyrrhonian practitioners of ethical and political conservatism.²⁵⁸ Seen in the light of Brahami's argument, it becomes clear that this endless sequence of weak, temporary judgements is a mode of scepticism which accepts, without trying to sublimate into *ataraxia*, the *fluctuatio animi* inherent in Montaigne's understanding of the world and his perception of it. As Montaigne says in 'De l'inconstance de nos actions', '[C] Nous

²⁵⁷ Ibid. pp. 68-69.

²⁵⁸ *Penser l'irrésolution: Montaigne, Pascal, La Mothe Le Vayer*. On Scepticism and Montaigne's need for philosophical teachings to 'prove possible in practice' (p. 55), see Alison Calhoun's *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers: Life Writing and Transversality in the Essais*. Calhoun argues that Montaigne relies on the form and content of philosophical 'life-writing', taken from Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius, 'not simply to construct a self-portrait, but more precisely to generate an expression of a transverse self [...]. Transversality allows Montaigne's philosophical Lives to form one of the major expressions of the failure of exemplarity,' pp. 8-9. A similar view is taken by Olivier Guerrier who argues that the intertexts of the *Essais*, performing a certain 'difference', allow Montaigne to consolidate the 'self': 'C'est le langage emprunté qui renvoie à Montaigne l'image de sa complexion présente, en assurant une continuité entre la faculté d'autrefois et celle d'aujourd'hui.' See *Quand les poètes feignent*, p. 286.

flottons entre divers advis: nous ne voulons rien librement, rien absolument, rien constamment' (II.1.333). Incapable of arresting his thought, the famous 'balance', imprinted on the 1576 'jeton', still stands though, rather than functioning as a symbol of constant, static equipollence, we see the scales tilting back and forth endlessly, showing now one reading, now another, without ever resting definitively one way or the other.²⁵⁹ Aligning this with the problem of text and intertextuality, we may recall Montaigne's 'peine' in which he is 'tousjours sur [ses] gardes' (III.8.940): in both instances, we see a suspension of judgement which is moving, unstable, uncomfortable and far from the tranquil *ataraxia* of Pyrrhonism.

The dis-/re-location of authorship, which prompts us to ask ourselves constantly what is Montaigne's and what is 'emprunté', functions as an attempt to create an equally temporary discourse, capable of reflecting weak and temporary judgements in spite of the fixity of the printed word. '[B] Si je parle diversement de moy,' notes Montaigne, 'c'est que je me regarde diversement' (II.1.335). '[C] Car en ce que je dy,' he writes elsewhere, 'je ne pleuvis autre certitude, sinon que c'est ce que lors j'en avoy en ma pensée, pensée tumultuaire et vacillante' (III.9.1033). The guarantee ensures only that such a view *was* held, highlighting once again the transient, moving nature of thought which he seeks to express and explore on the page. The problem, as we have already seen, rests with language: '[B] Pourquoi est-ce que nostre langage commun, si aisé à tout autre usage, devient obscur et non intelligible en contract et testament, et que celuy qui s'exprime si clairement, quoy qu'il die et escrive, ne trouve en cela aucune maniere de se declarer qui ne tombe en doute et contradiction?' (III.13.1066).²⁶⁰ If Montaigne is to

²⁵⁹ On the metaphor of the balance, see Floyd Gray, *La Balance de Montaigne* and Marie-Luce Demonet, 'Monnaie de signe', *A plaisir: Sémiotique et scepticisme chez Montaigne* (Orléans: Paradigme, 2002), pp. 35-77.

²⁶⁰ We might compare this reference to 'contract et testament' with the description of the *Essais* and their function given in the 'Au lecteur': 'Je l'ay voué à la commodité particuliere de mes parens et amis: à ce que m'ayant perdu (ce qu'ils ont à faire bien tost) ils y puissent retrouver

find a means of extending these temporary judgements onto the page, he must do something other than simply record ‘completed’ thoughts, piling up instance and example, layer and gloss.

The deliberate and sustained ambiguity of authorship forces us to break the binary paradigm of citing author and cited author; assimilating author and assimilated author. If we return to the end of the ‘Apologie’, we see that Montaigne is expecting his reader to follow his own example: ‘je me tiens tousjours sur mes gardes’ (III.8.940). The determining factor in which of these ‘diverses visages’ we see is how and when we enter the text; the assumptions we bring with us: if the text looks to be Montaigne’s and we then identify it as having come from Plutarch we assume Montaigne to be the ‘author’; if, however, we approach the text as an appropriation, recognising primarily its Plutarchan provenance, we see Plutarch. With his repeated use of contradictory and absolute statements on his role as author – the text is entirely his; it is entirely not his – he encourages the reader to engage in a binary mode of thinking only to show us that such a position is untenable. This dualism allows for the role of ‘authorship’ to be relocated to the space in-between Montaigne and his authors. Just as the essayist’s judgements are weak and temporary, constantly changing, seen always ‘diversement’, so are his ‘emprunts’ which move back and forth between being his and not-his as the reader (including Montaigne reading his own text) changes perspective. In-between authorship is, then, a way of sustaining ambiguity such that, when we encounter a passage, we see two authorial ‘visages’ which seem to flicker back and forth. It is a means of rupturing and disconnecting – though not absolutely – the link between the ‘author’ and ‘his’ text, affording a means of thinking with text which capitalises on this authorial doubleness.

aucuns traits de mes conditions et humeurs, et que par ce moyen ils nourrissent plus entiere et plus vifve, la connoissance qu'ils ont eu de moy’, p. 3.

A key example of this re-situation of authorship into this in-between space has been highlighted by Eric MacPhail in his discussion of ‘De la gloire’:

If we had Cicero’s lost work *De Gloria* [...], Montaigne assures us in ‘De la gloire’, then we would read some howlers, since Cicero would have said, if he had dared, that virtue is desirable only for the honour that accompanies it [...]. This hypothetical transgression is then illustrated with a quotation from Horace, not Cicero, before the essayist expresses his “dépît” that such a false opinion could ever have been entertained by one honoured with the name of philosopher. Montaigne’s approach to his sources here is to impute to them false opinions from lost works that are then rebutted with arguments taken from the extant works.²⁶¹

Describing this as ‘most devious’, MacPhail’s analysis demonstrates clearly not only the deliberate deception of Montaigne’s challenge to the reader but also the means by which authority and ‘authors’ – including Montaigne himself – become entangled and indiscrete, with the function of ‘authoring’ the text being situated on the page, between authors, shifting kaleidoscopically as we move around the text. Authorship, then, moves on two axes simultaneously, mirroring the fluctuating movement of the balance of *astheneia*: Montaigne – not Montaigne; now – then.

In writing in this way, Montaigne goes some way towards divorcing the judge from the judgement: ‘[A] et le jugeant et le jugé estans en continuelle mutation et branle’ (II.12.601). With the act of judgement, the judge, and the thing being judged all subject to constant flux, this displacement of the act of authorship allows him to associate himself – to varying degrees and for defined periods of time – with the statements being made, whether they are ‘his’ or ‘empruntés’. This allows Montaigne to think on the page, to extend his thought processes and temporary perspectives, without making a positive, definitive affirmation and without concerning himself with the issue of whether or not the statement reflects his opinion or functions in contradistinction to

²⁶¹ ‘Montaigne and the Theatre of Conscience’, *French Studies*, 68 (2014), pp. 465-476 (p. 470).

it.²⁶² Once the statement – borrowed or otherwise – is on the page, he can move around it, considering it from multiple perspectives, considering ‘tantost un visage, tantost un autre’. Rather than assimilating or owning these texts, he can associate his thought with them, thinking with – as well as on – the page. We can imagine Montaigne placing one scrabble tile – say, a quotation from Seneca – next to another – a line of his own, perhaps – and, in doing so, thinking with them, seeing how they fit together, ‘owning’ Seneca without erasing the sense of difference while recognising the otherness and detachment of his own words without forgetting that they are, of course, ‘his’. This practice of thinking with text goes beyond thinking with the *Essais*: Montaigne is using other books and other authors as cognitive resources and, more significantly still, he is placing these multiple texts (including his own) together, thinking with many texts at once. Here, we can see one of the ways in which my argument might develop ideas taken from ‘extended mind’ hypotheses: Montaigne’s practice of thinking with other texts, with other authors, might be seen as a textual analogue for the ways in which cognition is said to be distributed between individuals, particularly when those individuals have a strong social bond. Typically, it is argued that married couples, for example, engage in ‘shared remembering’ or that they engage in other forms of collaborative cognition as exemplified by an ability to finish one another’s sentences. With Montaigne, we can not only see how this functions in a textual setting; I can also suggest that these relationships and the identities which constitute them can be more complex – to return to an example from Chapter One, Montaigne can think with (the texts of) Seneca, Epicurus, Cicero, and Plutarch together and at the same time – than has previously been demonstrated in cognitive studies.

²⁶² We might compare this with Montaigne’s habit of externalising and embodying his faculty for thought and imagination: ‘cheval’, ‘chimère’, ‘ma fantasie’.

For the reader (which always includes Montaigne reading his own text), this process of thinking with texts allows for a simultaneity of meaning and for synchronic authorship which leads, therefore, not only to a ‘forme d’écrire douteuse’ but also a doubtful way of reading. As Montaigne says in ‘De l’expérience’, ‘[B] La parole est moitié à celui qui parle, moitié à celui qui l’écoute. Cettuy-cy se doit préparer à la recevoir selon le branle qu’elle prend. Comme entre ceux qui jouent à la paume, celui qui soustient se desmarche et s’apreste selon qu’il voit remuer celui qui luy jette le coup et selon la forme du coup’ (III.13.1088). As Hall Bjørnstad notes, ‘[w]hat seems to trigger the appearance of the tennis players in this phrase is the word “motion”.’²⁶³ For Montaigne, words and texts are on the move and, to read and write proficiently, we must be able to move as well; we must be agile and ‘allegre’: ‘[A] j’aymeroy aussi cher que mon escolier eut passé le temps à joüer à la paume; au moins le corps en seroit plus allegre’ (I.25.138). Notably, the line from ‘De l’expérience’ is lifted almost exactly from Plutarch’s own discussion of how we ought to listen to and engage actively with literature: ‘car il est à moitié de la parole avec celui qui dit, & luy doit ayder [...]. Mais tout ainsi comme en jouant à la paulme, il fault que celui qui reçoit la balle se remue dextrement, au pris qu’il voit remuer celui qui luy renvoye.’²⁶⁴ Here, then, precisely at the moment he is describing this process of shared, collaborative authorship, of moving as a reader to anticipate the moving, shifting text, we see Montaigne engaging in this act he describes, responding to Plutarch’s volley and redirecting ‘la balle’ which is now in his court.

Reading – both in and of the *Essais* – is not passive reception but, crucially, neither is it appropriation or digestive transformation or any of those other standard tropes which are frequently employed when thinking about textual transfer; if it were,

²⁶³ ‘The Metaphors of Textual Transfer: From Indigestion to Early Modern Tennis’, *Borrowed Feathers*, p. 227.

²⁶⁴ ‘Comment il fault ouir’, fol. 29r.

the text would once again become static, resolved; it would lose its vitality and productive ambiguity; it would go from being ‘Plutarchan’ text to ‘Plutarchan’ text reworked, re-authored by Montaigne and that would be the end of it. Reading in and of Montaigne’s text requires collaborative movement to keep the ball in play and to defer arrest and conclusion. We enter the *Essais* seeing Montaigne in such a game of tennis, playing with Seneca or Plutarch or both of them or someone else: the text – that is, the ball – does not ‘become’ his when it is in his half of the court but neither does it cease to be his when it is not; rather, the text moves back and forth, taking on a particular characteristic – its ‘spin’ – ‘selon la forme du coup’, though this characteristic is certainly not definitive. As readers of the *Essais*, we are more than spectators: we enter the game ourselves, playing not only with Montaigne but also with his own competitors in a sort of three-, four-, five-way tennis.²⁶⁵

This is, then, a moving text, attempting to extend, practise, and facilitate moving thought, which functions as a moving centre of reading and writing, around which authors and readers, including Montaigne, circle ‘allegrement’: the locus of authorship sits between these three nodes of Montaigne, his author(s), and his reader. Sylvia Giocanti’s study has investigated the ways in which Montaigne attempts to ‘penser l’irrésolution’;²⁶⁶ here, in combining prose ‘emprunts’, Latin quotations, and statements which might more typically be considered ‘his own’, we see Montaigne trying to ‘*écrire l’irrésolution*’, attempting to break out of the monovocal, monovalent, fundamentally

²⁶⁵ On ‘la participation du lecteur’, see Margaret M. McGowan, ‘L’Art du décousu et la part du lecteur dans les *Essais*’, *Lire les Essais de Montaigne*, ed. by Noel Peacock and James J. Supple (Paris: Champion, 2001), pp. 39-50.

²⁶⁶ Giocanti notes that Montaigne and La Mothe Le Vayer construct a ‘discours qui renonçait à la forme du traité philosophique, pour inventer une manière d’écrire conforme à leur scepticisme’, pp. 20-21. In spite of this acknowledgement, however, Giocanti’s study focuses almost exclusively on arguments and philosophical positions held and maintained by these authors *about* irresolution without considering the more microcosmic mechanics of this ‘manière d’écrire’. She describes ‘une dialectique sceptique, dialectique de l’irrésolution’ (p. 71), though this is fundamentally a linear record of contradictory philosophical assertions rather than a form of writing which is, in itself, unresolved.

assertive nature of language by displacing the role of authorship to this space ‘in-between’ authors. In doing so, he finds a way to think with text; to extend his working without simply making a record of thoughts.

‘Alieno an suo magnus est?’: In-Between Authorship in Practice

So far in this chapter, we have seen that Montaigne challenges his reader to suspend judgement when he or she encounters the problem of determining ‘ce qui est sien et ce qui ne l’est point’; to resist the temptation to see the essayist successfully integrating and assimilating his intertexts without adopting the Malebranchean view that the text of the *Essais* is little more than a compilation of distinctly foreign writings. In sustaining this intertextual dualism, in which a cited text is seen as both his and not-his depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed, he creates a moving discourse capable of inconstancy. In allowing the authorial status of his text to become multiple, Montaigne finds a means of extending thought onto the page: rather than issuing assertions or citing counter-points, this in-between authorship renders the activity of writing an activity of thinking and, significantly, of thinking doubtfully, without resolution or conclusion. This chapter has, until now, focused primarily on Montaigne’s self-reflexive, meta-textual discussion of his practices. Now, in the closing section of this chapter, I will provide a handful of case studies which will show ‘in-between authorship’ in practice.

A particularly illuminating example is to be found in ‘De l’inegalité qui est entre nous’ (I.42). This chapter, which begins and ends with ‘emprunts’ taken from Plutarch, has the moving, doubtful trajectory of ‘dédoublement’ described by Tournon: Montaigne begins with the idea that we are all radically different from each other; he then notes that we ought to look beyond material possessions when judging a man,

suggesting that economic inequality may conceal a deeper potential equality; he suggests that '[t]out ce qui s'appelle bien' is the same for both king and pauper, before concluding that kingship is a duty and a burden rather than a reward and, as such, kings are worse off than the common man. The chapter traces a pattern of inequality – equality – inequality, though the 'inequality' with which he concludes is not the same 'inequality' with which he began. This is a chapter which, in spite of appearances, reaches no conclusions, ending up back where it started, but seeing that this original position is fundamentally different.²⁶⁷ It will not be surprising, then, to see that the place of authorship is equally unstable and slippery in this chapter.

Montaigne opens the chapter with the seemingly reliable, authoritative voice of Plutarch – Plutarch says that there is more distance and difference between one man and another than between one species of animal and another – only for Montaigne to 'enrich' this comparison, to say 'yes' and 'no': '[A] Plutarque dit en quelque lieu qu'il ne trouve point si grande distance de beste à beste, comme il trouve d'homme à homme. Il parle de la suffisance de l'ame et qualitez internes. A la verité, je trouve si loing d'Epaminundas, comme je l'imagine, jusques à tel que je connois, je dy capable de sens commun, que j'encherirois volontiers sur Plutarque; et dirois qu'il y a plus de distance de tel à tel homme qu'il n'y a de tel homme à telle beste' (I.42.258). This uneasy relationship of similarity and difference – of echoing but not quite – is then written into the intertextual practices at work in the long section which follows. After quoting Plutarch only to challenge his claim, Montaigne argues at length that we ought to judge a man not according to that which is borrowed, owned, or, in some other way, 'external' to him but, rather, he should be judged according to what is properly and intrinsically his own:

²⁶⁷ Ann Hartle traces a similar pattern of starting with the familiar, digressing towards the unusual, and then returning to the familiar only to see that it has 'changed'. See 'The Circular Dialectic of Self-Knowledge', *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher*, pp. 91-120.

[A] Mais, à propos de l'estimation des hommes, c'est merveille que, sauf nous, aucune chose ne s'estime que par ses propres qualitez.²⁶⁸ Nous louons un cheval de ce qu'il est vigoureux et adroit,

[B] *volucrum*

Sic laudamus equum, facili cui plurima palma

Fervet, et exultat rauco victoria circo,

[A] non de son harnois;²⁶⁹ un levrier de sa vitesse, non de son colier: un oyseau de son aile, non de ses longes et sonettes. Pourquoi de mesmes n'estimons nous un homme par ce qui est sien?²⁷⁰ Il a un grand train, un beau palais, tant de credit, tant de rente: tout cela est autour de luy, non en luy²⁷¹. Vous n'achetez pas un chat en poche. Si vous marchandez un cheval, vous lui ostez ses bardes, vous le voyez nud et à decouvert;²⁷² ou, s'il est couvert, comme on les presentoit anciennement aux Princes à vendre, c'est par les parties moins nécessaires, afin que vous ne vous amusez pas à la beauté de son poil ou largeur de sa croupe, et que vous vous arrêtez principalement à considerer les jambes, les yeux et le pied, qui sont les membres les plus utiles,

Regibus hic mos est: ubi equos mercantur, opertos

Inspiciunt, ne, si facies, ut saepe, decora

Molli fulta pede est, emptorem inducat hiantem,

Quod pulchrae clunes, breve quod caput, ardua cervix.

Pourquoy, estimant un homme, l'estimez vous tout enveloppé et empacqueté?²⁷³ Il ne nous fait montre que des parties qui ne sont aucunement siennes, et nous cache celles par lesquelles seules on peut vraiment juger de son estimation. C'est le pris de l'espée que vous cherchez, non de la guaine: vous n'en donnerez à l'adventure pas un quatrain, si vous l'avez despouillé.²⁷⁴ Il le faut juger par luy mesme, non par ses atours. Et, comme dit tres-plaisamment un ancien: Sçavez vous pourquoy vous l'estimez grand? Vous y comptez la hauteur de ses patins. La base n'est pas de la statue. Mesurez le sans ses eschaces:²⁷⁵ qu'il mette à part ses richesses et honneurs, qu'il se presente en chemise.²⁷⁶ A il le corps propre à ses fonctions, sain

²⁶⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* 76.6: 'Omnia suo bono constant'.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. *Ep.* 41.6: 'non faciunt meliorem equum aurei freni'.

²⁷⁰ A loose imitation of ep. 76.

²⁷¹ Ibid. *Ep.* 41.7: 'Familiam formosam habet et domum pulchram, multum serit, multum fenerat: nihil horum in ipso est sed circa ipsum'.

²⁷² Ibid. *Ep.* 80.9: 'Equum empturus solvi iubes stratum, detrahis vestimenta venalibus ne qua vitia corporis lateant: hominem involutum aestimas?'

²⁷³ Ibid. *Ep.* 80.9: 'hominem involutum aestimas?'

²⁷⁴ Ibid. *Ep.* 76.14: 'gladium bonum dices non cui auratus est balteus nec cuius vagina gemmis distinguitur, sed cui et ad secundum subtilis acies est et mucro munimentum omne rupturus; regula non quam formosa, sed quam recta sit quaeritur: eo quidque laudatur cui comparatur, quod illi proprium est'.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. *Ep.* 76.31: 'Quare ergo magnus videtur? cum basi illum sua metiris. Non est magnus pumilio licet in monte constiterit; colossus magnitudinem suam servabit etiam si steterit in puteo'.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. *Ep.* 76.32: 'Atqui cum voles veram hominis aestimationem inire et scire qualis sit, nudum inspicere; ponat patrimonium, ponat honores et alia fortunae mendacia'.

et allegre?²⁷⁷ Quelle ame a il? est elle belle, capable et heureusement pourveue de toutes ses pieces? Est elle riche du sien, ou de l'autruy?²⁷⁸ la fortune n'y a elle que voir? Si, les yeux ouverts, elle attend les espées traites; s'il ne luy chaut par où luy sorte la vie, par la bouche ou par le gosier; si elle est rassise, equable et contente: c'est ce qu'il faut veoir²⁷⁹, et juger par là les extremes differences qui sont entre nous. (I.42.259-260).

I have quoted this in full so that I might reveal clearly the intertextual game that underpins this section. If we are to judge men properly – if we are to establish in what ways they are different – we must judge them in the same way we judge a horse: the opening distinction proposed by Plutarch between man and beast has here been collapsed by these analogies. But whose analogies are these? Everything underlined is taken from Seneca, primarily from one epistle, and is, in the vast majority of cases, a direct translation. The fidelity to this source-text allows us to assume confidently that this is not a case of words and phrases having stuck in Montaigne's memory: he is clearly working with the Senecan text before him or perhaps with a commonplace book or some other collection of notes on his reading.²⁸⁰

The two verse quotations, from Juvenal and Horace respectively, perform an explicit 'otherness' against which the French prose looks decidedly 'Montaignean'. Similarly, towards the end of this passage, Montaigne makes reference to 'un ancien', his standard means of introducing Seneca: 'Et, comme dict tres-plaisamment un ancien [...]'. As with the end of the 'Apologie', this reference to a foreign, cited text is not as transparent as it might seem to be: how much of what follows was 'dict [par] un ancien'? We might assume that this citation is operative only as far as the end of 'Vous y compez

²⁷⁷ Perhaps alluding to *Ep.* 80.9: 'Mangones quidquid est quod displiceat, id aliquo lenocinio abscondunt, itaque ementibus ornamenta ipsa suspecta sunt: sive crus alligatum sive brachium aspiceres, nudari iuberet et ipsum tibi corpus ostendi'.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. *Ep.* 76.32: 'alieno an suo magnus'.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. *Ep.* 76.33: 'Si rectis oculis gladios micantes videt et si scit sua nihil interesse utrum anima per os an per iugulum exeat, beatum voca'.

²⁸⁰ Montaigne's copy of Lucretius reveals that he kept an index of lines in the fly-leaves. It would not be unreasonable to assume he did something similar in his copy of Seneca.

la hauteur de ses patins’, rendering the subsequent ‘La base n’est pas de la statue’ a Montaignean gloss. Alternatively, we could read the ‘emprunt’ as including this sentence and half of the next, with the statue metaphor being Senecan and the shirt metaphor an ‘original’ Montaignean continuation of the same idea. We might think about this ambiguity by asking ourselves where, as editors or readers of the *Essais*, would we put the quotation marks around this Senecan borrowing: the quotation opens unambiguously enough with Montaigne’s introduction – ‘as an ancient says’ – but where does it end? In returning to the source, we see that all of this – platform heels, statues, and shirt-sleeves – is taken directly from epistle seventy-six. Crucially, moreover, in referring at this late stage in a long series of Senecan borrowings to this external source, Montaigne gives us the impression that what came before *was not* taken from Seneca but was, instead, written by himself. In telling us that this closing bit comes from Seneca, he implies – duplicitously – that the rest does not. Here, then, in naming his author, Montaigne renders his borrowing more doubtful, all while giving the impression of transparency.

This is, then, an instance of Montaigne’s challenge to the reader: he seems to be trying to tempt the reader into seeing the Senecan ‘emprunts’ – after the allusion to ‘un ancien’, perhaps, though certainly before it – as ‘his’. Our immediate response, having uncovered Montaigne’s ruse, is to assume that these translations which precede the reference to ‘un ancien’ are borrowed, even stolen, goods; this deception is – for the ‘indiligent lecteur’ – plagiarism. We must, however, refrain from such judgements. Attending to the subject matter reveals an irony which underpins the intertextual practices of this passage: Montaigne uses silently translated extracts from Seneca to criticise our tendency of misplacing praise, judging men not on what is theirs but on what is borrowed, extrinsic, and foreign. This is comic, certainly; though that does not

preclude serious intentions: as we saw at the beginning of Chapter One, ‘niaiser et fantastiquer’ (II.3.350) are core components of Montaigne’s understanding of doubt and of philosophy.

We begin by assuming that the text – at least the first three-quarters of the passage cited – is written by Montaigne; we discover the Senecan source, and then assume that Montaigne has incorporated a text without ‘authoring’ it: it is not ‘his’, according to the schema of determining ‘ce qui est sien et ce qui ne l’est point’ set out in ‘De l’art de conférer’, though we might yet judge him on its ‘disposition, ornement et langage’ (III.8.940). Seneca then becomes the ‘real’ author of these sentences. In concealing this Senecan source, however, Montaigne gives the passage its ironic character. This ironic quality – which, introduced by Montaigne, makes him, in some way, the ‘real’ author – can only be seen if we see the epistles lurking behind the ‘essai’ and think of Seneca, rather than Montaigne, as the author. Thus, for Montaigne to be the author of this passage, Seneca must be the author. If we are to apply Montaigne’s/Seneca’s question to this extract – ‘Est elle riche du sien, ou de l’autrui?’/‘alieno an suo magnus [sit]’ – we must resist reading practices which collapse this difference, favouring an understanding of the text which allows for two, simultaneous authors. We might think here of another one of Montaigne’s key metaphors: he talks of boys who try to catch mercury in their hands and force it to go one way or another only to find that, the more they press, mould, and try to contain it, the more it escapes them (III.13.1067). The textual doubleness in this extract shows clearly the moving, in-between nature of authorship in the *Essais*: Montaigne does not assimilate Seneca’s words, making them his own; rather, Seneca and Montaigne, playing a game of textual tennis, move around the text and we, as readers, see ‘tantost un visage, tantost un autre’. Here, Montaigne uses translation and ambiguity to create a doubtful

and double text but it is double not because we have failed exegetically but because it resists the approaches of the ‘sçavants’ to whom we might defer when we want to know ‘ce qui est sien et ce qui ne l’est point’. To read Montaigne’s patchwork of Senecan translations properly, we have to hold our guard and struggle with it, sustaining its duality.

We see a similar instance of textual doubleness and misleading intertextual signposting in ‘De la vanité’. Montaigne, in the lead up to his full transcription of his ‘[B] bulle authentique de bourgeoisie Romaine’ (III.9.999), describes in detail his feelings of affinity with Classical Antiquity and his sense of having a deep knowledge of Rome even before he had visited the city: ‘[B] Or j’ay esté nourry dés mon enfance avec ceux icy; j’ay eu connoissance des affaires de Romme, long temps avant que je l’aye eue de ceux de ma maison: je sçavois le Capitole et son plant avant que je sceusse le Louvre, et le Tibre avant la Seine. J’ay eu plus en teste les conditions et fortunes de Lucullus, Metellus et Scipion, que je n’ay d’aucuns hommes des nostres’ (III.9.996). After digressing briefly to talk of friendship, Montaigne returns, by way of Pompey and Brutus, to his feelings about Rome:

[B] Me trouvant inutile à ce siecle, 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 passionne. Parquoy je ne sçauroy revoir si souvent l’assiette de leurs rues et de leurs maisons, et ces ruynes profondes jusques aux Antipodes, que je ne m’y amuse. [C] Est-ce par nature ou par erreur de fantasie que la veue des places que nous sçavons avoir esté hantées et habitées par personnes desquelles la memoire est en recommandation, nous esmeut aucunement plus qu’ouïr le recit de leur faicts ou lire leurs escrits? *Tanta vis admonitionis inest in locis. Et id quidem in hac urbe infinitum: quacunque enim ingredimur in aliquam historiam vestigium ponimus.* [B] Il me plaist de considerer leur visage, leur port et leurs vestemens; je remache ces grands noms entre les dents et les faicts retentir à mes oreilles. [C] *Ego illos veneror et tantis nominibus semper assurgo.* (III.9.996-997).

Montaigne, discussing his affinity with Rome, naturally – we might think – turns to two of the most central Roman writers of Latin prose: Cicero, who provides the first quotation, and Seneca, who provides the other. Even if we are not aware that these citations are from Seneca and Cicero specifically, we are likely to assume that, like the vast majority of the Latin texts quoted in the *Essais*, they are classical rather than neo-Latin. At first glance, then, this looks to be an instance of Montaigne ‘making others say what he cannot say so well,’ though, upon closer inspection, we notice a problem: Cicero says, ‘in hac urbe’ but does this refer to Rome? If we return to the source, we see that, at this point in the *De finibus*, Cicero and his interlocutors are discussing Athens.²⁸¹ Similarly, the ‘tantis nominibus’ of Seneca’s epistle refers (primarily) to Greek philosophers: Socrates, Plato, Zeno, Cleanthes.²⁸²

Montaigne repeats Seneca and Cicero while referring to something different: his transcription of these Latin words does not mean the same thing as these words meant in their original contexts; they have different referents. And yet, at the same time, they do refer to the same thing: they refer to a feeling of intimate connection with a past culture still accessible through a geographic connection and it is, perhaps, in this light that we see Montaigne’s connection and similarity with Seneca and Cicero through a shared feeling of distance and disconnection. He is making these Senecan and Ciceronian words self-reflexive in a way that is productively unsuccessful: we feel this sense of difference; we recognise that these words do not mean the same thing; we understand that Montaigne is different from Seneca and Cicero and, in seeing this difference, we see their similarity.

²⁸¹ *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, ed. and trans. by H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 5.1.2, 5.2.5. Montaigne’s quotation is made up of two phrases, the second of which is slightly reworked. These phrases come from different parts of the text and are spoken by different interlocutors (Marcus Piso and Lucius Cicero respectively).

²⁸² He also refers to both Cato the Elder and Younger and to Laelius the Wise.

Both of these Latin quotations were added after 1588. In what seems to be something of a trend in [C] text additions, Montaigne combines quotation and translation from the same text within a single *allongéail*. The French text which immediately precedes the Ciceronian quotation is a translation taken from the same book of *De finibus*: ‘Naturane nobis hoc, inquit, datum dicam an errore quodam, ut, cum ea loca videamus, in quibus memoria dignos viros acceperimus multum esse versatos, magis moveamur, quam si quando eorum ipsorum aut facta audiamus aut scriptum aliquod legamus?’²⁸³ This interpolation retrospectively gives the 1588 text which follows – ‘je remache ces grands noms entre les dents’ – a new meaning: Montaigne, once again departing from the standard digestive trope of *imitatio*, has only partially digested this Ciceronian source. Further, as the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ shows (see *fig. 6*), he began his marginal note by writing the Latin quotation (‘Tanta vis admonitionis inest in locis’), he then erased it, inserted the translated ‘emprunt’, and then rewrote the Latin quotation. This hesitation reveals a concern and consideration regarding the extent to which he wants to be associated with the text being written: Montaigne, working from the same text, chooses to transcribe one section, implying distance, and to translate another, which is at least suggestive of a stronger degree of association if not indicative of a decision to give the casual reader the impression that these words are entirely and originally ‘his’. He is, it seems, concerned with the issue of who appears to be saying what and his decision to prioritise the translation over the quotation reveals an attempt to integrate Cicero’s text into his own before distancing it through transcribing its foreign words and the result is an ambiguous, double gesture of assimilation and differentiation. On the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, then, we see him thinking with *De finibus*, asking where it fits on the Montaigne/not-Montaigne spectrum, placing different sections along this continuum. This is an ambiguous passage which relies on sustaining

²⁸³ *De finibus*, 5.1.2.

the tension between difference and similarity: Seneca and Cicero's Athens becomes a (quasi-self-reflexive) description of Rome; text is now more Montaignean, now more Ciceronian, though does not belong definitively to either one.

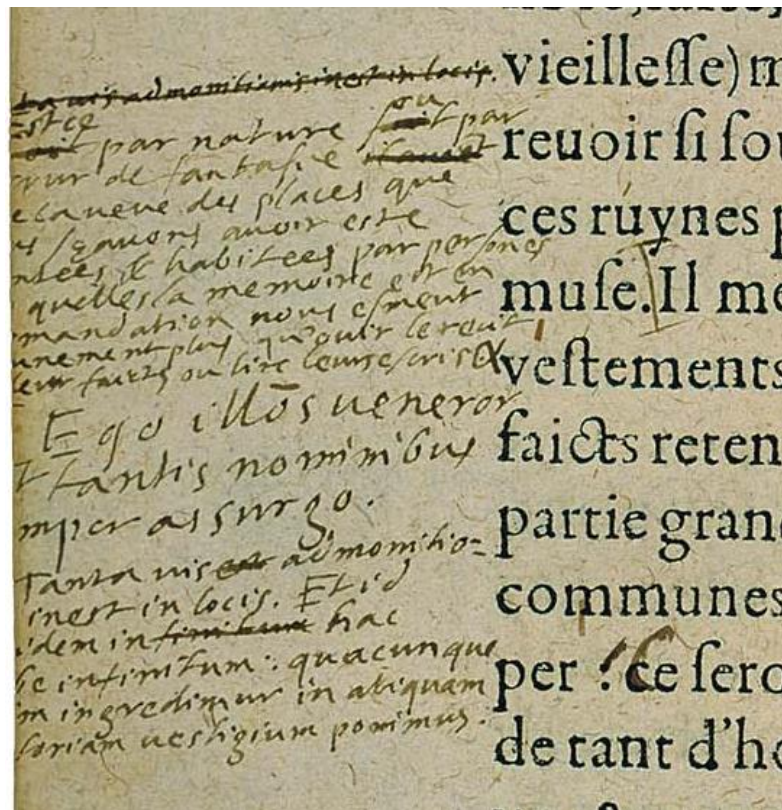


Fig. 6. 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 440v.

The 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' provides us with a good number of such textual, graphic hesitations, testifying to Montaigne's conscious deliberation in choosing which 'visage' to privilege in these two-faced, doubly authored 'emprunts'. I am not suggesting that all of these ambiguities and deliberations would have been available to early modern readers and we can, in any case, identify these issues of ambiguity and plurality through tracing Montaigne's prose style, his idiosyncratic and rhythmic punctuation, his practices of combination and rupture (and combination as rupture). The benefit of working with the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', however, is that we can see these ambiguities and the points at which Montaigne places a text along the 'his'/'not-his'

spectrum as they are being constructed. As an example, we may look at ‘Des loix somptuaires’ (I.43, see *fig. 7*). Here, he quotes Quintilian before changing his mind and translating the phrase, before changing his mind once again and rewriting the quotation. These intertextual modes determine how we see the ‘emprunt’, ‘staining’²⁸⁴ it to varying degrees: on the one hand, the Latin quotation is graphically, typologically distinguished on the page though, semantically, it is integrated into Montaigne’s own argument; on the other, the translation, blending neatly into Montaigne’s own prose, is attributed to ‘un antien’, an attribution which declares its foreignness. In both versions, Montaigne draws Quintilian’s words in with one gesture while simultaneously pushing them away with another. We can show definitively, then, that his choices in deciding whether to quote or translate an ‘emprunt’ are not determined by issues of memory, recall, or availability but are rather active, deliberate textual choices which allow him to construct a purposefully ambiguous intertextual praxis which in turn allows him to associate his thought with the thought of others by degrees.

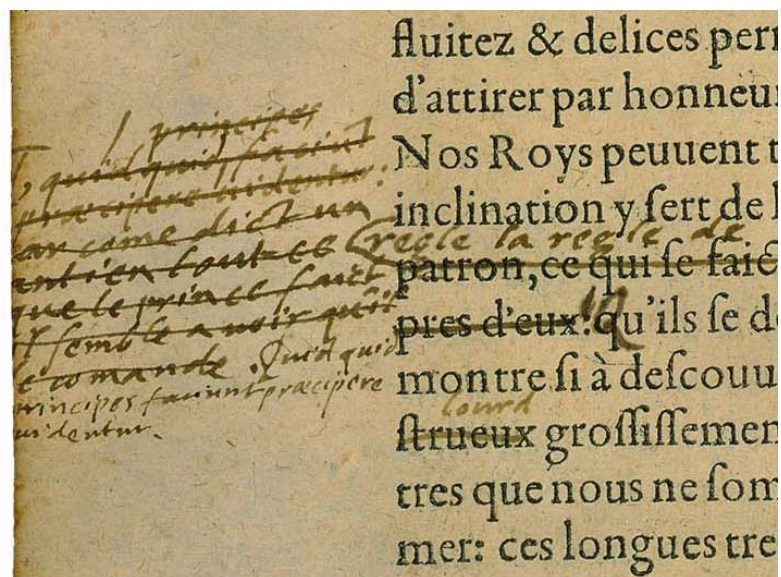


Fig. 7. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 112v.

²⁸⁴ Cf. I.50.302: ‘[C] Les choses à part elles ont peut estre leurs poids et mesures et conditions; mais [elles] se despoillent à l’entrée, et reçoivent de l’ame nouvelle vesture, et de la teinture qu’il lui plaist.’

Translation is not, then, a sure sign of intertextual assimilation. Further evidence of this may be found in ‘De ne communiquer sa gloire’ (I.41): before he starts giving examples and stories taken from his reading, he uses three authors – Tasso, Augustine, and Cicero – in outlining his position. Each of these authors was introduced at a different stage of composition: Cicero in the first edition, Tasso in 1582, and Augustine on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’. Each ‘emprunt’, moreover, takes a different intertextual form: Cicero is translated into French prose, Tasso’s Italian is printed as verse, and Augustine’s Latin prose would have been printed – according to Montaigne’s instructions to the printer – ‘parmi la prose françoise en caractere differant’.²⁸⁵ My focus here is on the two prose ‘emprunts’:

[A] Et, des humeurs des-raisonnables des hommes, il semble que les philosophes mesmes se défacent plus tard et plus envis de ceste-cy que de nulle autre. [B] C’est la plus revesche et opiniastre: [C] *Quia etiam bene proficientes animos tentare non cessat.* [B] Il n’en est guiere de laquelle la raison accuse si clairement la vanité, mais elle a ses racines si vifves en nous, que je ne sçay si jamais aucun s’en est peu nettement descharger. Apres que vous avez tout dict et tout creu pour la desadvouer, elle produict contre vostre discours une inclination si intestine que vous avez peu que tenir à l’encontre. [A] Car, comme dit Cicero, ceux mesmes qui la combattent, encores veulent-ils que les livres qu’ils en escrivent, portent au front leur nom, et se veulent rendre glorieux de ce qu’ils ont mesprisé la gloire. (I.41.255).

We might be inclined to view these as ‘transparent’ borrowings: the authorial overlap between Montaigne and Cicero or Montaigne and Augustine seems almost, if not entirely, complete; perhaps even more so with Cicero if we assume that translation is indicative of a greater degree of assimilation and digestion. However, as Montaigne says in what might be considered a companion piece to this chapter, ‘De la vanité’, ‘[B] J’entends que la matiere se distingue soy-mesmes [...] sans me gloser moymesme’

²⁸⁵ See Montaigne’s hand-written notes on the fly-leaf of the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’: ‘La prose latine grecque ou autre langue estrangiere il la faut mettre parmi la prose françoise en caractere differant les vers a part et le placer selon leur nature pentamettes saphiques les demi vers les comancemens au bout de la ligne la fin sur la fin[.]’

(III.9.995). In attending to this passage textually, we are able to suggest that the essayist's methodological choices allow him to judge these authors on the page without glossing this judgement; to agree with them without collapsing the difference between them and himself. Cicero, who in the previous chapter is placed alongside Pliny as an exemplar of vanity and vain-glory,²⁸⁶ is here named explicitly though his famously eloquent prose has been replaced with a summary gloss in French, a language so subject to continual change that Montaigne claims to doubt it will still be used, in its present form, in fifty years.²⁸⁷ Saint Augustine, however, is not – at least within this passage – guilty of this need to be named, yet his text and teachings live on and are here faithfully transcribed.

Montaigne's custom of thinking with texts at different moments in time and from different perspectives has, moreover, ruptured and re-orientated this text: the 1588 insertion into which Augustine would later be interpolated renders the subsequent 'Car, comme dit Cicero' problematic. Montaigne's text has shifted from describing 'philosophes' struggling with vain-glory to 'nous' and 'vous': where in 1580 the text was looking outwards, Cicero's comment now – without having changed textually – seems to have turned inwards, describing the author of *Essais de Michel Seigneur de Montaigne*. The text becomes polyvalent, capable of multiple meanings when viewed from diverse perspectives. In this way, it encourages the reader to enter this game of sharing responsibility for meaning: we see Montaigne associating himself with the ideas of *both* Cicero and Augustine while, attending to the text, we see a rather different relationship

²⁸⁶ '[A] Il se tire des escrits de Cicero et de ce Pline (peu retirant, à mon advis, aux humeurs de son oncle), infinis tesmoignages de nature outre mesure ambitieuse: entre autres qu'ils sollicitent, au sceu de tout le monde, les historiens de leur temps de ne les oublier en leurs registres; et la fortune, comme par despit, a fait durer jusques à nous la vanité de ces requestes, et pieça fait perdre ces histoires. Mais cecy surpasse toute bassesse de coeur, en personnes de tel rang, d'avoir voulu tirer quelque principale gloire du caquet et de la parlerie, jusques à y employer les lettres privées écriptes à leurs amis', I.40.249.

²⁸⁷ III.9.982.

between these three authors; a relationship which is hard to pin down. Montaigne turns to both as ‘authorities’ while, textually and implicitly, he accuses Cicero of the same vanity which, again implicitly, ‘Cicero’ – which is, of course, really Montaigne himself – links to the author of the *Essais*. These are Montaigne’s ‘scrabble tiles’, moving around and attaching to different and diverse points as he thinks with them again and again in new combinations.

As a final example of this ambiguous, in-between authorship, I will turn now to the chapter with which I introduced these issues of in-between authorship: ‘Nous ne goustons rien de pur’ (II.20). As the title may suggest, this chapter is loaded with ambiguous voices, deliberately confusing intertextual practices, and instances of thinking with and through texts. In addition to the quotation from Livy which was subsequently replaced with a translation, we find: ‘[A] un verset Grec ancien’ which is translated, rather than cited, making it unusual in comparison to Montaigne’s early tendency towards Greek quotation; an anonymous quotation again from Livy written – this time – in Latin, also inserted after 1588; and, more generally, a proliferation of [B] and [C] text stories and anecdotes taken from different authors and put next to each other with little by way of commentary. Interwoven into this ‘fantastique bigarrure’, we find a relatively long passage in which Montaigne is thinking with and through a small number of Senecan epistles:

[B] Metrodorus disoit qu’en la tristesse il y a quelque alliage de plaisir. Je ne sçay s’il vouloit dire autre chose; mais moy, j’imagine bien qu’il y a du dessein, du consentement et de la complaisance à se nourrir en la melancholie; je dis outre l’ambition, qui s’y peut encore mesler. Il y a quelque ombre de friandise et delicatesses qui nous rit et qui nous flatte au giron mesme de la melancholie. Y a-il pas des complexions qui en font leur aliment?

est quaedam flere voluptas.

[C] Et dict un Attalus en Seneque que la memoire de nos amis perdus nous agrée comme l’amer au vin trop vieux,

Minister vetuli, puer, falerni,

Ingere mi calices amariores;
 et comme des pommes doucement aigres. [B] Nature nous
 descouvre cette confusion: les peintres tiennent que les
 mouvemens et plis du visage qui servent au pleurer, servent
 aussi au rire. De vray, avant que l'un ou l'autre soyent achevez
 d'exprimer, regardez à la conduite de la peinture: vous estes en
 doubte vers lequel c'est qu'on va. Et l'extremité du rire se mesle
 aux larmes. [C] *Nullum sine auctoramento malum est.* (II.20.674).

Seneca has already appeared twice in this chapter: the third sentence of the 1580 text is a loose translation of epistle ninety-one and, a few lines before the passage quoted above, Montaigne (mis)quotes a line from epistle seventy-four. In the quoted passage, Seneca's ninety-ninth epistle provides the Metrodorus reference; Ovid the first verse quotation; Seneca's sixty-third epistle the saying of Attalus; Catullus the second verse quotation and, finally, Seneca's sixty-ninth epistle the prose quotation.

Seneca's ninety-ninth epistle is a letter within a letter: 'Epistulam, quam scripsi Marullo, cum filium parvulum amisisset et diceretur molliter ferre, misi tibi, in qua non sum solitum morem secutus nec putavi leniter illum debere tractari, cum obiurgatione esset quam solacio dignior.'²⁸⁸ Seneca's argument to his friend Marullus is not that we should stifle tears; simply that we ought not encourage them: 'Non est itaque, quod lacrimas propter circulum adstantem adsidentemque aut contineas aut exprimas; nec cessant nec fluunt umquam tam turpiter quam finguntur; eant sua sponte. Ire autem possunt placidis atque compositis.'²⁸⁹ Metrodorus is then introduced a few lines later: 'Illud nullo modo probo, quod ait Metrodorus: esse aliquam cognatam tristitiae voluptatem, hanc esse captandam in eiusmodi tempore. Ipsa Metrodori verba subscripsi. Μητροδώρου ἐπιστολῶν πρὸς τὴν ἀδελφὴν. Ἔστιν γὰρ τις ἡδονὴ λύπη συγγενής, ἣν χρὴ θηρεύειν κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν καιρὸν. De quibus non dubito quid sis sensurus.'²⁹⁰ Metrodorus

²⁸⁸ *Ep.* 99.1.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 99.20.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 99.25-26.

is introduced here not as an authority to be agreed with but rather as a mirror of Marcullus, subject to the same ‘obiurgatione’.

In Montaigne’s use of Metrodorus, this context has been erased entirely. Seneca’s lack of doubt in applying these words to Marcullus is perhaps mirrored in Montaigne’s uncertainty in reading Metrodorus’ meaning (‘Je ne sçay s’il voulait dire autre chose’), though there is no trace, textually at least, of the Senecan judgement so explicit in the source material. Montaigne’s opinion, like that of Metrodorus and, presumably, of Marcullus, is that we design, nourish, and consent to our grief as a means of finding a bitter-sweet pleasure: gone entirely is Seneca’s view that nothing ‘est turpius quam captare in ipso luctu voluptatem’. Montaigne encounters in Seneca an opinion which strikes him as accurate being treated as false: in citing Metrodorus, then, Montaigne is engaging with Seneca and with Metrodorus, thinking with the epistle. Metrodorus may, as the essayist considers, have meant something else and, in any case, Montaigne shifts rapidly to emphatically repeated first-person singular pronouns: ‘mais moy, j’imagine [...]’; ‘je dis outre l’ambition’. Rather than assimilating Seneca’s text, he thinks with the epistle, though without necessarily thinking in unison with it.

Returning to this passage sometime after 1588, he inserted another Senecan ‘emprunt’ and, this time, Seneca’s own borrowed words are presented, in the source material, as being in accordance with his – Seneca’s – view: ‘Nam, ut dicere solebat Attalus noster’.²⁹¹ In placing these two epistles next to each other, Montaigne reveals something of a contradiction between Seneca’s texts: we ought not to seek pleasure in grief but grief is pleasurable. Seneca, then, like everything in this chapter, is depicted on the page as an admixture; as a combination of contradictory, even opposing, parts. Of course, this is not immediately obvious to the reader: the Senecan context – including

²⁹¹ Ibid. 63.5.

Seneca's critique – in the first 'emprunt' is not present in the *Essais*; yet we may assume that this was available to Montaigne as he was writing and thinking through this passage. Here, we see Montaigne placing texts, including his own, in combination in order to think through multiple options and to consider diverse perspectives: Montaigne examines his approval of Metrodorus through the double lens of Seneca – a lens which is made to be self-reflexive, changing, even contradictory. Indeed, this fragmentary quality in Seneca is reflected in Montaigne's exposition of the Attalus saying itself: Seneca, ventriloquizing Attalus's (now French) similes, interrupts himself half way through the coupled comparisons to adopt – briefly – the mask of Catullus.

In this passage, Montaigne and Seneca and, to a lesser extent, Metrodorus and Attalus are moving, ambiguous figures. Different perspectives and 'diverses visages' come together to form a composite text but this is not subsumed into one monological, Montaignean discourse. Rather, Montaigne thinks through and with these multiple texts, 'essaying' collaboratively²⁹² and, in recognising that 'La parole est moitié à celui qui parle, moitié à celui qui l'escoute', he finds a way of writing which allows him to overcome the necessity of singular, linear affirmation. Language and printed text may always be relatively fixed but, like Montaigne, we move around this text, seeing its multiple points of connection, both intra- and intertextually, seeing a text which is 'glissant et coulant', 'douteu[x] et irresol[u]'.

²⁹² A more literal understanding of collaborative authorship in early modern texts has been developed in recent criticism which focuses on the roles played by secretaries, amanuenses, and printers. On Montaigne, see, in the first instance, George Hoffmann's *Montaigne's Career* and, on early modern texts more generally, Ann Blair's Rosenbach lectures on *Hidden Hands: Amanuenses and Authorship in Early Modern Europe* (2014), audio recordings of which can be found at URL: <<http://repository.upenn.edu/rosenbach/8/>> [Accessed: 11th January 2017].

'Douteuse et irresolue', 'double et divers': Doubtful Authorship and Doubtful Thought

Authors in the *Essais* are on the move: they move around a central text which has become the place of interactive, moving, and inconstant thought. While these authorial presences, the authorial status of the text (both in particular passages and when the text is viewed as a whole), and the processes of thought these authorial practices facilitate and engage in are all certainly ambiguous, shifting, and multiple, they are not 'blurry' or imprecise. The ambiguities, both of authorship and of Montaigne's thought processes, are ingrained in the formal and stylistic elements of the text in a way which allows for multiple and contradictory states to be present at once. We might compare the experience of reading one of Montaigne's ambiguously authored passages with having 'double vision' – we see Montaigne *and* Plutarch, for example – but it is important to recognise that we see both figures clearly. The problem is not one of perception but rather one to do with how we make sense of this duality.

I have argued that Montaigne's intertextual authorship is not one of assimilation: it is one wherein distinct authorial identities are capable of occupying the same textual space and, when they do, they remain distinct and discrete. One author or another may come to the fore, depending on how we approach the passage, but the authorial duality in these passages is real: we see 'diverses visages'. Rather than presenting a dialogue – 'I think this while another author thinks that' – Montaigne makes authorship problematic and plural: quotation is not, then, a means of presenting diverse ideas but is instead a way of allowing Montaigne and his reader to think through ideas on the page. It is not the case that authorship, rather than flowing from one source, now flows from multiple sources but rather that Montaigne, thinking with these other authors and with their texts in his own textual practice, relocates authorship to the space between them. It is here that we can see Montaigne engaging in the sort of

extended cognition described by Clark and Chalmers and other theorists of distributed cognition – he is thinking with texts and in writing – while also noting how he goes beyond the models these theories describe: this is a multiple and shifting network of interpersonal/intertextual relationships and a network with which Montaigne engages in complex and self-reflective thought about thinking.

This form of authorship forces us into that ‘painful’ suspension of judgement which is one characterised by struggle and active engagement rather than the tranquillity of Sceptical *ataraxia*: we must, like Montaigne, accommodate this duality all while wrestling with it. The ‘suffisant lecteur’, capable of suspending judgement, holding his or her guard in determining ‘ce qui est sien et ce qui n’est point’, discovers this authorial dualism and enters the ‘tennis match’ of ‘essaying’ and meaning-making.

In-between authorship serves Montaigne as a tool with which to think and, more than this, to think in ways which are complex, unresolved, and multi-perspectival: it becomes a cognitive resource. This formal feature is, then, more than an expression of Montaigne’s philosophical position: it is a means by which he does the thinking itself and by which this thought is, in turn, interrogated. Montaigne does not marshal his authors so that they might express or defend what it is that he thinks; he puts their words alongside his on the page as a means of thinking and, significantly, as a means of thinking textually, in language. Recognising this feature of the *Essais* not only affords us a new approach to these questions of intertextuality in Montaigne’s text: it shows us one of the ways in which Montaigne’s textual, stylistic practice breeds and allows for a conceptual and cognitive doubleness. It is in writing in this way, in relocating authorship to the ambiguous space between multiple authors and in embracing the authorial duality of borrowed words, that Montaigne goes some way towards writing a discourse which is double and doubtful. It is, moreover, the nature of this discourse, coupled with his

efforts to think with and on the page – in and through writing – which facilitates a way of thinking which is unresolved. In-between authorship, then, is doubtful for both Montaigne and his reader. In displacing authorship onto the page – the space between authors – he constructs a ‘forme d’écrire’ which is ‘douteuse et irresolue’; a way of writing which facilitates the way he thinks: ‘[B] Il n’est rien si souple et erratique que nostre entendement: c’est le soulier de Theramenez, bon à tous pieds. Et il est double et divers, et les matieres doubles et diverses’ (III.11.1034).

‘Diverses pieces [...] à diverses poses’: Forming the *Essais*

In Chapter Two, we saw Montaigne’s ambiguous authorship: his intertextual practices allow him to rethink the typically strict and steadfast link between author and text, resulting in an ambiguous and double text capable of being spoken by two ‘voices’ at once. This practice allows him to write temporary and tentative affirmations without falling into presumption, false certainty, dogmatism: this is a way of writing *astheneia*. This in-between authorship, however, relying as it does on intertextual ambiguities, does not go far enough in allowing Montaigne to truly and faithfully write his doubtful thought. For this, he would need a method capable of a broader reach; he would need a doubtful and unresolved form. In this chapter, I will ask how Montaigne’s mode of authorship finds this form, investigating the way in which the ‘forme d’écrire’ practised in the *Essais* attempts to write a ‘pensée sans forme’. In doing so, I suggest that Seneca and Plutarch are, as we have long recognised, central figures in the construction of this textual, literary form, though not for those reasons typically and traditionally asserted.

The ‘Form’ of the *Essai*

The question of the *essai*’s form is one that is too large – and, indeed, one that has been asked too often²⁹³ – to be answered definitively and exhaustively in just one chapter. Of course, everything examined so far in this thesis – intertextual practice, the ‘nouveau langage’, the role and function of the author, combination and rupture at the level of

²⁹³ Perhaps most foundational in this regard is Tournon’s *Montaigne: la glose et l’essai*. The key studies in this field, to which I will return throughout this chapter, are those by Tournon, Pouilloux, and Mathieu-Castellani.

sentence and paragraph, even the movement of doubtful thought – is inextricable from form: like Montaigne, we must look '[B] autant à la forme qu'à la substance' (III.8.928) because they are one and the same.²⁹⁴ J.-Y. Pouilloux made this clear in his influential study, *Lire les Essais de Montaigne*.²⁹⁵ We have a tendency, he argues, to extract a body of knowledge from the *Essais*, synthesising diverse sections of text or excerpting choice lines: 'On parvient ainsi à créer une unité intelligible sous laquelle ranger les différentes pièces de "puzzle" qui constituent un texte.'²⁹⁶ The form of the 'essai', far from functioning as a transparent vessel, is indistinguishable from the thoughts, ideas, and arguments it contains: 'la manière' and 'la matière' overlap and shape each other reciprocally. This equivalency of 'forme' and 'substance' in the *Essais* finds perhaps its clearest expression through comparison with Charron, as Sylvia Giocanti has demonstrated clearly: 'la remise en ordre (systématisation) des discours sceptiques de Montaigne et l'utilisation d'un lexique fondé sur le principe de la non-contradiction et de la division scolastique des concepts ruinent le scepticisme de Montaigne: l'unité de la pensée sceptique qui réside dans l'agencement chaotique de la pensée [...] est parfaitement perdue, si bien que l'on peut dire que Charron, doctrinalement si fidèle à Montaigne, n'est paradoxalement pas sceptique, précisément parce qu'il fait formellement de la philosophie de Montaigne une doctrine sceptique qui se détruit elle-même.'²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ See Alain Legros, 'Autant la forme que la substance', *Montaigne Studies*, 26 (2014), pp. 79-86. Legros' article consists of an 'enquête lexicale' of 'paires d'opposés des mots dont Montaigne se sert volontiers pour parler de son entreprise d'écriture: manière et matière, forme et substance, façon et sujet' (p. 79), before rethinking Desan's economic reading of 'mettre en roule' (*Les Commerces de Montaigne* (Paris: Nizet, 1992)), suggesting that this signifies a practice of adding, extending, lengthening a roll of parchment; a process of attaching discrete and yet contiguous 'pieces' and 'lopins' (pp. 84-86).

²⁹⁵ *Lire les Essais de Montaigne*, reprinted in *Montaigne: l'éveil de la pensée*. References here are to the reprinted edition.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 24.

²⁹⁷ *Penser l'irrésolution: Montaigne, Pascal, La Mothe Le Vayer*, p. 21.

Building on the important studies of Pouilloux and those who have written in his wake, my aim in this chapter is to reconsider the roles played by Senecan and Plutarchan forms in influencing the form of the ‘essai’. Rethinking this old question, which we have for a long time felt to be fully answered, from a perspective of doubtfully writing unresolved thought, I intend to elucidate the ways in which the ‘essai’ attempts to write more than an endless sequence of positions without conclusion and instead a text which is ‘double et divers’, saying this *and* that, not simply this *then* that. Rather than attempting to answer this question with ‘résolution’, I intend to explore a previously unexamined ‘visage’ of the Senecan/Plutarchan influence on the form of the ‘essai’.

De la forme de l’imagination

Near the beginning of ‘De l’expérience’, Montaigne describes the limitations of legal discourses, demonstrating how, in attempting to eradicate doubt, schoolmen, lawyers, and theologians find themselves more and more doubtful: ‘[B] *mus in pice*’ (III.13.1068). In attempting to pin down meaning and write away all ambiguity, these authors of glosses and commentaries achieve precisely the opposite of their intentions.²⁹⁸ Shifting subtly from a discussion of the relationship between ways of writing and doubtful thought to the patterns and movements of thought itself, he writes:

[B] Ce n’est rien que foiblesse particuliere qui nous faict contenter de ce que d’autres ou que nous-mesmes avons trouvé en cette chasse de cognoissance; un plus habile ne s’en contentera pas. Il y a tousjours place pour un suyvant, [C] ouy et pour nous mesmes, [B] et route par ailleurs. Il n’y a point de fin en nos inquisitions; nostre fin est en l’autre monde. [C] C’est

²⁹⁸ See Steven Rendall, ‘Mus in pice: Montaigne and Interpretation’, *MLN*, 94, 5 (1979), pp. 1056-1071. ‘This second text is never the same as the first, nor is it the same as the texts produced by other interpreters. Such efforts thus result only in the multiplication – or as we might now say, the dissemination – of meaning’, p. 1056.

signe de racourciment d'esprit quand il se contente, ou de lasseté. Nul esprit genereux ne s'arreste en soy: il pretend tousjours et va outre ses forces; il a des eslans au delà de ses effects; s'il ne s'avance et ne se presse et ne s'accule et ne se choque, il n'est vif qu'à demy; [B] ses poursuites sont sans terme, et sans forme; son aliment c'est admiration, chasse, ambiguité. Ce que declaroit assez Appollo, parlant tousjours à nous doublement, obscurément et obliquement, ne nous repaissant pas, mais nous amusant et embesongnant. C'est un mouvement [C] irregulier, [B] perpetuel, sans [C] patron, [B] et sans but. (III.13.1068).²⁹⁹

It would be misleading to present this as a philosophy of mind: Montaigne's engagement with reflection on how he thinks lacks the systemised and global approach of a 'philosophy'. It seems rather that he conceives of a practice of thinking: his concerns lie less with the essence of the mind and more with the experience of the thinking subject. It is in this passage that some of the key aspects of Montaigne's thought about thinking are revealed. The 'poursuites' of the 'esprit genereux' which are 'sans terme, et sans forme' are echoed in this movement of thought which is 'irregulier, perpetuel, sans patron, et sans but'. Tournon sees in this description the 'zététique' of the 'essai pyrrhonien' though, as we have seen in Chapters One and Two, we need not associate the essayist's doubtfulness with Pyrrhonism quite so readily.³⁰⁰ Notably, this passage underwent a process of careful revision on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' and there are two changes which are particularly revealing in this exposition of the form of thought.

²⁹⁹ The [C] markers in the final sentence are absent in the Villey-Saulnier edition.

³⁰⁰ *Route par ailleurs*, esp. pp. 7-31.

contradictory and temporary ‘cadences dogmatistes’ and, while your writing will not be ‘certain’, it will truly and truthfully reflect doubtful thought and an uncertain world. I will return to this idea of alogical, non-oppositional pairs in Chapter Four.

For the moment, however, we can note that this unusual term, ‘admiration’, is also used – in a similar context – in III.11.1030: ‘[C] L’admiration est fondement de toute philosophie, l’inquisition le progresz, l’ignorance le bout.’ While it is possible that this term bears the influence of Aristotle – William of Moerbeke’s standard medieval translation gives ‘*admiratio*’ for ‘*θαυμάζειν*’ (*Metaphysics*, 982b) – it seems that a more likely source is Plutarch and specifically his opuscle, ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’: ‘Et pourautant que aux philosophes appartient enquerir, admirer & doubter, à bon droict la plus part des choses de ce Dieu [Apollon] sont comme cachees soubz des enigmes, & paroles couvertes.’³⁰² The reference to Apollo which follows in Montaigne’s text, coupled with his sustained engagement with this opuscle, suggests that this may be the more likely source. With this revision, Montaigne’s text further aligns the moving, marvelling (and thus unresolved) nature of his thought with Apollo and particularly his double and obscure way of speaking.³⁰³

The second change made on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ (*fig.* 9) is more immediately significant. Here, Montaigne describes the ‘mouvement’ of thought and, in his manuscript changes, turns increasingly to spatial and quasi-visual terms. In 1588, the text read: ‘C’est un mouvement perpetuel, sans arrest, & sans but.’ On the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, we read: ‘[B] C’est un mouvement [C] irregulier [B] perpetuel, sans ~~arrest~~ [C] ~~regle~~ patron, [B] & sans but.’ As we have already seen in Chapter Two, Montaigne’s

³⁰² ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’, fol. 353r. For Moerbeke’s translation, see *Metaphysica, lib. I-XIV. Recensio et Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, ed. by Gudrun Vuillemin-Diem (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

³⁰³ On the influence of Plutarch’s characterisation of Apollo on Montaigne’s conception of this god, see Raymond Esclapez, ‘Le Dieu Apollon: des *Dialogues Pythiques* de Plutarque aux *Essais* de Montaigne’, *Moralia et œuvres morales à la Renaissance*, pp. 253-274, esp. pp. 267-272 which focuses on the Apollonian epithets ‘pythien’ (searcher/enquirer) and ‘loxias’ (obscure).

graphic hesitations and deliberations as evidenced by crossed-out sections of the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ can reveal the cognitive and writerly processes at work in a given passage or argument. What, then, is he trying to express about the nature of thought and his own difficulty in rendering it visible on the page? Not only does Montaigne say that thought is difficult to follow and to write; his deliberations and changes – both here and throughout the *Essais* – testify constantly to this difficulty.

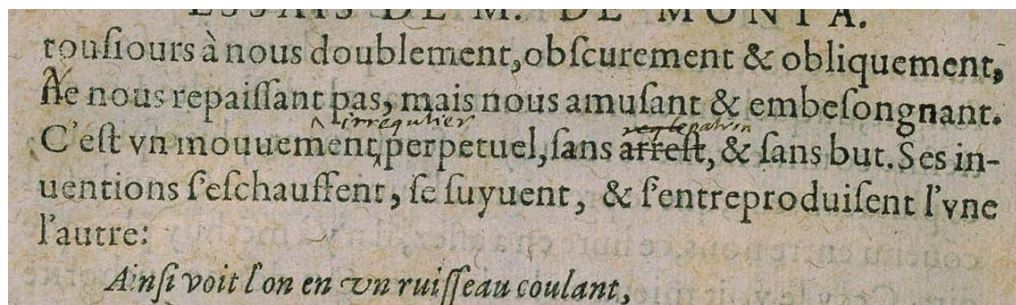


Fig. 9. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, Fol. 480v.

The essayist insists that this movement of thought is not only perpetual but irregular: its movements cannot be predicted. Knowing how thought will progress is not a case of immensely difficult but always hypothetically possible knowledge; rather, the trajectory or itinerary of any given thought is unknowable.³⁰⁴ Montaigne then erases the almost redundant ‘sans arrest’ which doubles ‘mouvement perpetuel’ though without serving as a perfect synonym: the use of ‘arrest’ here links back and contrasts this true depiction of the movement of thought with the legal/judicial practices discussed in the preceding section of this chapter. It seems that Montaigne was thinking within a juridical framework wherein ‘sans arrest’ means more than ‘without end’ and has implications of ‘without conclusion’ or ‘verdict’ – without a final form which can be put forward authoritatively and definitively. He then inserts first ‘regle’ and then ‘patron’ in what seems like a different ink. What are we to make of these two terms? Bernard Sève

³⁰⁴ On the vagabond nature of Montaigne’s thought and text, see Mary McKinley, *Les Terrains vagues des Essais: itinéraires et intertextes* (Paris: Champion, 1996) and Fausta Garavini, *Itinéraires à Montaigne: jeux de texte* (Paris: Champion, 1995).

has studied the former in great detail and, though there is a tendency in his work to conflate ‘règle’ and ‘forme’, his careful differentiation of ‘fertilité et fécondité’ helps to illuminate this passage. Approaching the issue from an Aristotelian perspective, Sève argues:

1) qu’un terrain fertile, que ce soit une terre grasse, le corps d’une femme, ou un esprit, est par lui-même producteur d’êtres ou d’objets; mais 2) que réduit à sa seule fertilité, non ensemencé par un principe extérieur, semence agricole, semence spermatique, ou, pour l’esprit, “sujet”, ce terrain fertile ne peut produire que des êtres absurdes et des “objets” indéterminés: herbes sauvages et inutiles, masses de chairs informes, folies et divagations.³⁰⁵

Fertility – that is, generation without a formal principle – creates ‘monstres fantasques’, ‘chimères’ (I.8.33). ‘Fécondité’, on the other hand, describes an ordered, well-formed production of beings and things: it is only with this formal principle, argues Sève, that the ‘potentialités de la fertilité’ are elevated to ‘la véritable fécondité’.³⁰⁶ The mind, at least as it is described in the *Essais*, is naturally without such a principle; it is ‘sans règle’ and its movement is therefore monstrous. Sève goes on to argue that ‘l’esprit ne dispose d’aucune règle immanente, n’a nul accès à des règles transcendantes’,³⁰⁷ that it has no in-built mechanism to guide or restrain it and, significantly, that the spirit has not lost its ‘règles’ but rather that ‘il n’en a jamais eu qui lui soient propres’.³⁰⁸ All of this is borne out by the extract currently under analysis though Sève suggests that, in place of such ‘règles’, Montaigne turns to ‘règles supplétives’, that is, ‘règle[s] applicable[s] à défaut d’autres dispositions (légalles ou conventionnelles)’,³⁰⁹ such as the ‘rules’ of habit, the body, and conversation. These are rules which lack an assured foundation and yet they are sufficient and provide enough of a framework with which to control and order this spirit ‘sans règle’.

³⁰⁵ *Montaigne: des règles pour l’esprit*, p. 28.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 29.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 179.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 31.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 179.

Montaigne's shift on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' first from 'sans arrest' to 'sans regle' and then from 'sans regle' to 'sans patron' seems, I think, to push against this last point. To say that the spirit is 'unruly' suggests that he is trying to rule it when it seems that he is rather trying to pursue and trace it: as he notes in 'De l'exercitation', '[C] C'est une espineuse entreprinse, et plus qu'il ne semble, de *suivre* une alleure si vagabonde que celle de nostre esprit' (II.6.378, my emphasis). 'Sans regle' and 'sans patron' function here as near synonyms, both describing the sorts of 'un-formed' generation examined by Sève with the latter allowing the essayist to describe less ambiguously the way in which thought and the spirit are without pattern, model, mould. Both terms allow Montaigne to differentiate between an endless movement without conclusion ('sans arrest') and an erratic, careering one.³¹⁰ With the shift to 'patron', however, Montaigne removes the connotations of ruling and taming that which is unruly: rather than trying to remedy a spirit 'sans regle', Montaigne is trying to trace the shapeless shape and the movement of a spirit 'sans patron'. We ought to read the account of the 'poursuites' of the spirit, described earlier in this passage as 'sans forme', in a similar fashion: as J.-Y. Pouilloux and Philippe Desan have both argued, 's'il faut prendre le mot forme dans son acception philosophique, il est pourtant erroné de lui donner une connotation essentialiste et universelle';³¹¹ 'la forme ne dit rien de l'être, elle désigne seulement – mais ce "seulement" est capital – la façon dont l'être apparaît, la figure de sa manifestation.'³¹² According to Desan and Pouilloux, 'forme' in the *Essais* describes the thing as it appears and says nothing of its essential being or order. These Aristotelian notions of 'forme' as the guiding principle, as that which gives structure,

³¹⁰ Cf. Montaigne's frequent use of images of stumbling or even drunken movement. In III.9.964, for instance, he describes how he has moved through time though not towards sagacity – that he has gotten older but not necessarily any wiser: '[C] C'est un mouvement d'yvrougne titubant, vertigineux, informe'.

³¹¹ Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: les formes du monde et de l'esprit* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008), p. 13.

³¹² J.-Y. Pouilloux, 'La forme maîtresse', *Montaigne et la question de l'homme*, ed. by Marie-Luce Demonet (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), pp. 33-45 (p. 34).

definition, or essence to an otherwise monstrous ‘férité’, are ‘difformés à nouveau service’ though this deformation takes place without erasing entirely the traditional philosophical understandings of these terms. Montaigne’s spirit and imagination is certainly without form, in the traditional Aristotelian sense, as Sève has shown, though here ‘forme’ seems to describe the shape, movement, and the quasi-physical properties of his imagination. This is particularly evident in the description of the ‘mouvement perpetuel’: where the 1588 text focuses exclusively on movement through time, the inclusion of ‘irregulier’ and ‘sans patron’ introduce additional dimensions and, as a result, a visual, three-dimensional impression of this ‘mouvement’.³¹³

But this is, of course, a movement ‘sans patron’; a pursuit ‘sans forme’. Not only is thought without end; it is without shape. What shape, then, do these ‘[B] imaginations irresolues’ (III.2.805) take when they are put into text?³¹⁴ If thought is to be done in writing, what would this shapeless thought look like? The example of Apollonian discourse – ‘parlant tousjours à nous doublement, obscurément et obliquement’ – highlights some of the key aspects which will return throughout Montaigne’s discussions of this ideal form of writing: doubleness, productive difficulty, and endlessly reaching further and beyond what is currently available. In the long [C] addition to II.6, he writes, ‘je peins principalement mes cogitations, subject informe’, but what ‘forme d’escrire’ is capable of writing this ‘pensée sans forme’?³¹⁵ ‘[A] J’ay tousjours une idée en

³¹³ A connection may be drawn between this emphasis on the physicality of thought and the early modern understanding of ‘imagination’ as *phantasia*; that is, as the ‘façon de penser particulière pour les choses matérielles’. This quotation, taken from Descartes, is used by John Lyons in his study of this early modern imagination, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. xi. It might be said that, in describing his ‘entendement’ in this way, Montaigne is ‘imagining’ his imagination.

³¹⁴ It is in this regard that this chapter builds upon and develops the argument of Tournon’s *Route par ailleurs*: Tournon has studied the ‘endless’ quality of pyrrhonian ‘zététique’; here, as we will see, my focus is on how thought extends across multiple dimensions including though not limited to that of time.

³¹⁵ Compare III.2.804: ‘[B] Les autres forment l’homme, je le recite et en represente un particulier bien mal formé’.

l'ame,' he writes elsewhere, 'qui me presente [...] une meilleure forme que celle que j'ay mis en besongne mais je ne la puis saisir'³¹⁶ (II.17.637): thought escapes form and yet, clearly, it would be a 'signe de racourciment d'esprit' not to pursue ('chasse[r]') this elusive marriage of 'le penser' and 'le dire'.

'Double et divers'

In 'Des boyteux', Montaigne gives what is perhaps the key to understanding this enterprise of writing thought and thinking in writing: '[B] Il n'est rien si souple et erratique que nostre entendement: c'est le soulier de Theramenez, bon à tous pieds. Et il est double et divers, et les matieres doubles et diverses' (III.11.1034). It is with this quotation that I closed the last chapter and here, yet again, we see the centrality of the double, the pair, duality though, in this chapter, we will see yet another of its 'visages'. If Montaigne is to trace in writing the 'double et divers' nature not only of thought but also of the objects of thought and the world in which one lives and thinks, his text must also be capable of being 'double et divers'. The text would require more than an 'endlessness', growing longer with each new edition; 'double et divers' demands not simply a plurality, an unending sequence of different thoughts, but also a simultaneity: Montaigne's proliferation of thought, in all of its monstrosity, is not just a sequence of disagreeing positions but is, rather, one where different and opposing thoughts can be held and maintained at once. It will be noted that this doubleness is not strictly binary: in aligning 'double' with 'divers', Montaigne's point has less to do with oppositional thought and seems rather to stress the instantaneous adoption of multiple viewpoints, of two or more perspectives at once. We might compare the passage from the 'Apologie' studied in Chapter One where Seneca and Plutarch present things 'tantost

³¹⁶ Note the subsequent discussion of 'parler informe et sans règle'.

d'un visage, tantost d'un autre' (II.12.509): it seems consonant with his point that he could have added, 'and now with a third'. To write thought as Montaigne perceives it, it would not be enough for his text or the ways of thinking it describes and performs to be pliable, affording multiple, divergent perspectives or interpretations at different times, nor simply packed with diverse opinions on a given subject; rather, this diversity must be coupled – as it is in the quotation above from 'Des boyteux' – with duality and simultaneity. But what are we to make of these terms in this context?

Before proceeding, it is worth repeating a methodological point which has been employed at frequent intervals throughout this thesis. Montaigne has a number of key words and phrases to which he frequently returns – a 'nouveau langage', perhaps – though, as he writes in 'Sur des vers de Virgile', '[C] elles signifient plus qu'elle ne disent' (III.5.873). His practice is one of 'innovating' language, 'estirant et ployant' (ibid.) though by way of explication Montaigne, like Plutarch who '[A] guigne seulement du doigt' (I.26.156), often only '[B] montre au doigt' (III.9.983). There are certain innovative textual practices, unnamed by the essayist though perhaps pointed at, which I have named such as the concept of 'in-between authorship'. On the other hand, certain words are 'difformés' and explained or glossed by Montaigne himself (such as Montaigne's redefinition of 'la vertu' at the beginning of 'De la cruauté' (II.11)). My aim in examining 'double' and 'divers', however, is to draw out the implied, gestured towards implications and meanings of his language and terminology which '[C] sonnent à gauche un ton plus delicat' (I.40.251). In 'De la vanité', he writes, '[B] si on y regarde, on trouvera que j'ay tout dict, ou tout designé' (III.9.983) and, as Tournon has noted, this process of 'désignant' is the 'équivalent textuel de l'index pointé vers l'objet à considérer, geste moins explicite sans doute que le "dire", mais peut-être plus

insistant’.³¹⁷ These are terms which Montaigne uses repeatedly, emphatically but without providing a commentary: if we are to understand his use of these words, we must follow his pointing finger.

Let us return to the terms at hand: ‘double et divers’. ‘Divers’, in the context of thought and writing, signifies plurality, a multiplicity of perspectives, a diversity of opinion and, as such, a mode of irresolution.³¹⁸ We see this clearly in the 1580 version of the description of Plutarch as the exemplar of the ‘tiers genre’: ‘combien de fois nous presente il deux ou trois causes contraires de mesme subject, et diverses raisons, sans choisir celle que nous avons à suivre?’ (II.12.509). We see a similar usage, this time directed towards Montaigne himself, near the beginning of the second book: ‘[B] Si je parle diversement de moy, c’est que je me regarde diversement. Toutes les contrarietez s’y trouvent selon quelque tour et en quelque façon’ (II.1.335). Also in the ‘Apologie’, we find: ‘[A] Combien diversement jugeons nous des choses? Combien de fois changeons nous nos fantasies?’ (II.12.563). We might also note that Montaigne, in a passage which will be studied in full detail later in this chapter, hesitates over the word ‘diversement’ before settling on its near equivalent, ‘discordamment’, in ‘De la vanité’: ‘[C] Joint qu’à l’adventure ay-je quelque obligation particuliere à ne dire qu’à demy, à dire confusément, à dire ~~diversement~~ discordamment’ (III.9.996).

³¹⁷ ‘Tout dire ou tout désigner’, *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France*, 88, 5 (1988), pp. 923-933 (p. 923).

³¹⁸ We might contrast this understanding of ‘divers’ with that evident in the French title of Pedro Mexía’s *Silva de varia lección* (1540): *Les Diverses leçons de Pierre Messie*, trans. by Claude Gruget (Paris: Ian Longis, 1552). In Mexía’s text, we find a diversity of subject matter though no real diversity or irresolution of opinion or perspective. For an introduction to this text and its positioning of the author, see Dominique de Courcelles, ‘Le Mélange des savoirs: pour la connaissance du monde et la connaissance de soi au milieu du XVIe siècle dans la *Silva de Varia Lección* du Sévillan Pedro Mexía’, *Ouvrages miscellanées et théories de la connaissance à la Renaissance*, pp. 103-115. Cf. Terence Cave and Kirsti Sellevold, “‘Or, ces exemples me semblent plus à propos’: une phrase inaugurale dans les *Essais* de Montaigne”, *Eveils: études en l’honneur de J.-Y. Pouilloux* (Paris: Garnier, 2010), pp. 65-75. Cave and Sellevold show how Montaigne’s textual demonstration of cognitive activity distinguishes even his earliest chapters from ‘recueils d’exemples’ such as those found in Mexía’s text.

Significantly, in these circumstances, ‘divers’ and ‘diversement’ seem to signify an interiorised diversity of opinion – internal disagreement either within an individual or within a text composed under the name of a single author – rather than diversity of opinion as a disagreement between distinct individuals. It is here, then, that we can recall the notion raised in Chapter Two that dialogue, and particularly the Socratic model, is not as helpful an analogy for the *essai* as we tend to assume. This mode of ‘diversity’ is by no means surprising: presenting multiple, different ideas, accounts, or reasons for a given thing is surely to be expected in a ‘doubtful’ text. Indeed, this process of ‘diverse’ thought lies at the heart of the Sceptical principle of *ou mallon* and the ‘universal’ or ‘general mode’ of the Pyrrhonists as described by Sextus: ‘Opponimus autem apparentia apparentibus, aut intellectualia intellectualibus: aut permutatim. [...] ut Anaxagoras, huic propositioni, albam esse nivem; opponebat hanc, nivem, aquam esse concretam, aquam aurem esse nigram: igitur & nivem nigram esse.’³¹⁹ To write or think ‘diversement’ is, for the Sceptic, to posit one argument in a given context (typically dictated – inversely – by the argument maintained by the opposing dogmatist) and another at a later point in time when that context has changed. Diversity of this kind is not, of course, limited to Sceptical texts: we need only think of the school-boy exercise of *argumentum in utramque partem* to realise how widespread, at least in principle, this model of irresolution was in early modern Europe.

‘Divers’, then, signifies the ability to think from and write a multitude of opinions, moving from one position to the next. It is a form of dialectic which moves, potentially without progression or end and, most importantly for my purposes here, it is a model of irresolution which is linear. By this, I mean that thinking ‘diversement’ entails taking one ‘visage’, then another, then another, and so on, moving through time – the time of thinking, reading, writing – such that each position or concept is taken

³¹⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhonianarum hypotyposeon*, I.13.411.

separately and in sequence. In the *Essais*, we see this most clearly in those passages of the ‘Apologie’, modelled, it seems, upon Plutarch’s ‘Les Opinions des philosophes’, in which Montaigne presents a series of ‘raisons’ for a given question, passing through each in turn, before reaching a position of irresolution and suspending judgement. Once again, the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ illuminates this practice (fig. 10): in his long, cascading account of the ‘diverses’ opinions on the nature of God which fills the right-hand column, Montaigne incorporates and (temporarily) assimilates this sequential multitude of opinion, passing through each in turn, before exclaiming: ‘[C] Fiez vous à vostre philosophie; vantez vous d’avoir trouvé la feve au gasteau, à voir ce tintamarre de tant de cervelles philosophiques!’ (II.12.5160).

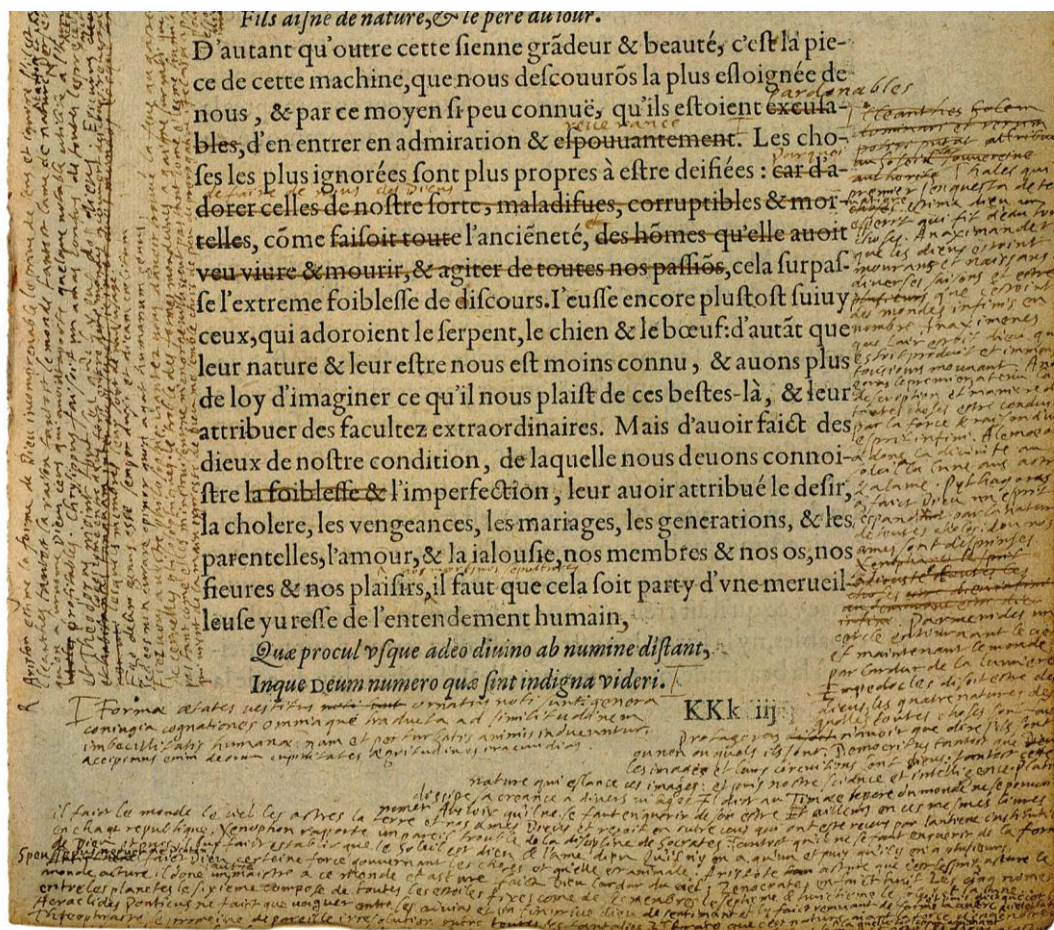


Fig. 10. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, Fol. 223r.

‘Double’, however, suggests something less common and, I think, more radical. ‘Double’ signifies a *simultaneity* of contradiction or difference of thought.³²⁰ As Montaigne writes in ‘De la gloire’, ‘[A] nous sommes, je ne sçay comment, doubles en nous mesmes, qui fait que ce que nous croyons, nous ne le croyons pas, et nous ne pouvons deffaire de ce que nous condamnons’ (II.16.619). The subject under discussion in this passage is one of Epicurus’ ‘principaux dogmes’: ‘Cache ta vie’. ‘Voyons les dernieres paroles d’Epicurus,’ he writes, ‘et qu’il dict en mourant: elles sont grandes et dignes d’un tel philosophe, mais si ont elles quelque marque de la recommandation de son nom, et de cette humeur qu’il avoit décriée par ses preceptes’ (II.16.619-620). Here, there is a simultaneity of contradiction: Epicurus believes and thinks two things at once (albeit that, in this example, one thought may be more ‘conscious’ than the other). He does not argue that Epicurus believed his precept while healthy and then ceased believing in it when death was at hand; nor does he argue that Epicurus claimed to believe one thing while ‘truly’ believing something else: rather, ‘ce que nous croyons, nous ne le croyons pas’. For Montaigne, ‘nostre entendement’ is ‘double’ precisely because it is capable of this simultaneity of thought; of thinking this *and* that, regardless of contradiction, at the same time. As Ian Maclean has noted, Montaigne ‘rejette l’application du système [logique] aristotélicien’ and, in particular, the central principle of non-contradiction which is, for Aristotle, ‘le plus certain [...] car “il est impossible qu’un même attribut appartienne et n’appartienne pas à la même chose et dans la même

³²⁰ Nicola Panichi has interpreted the temporality of contradiction in Montaigne antithetically, suggesting that Montaigne’s temporal markers imply a diachronic model of difference similar to the model of diversity outlined above. See ‘Le Scepticisme qui “gagne” le jugement: le Plutarque de Montaigne’, *Montaigne: cahiers d’histoire de la philosophie*, ed. by Pierre Magnard and Thierry Gontier (Paris: CERF, 2010), pp. 67-80. Panichi argues that, ‘Si la contradiction chez Plutarque semble se résoudre dans la modération, elle trouve chez Montaigne sa résolution principalement dans le temps: “tantost ... tantost” signifie la non-simultanéité et la diachronie du passage. C’est ainsi grâce au temps que Montaigne résout la contradiction sceptique.’ As we will see, I argue that this ‘contradiction sceptique’ is not ‘resolved’ and requires a cognitive and writerly/textual simultaneity.

relation à la chose”³²¹. Here, then, in defiance of this Aristotelian principle, Montaigne makes thought double, illogical, and apparently impossible.

We see a similar account of this duality in ‘De l’experience’ where he describes ‘cette longue attention qu[’il] employe à [se] considerer’ (III.13.1076):

[B] Je laisse aux artistes, et ne sçay s’ils en viennent à bout en chose si meslées, si menue et fortuite, de renger en bandes cette infinie diversité de visages, et arrester nostre inconstance et la mettre par ordre. Non seulement je trouve mal-aisé d’attacher nos actions les unes aux autres, mais chacune à part soy je trouve mal-aysé de la designer proprement par quelque qualité principale, tant elles sont doubles et bigarrées à divers lustres. (III.13.1076-1077).

Unlike the ‘[C] sçavans’ who ‘partent et denotent leur fantasies’ (III.13.1076), Montaigne recognises that unpicking the doubleness of thought is an impossible task: it is a task which he leaves to ‘artistes’, doubting that they will be successful. To ‘renger en bandes’ or ‘mettre par ordre’ this ‘infinie diversité’ is to take duality and simultaneity and present it, artificially, according to a linear and discrete model. ‘Nos actions’ refers, in this context, to the ‘actions’ of the spirit – ‘contenances, humeurs, discours’ (III.13.1076) – and he recognises these to be ‘doubles et bigarrées’; entangled, multiform, simultaneously plural. In ‘Des boyteux’, he said that ‘les matieres’ as well as ‘nostre entendement’ were ‘doubles et diverses’ and we can see this simultaneity of difference in external reality in a post-1588 qualification to a sentence in ‘Des coches’: ‘[B] Si nous voyons autant du monde comme nous n’en voyons pas, nous apercevrons, comme il est à croire, une perpetuele [C] multiplication et [B] vicissitude de formes’ (III.6.908). For Montaigne, thought, like the world, is multiple and double: thought bifurcates, following two (or more) paths at once. ‘Nostre entendement’ certainly changes across time and is ‘divers’, but this diversity is parallel rather than linear.

³²¹ *Montaigne philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), pp. 33-34. See also p. 50 where Maclean suggests that this ‘refus de la loi de la non-contradiction’ results in ‘l’abandon d’un concept rigoureux de vérité’.

This is a model of unresolved thought without precedent in previous ‘patrons’ or ‘formes’ and, as such, one which requires a new ‘forme d’écrire’ capable of expressing it. We might also note that this double, simultaneous aspect of Montaigne’s cognitive irresolution is one which has been largely neglected by critics.³²² While we can draw a rough comparison with paradox and paradoxical writing, it is important to recognise a significant difference: the paradox, and the cognitive duality it entails, consists of a peculiar and unordinary experience forced upon the thinking agent – it is, in most cases, a logical or semantic ‘trick’ or a perspective which affords a new and shocking way of seeing something – whereas, for Montaigne, cognitive doubleness is a necessary and constant reality.³²³ After asking himself, ‘[B] combien souvent et sottement à l’aventure ay-je estandu mon livre à parler de soy?’, he turns once again to the problem of doubtful thought and the impotence of traditional dialectic: ‘[B] Pour satisfaire à un doute, ils m’en donnent trois: c’est la teste de Hydra’ (III.13. 1069). Like the Hydra, thought, as he understands it, branches out, becoming increasingly monstrous and inconceivable: from one head springs two; from two four and the result of this ‘chimère’ of dual, simultaneous thought is always uncertainty and irresolution. How, then, does Montaigne manipulate his text and his writerly practices to accommodate this ‘double et divers’ thought? Turning now to Seneca and Plutarch, I argue that Montaigne identifies in these authors two distinct forms of writing irresolution which are dependent on linear progression before bringing these two models together and collapsing their linearity. My contention, then, is that the textual practices found within the *Essais* afford their author

³²² We may draw a comparison, however, with the similar concept of antiperistasis described by Terence Cave: Cave describes a ‘mouvement de transvaluation qui permet d’entretenir successivement – sinon simultanément – deux attitudes, ou même plusieurs attitudes, radicalement différentes’, *Pré-histoires*, p. 49.

³²³ On paradoxical writing in the early modern period, see Rosalie Colie’s influential study, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), Agnieszka Steczowicz, *The Defence of Contraries’: Paradox in the Late Renaissance Disciplines*, unpublished DPhil. dissertation, University of Oxford (2004), and, on the relationship between paradoxical literature and the form of the ‘essai’, André Tournon, ‘Du paradoxe à l’essai’, *Montaigne: la glose et l’essai*, pp. 203-256.

a means of ‘collapsing’ the two axes of linear development, allowing him to flatten without erasing the compositional ‘chronologie’ on one axis and, on the other, to hold simultaneously a plurality of diverse opinions and perspectives.

‘A pieces décousues’: Senecan and Plutarchan Forms of Irresolution

In his description in ‘Des livres’ of the forms practised by Seneca and Plutarch – the epistle and the moral opusculum – Montaigne points towards a direct parallel with his own way of writing: ‘[A] Ils ont tous deux cette notable commodité pour mon humeur, que la science que j’y cherche, y est traictée à pieces décousues’ (II.10.413). This phrase – ‘pieces décousues’ – and its variants are frequently repeated by Montaigne when he discusses his own text and it clearly holds an important position in describing this key formal feature which unites these three authors: ‘[A] Le parler que j’aime, c’est un parler simple et naïf, tel sur le papier qu’à la bouche; un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serré, [C] non tant délicat et peigné comme véhément et brusque: *Haec demum sapiet dictio, quae feriet*, [A] plustost difficile qu’ennuieux, esloigné d’affectation, desreglé, descousu et hardy: chaque lopin y face son corps’ (I.26.171-172); ‘[B] une forme mienne [...]: trop serré, desordonné, couppé, particulier’ (I.40.252); ‘[B] je feuillette à cette heure un livre, à cette heure un autre, sans ordre et sans dessein, à pieces descousues’ (III.3.828); ‘[C] Je propose les fantasies humaines et miennes [...] et separement considerées’ (I.56.323).

We have already seen in Chapter One that this phrase describes the way in which these texts are particularly accommodating towards fragmentation, allowing Montaigne to disarticulate their parts and combine them in new ways.³²⁴ Similarly, when applied to

³²⁴ Margaret McGowan has argued that this phrase describes a practice of opening up a space for the reader to complement Montaigne’s ‘incapacité de voir ou de comprendre le tout même d’une expérience fragmentaire et l’impossibilité de construire une œuvre définitive’, ‘L’art du décousu et la part du lecteur dans les *Essais*’, *Lire les Essais de Montaigne*, pp. 39-50 (p. 45).

his own text, this quality affords him a certain flexibility; a potential to disarticulate and rearticulate his text at various and even multiple instances. Here, I return to this phrase to highlight the way in which Montaigne's fragmentary reading of these fragmented and fragmentary forms allows him to rupture, collapse, and disorder the linear modes of irresolution practised by Seneca and Plutarch. And we ought to note that, in 'Des livres', he is describing what we would more strictly speaking call 'form' than 'style': it is, after all, 'les Opuscules de Plutarque et les Epistres de Seneque' which are 'pieces décousues'. Not only are their texts 'décousus' on a small scale, but so are their forms – their ways of writing, certainly, but also the short forms they employ – and, as such, Montaigne can unpick these 'lopins' and, in reordering their structural, formal, and conceptual frameworks, remove their reliance on linear progression.

A brief digression on the *Meslanges historiques et recueils de diverses matieres pour la pluspart Paradoxales, & neantmoins vrayes* (1588) – a text written by one of Montaigne's earliest readers, Pierre de Saint-Julien, who was also a translator of (Erasmus' Latin version of) Plutarch's 'De cohibenda ira'³²⁵ – provides a further, useful perspective on this 'piecemeal' form. In his 'Avant propos', subtitled 'Pourquoy l'Autheur a nommé ce labour sien Meslanges', Saint-Julien distinguishes between two types of men: those with 'sçavantes' and 'enceintes' 'ames, [qui] (ont pour la pluspart) choisi un subject special' and those who are 'disposez à traicter diverses matieres: & poussez de gaillardes humeurs (qui se delectent de varietez) [qui] ont [...] façonné des chapelets, & garlands'.³²⁶ Immediately we see in this second description the vocabulary we have come to expect from Montaigne and certain key terms – 'diverses', 'gaillardes humeurs', 'varietez' – which will be echoed throughout this chapter. 'Ceux cy,' writes Saint-Julien,

³²⁵ See Robert Aulotte, *Plutarque en France au XVIe siècle. Trois opuscules moraux traduits par Antoine du Saix, Pierre de Saint-Julien et Jacques Amyot* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971).

³²⁶ *Meslanges historiques...* (Lyon: Benoist Rigaud, 1588), fol. E5r. The full title, with its reference to 'matieres paradoxales & neantmoins vrayes', seems to describe the sorts of non-oppositional, alogical pairings which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

‘ont donné tel nom que bon leur à [*sic*] semblé’: ‘*varia historia*’, ‘Anciennes leçons’, ‘*Saturnales*’, ‘*Miscellanies*’. This passage is in imitation of Aulus Gellius’ explanation of his own title in which he too gives an extended survey of different titles given to miscellaneous texts.³²⁷ ‘Le Sieur de la Montaigne’, notes Saint-Julien, ‘a montré en ses *Essais* qu’il n’a faite d’erudition.’³²⁸ The list continues until he comes at last to his own choice: ‘*Meslanges, & recueils de diverses matieres.*’³²⁹ He goes on to say: ‘Je l’avois pensé intituler *Marquetterie*: qu’est une sorte d’ouvrages que les Latins appellent *Tesselata opera*: noz François pieces r’apportees, & l’ancien vulgaire Mosaique. Mais je n’ay voulu promettre que je puisse atteindre la diligence de laquelle Lucilius est tesmoing quand il en parle ainsi: *Quam lepide lexeis compostae, ut tesserulae omnes: | arte pavimento atque emblemate vermiculato.*’³³⁰ As readers of Montaigne, we cannot help but think of the *Essais* when we read these lines: the working title of *Marquetterie*, dismissed because of its association with perfect tessellation and congruence, pushes us to think again about the essayist’s ‘*marqueterie mal jointe*’ (III.9.964), seeing that this is an image more unusual than we might tend to think. Montaigne’s chosen image has its key characteristic distorted and the result is a feeling of being pulled in two directions at once: by way of analogy, how would we understand a description of something as ‘like irregular clockwork’? Clocks are perfectly capable of being irregular and we would have no problem in understanding this

³²⁷ See ‘*Praefatio*’, *Attic Nights*, ed. and trans. by J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 1.4-9. On Aulus Gellius’ list and on the relationship between the ‘miscellany’ and its various titles, see Jean-Marc Mandosio, ‘La miscellanée: histoire d’un genre’, in *Ouvrages miscellanées et théories de la connaissance à la Renaissance*, pp. 7-27.

³²⁸ *Meslanges historiques...*, fol. E5v.

³²⁹ Though without direct impact on my study of the *Essais* owing to Montaigne’s ignorance of these texts, we might observe that Simon Goulart, who printed pirated editions of Amyot’s *Œuvres morales et meslees de Plutarque* with his own often moralising summaries before each work, also published his own translation into French of Seneca’s works along with a ‘*Vie de Sénèque*’ and an expansive defence of his doctrine. This text, which had four editions between 1595 and 1606, was titled, *Les Œuvres morales et meslées de Sénèque*. As Marie-Dominique Couzinet has argued, ‘pour Goulart, les *Œuvres mêlées* se distinguent des *Œuvres morales* moins par la matière que par la manière: [...] les *Œuvres mêlées* se caractérisent par le style académique (au sens de la Nouvelle Académie) qui ne tente pas d’élaborer une doctrine positive [...] par opposition aux disputes laborieuses des Platoniciens et des Aristotéliens’. See ‘*Les Essais* de Montaigne et les *Miscellanées*’, *Ouvrages miscellanées et théories de la connaissance à la Renaissance*, pp. 153-169 (p. 164).

³³⁰ *Meslanges historiques...*, fol. E6r.

comparison and yet the image would be unusual. Similarly, the French gloss – ‘pieces r’apportees’ – reframes Montaigne’s persistent reference to ‘pieces décousues’: seen in this light, Montaigne’s images seem to push his ‘pieces’ together and pull them slightly apart in one motion. Once again and recalling the ideas studied in the last chapter, we see our author inhabiting the in-between spaces: not the ‘middle ground’ as a space of moderation and temperance but the space which is both x and y , both this and that, the spaces between the mosaic tiles which are both points of connection and of rupture.

What, though, does Montaigne say about these ‘décousues’ forms as employed by Seneca and Plutarch? How does he use them? And in what sense do they render their doubtful irresolution ‘linearly’? Beginning with Plutarch, we see what might be called a practice of ‘diverse perspectives’; a practice which I have begun to identify already. Montaigne describes this, for example, in the conclusion to ‘De la phisionomie’: ‘[B] A moy, qui ne suis qu’escuyer de trefles, peut toucher ce qu’on disoit de Charillus, roy de Sparte: Il ne sçauroit estre bon, puis qu’il n’est pas mauvais aux meschants. Ou bien ainsi, car Plutarque le presente en ces deux sortes, comme mille autres choses, diversement et contrairement: Il faut bien qu’il soit bon, puisqu’il l’est aux meschants mesme’ (III.12.1063). Plutarch presents us with two diverse and contradictory readings of the same thing, ‘tantost d’un visage, tantost d’un autre’ (II.12.509): rather than providing us with a conclusion, Plutarch passes from one interpretation and onto another, moving through a sequential text which reflects a sequentially diverse way of thinking.

Highlighting the exception which proves the rule, Montaigne writes in the ‘Apologie’ that:

[A] Il y en a aussi qui ont estimé que des ames des condamnez il s’en faisoit des diables [C] (et aucuns des nostres l’ont ainsi jugé); [A] comme Plutarque pense qu’il se face des dieux de celles qui sont sauvées; car il est peu de choses que cet autheur

là établisse d'une façon de parler si resoluë qu'il faict cette-cy, maintenant par tout ailleurs une maniere dubitative et ambigue. (II.12.556).

Notably, it is at this point in the 'Apologie' that Montaigne is doing precisely what Plutarch typically does and what Plutarch does not do in this instance: here, Montaigne is providing us with 'causes contraires de mesme subject' – 'le subject de nostre ame' (II.12.556) – 'et diverses raisons, sans choisir celle que nous avons à suivre' (II.12.509, erased on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' after the inclusion of Seneca in the 'tiers genre', fol. 213r.). In this same passage and in terms associated with *epoché*, he describes Plutarch as '[A] luy qui est des plus retenus pourtant et moderez de la bande' before directing us towards more typically Plutarchan texts – 'son discours de la Lune et du Daemon de Socrates' – where we see, 'aussi evidemment qu'en nul autre lieu, [...] l'entendement humain se perdant à vouloir sonder et contreroller toutes choses jusques au bout' (II.12.556). Here, then, Montaigne is presenting himself as more Plutarchan than Plutarch himself, progressing through a series of 'diverses opinions' before reaching irresolution, all while reminding us of the doubtful tendency towards suspended judgement and open-ended enquiry in this Plutarchan form of writing diversity.

Montaigne also tells us that Plutarch's thought is diverse and unresolved implicitly, even where the text itself may appear to outline in full only one argument, thought, or idea:

[A] Il y a dans Plutarque beaucoup de discours estandus, tres-dignes d'estre sceus, car à mon gré c'est le maistre ouvrier de telle besongne; mais il y en a mille qu'il n'a que touché simplement: il guigne seulement du doigt par où nous irons, s'il nous plaist, et se contente quelquefois de ne donner qu'une atteinte dans le plus vif d'un propos. (I.26.156).

In gesturing in this way, Plutarch leaves his text open for his reader, allowing the reader the possibility not only of finding 'diverse' readings left by the author but also of introducing his or her own: '[C] C'est à mon gré, entre toutes, la matiere à laquelle nos

esprits s'appliquent de plus diverse mesure. 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' (I.26.156). The result is a 'diversity' of readings and a plurality of interpretations which, in turn, teach us judgement rather than certain knowledge: Montaigne is speaking of his imagined pedagogue, though he may as well be speaking of Plutarch when he notes, '[A] Qu'il ne luy apprenne pas tant les histoires, qu'à en juger' (ibid.).

A very brief look at Plutarch's *Moralia* will allow us to ratify these comments made in the *Essais*. In a passage from 'De la vanité' which will be returned to later in this chapter, Montaigne writes: '[C] Il est des ouvrages en Plutarque où il oublie son theme, où le propos de son argument ne se trouve que par incident, tout estouffé en matiere estrangere: voyez ses alleures au Daemon de Socrates' (III.9.994). Plutarch's 'Du Demon ou esprit familier de Socrates' is indeed stuffed with material that is both strange and foreign to the proposed subject matter. Written 'en forme de devis',³³¹ the discussion written by 'Plutarch' – rather than the discussion recounted by Caphisias within the meta-discussion – ceases to function as a dialogue after the introduction, though Montaigne describes Plutarch rather than the character of Caphisias as the 'voice' which loses its theme. This is seen by the essayist, then, as a characteristic of Plutarch rather than an affected style adopted in the voice of Caphisias. As Tournon has summarised, this text 'associe et entremêle deux développements concurrents: le récit du complot qui aboutit au meurtre du tyran Archias [...]; et une longue discussion sur les avertissements que certains hommes, tel Socrate, reçoivent de leur "démon" tutélaire'.³³² The discussion moves back and forth between these two topics as characters and interlocutors arrive,

³³¹ Plutarch, *Œuvres morales et meslees*, fol. 636r. Cf. III.11.1033: '[C] C'est par maniere de devis que je parle de tout, et rien par maniere d'avis.'

³³² *Montaigne: la glose et l'essai*, p. 143. See also André Tournon, 'Le Philosophe et ses démons', *Moralia et œuvres morales à la Renaissance*, pp. 309-327.

themselves introducing new topics of conversation, subsequently leaving, only for someone else to then be introduced. This is a process of deferring the proposed subject – the Daemon of Socrates, a subject which is only slightly dealt with – which creates a text which is littered with tangents, ‘diverses visages’, and a fair few dead-ends.

It would be a mistake, however, to justify and associate this variety of opinion and theme with the dialogic form employed in this text. ‘Du premier froid’, for instance, is a work on physics written with a single, unified voice. It is, moreover, a work which provides a clear model of ‘Sceptical’ irresolution.³³³ Plutarch’s aim in this text is to enquire into the ‘premiere puissance et substance du froid’: if the ‘premiere puissance [...] du chaud est le feu,’ then what is the ‘premier froid’?³³⁴ Plutarch argues first that it is air, then water, and finally earth, before providing a brief conclusion which is, in fact, not a conclusion at all:

Compare, Seigneur Favorin, ces arguments la avec les raisons des autres, & si tu trouves que les unes ne cedent ny ne surpassent gueres les autres en probable verissimilitude, laisse moy là l’opiniastreté d’espouser aucunes particulieres opinions, estimant que le surseoir et retenir son jugement en choses obscures & incertaines, est fait en plus sage philosophe, que non pas de prester & adjouster à l’une ou à l’autre partie son consentement.³³⁵

This is, then, the writing of *epoché* and *isostheneia*. Plutarch presents three distinct arguments separately and in sequence before announcing his uncertainty.

³³³ Though he accepts that this is a text which ‘consists of a debate marshalled along overtly sceptical lines,’ George Boys-Stones has argued for a more nuanced approach to the ‘scepticism’ of this text, suggesting that ‘this interpretation glosses over too quickly what Plutarch actually says. [...] [H]e says that *if* no one position emerges as more plausible than the others, [...] *then* we should consider the matter unclear and suspend judgement.’ I do not disagree with this reading; my purpose here is simply to show how this text provides a textual and argumentative form of writing linear and diverse irresolution. See Boys-Stones, ‘Plutarch and the Probable Principle of Cold: Epistemology and the *De Primo Frigido*’, *The Classical Quarterly*, 47 (1997), pp. 227-238 (pp. 227-228).

³³⁴ Plutarch, *Œuvres morales et meslees*, fol. 529r.

³³⁵ Ibid. fol. 534v.

A similar practice, albeit one where this conclusion of uncertainty is less absolute and, while gestured towards, remains unstated, is found in the ‘Questions Platoniques’. This text consists of nine ‘questions’, most of which begin with the formula, ‘Pourquoy est-ce que’, before advancing through a number of responses in sequence without an explicit argument or conclusion. The fifth question – the shortest – is quoted here in full and, while some are much longer, they all follow the same structure:

V. Pourquoy est-ce qu’il dit au livre intitulé Phaedrus, que la nature de l’aele, dont ce qui est grave & pesant se leve contre-mont, participe grandement du corps de Dieu? Est-ce pource que là il parle de l’amour, lequel est de beauté corporelle, & ceste beauté pour la similitude qu’elle a avec la divinité emeut l’ame, & la fait rememorer? Ou bien plus tost il le fault prendre simplement, sans curieusement rechercher rien plus oultre, que l’ame estant dedans le corps a plusieurs facultez & puissances, dont celle du discours de la raison & de l’entendement participe de la divinité, laquelle il a non improprement ny impertinemment appelée aele, pource qu’elle eleve l’ame des choses basses & mortelles à la consideration des celestes & divines.³³⁶

This question offers only two possible solutions, though others present the reader with greater diversity. As Jan Opsomer has argued, Plutarch’s structural choices in these ‘Questions Platoniques’ allow him to ‘guigne au doigt’; to gesture towards a ‘most likely’ solution or towards the position favoured by Plutarch himself: ‘le problème exégétique est introduit, puis de nombreux arguments sont avancées qui, tant en contribuant utilement à la discussion, contiennent aussi des erreurs. Finalement, une solution plus satisfaisante est proposée.’³³⁷ Opsomer notes, however, that ‘[l]orsqu’une nouvelle perspective s’énonce, les positions précédentes ne sont pas complètement abandonnées’.³³⁸

³³⁶ Ibid. fol. 542v.

³³⁷ ‘Arguments non linéaires et pensée en cercles: forme et argumentation dans les *Questions Platoniciennes* de Plutarque’, *Les Dialogues platoniciens chez Plutarque*, ed. by X. Brouillette and A. Giavatto (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011), pp. 93-116 (p. 114).

³³⁸ Ibid.

Seneca's mode of writing irresolution is altogether markedly different and relies on what I will call his double or multiple temporality. It should be noted that Montaigne describes Plutarch's 'manière' in much more detail and much more explicitly than he describes the style of Seneca. We can, nevertheless, join up the dots, seeing what he says about Seneca, what he writes about the epistolary form, and how his views on these fit together. He discusses his relationship with letter-writing at length in I.40, a passage which has attracted a significant amount of attention and one which is typically seen from a perspective of anti-Ciceronianism. My focus, however, lies not in his self-assessment as 'inepte' or 'dédaigneux' with regard to stylised 'paroles courtoises' but rather in his account of the act itself of writing epistolary texts:

[B] J'escris mes lettres tousjours en poste, et si precipiteusement que, quoy que je peigne insupportablement mal, j'ayme mieux escrire de ma main que d'y en employer un'autre [...]. J'ay accoustumé les grands qui me connoissent, à y supporter des litures et des trassures, et un papier sans plieure et sans marge. [...] Je commence volontiers sans project; le premier traict produit le second. [...] Comme j'ayme mieux composer deux lettres que d'en clorre et plier une, et resigne tousjours cette commission à quelque autre. (I.40.253).

While we must certainly be careful to contextualise this account within a framework of anti-Ciceronian rhetoric and *sprezzatura*, we can identify here some of the key aspects of Montaignean epistolography and its influence on the writing of the *Essais*. Most importantly, Montaigne places letter-writing within a temporal framework: he writes quickly, throwing himself precipitously – suddenly and headlong – into the act of writing; his hurried handwriting bears the trace of the elliptical progression of thought and writing, falling back in upon itself and crossing-out a word or phrase as he composes his text. He begins without a plan, allowing composition and thought to develop simultaneously (this is further evidence of the cognitive extension – Montaigne's act of thinking in writing – discussed in Chapter Two). The act of composition is, moreover, not only described as occurring across time but is also

temporally fixed: epistolographic composition is multiple, consisting of distinct and discrete episodes of writing. Indeed, we might even say that this mode of composition is so temporally fixed that Montaigne struggles to shift from writing in and for a specific moment to a more formulaic mode of '[B] longues harengues, offres et prieres' (I.40.253): he would rather 'composer deux lettres que d'en clorre et plier une'. We ought to note that this 'closing up' may be more literal than we might otherwise assume, referring to the folding and sealing of letters (a necessary element of epistolography before the advent of the envelope), though I would suggest that the association between this routine material practice and the 'offres et prieres' highlights the shift between epistolography proper (writing in the moment) and the formulaic mode which bookends it, stressing that the latter is detached, unthinking, and unspecific.

In the extract preceding the passage quoted above, Montaigne, describing his own practice, notes that it is 'bien loing de l'usage present' (I.40.253). Under the title of this chapter – 'Consideration sur Cicéron' – and within its explicitly anti-Ciceronian context, he seems to be drawing a comparison between his own 'old-fashioned' style and that other great model of Latin epistolography, Seneca's *Epistulae ad Lucilium*. This comparison is made even more apparent through reference to the parallel comparison of two pairs of epistolographers – Cicero and Pliny; Seneca and Epicurus – which governs the whole of this chapter.³³⁹ Montaigne's epistolography is presented, then, not only as anti-Ciceronian but, implicitly, as Senecan. In the conclusion to 'De trois bonnes femmes' (II.35), he translates at length Seneca's Epistle 104 and, in introducing this transcription, further emphasises this temporal nature of Seneca's 'usage ancien': '[A] En l'une des lettres qu'il escrit à Lucilius, apres qu'il luy a fait entendre comme, la fiebvre

³³⁹ On this comparison of pairs, see Chapter One. It should be remembered that Epicurus is both the source for many of Seneca's closing quotations and the formal model for Seneca's own epistolographic enterprise. On this formal relationship, see Brad Inwood, 'The Importance of Form in Seneca's Philosophical Letters', *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography*, ed. by A.D. Morrison and Ruth Morello (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 133-148.

l'ayant pris à Rome, il monta soudain en coche pour s'en aller à une sienne maison aux champs, contre l'opinion de sa femme qui le vouloit arrester, et qu'il luy avoit respondu que la fiebvre qu'il avoit, ce n'estoit pas fiebvre du corps, mais du lieu, il suit ainsin' (II.35.750). What follows is a long section of the epistle in which Seneca outlines his argument that 'il pensoit avoir autant fait pour elle [Paulina], d'allonger sa vie en sa faveur, comme s'il fut mort pour elle.' Seneca, as Montaigne's introduction makes clear, writes in and for the moment: each epistle is a text which, at least at some level, could not have been written at any other time; they are fixed to a historical, temporal point.

The epistle – even the 'philosophical' epistle as practised by Seneca – is part of an 'occasional' genre and it is, I think, this temporal fixity which lies at the heart of the relationship between Seneca's epistles and Montaigne's *Essais*. Approaching this relationship between epistle and essay from a Senecan starting-point, Marcus Wilson has challenged a good number of the commonplace assumptions upon which we traditionally base this comparison, though not without opening a way for the argument I am making in this chapter. Noting that 'the view that the *Epistles* are really essays is a reclassification which has enjoyed quite a remarkable run' and that, having been 'gratuitously endowed with Baconian titles', Seneca's text is 'processed for modern (or, at least, mid-twentieth century) consumption, converted into the genre they were said to resemble',³⁴⁰ Wilson argues that the essay-epistle comparison is 'unsatisfactory' in that it 'discourages the reading of the collection sequentially'.³⁴¹ 'Each new epistle,' Wilson argues, 'resituates the author differently in a new time, a new mood, sometimes in a new place. Neither the author's self nor the context in which he writes is fixed. He offers a

³⁴⁰ 'Seneca's Epistles Reclassified', *Texts, Ideas, and the Classics*, ed. by S. J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 164-187 (pp. 164-165).

³⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 168.

record of his temporary accords with the world and, as it were, rediscovers his philosophy through different situations.³⁴²

Here, we have a mode of writing irresolution which relies on the linear and sequential progression of time: each epistle is not only temporally fixed but also temporarily fixed. Discussing Montaigne and his own use of temporal markers rather than the epistolary style of Seneca, Bernard Sève has argued that the essayist's inscription 'des marques de temporalisation dans ses énoncés philosophiques' is 'une innovation d'une tout autre portée': 'Qu'une simple opinion soit temporellement marquée, cela va de soi [...]; mais qu'un énoncé philosophique soit comme travaillé de l'intérieur par des marques temporelles, cela paraît presque contradictoire.'³⁴³ The argument here is that philosophy, the conclusions and propositions it makes, and its arguments and methods ought to be timeless, impersonal, and reproducible: in short, philosophical discourse ought to be objective. As Maclean has shown, Aristotelian or scholastic philosophy, with its basis in logic, can employ temporal markers within a logical resolution of contradictions – 'la contradiction "Pierre est prodigue", "Pierre n'est pas prodigue" se laisse résoudre [...] par le temps (Pierre est prodigue le matin, avare le soir)' – though this temporality is situated within the world being described and not in the atemporal, logical operations or the philosophical discourse itself.³⁴⁴ For the Aristotelian, there is no *hic et nunc* from which to speak philosophy but only a *semper et ubique*.³⁴⁵

It seems clear, however, that Seneca's text, which consists of a linear sequence of distinct texts – most of which take up one theme (though later epistles tend towards being slightly more polythematic) – serves as a model for writing a philosophy capable

³⁴² Ibid. p. 167.

³⁴³ *Montaigne: des règles pour l'esprit*, p. 293.

³⁴⁴ Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, p. 34.

³⁴⁵ See Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, p. 55.

of change, development, and progression across time.³⁴⁶ Indeed, in a collection of letters advocating day-to-day Stoic labour, tracing the progression of ‘Seneca proficiens’ and his apprentice, the *Epistulae* seem as much a journal and record as a guide or textbook. Moving through the letters allows us to move through time and, in doing so, see the multiple facets – and the developing opinions on them – of the subjects and ideas discussed within. As A.D. Morrison and Ruth Morello have noted:

Letters are particularly suited to this topic [philosophical, spiritual, and physical health], partly because of the sense of development and change they afford (a series of letters, for example, can report on changes in health from day to day) and partly because of their natural association with current news and current projects – a sense of urgency hangs about several surviving letters from the ancient world. [...] [E]thics needs to be done every day – hence letters.³⁴⁷

With a letter, Seneca can say one thing today and something else tomorrow and, as such, he creates an unresolved text, always awaiting the next temporary instalment in the sequence.

This is immediately apparent and we need only look at some of Seneca’s opening lines to see how these discrete epistles are fixed to a specific moment in time and, often, to a specific event which occasions the act of writing: ‘Locutus est mecum amicus tuus bonae indolis, in quo quantum esset animi, quantum ingenii, quantum iam etiam profectus, sermo primus ostendit’ (*Ep.* 11.1); ‘December est mensis; cum maxime civitas sudat’ (*Ep.* 28.1); ‘Sollicitum esse te scribis de iudicii eventu, quod tibi furor inimici denuntiat, existimas me suasurum, ut meliora tibi ipse proponas et adquiescas spei blandae’ (*Ep.* 24.1); ‘Librum tuum, quem mihi promiseras, accepi et tamquam lecturus ex commodo adaperui ac tantum degustare volui’ (*Ep.* 46.1); ‘Molesto fero decessisse Flaccum, amicum tuum, plus tamen aequo dolere te nolo’ (*Ep.* 63.1). These are examples

³⁴⁶ This is not to say, however, that Seneca’s philosophy does change substantially but simply that his form stands as an exemplar to Montaigne of a philosophical discourse capable of writing change and philosophical ‘movement’.

³⁴⁷ ‘Editors’ Preface’, *Ancient Letters*, p. ix.

chosen almost at random: nearly every letter begins by announcing the event which has occasioned it, locating the act of writing – and, as such, the ideas and opinions expressed – in space and time. As Wilson puts it, ‘much of the effect of Seneca’s *Epistles* depends on their sequence [...]. Though Seneca’s letters don’t carry dates, it is clearly implied that their order reflects the order of composition [...]. In other words, they are ordered chronologically.’³⁴⁸ Seeing this temporal and temporary fixity as the key to Seneca’s form, Wilson argues convincingly that ‘Instead of the “dialogue” model, it is perhaps more fruitful to reconceptualise [this form as] “serial epistolography”’.³⁴⁹

And yet, Montaigne tells us, Seneca repeats himself endlessly:

[B] Ce sont imaginations communes: les ayant à l’avanture conceues cent fois, j’ay peur de les avoir desjà enrollées. La redicte est par tout ennuyeuse, fut ce dans Homere, mais elle est ruineuse aux choses qui n’ont qu’une montre superficielle et passagiere. Je me desplais de l’inculcation, voire aux choses utiles, comme en Seneque, [C] et l’usage de son escole stoïque me desplait, de redire sur chaque matiere tout au long et au large les principes et presuppositions qui servent en general, et realleguer tousjours de nouveau les argumens et raisons communes et universelles. (III.9.962).

While discussing his own anxiety about repeating himself, Montaigne suggests that Seneca endlessly rewrites the same thing: the basic principles of Stoicism. Seneca’s form, however, is one that is constantly on the move, tied to a specific time, place, event, and set of circumstances. His individual epistles, then, are his temporally fixed accounts of what he has to say to Lucilius about the ‘argumens et raisons communes et universelles’ of Stoicism: he is writing the same key set of ideas again and again and yet his texts are always different, viewing this central point from a new perspective or within a different context. It is perhaps for this reason that Seneca is included after 1588 in the description of the ‘tiers genre’: his epistles reveal now one ‘visage’, now another of this central point.

³⁴⁸ ‘Seneca’s *Epistles* Reclassified’, p. 184.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 185.

I call this a double or multiple temporality because, unlike Plutarch, Seneca does not present the reader with diversity across opinion – his message is typically constant and steadfast – but rather with a multiplicity of iterations across time and it is this progression through time, in which each successive epistle can modify, contradict, or supplement its predecessor, which makes this a mode of unresolved writing. Lipsius, famous for his study of Seneca and his epistolary form, provides us with a useful epitome of letter writing contemporary with Montaigne: ‘bis non scribo,’ he writes, ‘bis vix eas lego’.³⁵⁰ His point was that letters should be written without affectation and ought rather to be written naturally, freely: ‘Profluunt mihi ex liquido quodam canali pectoris: et ut animus aut corpus meum est cum scribo, ita illae.’³⁵¹ In only writing ‘once’, however, the letter-writer is forced to place after-thoughts, reviews, and reservations in subsequent texts: the chronology of thought becomes the chronology of writing and, in returning as Seneca does to his central ideas, the epistolographer does write ‘twice’, albeit separately and in distinct letters. The result is a series – a linear sequence – of discrete and individual testaments, fixed temporally and temporarily, as part of a potentially endless progression through ‘diverses’ and ‘décousus’ textual moments.

Seneca and Plutarch: Generic Models?

In a recent article, Alain Legros has written that: ‘Si Plutarque-Amyot des *Œuvres morales* a servi de modèle, c’est parce que Sénèque *ad Lucilium* ou Cicéron *ad familiares* ne pouvaient plus fournir la “forme” la plus appropriée au désir de Montaigne.’³⁵² This is, it seems, the standard response to the question of the Senecan and Plutarchan influence

³⁵⁰ *Epistolarum miscellanearum centuriae quinque*, fol. *3r. in *Opera omnia*, Tome IV (Antwerp: Joannem Moretum, 1605). On this phrase and on early modern epistolography more generally, see Marc Bizer, ‘Nature et statut de l’art épistolaire en France’, *Les Lettres romaines de Du Bellay* (Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2001), pp. 17-59.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² ‘Autant la forme que la substance’, p. 83.

on the form of the *Essais*: focusing on Montaigne's brief comment that he would have 'prins plus volontiers ceste forme [l'épître] à publier mes verves, si j'eusse eu à qui parler' (I.40.252), there has been a critical tendency towards suggesting that Montaigne takes the Senecan epistle and makes it 'Plutarchan' in the absence of an addressee. This reading, which goes back at least as far as Friedrich's influential study and has been repeated countless times, has, it seems, been fixated on just one characteristic of the Senecan epistle: dialogue.³⁵³ As we have seen above, however, a much more important feature, for Montaigne and for Seneca, is the epistle's potential for endless (re)writing of temporarily and temporally fixed, fragmentary, and diverse texts. Seneca's epistles are central to Montaigne's enterprise not because they are addressed to an individual, engaging in informal discussion and dialogue; they are important because they can write in and for the moment, 'à diverses pieces' and 'à diverses poses'.

So far, then, we have seen that Montaigne identifies in Seneca and Plutarch two complementary constituent parts of a 'double et divers' discourse. In Plutarch's *Œuvres morales et meslees*, Montaigne finds a means of writing diverse opinions across the space of the page: following the trajectory and tracing the linear movement from one position to another, Plutarch creates a (potentially) endless sequence of disagreements which is unresolved not only in that it is without end but also because of its uncertainty, its lack of conclusion, and its frequent recourse to *epoché*. This, then, is a form which achieves irresolution through the use of space and the sequential disposition of its ideas. In Seneca's epistolary form, he finds a temporally fixed discourse capable of writing in

³⁵³ Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, pp. 368-375. See also Richard Sayce's *The Essays of Montaigne: A Critical Exploration* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p. 263: 'In some ways the closest parallel [to the "essai"] is the letter [...]. It is none the less interesting that he contemplated the use of the letter form but rejected it because after the death of La Boétie he had no one to write to [...]. This brings out another vital difference between the essay and the letter: communication with a single person, real or feigned'. More recently, see the preface to the 2009 Gallimard edition of the *Essais* edited by Emmanuel Naya, Delphine Reguig, and Alexandre Tarrête: 'son livre est comme une correspondance sans correspondant, le seul interlocuteur valable (La Boétie) ayant désormais disparu,' p. 13.

and for the moment. Here, we see a linear movement across time and this is also a potentially endless sequence: each epistle is singular and monovocal and the form – if it is to be seen as unresolved – demands a linear, serial reading and writing in which a further epistle could always be added to qualify or undermine those which came before. In both instances, the individual unit – the single epistle or the extracted and isolated ‘opinion’ – is monovocal, assertive, and singular. Without this linear and sequential progression, neither of these forms would be capable of irresolution, diversity, or uncertainty. As such, these linear forms of irresolution can only ever be capable of rendering diversity as singular rather than double: they present their ‘diverse visages’ and ‘opinions’ one at a time. Montaigne, however, in attempting to render not only the ‘diversity’ but also the ‘doubleness’ of ‘nostre entendement’ legible on the page, would have to go further than Seneca and Plutarch: these Senecan and Plutarchan forms, serving as a spring-board, allow him to twist and manipulate text, working to perform this duality and simultaneity of thinking in the static, monovocal, and linear nature of printed text. In the next two sections, I will show that he combines these two models and collapses their techniques, disordering their linear processes – a process which, surprisingly, given that it is precisely this characteristic which makes the Senecan and Plutarchan forms ‘unresolved’, renders his own text more uncertain, doubtful, and ‘double’.

Turning then to the final section of this chapter, I will explore two key case-studies, asking how these techniques work in practice. These examples have been chosen as they demonstrate, respectively, Montaigne at his most extreme, working to push his text to its limits and to make it intensely ‘double’ and, on the other hand, the subtle ways in which this duality emerges in seemingly innocuous passages. With these passages, then, I will show that ‘double writing’ is not restricted to passages which are

particularly or obviously focused on issues of writing: provided we attend carefully to the text, we see this doubleness emerging throughout the *Essais*, at all stages of composition and from the beginning of the first book to the end of the last. While it may not be the case that every passage or chapter exhibits the qualities I describe, I argue with these two examples that ‘double writing’ is, in the *Essais*, a sustained practice and not an isolated, occasional one.

‘Skeletos’: Collapsing Seneca and Plutarch

1. Collapsing ‘chronologie’

‘[C] Mon livre est tousjours un,’ writes Montaigne. ‘[C] De là toutesfois il adviendra facilement qu’il s’y mesle quelque *transposition de chronologie*, mes contes prenans place *selon leur opportunité, non tousjours selon leur aage*. [B] Secondement que, pour mon regard, je crains de perdre au change: mon entendement ne va pas tousjours avant, il va à reculons aussi’ (III.9.964, my emphasis). Developing the idea of ‘nostre entendement’ as ‘double’, we see here that Montaigne’s thought goes both forwards and backwards, bifurcating not only – as we saw earlier – across a diversity of opinion but also across the space of the material text and the time-line of its composition. It is, of course, in this passage that he discusses his ‘[B] troisieme allongail’, his ‘[C] marqueterie mal jointe’, and his process of adding to his text: if his thought was, temporally speaking, only to go ‘avant’ and never ‘à reculons’, we might expect his third book to be followed not by a process of systematic editing and addition but simply by a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, etc. George Hoffmann’s arguments – which suggest that Montaigne’s process of adding to his text was commercially motivated and served to secure a renewal of the ‘privilège du roi’ – certainly account for a general principle of augmentation though this process, at least as evidenced by the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, clearly went beyond these purely

commercial interests: one need only look, for example, at the systematic revision of punctuation to see that Montaigne’s editorial practice was not primarily concerned with simply meeting this required level of augmentation and renewing the ‘privilège’.³⁵⁴ It is, notably, unclear as to what exactly constitutes this ‘troisième allongail’ and what is being discussed when Montaigne talks of addition: the third book is surely the *first* ‘allongail’ and is, in any case, not obviously analogous to the process of addition practised upon the first two books.³⁵⁵ The reference to ‘[C] transposition de chronologie’, however, suggests that, at least after 1588, Montaigne’s comments refer to small-scale, interlinear additions.

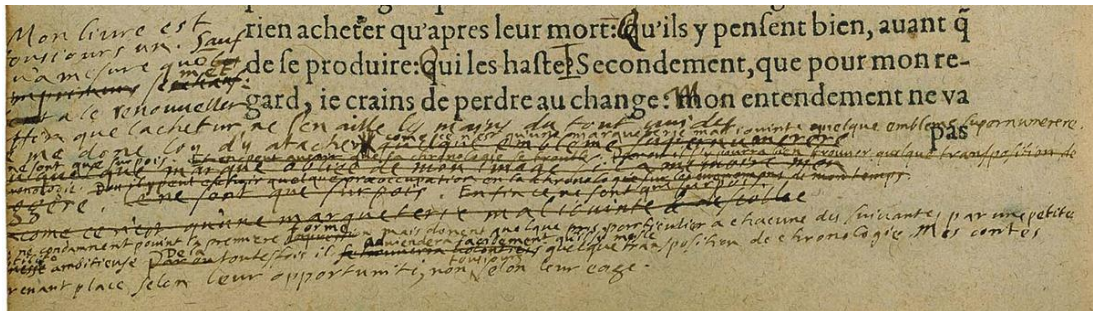


Fig. 11. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, Fol. 432v.

What is clear is that Montaigne struggles to express these difficult ideas about simultaneous uniformity – ‘Mon livre est toujours un’ – and puncturing, punctuating insertions which collapse the text’s ‘chronologie’ (fig. 11). The ‘chronologie’ – the only instance of this term in the *Essais* – of composition seems to reflect (or, at least, attempts to reflect) that of thought: in writing his text, he ‘ne va pas toujours avant, il

³⁵⁴ *Montaigne’s Career*. See André Tournon, ‘Les Marques de profération dans les *Essais*’, *La Ponctuation à la Renaissance*, ed. by Nathalie Dauvois and Jacques Dürrenmatt (Paris: Garnier, 2011), pp. 163-172. Approaching this issue through the lens of scribal practices in legal contexts, Tournon argues that this ‘pratique scripturale non seulement très cohérente [...] mais en outre codifiée plus strictement qu’on ne l’a cru’ (p. 163) allows Montaigne to repeat and reaffirm ‘à tout moment son geste initial d’écrivain-philosophe’ (p. 168). These punctuation changes, Tournon argues, ‘réinscrivent les propos anciens dans l’actualité d’une méditation sans fin, souvent sans les modifier, parfois en accusant leurs reliefs, toujours en valident discrètement leur énonciation’ (p. 169).

³⁵⁵ On this, see André Tournon, *Essais de Montaigne, Livre III* (Paris: Atlande, 2002), pp. 21-24.

va à reculons aussi'. Montaigne tries numerous times to explain and describe this unified text of discrete pieces written at different times and in an order other than that which we, as readers, are presented with. His prior attempts, crossed out on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', juggle certain key terms which keep occurring at different stages of composition: 'marqueterie', 'surpoids', and 'chronologie'. This is yet a further instance of the form of extended thinking we saw in Chapter Two and, here, Montaigne is using writing to think through the relationship between the multi-directional and multi-temporal nature of thought and its linear and static presentation and extension in written, printed language: it is in writing and rewriting that he thinks through the nature of writing and rewriting.

Significantly, Montaigne's concern here – 'je crains de perdre au change' – is not with problematic chronologies of writing *per se* but rather, as is made clear in a passage from the 'Apologie' which also tackles this issue, with inserting something worse in place of a better, albeit forgotten, meaning: '[B] En mes escrits mesmes je ne retrouve pas toujours 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. Je ne fay qu'aller et venir: mon jugement ne tire pas toujours en avant; il flotte, il vague' (II.12.566). Here, the 'premier' may have been 'mieux', but not by virtue of being first. Once again, we see Montaigne describing his thought as a linear ('mon jugement ne tire pas toujours en avant') and, as before, he establishes a strict relationship between a linear thought and non-chronological composition.

We see a similar account of this achronological though thoroughly temporal writing in the opening passage of 'De la ressemblance des enfans aux pères':

[A] Ce fagotage de tant de diverses pieces se faict en cette condition, que je n'y mets la main que lors qu'une trop lasche oisiveté me presse, et non ailleurs que chez moy. Ainsin il s'est basté à diverses poses et intervalles, comme les occasions me

detiennent ailleurs par fois plusieurs moys. Au demeurant, je ne corrige point mes premieres imaginations par les secondes; [C] ouy à l'aventure quelque mot, mais pour diversifier, non pour oster. [A] Je veux représenter le progrez de mes humeurs, et qu'on voye chaque piece en sa naissance. Je prendrois plaisir d'avoir commencé plus-tost et à reconnoistre le trein de mes mutations. (II.37.758).

Highlighting first the diversity and fragmentation of his text, Montaigne emphasises the spatial and temporal location of the act of writing before suggesting that, through temporally fixing his textual fragments in this way, he is able to trace 'le progrez de [s]es humeurs' and 'le trein de [s]es mutations'. This is unusual and counter-intuitive: if one were to imagine a means of recording the moving, changing state of one's opinions and perspectives, it would seem that a linear text in which 'dispositio' and chronology align would be most fitting as this, one might think, would allow for a presentation of 'progrez'. And yet this is most certainly not how Montaigne wrote his *Essais*.

'Essaying,' writes Richard Scholar, 'is caught in the flow of time. Montaigne makes this clear by using temporal markers [...] to designate variations in the tests he sets his judgement [and also] by revising and adding [to his text] throughout the nearly two decades during which he was writing his book: the passing of time is woven into the fabric of the passage. The genesis of the *Essais*,' Scholar asserts, 'crystallizes the open-ended temporal process of essaying that the text initiates.'³⁵⁶ As Scholar notes, the *Essais*, like the epistles of Seneca, are composed in such a way that they are inextricable from the temporal context within which they are produced and, again for both texts, this temporality is necessarily endless and open-ended. Even when their author ceases to add further instalments, this sense of a sequential continuation remains: this endlessness is ingrained in the form such that the reader, engaging with the text, can posit his or her own addendums. For Montaigne, however, this open-endedness is not, as it was for Seneca, a linear passage in which the movement through time mirrors the movement

³⁵⁶ *Montaigne and the Art of Free-Thinking*, p. 76.

through text: in the *Essais*, compositional chronology ‘va à reculons aussi’. Most importantly, Montaigne collapses this chronology all while calling attention to the temporality of writing: not only does he inform the reader directly with references to ‘surpoids’ and ‘allongeails’, or with claims that he ‘ne corrige point [s]es premieres imaginations par les secondes’; this temporality is, as Scholar recognises, embedded in Montaigne’s prose with its recurring references to ‘tantost’, ‘hier’, ‘à cette heure’. This is a form of writing which is achronological but overwhelmingly temporal and, as such, differentiated from more standard modes of alinear composition in which the reality of writing ‘à diverses poses’ is made invisible and concealed from the reader.

How, then, does this compositional ‘transposition de chronologie’ facilitate a textual rendering of an ‘entendement’ which is ‘double’ and which moves both ‘avant’ and ‘à reculons’? What, in short, does Montaigne achieve in collapsing the ‘chronologie’ of writing? In these passages, Montaigne seems to deal almost exclusively in contradictions and paradoxes: his book is always ‘one’ and yet it is full of dislocated and discrete ‘lopins’; he wants to trace the ‘trein’ and the ‘progrez’ of his ‘humeurs’ and his ‘entendement’, and yet he attempts to do this by disordering the linear sequence – the progression – of composition. This process, described in difficult and confusing terms, is one which achieves, I think, two closely related aims: on one hand, it is a means of making the thought processes which take place in and with writing more diverse. On the other, it serves to figure or represent the doubleness Montaigne associates with thought. The former is focused primarily on the author’s thought and the latter on the reader’s: put simply, collapsed compositional chronology makes the thought Montaigne does in writing more diverse and makes the reader think of this diverse thought as double and simultaneous.

First, then, it allows Montaigne to incorporate diversity of the kind we have already outlined in a non-linear manner: in collapsing this temporal difference, he can propose a thought or a perspective from 1580 alongside a different view taken in, say, 1590 and present them side by side. It is a means of going back over what has been thought and thinking it through again but differently. Rather than placing his changing opinions on a textual time-line, Montaigne overlaps them in a text which enunciates diversity (almost) simultaneously. We have already seen a clear example of this: '[A] je ne corrige point mes premieres imaginations par les secondes; [C] ouy à l'aventure quelque mot, mais pour diversifier, non pour oster' (II.37.758). Montaigne presents the reader with two almost contradictory assertions – he does not correct; he does – without having to move from one position to another: they are maintained and asserted equally and simultaneously. The 'mutations' of his thought mean that he has differing opinions at different times and, in presenting them together rather than in sequence, he confuses, disorders, and makes more doubtful the 'diversity' of his thought. We understand this simultaneous diversity of opinion intuitively, though language struggles to capture it fully: we speak metaphorically and with gestures, presenting one idea 'on one hand' and a second 'on the other', though language forces us to extend only one hand at a time; Montaigne, it seems, in superimposing these cognitive and compositional moments, is trying to present us with both hands at once.

This image reveals a further ramification of Montaigne's 'pointing finger': in telling us that he writes a bit here and a bit there, he pulls discrete parts of the text from potentially very distant points of the book together and into focus. His mode of writing prompts us to adopt a reading practice wherein we too identify different textual moments from different parts of the book and hold these passages (and the different ideas or perspectives they reveal) together and at once.

I have already begun to develop the second function of this collapsed chronology; that which is directed primarily at presenting the reader with simultaneous duality. Recognising that writing struggles to capture the duality of thought he experiences and describes, Montaigne works to artificially collapse a linear chronology of writing into a multiple and simultaneous impression of diverse thoughts upon the reader as he or she experiences this achronological text. In overwriting his text in this way, he gives the written word an artificial doubleness and, in doing so, gives the reading experience – if not the act of composition itself – a sense of the simultaneity of his diverse thoughts. The clearest example of this is Montaigne’s back-dating of the ‘Au lecteur’ on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’: where the 1588 edition had updated the original date of ‘ce premier de Mars. 1580.’, closing with ‘ce 12. Juin. 1588.’, the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ reads, ‘ce premier de Mars ~~1580~~ mille cinq cens quatre vins’.³⁵⁷ Montaigne presents his reader with discrete textual moments – in chronological disorder and consisting of a deliberate diversity of perspective across time – simultaneously, under a unified ‘moment’ of authorial composition. Montaigne intends for his reader to encounter these ‘diverses poses’ as being written, paradoxically and in spite of their temporal markers, at once, concurrently.

This collapsed chronology is, then, an attempt to flatten time and force the duality and simultaneity of thought into written language; to make thought – at least as it is presented on the page and experienced by the reader – double and to allow it to follow multiple paths at once, in spite of divergence, diversity, or even contradiction. The point here is that this is not simply diverse and multiple thought across time but

³⁵⁷ ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. Aii-r. In his introduction to the ‘Edition numérique de l’*Exemplaire de Bordeaux*’, Alain Legros notes that there are other extant copies of the 1588 edition with this change of date written in Montaigne’s hand: these are the Lambiotte copy, held in Bordeaux, and the Solvay copy, held in Brussels. See Alain Legros, ‘*Essais de 1588 et l’Exemplaire de Bordeaux*’ (2015). URL: <<https://montaigne.univ-tours.fr/essais-1588-exemplaire-bordeaux/>> [Accessed: 11th January 2017].

rather that, in reworking the compositional chronology as he does, Montaigne makes these diverse and multiple points simultaneously available to the reader (which, as always, includes Montaigne reading and thinking with his own text). It is with this quality of simultaneity that the text achieves not only the diversity but also the doubleness of Montaigne's 'entendement'. If we were to think of the Senecan epistle as a snapshot or, rather, a series of snapshots which allows us to trace and follow change across time, Montaigne's collapsed chronology is analogous to a photographic double-exposure: like the photograph, written language – at the level of the single utterance – can only capture one moment of thought from one perspective; it is monovocal and singular. This 'double-exposure' is not, however, a sort of palimpsest: the first impression is not erased in preparation for the second. Rather, by overlaying and disordering different compositional moments, Montaigne allows us to see both impressions at once and, in doing so, restores to the thought of the *Essais* its duality.

That this dismantling of compositional chronology occurs across the three main strata of the *Essais* is fairly apparent. More recent editions of the *Essais* have, to various extents, marginalised this aspect of composition: the 1998 Imprimerie Nationale edition relegates [A], [B], and [C] indicators to the margin, reducing their accuracy; the 2009 edition published by Gallimard under the direction of Emmanuel Naya, Delphine Reguig and Alexandre Tarrête uses different fonts to differentiate printed text from manuscript in the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' without providing markers for the original 1580 text or the 1582 and 1588 insertions, and the 2007 Pléiade edition is based on the 1595 text. Nevertheless, my close analysis of the ways in which this collapsed chronology functions will attempt to illuminate some of the less immediately obvious and perhaps more surprising manifestations of this collapsed chronology within individual strata. '[B] Il faut accommoder mon histoire à l'heure,' wrote Montaigne. My

aim in my close-readings, then, will be to uncover the superposition of cognitive and textual temporal moments not '[B] d'aage en autre, ou, comme dict le peuple, de sept en sept ans, mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute' (III.2.805). Before we move on to these close-readings, however, we must first uncover the mechanics and logic behind the second of Montaigne's ruptures of linear practices of irresolution.

2. Collapsing Perspective

The analogy, made above, of the double exposure finds a more historically appropriate mirror in Montaigne's long post-1588 coda to 'De l'exercitation':

[C] Je peins principalement mes cogitations, subject informe, qui ne peut tomber en production ouvrage. A toute peine le puis je coucher en ce corps aerée de la voix. Des plus sages hommes et des plus devots ont vescu fuyants tous apparens effects. Les effects diroyent plus de la Fortune que de moy. Ils tesmoignent leur roole, non pas le mien, si ce n'est conjecturalement et incertainement: eschantillons d'une montre particuliere. Je m'estalle entier: c'est un Skeletos où, d'une veue, les veines, les muscles, les tendons paroissent, chaque piece en son siege. L'effect de la toux en produisoit une partie; l'effect de la palleur ou battement de coeur, un'autre, et douteusement. (II.6.379).

Once again, we see that 'ce corps aerée de la voix', which seems to refer here to speech and writing, is an imperfect medium for the 'depiction' of thought. And yet this corporeal image leads, by way of association, to an admittedly unusual metaphor taken from anatomy: the text, and the depiction of thought contained within, is a 'skeletalos'. But what does Montaigne mean by this specialised and peculiar word?

The first thing to note is that the 'skeletalos' is not an account of Montaigne's actions or circumstances; it is not a personal history: he states explicitly in the sentence which follows the extract above, 'ce ne sont mes gestes que j'escris, c'est moy, c'est mon essence'. As Jean Céard puts it, Montaigne is careful in this passage to 'précise[r] son

dessein. Ce qu'il entend peindre, ce ne sont pas ses actions [...]. Il retrouve (ou reprend) ici une réflexion d'Amyot préfaçant sa traduction des *Vies* de Plutarque.³⁵⁸ Montaigne, then, intends to present the 'entirety' of himself, privileging, in contrast to '[s]es gestes', a moral, intellectual, and cognitive interiority. And yet he uses this word, 'skeletalos'; a word which suggests interiority, certainly, but also partiality.

Marie-Luce Demonet, tracing the uses and meanings of this term in the sixteenth-century, has suggested that this is a defective metaphor. 'Skeletalos', of course, means 'skeleton' and though this rare word, taken directly, Balsamo suggests, from the Greek text of Plutarch's 'Life of Antony',³⁵⁹ was certainly new in sixteenth-century French, Demonet asserts that its meaning was quickly established, referring specifically to 'anatomie sèche' and bones stripped of flesh.³⁶⁰ Clearly, however, Montaigne's use of the term, in which he '[s]'estalle entier', is much more inclusive and seems to imagine something more like a cadaver. '[Il] faut donc se demander,' writes Demonet, 'si Montaigne, conscient de l'inadéquation, la maintient dans une sorte de provocation destinée à la sagacité du lecteur; ou bien si, vaguement informé du sens technique de *skeletalos*, il l'utilise seulement d'une manière approximative.'³⁶¹ There can be little doubt that the latter is the more likely scenario. In any case, Demonet's analysis of this term leads her to identify the metaphoric significance of 'skeletalos' as one of nakedness and transparency: 'le livre est un corps nu comme une "anatomie", un corps total, [...] sans la peau de l'apparence.'³⁶² She concludes by suggesting that, 'même s'il semble avoir

³⁵⁸ 'Montaigne Anatomiste', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 55 (2003), pp. 299-315 (p. 311).

³⁵⁹ Jean Balsamo, 'Skeletalos', *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, pp. 922-923 (p. 922). Cf. Plutarch, 'Antony', in *Lives*, ed. and trans. by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), Vol. 9, chapter 75): 'σκελετὸς'. Amyot has 'un corps mort', 'Antonius', *Vies des hommes illustres*, fol. 654r.

³⁶⁰ 'Le Skeletos de Montaigne ou la leçon de l'anatomie', in *Théâtres de l'anatomie et corps en spectacle*, ed. by I. Zinguer and L. Van Delft (Berne: Peter Lang, 2006), pp.63-88 (p. 69).

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid. p. 66.

laissé de côté le fait que le squelette est décharné, il en a conservé [...] la conscience d'une totalité visible au moins par son auteur.³⁶³

The 'skeletalos' metaphor is certainly inadequate though perhaps not for the reasons outlined by Demonet. If we accept that 'skeletalos' does not signify a literal skeleton, we can begin to think more fully about what Montaigne is trying to describe with this metaphor. In his article in the *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, Balsamo suggests that 'skeletalos' 'désigne peut-être un dessin ou une représentation anatomique du corps découpé en couches successives' before noting that Montaigne 'avait eu l'occasion d'examiner la réalité même' of anatomical dissection while visiting Basle.³⁶⁴ Clearly, Montaigne has in mind the types of anatomical drawings made famous by Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) and Charles Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain* (1546): cadavers propped up and positioned in life-like poses, flayed and skinned to various extents, revealing different layers. In one drawing we might see a skeleton, but in another, we may be presented with a human figure made entirely from muscles and, in another, the full network of tendons.³⁶⁵

And yet, this is also what Montaigne is not describing, for these drawings depict only 'eschantillons d'une montre particuliere' or, in Balsamo's terms, 'couches successives'.³⁶⁶ Montaigne imagines a way of depicting the 'skeletalos', the veins, the muscles, the tendons all 'd'une veue'. He is describing an impossible drawing, as Céard's

³⁶³ Ibid. p. 85.

³⁶⁴ 'Skeletalos', *Dictionnaire de Montaigne*, pp. 922-923. Montaigne's account of this in the *Journal de voyage* is brief: 'Nous vismes & ches luy [Felix Platerus, médecin] & en l'escole publique des anatomies entieres homes morts, qui se tiennent,' *Journal de voyage en Italie* (1774), ed. by Philippe Desan (Paris: Garnier, 2014), p. 45.

³⁶⁵ On the cultural history of anatomy and dissection in the early modern period more broadly, see, in the first instance, Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

³⁶⁶ See, for instance, Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain* (Paris: Simon de Colines, 1546), pp. 96-97. These facing pages present two illustrations, both of a full-length male cadaver: the first is constituted solely of bones; the second of muscles. These are discrete steps in which we are shown different layers.

analysis makes clear: ‘Le dessein de Montaigne, c’est de s’étaler tout entier [...] comme sur une table de dissection. [...] Mais, en même temps, Montaigne se propose de faire voir “d’une veue”, non seulement le squelette, mais aussi les veines, les muscles, les tendons. Et, qui plus est, il veut qu’on voie “chaque piece en son siège”, à sa place, comme si ce corps pourrait découvrir toutes ses pièces sans pourtant être désassemblé.’³⁶⁷ Céard’s argument is that Montaigne is creating a scriptural dissection which preserves ‘l’unité du vivant’,³⁶⁸ and while the ‘unity’ of this self-depiction is certainly key, we ought also to recognise that this metaphor of the ‘skeleton’, rather than describing a transparency, as suggested by Demonet, in which we look ‘through’ the skin to some deeper, inner ‘Self’, is, in fact, working to describe a way of making multiple perspectives available simultaneously. With this quasi-defective metaphor, Montaigne attempts to describe a new way of seeing: a way of seeing multiple layers, perspectives, connections, effects, and causes simultaneously. That we see these multiple perspectives simultaneously should not lead us to think that this is a static image: Montaigne’s beating heart and his coughing means that this is an image fully endowed with time and movement. We see each ‘layer’ of Montaigne’s anatomy of his ‘cogitations’ separately and together at once; we see these thoughts in motion along with their causes and their consequences. We see the whole of Montaigne *and*, ‘d’une veue’, each layer and each part and, significantly, we see this multiple, shifting, and almost holographic or proto-Cubist plurality of layers ‘doublement’: the effect of this portrayal is ambiguous, multiple, and uncertain.

As readers of Montaigne’s multi-perspectival ‘skeleton’, we see multiple layers simultaneously. In this regard, his collapsed perspectives are the corollary to the collapsed chronology detailed above: he overlays a multitude of perspectives or

³⁶⁷ ‘Montaigne Anatomiste’, p. 313.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 313-314.

opinions, building up the text, writing a bit here and a bit there, ‘à diverses pieces’ and ‘à diverses poses’. With these two techniques, Montaigne superimposes text over text, moment over moment, perspective over perspective: he collapses the space of the text and the temporality of writing and reading and, in doing so, extends his ‘double et divers’ thought onto a linear, static page. Here again, however, we see that these processes of overlaying, though seen most clearly in additions and insertions made across the three main strata of composition, are by no means limited to such large-scale techniques. Rather, we see such processes functioning at the level of the sentence and clause throughout Montaigne’s text. [C] Semant icy un mot icy un autre: eschantillons despris de leur piece: escartez,’ writes Montaigne in ‘De Democritus et Heraclitus’ (I.50.302, punctuation following the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 126r.). Noting that these clauses ‘reflect in their form the dispersal of which they speak’, Richard Scholar recognises that ‘[e]ach segment corresponds to a separate thought – its sudden appearance disrupting the onward flow of which it is a part – the flow to which the act of reading must eventually return’.³⁶⁹ Here, Montaigne is describing a process of accumulative composition, capable of moving both ‘avant’ and ‘à reculons’, sowing a word here and a word there, writing non-linearly and across the page, writing two sections of text at different ends of the *Essais* in one sitting, and inserting a line into a paragraph written twenty years ago. In describing these practices in this line from I.50, Montaigne’s text, with its symmetrical structures (‘icy [...] icy’), its idiosyncratic use of colons which seems to set up parallels to be considered simultaneously, and its repetition of ideas seen in new terms and from slightly different perspectives (‘despris [...] escartez’)³⁷⁰ enacts the very thing it describes: a way of writing which presents a

³⁶⁹ *Montaigne and the Art of Free-Thinking*, p. 84.

³⁷⁰ On a related note, Montaigne is here describing his work as made up of ‘eschantillons’ while, in the passage from II.6 studied above, he says the opposite while using the same term. Both extracts are from the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’. Here we see, then, that Montaigne’s multiple

multiplicity of perspectives, not ‘tantost d’un visage, tantost d’un autre’, but simultaneously, synchronically.

We have seen, then, that Montaigne’s conception of thought is one wherein thought is, in itself, double, simultaneously diverse, capable of moving – both through the space of the text and through the time of reading and writing – not only ‘avant’ but also ‘à reculons’. In attempting to extend this thought in language, he turns to the linear models of writing unresolved thought in Seneca’s letters and Plutarch’s moral works. Neither of these models, however, is satisfactory. In Plutarch, Montaigne identifies a means of writing unresolved and sustained diversity; in Seneca, a method of temporally – and, as a consequence, temporarily – fixing the act of writing and the assertions and positions maintained within. Both of these models rely on their linear structures for their irresolution and it is, surprisingly, precisely this linearity which he rejects and reforms. Remoulding the epistolographic model, Montaigne collapses the chronology of composition, writing ‘à diverses poses et intervalles’ but without marrying the progression of time to the progression of the text. The result is a compositional superposition which allows Montaigne to present his diverse opinions and vantage points concurrently and, in doing so, he creates an artificial doubleness; a perceived simultaneity of multiplied thinking. For thought to be double, it must be capable of multiple perspectives at the same time. In the conclusion to ‘De l’exercitation’, we see the essayist approaching this cognitive and textual duality from the other side, privileging not time but perspective: in his depiction of the ‘skeletalos’, Montaigne presents all of his layers, with all of their opacity and in their proper place, at the same time. With this metaphor, he describes a way of writing which superimposes different viewpoints, perspectives, and opinions, not simply across the [A], [B], and [C] strata, but within the

perspectives on his own text can be written at (roughly) the same time and, in different contexts, can be entirely antithetical.

composition of a paragraph or sentence, employing punctuation, parallels, and connections in an attempt to render this simultaneous.

Of course, Montaigne's collapsed chronology and his collapsed perspectives are techniques which are difficult – and sometimes impossible – to disentangle: chronological collapse, for instance, serves to increase the number of perspectives. In unpicking these elements as I have, I am not suggesting that these are discrete methods. Rather, I am pulling them apart in an attempt to show how they work, though this is always against an intrinsic resistance: they will always work together and are, like the 'cogitations' they describe and facilitate, double. This, then, is the 'thinking behind' behind Montaigne's 'double et diverse' form: this is only gestured towards but, following the essayist's pointing finger, we have been able to uncover its logic, its mechanics, and its intended purpose.

What remains to be seen is how this 'double' writing works in practice and it is with two close-readings that I will now close this chapter. These extracts have been selected due to their particularly rich application of the techniques outlined above and are, therefore, representative of Montaigne at his most 'double'. These close-readings are also, however, to be understood as case-studies which demonstrate the latency of this duality which is often to be found just below the surface. Clearly, Montaigne's text is not always and at every moment 'double' though, as I hope these case-studies make apparent, this duality is evident at certain key junctures (as evidenced by the first study) and, significantly, in extracts which appear to be relatively simple performances of accumulation and sequential development (such as the extract at the centre of my second study). These analyses represent Montaigne both at his most novel, doubling and collapsing text in complex and surprising ways, and – on the other hand – performing the typical processes employed throughout the *Essais*, multiplying his text subtly: we

must become ‘diligents’ or ‘suffisants’ readers, sensitive and ‘allegre’ in response to the connections, divisions, and multiplications quietly at work. In what follows, I show the duality and simultaneous diversity evident in two particularly interesting passages; ‘[B] ‘chacun y peut joindre ses exemples’ (I.21.105).

‘Regardant autant à la forme qu’à la substance’: Close-Readings

1. Getting Lost in ‘De la vanité’

‘[B] Quo diversus abis?’ (III.9.994). With this line taken from Virgil, Montaigne announces that he is ‘hors de [son] theme’: he has been discussing the relative virtues of obedience and disobedience ‘[B] en un temps malade comme cettuy-cy’ (III.9.993), noting ‘[B] à l’avanture y a il plus de recommandation d’obeyr aux mauvais [magistrats] qu’aux bons’ (III.9.994).³⁷¹ The quotation from Virgil, breaking one digression and opening another, leads into a strange passage in which Montaigne engages in a process of seeing and describing his writing process from multiple perspectives, performing his formal practices as he attempts to describe them.³⁷²

After noting that he is outside of his theme, Montaigne constructs a carefully balanced, paronomasic sentence; a sentence which seems to push and pull, relying on doubles and repetition as it sustains its opposition: ‘Je m’escare; mais plustost par licence, que par mesgarde: ~~m~~Mes fantasies, se suyvent; mais parfois c’est de loing: & Et se regardent; mais d’une veuë oblique.’ As Tournon’s work has shown, we ought to pay

³⁷¹ The line from Virgil is taken from *Aeneid*, book 5, line 166: Gyas, during the boat race which forms the first part of the funeral games for Anchises, is addressing Menoetes who, fearing rocks lurking beneath the waves, takes the ship further out to sea when cornering and, in doing so, loses the race. That this is part of a game – a simulation – may be significant when we come to consider Montaigne’s use of ‘sembler’ to describe the ways in which he and other writers get lost.

³⁷² Unless otherwise stated, quotations from the *Essais* in this section refer to III.9.994-995, though I have restored the punctuation and spelling as it is seen on fol. 447v. of the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’.

close attention to Montaigne's punctuation and his 'majuscules de scansion' and this is a prime example. Rather than seeing this as a flowing sentence of moderation and compromise, these graphic markers remould this sentence, forcing us to see it as a series of 'x but y' statements in which the result is not a median point but is rather a sustained tension. This is seen most clearly in the opening clause where Montaigne's pun on 'm'esgare' and 'mesgarde' highlights the apparent contradiction: he seems to be saying that he loses himself but not by getting lost. These are, then, two perspectives – two contradictory ideas – maintained simultaneously.

What follows in the 1588 text is less challenging: noting that 'les noms de [ses] chapitres n'en embrassent pas tousjours la matiere' and that '[il] ayme l'alleure poetique, à sauts & à gambades', this passage is, in essence, a declaration of an affected 'poetic' nonchalance in speech and writing. Invoking the 'fureur' of the poet, he repeats a number of tropes and commonplaces: 'il faut avoir un peu de folie, qui ne veut avoir plus de sottise', 'il luy faut certes quitter la maistrise, & preeminence en la parlerie'. In the 1588 text, we see Montaigne drawing a link between prose and poetry which licences his own digressive and associative way of writing. While this certainly reveals something of the essayist's view of writing as one informed by what we might call 'inspiration' or *furor poeticus*, his formal and textual practices are relatively simple and conventional.³⁷³

In linguistic and textual terms, the most challenging aspect of the 1588 text is the sentence studied above, beginning with 'Je m'esgare'. On the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', Montaigne capitalises on this: what was originally a stylistic turn of phrase spirals out of control as he attempts to write a series of contradictions which are not presented as such and which are forced to fit together in spite of the overwhelming tension. On this one page of the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', Montaigne makes half a dozen major additions

³⁷³ On *furor poeticus* in this passage, see Tournon, *Montaigne: la glose et l'essai*, pp. 136-141.

and numerous smaller changes and the order in which these are intended to be read is not absolutely clear. Tracing the various symbols indicating points of insertion – I, ±, and X, among others – Tournon has suggested an alternate reading to the commonly accepted order as found in modern editions of the *Essais*.³⁷⁴ The most significant change moves the discussion of Plutarch and the ‘indiligent lecteur’ between ‘Torquatus’ and ‘J’ayme l’alleure poetique’ (see *fig.* 12). The reference to Plato’s ‘legere, volage, demoniacle’ art is relocated to the space between ‘à sauts et à gambades’ and ‘Et vois au change’. This reading posits that the ‘Je’, which comes at the end of the long passage regarding Plutarch and the ‘indiligent’ reader, is erroneous, privileging the ‘signe d’insertion’ (±) over the ‘oblitéré, mais non pas raturé’ ampersand which introduces ‘vois au change’. Tournon also notes that the problematic ‘Je’ seems not to have been written at the same time as the passage which precedes it: ‘ses caractères sont plus gros; et surtout il n’apparaît pas à la suite des fins de phrase du premier jet’.³⁷⁵ It is Tournon’s reading, which is to be found in his Imprimerie Nationale edition, which will be followed here.³⁷⁶ As we will see, Montaigne’s practice of piling up diverse fragments of text, ‘semant icy un mot, icy un autre’, all within the [C] stratum, shows his collapsed chronology working on a small-scale: within a small time-frame, he accumulates and superimposes these textual fragments, intensifying, multiplying, and ‘doubling’ the trajectories of thought contained within this short passage.

³⁷⁴ ‘Montaigne et l’“alleure poétique”’: pour une nouvelle lecture d’une page des *Essais*, *Bibliothèque d’humanisme et Renaissance*, 33 (1971), pp. 155-162.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 158

³⁷⁶ See Tournon’s edition, III.9.322-4.

Montaigne's own text: 'J'ay passé les yeux sur tel dialogue de Platon mi party d'une fantastique bigarrure, le devant à l'amour, tout le bas à la rhétorique. Ils ne craignent point ces nuances, Et ont une merveilleuse grace à se laisser ainsi rouler au vent, ou à le sembler.' He is describing the *Phaedrus*, a text which is, as Montaigne notes, split in half. This description, which comes just after the account of 'oblique' connections, is certainly analogous to the type of writing the essayist assumes for himself – it begins with one 'theme' before moving on to another – though this is a radically simplified analogy, with Plato's *Phaedrus* standing in as a basic, two-part form of diversity. Rather than representing 'fantasies' which 'se suivent', the *Phaedrus*, with its clean division into 'le devant' and 'le bas', seems rather to recall the Horatian monster from 'De l'amitié': the *Phaedrus* is certainly not a 'farcesseur' and, indeed, Montaigne's use of 'bigarrure' seems generous.

Plato's text, then, serves as a streamlined, simplified comparison which, though it allows Montaigne to make plain this key point regarding thematic disconnect, is ultimately unsatisfactory and fails to ring true as a legitimate analogue for his own text. In the second sentence of this insertion, however, we begin to see those 'fantaisies' which follow each other distantly and obliquely: 'Ils ne craignent point ces nuances', he writes, 'Et ont une merveilleuse grace à se laisser ainsi rouler au vent, ou à le sembler.' What does 'ils' refer to? It can, presumably, refer only to an implied reference to 'les dialogues' – plural – gestured towards by 'tel': Montaigne's text has begun, it seems, to 'se laisse[r] ainsi rouler au vent', making connections that are implied but 'distant' and 'oblique'. In going from one sentence to the next, he has begun to lose his theme and to subtly embrace 'ces nuances', 'ou', at least, 'à le sembler'. Though the leap is small, we see in these two sentences Montaigne's movement 'à sauts et à gambades'.

This final phrase – ‘ou à le sembler’ – is central, not just in this insertion regarding Plato, but in the passage more generally: Plato *seems* to ‘rouler au vent’, Montaigne’s text *seems* to be analogous to that of Plato and, as we will see, Montaigne *seems* to associate his work with Plutarch’s. The whole of this digression turns, as will become clear, on this slippery notion of semblance and its potential to suggest two opposite meanings depending on where the stress is placed. The description of the *Phaedrus* is followed by a return to the [B] text – ‘Les noms de mes chapitres n’en embrassent pas tousjours la matiere; souvent ils la denotent seulement par quelque marque, comme ces autres [C] tiltres: l’Andrie, l’Eunuque, ou ces autres [B] noms: Sylla, Cicero, Torquatus’ – which is, in turn, followed by a lengthy post-1588 passage describing Plutarch, his ‘Daemon de Socrates’, and Montaigne’s account of his relationship with the ‘indiligent lecteur’. Before looking at this addition in detail, we ought to note that this description of Plutarch’s ‘Daemon’ prompts a return to Plato – here, we see ‘fantasies’ which ‘se suyvent’, albeit ‘de loing’ – with Montaigne citing Plato on ‘l’alleure poetique’: ‘c’est un art come dict Platon legere volage ~~sacree daemoniacle~~ ~~sacree daemoniacle.~~’ In passing from ‘daemon’ to ‘daemon’, from Plato to Plutarch and back again, Montaigne is drawing connections which are neither linear nor argumentative but are, rather, associative and diverse, pulling both thought and text in multiple, distinct directions, simultaneously following diverse ‘fantasies’ which ‘se regardent.’³⁷⁸

Montaigne’s attempts to write this thought about Plutarch fill the whole of the right-hand margin. His first attempt reads: ‘Il me semble qu’il y a ouvrage en Plutarque ~~qui de~~ dedié à Socrates qui ~~et~~ a peine en parle il un mot sur la fin tout le corps estant d’Epaminondas. Ces escartemants sont d’autant plus ingenieus qu’ils semblent estres

³⁷⁸ We may again note that these three passages, written, it seems, at different times, are presented simultaneously in a flattened chronology.

fortuites.’ Here, we see lines of connection being drawn to both Plato and to Montaigne himself: Plutarch’s lacunae *seem* to be accidental (‘ils semblent estres fortuites’), just as Plato’s dialogues seem to ‘rouler au vent’; similarly, Montaigne seems to lose himself, ‘mais plustost par licence’. Are we to understand ‘sembler’ in the same way for both Plutarch and Plato? This is unclear: it may reflect Montaigne’s opinion – ‘this seems to be the case’ – or, on the other hand, it may be used to describe an affected appearance – ‘they seem to lose themselves, go with the wind, and this all seems to be accidental and inartificial, but it is not really’.

In any case, this preliminary version is erased, though the ambiguity of seeming to lose oneself remains. In its second incarnation, Montaigne introduces a direct comment of self-assessment before turning to Plutarch and his ‘Daemon’, thereby rendering more explicit – though not necessarily more clear – the comparison of his own digressive qualities with those of Plutarch: ‘Ils en disent tousjours en quelque coin un mot bien serré [...] l’auteur ne la pert pas c’est l’indiligent lector.’ This is the first of a number of attempts to write the paradoxical statement – echoing and expanding upon the 1588 claim, ‘Je m’escare, mais plustost par licence’ – that he both loses and does not lose his subject. Here, we see another ‘décousu’ ‘ils’ and, again, it reveals a point of slippage: ‘ils’ refers not, as it ought, to ‘les noms de mes chapitres’, but to the chapters themselves. Here, then, Montaigne’s own ‘escartements’ reveal cognitive jumps which result from shifts in perspective where associated thoughts sit next to each other, without flowing in sequence, though always ‘se regard[ant]’.

This version is, in its turn, also erased and replaced by: ‘Au demurant, encore ~~la~~ que la montre soit autre et autre le gros du corps, si ne la laisse je pas en arriere, et en laisse en un coin tousjours quelque mot, et bien serré. C’est l’indiligent lectur qui la pert non pas moi.’ Here, we see a significant shift from ‘l’auteur’ to ‘moi’: ‘Je m’escare’,

from the beginning of this digression, even with its ‘licence’, has been entirely contradicted. As Montaigne makes plain, however, ‘[A] je ne corrige point mes premieres imaginations par les secondes’ (II.37.758): he did not feel that he lost himself and his ‘theme’ in his text in 1588 and then realise, after 1588 and while making his changes on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, that it’s the reader rather than himself who gets lost; rather, Montaigne loses himself and doesn’t lose himself. This version is still, however, insufficient and Montaigne rewrites this idea for a final time:

Il est des ouvrages en Plutarque où il oublie son ~~promesse~~ theme, où le propos ~~desseigné~~ de son argument ne se trouve que par incident, tout estouffé en matiere estrangere: voyez ses alleures au Daemon de Socrates. O Dieu, que ces ~~escartemens~~ gaillardes escapades, que cette variation a de ~~grace~~ beauté, et plus lors ~~qu’elle semble nonchalante et fortuite~~ que plus elle retire au nonchalant et fortuite. C’est l’indiligent lecteur qui pert mon subject, non pas moy[:] il s’en trouvera tousjours en un coing quelque mot ~~bien serré, il~~ qui ne laisse pas d’estre ~~pertinent et suffisant quoi qu’il ne soit estendu~~ bastant, quoy qu’il ~~ne soit estendu~~ serré.

Tracing these multiple attempts at expressing this idea gives us a better understanding of Montaigne’s intention: it allows us to see him playing with the order in which he sets out this implied comparison with Plutarch, thinking in and with writing; it reveals a shift from a negative view of ‘escartements’ to a much more positive reference to ‘gaillardes escapades’; we see a movement away from the impersonal and generic ‘auteur’ to ‘moi’.

There is a central question, however, which remains unclear at all stages of composition: who loses whom? Montaigne began the passage by losing himself but only ‘par licence’; Plato’s dialogues ‘roulent au vent’ *or* seem to; Plutarch, in the final version, ‘*retire* au nonchalant et fortuite’ (my emphasis) and the notion that he genuinely ‘oublie son theme’ is reinforced by the erasure of ‘elle semble nonchalante et fortuite’; and, at the very end of the passage, Montaigne states in plain terms, seemingly contradicting the opening of the passage, that ‘c’est l’indiligent lecteur qui pert mon subject, non pas moy’.

What, then, is the difference between losing the subject and seeming to lose the subject? And what is the purpose of these difficult and fluctuating distinctions?

Plutarch's role in this passage is, it seems, to stand as an analogue or mirror for Montaigne: the laudatory description of Plutarch's digressive qualities and the 'beauté' of his variation map congruently onto what we – and, I think, Montaigne himself – think about the *Essais* and is clearly intended to echo the preceding comments regarding being 'hors de [son] theme' and titles 'n'en embrass[ant] pas tousjours la matiere'. And yet, in his final addition, he has arranged his ideas – evident in the earlier versions though without drawing this direct parallel – such that they describe a clear and distinct line of difference between Plutarch and himself: Plutarch 'oublie son theme', writes Montaigne, 'non pas moy'. These sentences, as we find them in the final version, are highly stylised and seem to embody two opposed aesthetic ideas, further cementing this apparent line of difference through the use of rhetorical techniques. The 'coupé', 'serré' quality of Montaigne's self-assessment – 'c'est l'indiligent lecteur qui pert mon subject, non pas moy' – is not only a chiasmus, inverting and reversing its structure around 'mon subject'; it is also sylleptic, dropping the verb in the second clause for euphuistic purposes and attaching the first-person 'moy' to the third-person 'pert'. This tightly wrought and delicately balanced turn of phrase punctuates the preceding apostrophic description of Plutarch ('O Dieu, que ces gaillardes escapades [...]'), which is amplified and extended with its anaphoric repetition of 'où [...] où' and 'que [...] que [...] plus lors que'. Comparing this description to Montaigne's first attempt – 'Il me semble qu'il y a ouvrage en Plutarche dedié à Socrates qui a peine en parle il un mot sur la fin tout le corps estant d'Epaminondas. Ces escartemants sont d'autant plus ingenieus qu'ils semblent estres fortuites' – reveals the extent to which Montaigne has loaded what was originally a simple observation coupled with some modest praise with an overwhelming

rush of rhetorical effects, only for this to break off suddenly into stark *brevitas* as Montaigne's attention turns towards his own text. In expressing these ideas in these two radically different styles, he seems to displace his own rambling, exuberant digression on the qualities of Plutarch's style onto Plutarch himself while reserving a succinct, curt point for his self-assessment, further problematizing the easy association of Plutarch's 'gaillardes escapades' with Montaigne's own 'farcisseure'. What he writes about Plutarch implies that they are similar; how he writes it suggests that they are not.

In this passage, we see Montaigne thinking 'doubly' as he attempts to express his intuitive idea about how he loses and yet does not lose his subject. He tries to write this idea twice, filling the right-hand margin, and, both times, his attempts are abortive. His idea finds expression, however, once he attaches his self-description to his description of Plutarch. He has to think about and describe himself and Plutarch simultaneously, keeping both of their manners of writing in mind at once, to see that they are both the same and not the same³⁷⁹ on precisely this same point regarding whether or not they 'really' digress and lose the thread of their writing. Montaigne's writing, then, is just like Plutarch's except that it is not. As we see at the very bottom of this page, he adds: 'Joint qu'à l'adventure ay-je quelque obligation particuliere à ne dire qu'à demy, à dire confusément, à dire discordamment.' He is trying to sustain a plurality of opinion and perspective – he loses his theme, he doesn't; he is like Plutarch, he isn't – and, in order to do so, he constructs these connections which go 'avant et à reculons aussi', 'à sauts et à gambades', pushing us to read across the passage in a non-linear way, finding connections and comparisons which seem to rupture under scrutiny, only for another set of connections to emerge. This is, then, a 'doubtful' passage and we ought not

³⁷⁹ Compare the opening of III.13: '[B] La ressemblance ne fait pas tant un comme la difference fait autre. [C] Nature s'est obligée à ne rien faire autre, qui ne fust dissemblable.'

reduce its ‘doubleness’ and its multiplicity of contradictory positions in an attempt to find its monovocal, stable meaning.

At the bottom of this page, we see another long [C] addition, written before the section on ‘l’indiligent lecteur’ – this later section is shaped to fit around the addition at the bottom of the page – and written, apparently, with much greater ease:

Par ce que la coupure si frequente des chapitres de quoy j’usoy au commencement m’a semblé rompre l’attention avant qu’elle soit née: et la dissoudre, dedaignant s’y coucher pour si peu, et se recueillir: je me suis mis à les faire plus longs, qui requierent de la proposition et du loisir assigné. En telle occupation, à qui on ne veut donner une seule heure on ne veut rien donner. Et ne fait on rien pour celuy pour qui on ne faict, qu’autre chose faisant.³⁸⁰

Here, Montaigne explains how he set about making his chapters *longer*, temporally speaking. His efforts to augment his text were not, according to this extract, concerned with making his chapters more comprehensive, more copious, nor even with filling them with more ‘divers’ perspectives. Rather, he reveals a concern here for the reading experience, both for the envisaged reader and, I think, for himself as he re-read his own early chapters, experiencing this premature end which breaks his concentration. Here, in trying to explain this double idea of (not) getting lost, he recognises that he needs a form long enough to capture the attention and to get one’s imagination moving: as he writes elsewhere, ‘[C] Tout lieu retiré requiert un proumenoir. Mes pensées dorment, si je les assis. Mon esprit ne va, si les jambes ne l’agitent’ (III.3.828). Montaigne’s form needs to be long enough for us to get a little lost while simultaneously being full of discord, rupture, spoken only ‘à demy’. He is describing, then, an extended, continuous reading

³⁸⁰ On the idea of ‘an hour’s worth of reading’ – a notion which recurs a number of times in the *Essais* – see Antoine Compagnon, ‘A Long Short Story: Montaigne’s Brevity’, *Yale French Studies*, 64 (1983), pp. 24-50. ‘The paradox is remarkable: Tacitus, Seneca, and Plutarch can be read for an hour at a stretch, unlike Cicero, because they can be read at intervals. Their writings are detached, without sequence, and their style is pointed and subtle. One can devote time to them because they do not demand it. Montaigne [...] must attain this equilibrium: to be readable for an hour because readable in a moment’, p. 32.

of a ruptured, fragmentary, and polyvalent text: the reading experience allows us – himself included – to get (half-)lost; the text itself allows us to see both the breaks and the connections, reading across, up and down, back and forth. With Montaigne, we get lost ‘mais plustot par licence que par mesgarde’. Once lost, we see that ‘[s]es fantasies se suyvent, mais par fois c’est de loing, et se regardent, mais d’une veue oblique’.

2. Present and Future Concerns in ‘Nos affections s’emportent au-delà de nous’ (I.3).

As we have seen, then, Montaigne claims that, in returning to and augmenting his early chapters, his intention was to make them longer and, in doing so, give the reader’s imagination enough time to make connections, find gaps, and to get ‘lost’. Taking ‘Nos affections s’emportent au-delà de nous’ as my case-study, I will now show how he does this while asking what implications this has for writing ‘doubly’.

The chapter opens with one of the sentences Tournon highlights in his ‘exemples d’altération du texte par segmentation défectueuse dans l’édition posthume’:

[B] Ceux qui accusent les hommes d’aller tousjours beant apres les choses futures, ~~et~~ [C] Et [B] nous aprennent à nous saisir des biens presens, & nous rassoir en ceux-là, comme n’ayant aucune prise sur ce qui est à venir; voire assez moins que nous n’avons sur ce qui est passé, touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs: ~~s’ils~~ [C] S’ils [B] osent appeller erreur, chose à quoy nature mesme nous achemine, pour le service de la continuation de son ouvrage (I.3.15, punctuation following the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 4r.)³⁸¹

With the exception of changes to punctuation and a brief extension of this sentence, this opening passage, inserted in 1588, remains unchanged on the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’.

Tournon notes that ‘la majuscule de scansion [“S’ils osent...”] marque un retour critique sur le présumé, et met en concurrence les deux perspectives qui prévalent

³⁸¹ Annexe II, *Route par ailleurs*, pp. 403-428. These examples are highlighted and given a one line explanation though Tournon does not analyse this passage in more detail. I have provided the [C] markers which are not found in the Villey-Saulnier edition.

alternativement dans le préambule ajouté en 1588'.³⁸² As Tournon recognises, this subtle change goes some way towards creating a written form of simultaneously diverse thought: Montaigne's use of colons and majuscules allows him to present two clauses equally and, in doing so, pushes us to consider them together as simultaneous and yet separate.

Looking at this sentence more closely, we can take Tournon's point further.

Below is an attempt to render the movement of this sentence graphically:

- Ceux qui accusent les hommes d'aller tousjours béant après les choses futures,
 - & Et nous apprennent à nous saisir des biens presens,
 - & nous rassoier en ceux-là
 - comme n'ayant aucune prise sur ce qui est à venir:
 - voire assez moins que nous n'avons sur ce qui est passé,
- touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs:
 - ← S'ils osent appeler erreur, chose à quoy nature mesme nous achemine, pour le service de la continuation de son ouvrage:
 - [C] nous imprimant, comme assez d'autres, cette imagination fausse, plus jalouse de nostre action que de nostre science.

In the first clause, Montaigne presents the reader with an anonymous assertion which is then extended by two sub-clauses before reaching a second, subsidiary point which functions as a way of explaining this accusation. It is only then that, finally, we reach Montaigne's verdict on the anonymous 'ceux' and their accusation: they 'touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs'.

This, then, is the first 'half' of this sentence and we see that it is governed by parallels, comparisons, and other such balancing techniques. The anonymous 'ceux' are opposed to the equally generic 'les hommes'; 'choses futures' balances 'bien presens' though 'bien presens' is part of its own prose 'couplet' with '& nous rassoier en ceux-là' by virtue of Montaigne's of 'Et... &' rather than the original '&... &'. In changing his

³⁸² *Route par ailleurs*, p. 404.

text to read 'Et', he brings these two clauses into a parallel relationship of their own whereas, in the 1588 text, the functioned hypotactically, extending and running on from the first clause. Returning to 'choses futures', we see this echoed again in the next main sub-clause in 'ce qui est à venir' though, once again, this opens its own pairing, opposing and balancing 'ce qui est passé'. In this couple, we see an interesting shift, mirroring the opening pair of 'ceux' and 'les hommes' and reinforcing our implicit association with the latter, more generic term though, this time, through creating a pairing of association rather than a pair of difference and contrast: 'ce qui est à venir' is out of reach of an implied 'ils' ('comme n'*ayant* aucune prise') while 'nous' cannot grasp 'ce qui est passé'.

In half a sentence, Montaigne has set up a series of interconnecting, non-exclusive doubles which is also coupled with an apparent movement between different groups of people as his verbs and pronouns shift from clause to clause. We are beginning to see a plurality of perspectives in this apparently monovocal and simple claim that '[c]eux qui accusent les hommes d'aller tousjours béant après les choses futures [...] touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs'. These small-scale doubles and oppositions find their larger counterpart in the second half of this sentence which is introduced by the pivot identified by Tourmon and highlighted by Montaigne's shift to the majuscule: 'S'ils osent appeler erreur, chose à quoy nature mesme nous achemine.' Upon first impression, this looks like a moderating statement: Montaigne is querying a point of terminology, balancing his apparently affirmative and resolved opinion that the anonymous 'ceux' have touched upon this most common of errors.

And yet this is a balancing act which does not quite work: the spinning plates that have been set up in each successive clause and sub-clause come crashing down. It is Montaigne, not the anonymous 'ceux', who dares call this natural tendency an 'erreur'. '[B]éant après les choses futures' – his antithesis, his sub-clauses, his rich and diverse

exposition of his argument – he finds himself unable to ‘saisir’ his first premise. The first half of the sentence, stripped of its diversity and *copia*, contains two judgements: the judgement of ‘ceux’ who criticise ‘les hommes’ for chasing after future concerns and the judgement of Montaigne that this accusation touches this most common error: in accumulating his diverse perspectives, he loses his thread and elides these two judgements before displacing his own judgement onto ‘ceux’ and, in doing so, disowning it and arguing against it. This is, it might be noted, evidence of his diversity of opinion across time, ‘de minute en minute’ (III.2.805).

The mechanics of Montaigne’s argument – the way he writes and the thinking he does in writing – reveals a cognitive doubleness. His corrective antithesis is wrong: it contains a syllogistic fallacy. But it is, at the same time, right: it testifies to his assertion that ‘les hommes [vont] tousjours beant apres les choses futures’, that Nature ‘nous imprim[e] cette imagination fausse’, pushing us to race ahead without grasping what is at hand. Similarly, he tells us that ‘ceux’ are both correct – they ‘touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs’ – and, at the same time, incorrect: to err in living according to Nature is surely a contradiction. Importantly, he does not describe this simultaneity or doubleness, nor does he say that the anonymous accusers are *somewhat* right or right given a certain set of circumstances. As he writes in ‘De la vanité’, ‘[B] J’entends que la matiere se distingue soy-mesme’ (III.9.995). This is a sentence which moves and fills out as it progresses: we can see Montaigne thinking, exploring multiple ‘visages’ though without reducing this to a dialectical (and therefore linear and sequential) analysis of *pro* and *contra* ‘ceux qui accusent les hommes’.³⁸³ The focus shifts in almost every clause,

³⁸³ Tournon, working on ‘De l’incertitude de nostre judgement’ (I.47), has noted a similar resistance to ‘arguments *pro et contra*,’ particularly as Montaigne would have encountered them during his time working in the *Chambre des Enquêtes*: ‘l’information recherchée est méthodiquement associée à l’information contraire, si bien que la question reste irrésolue. [...] [L]e texte produit n’est pas un répertoire d’arguments *pro et contra*, en vue d’un choix ou d’une synthèse, mais l’exhibition d’une série de contradictions.’ Tournon also notes that this is the

allowing us to see this multiplicity and overlaying of diverse thought, though Montaigne leaves this for the ‘suffisant lecteur’: he does not label his diversity, nor does he label this simultaneity of ‘right and wrong’. In this one sentence, then, we can identify a clear formal manifestation of Montaigne’s view of ‘nostre entendement’ as ‘double et divers’ and his attempt to write this double diversity without reducing it to a linear sequence.

We can also see how a ‘collapsed chronology’ of double thought does not require us to think of this ‘chronologie’ purely at the level of the [A], [B], and [C] strata. Thinking through diverse perspectives and maintaining multiple opinions simultaneously, Montaigne has created a sentence which appears, at first glance, to present one opinion – they are correct – and then another – they are not – though once we look more closely at the formal practices at work – at its ‘maniere’ as well as its ‘matiere’ – the concurrence and simultaneously diverse nature of this sentence begins to emerge, allowing us to see that both positions are held at once. Here, in this short opening to a chapter, we find Montaigne ‘semant icy un mot, icy un autre’, all so as to collapse these diverse perspectives and write the simultaneously multiple nature of his cognition.

This is, nevertheless, a chapter full of [B] and [C] additions which work to lengthen the chapter and the reader’s experience of it. The chapter is augmented significantly: it is by no means a long chapter, even in its final state, though, from five hundred words in its first edition, the final version reaches a little more than two and a half thousand words. It is, moreover, a chapter concerned with the issue of time and our place within it and it is therefore not surprising that it engages in these practices of ‘collapsing chronology’. The [A] text is already one of diversity, parading before us a

only chapter in the *Essais* which breaks its contents into paragraphs though, rather than separating ideas, this technique combines them: ‘chaque alinéa contient un couple d’opinions opposées.’ *Route par ailleurs*, p. 119.

series of noble, military men, each representing a different model of how one should care for the fortune of one's bodily remains after death.³⁸⁴ Montaigne presents us with five stories all taken from modern history: 'il y a tant d'exemples anciens,' he notes, 'laissant à part les nostres, qu'il n'est besoing que je m'en fournisse.'³⁸⁵ Structurally, these are gathered into two pairs followed by a concluding anecdote which is framed separately: 'Il me faut *adjouster* cet exemple, aussi remarquable pour cete consideration que nul des precedens' (I.3.15, my emphasis).³⁸⁶

The first two stories describe dead men whose terrestrial 'after-life' is dictated by other men: Bertrand du Guesclin died while commanding the siege of Châteauneuf-de-Randon and, when the siege was ultimately successful, 'les assiegez [...] furent obligez de porter les clefs de la place sur le corps du trespasé', (I.3.12); Barthelemy d'Alviane, having died while on campaign in Brescia, was, on the order of Theodore Trivolce and against the recommendation of the majority of the army, transported across enemy territory 'par vive force, au hazard du combat', with Trivolce arguing that the deceased would not have feared his enemy and asked for safe-conduct while alive.³⁸⁷ The story of Barthelemy leads into an account of Edward I of England and his totemic bones: he 'obligea son fils, par solennel serment, a ce qu'estant trespasé, il fit boullir son corps, pour desprendre sa chair d'avec les os [...] et, quant aus os, qu'il les reservast pour les porter avec lui et en son armée, toutes les fois qu'il luy adviendroit d'avoir guerre contre

³⁸⁴ The connection between the title and the text as we find it in 1580 seems somewhat tenuous – 'les noms de [ses] chapitres n'en embrassent pas tousjours la matiere,' writes Montaigne (III.9.994) – though this 'escartement' seems to be filled in as Montaigne augments the chapter.

³⁸⁵ *Essais de Messire Michel Seigneur de Montaigne* (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1580), I.3.13. When discussing the 1580 text of I.3, references are, unless otherwise stated, to the first edition and, when discussing later additions, quotations are taken from Villey-Saulnier. In 1588, this sentence was rewritten as, 'il n'est besoing que je m'y estende.'

³⁸⁶ Compare my discussion in Chapter One of 'allonger' and 'adjouter' at the end of 'De la force de l'imagination'.

³⁸⁷ For a study of early modern conceptions of death, afterlives, and the power of language (and particularly tense and grammar) to shape these afterlives, see Neil Kenny, *Death and Tenses: Posthumous Presence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

les Escossois: comme si la destinée avoit fatalement ataché la victoire a ses membres'. This story of an individual determining the continuity between life and death for himself is then paralleled with the 'le fait du Capiteine Baiard', shifting the focus from the potency of the dead body to that of the dying body: 'se sentant blessé à mort d'une harquebusade dans le corps, conseillé de se retirer de la meslée, respondit qu'il ne commenceroit point sur sa fin à tourner le dos à l'ennemy: et ayant combatu autant qu'il eut de force, se sentant defaillir et eschaper du cheual, commanda à son maistre d'hostel de le coucher au pied d'un arbre: mais que ce fut en façon qu'il mourut le visage tourné vers l'ennemy, comme il fit.' Finally, Maximilian I is introduced, closing the chapter with a story detached from those that come before, providing a disruptive jump from military men dying in battle to a private, even effeminate concern³⁸⁸ about *not* being seen after death: 'il ordonna, par parolles expresses de son testament, qu'on luy attachat des calessons, quand il seroit mort. Il devoit adjouster, par codicille, que celuy qui les luy monteroit eut les yeux bandés' (I.3.16).

In the 1580 text, we have a display of diversity full of the connections, comparisons, and points of difference – both explicit and unstated – that we have come to expect. The extensive additions which were to come take this relatively simple five-part account of the different responses these men exemplify to this one issue and pull it apart in all directions. Most simply, this process of augmentation allows Montaigne to 'diversify' his examples: in 1580, he gestured towards a vast collection of potential *exempla* provided by Antiquity, noting that 'il n'est besoing que je m'en fournisse'. Modifying this sentence in the 1588 edition so that it reads 'il n'est besoing que je m'y estende', he proceeds to do precisely what he says there is no need to do: he begins incorporating not only ancient examples but also those taken from the New World.

³⁸⁸ Maximilian is described as 'aussi religieux qu'une fille', p. 16. 'Fille' is replaced with 'pucelle' on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 5v.

Significantly, this is, as Montaigne's linguistic choice suggests, a 'spreading out' rather than an accumulation or gathering of corroborating *exempla*: these stories, though they are certainly all related to each other, do not repeat the same 'leçon' or testify to the same assertion.

After the opening sentence – studied in detail above – and its instruction on how we ought to focus on present rather than future concerns, the 1588 text shifts radically, presenting us with an inversion of this relationship between the present and the future: 'Entre les loix qui regardent les trespassez, celle icy me semble autant solide, qui oblige les actions des Princes à estre examinées apres leur mort.' Montaigne is now suggesting that we ought to delay our thoughts on the present state of things until a later date. We can make sense of this reversal – he states in the opening sentence that, as with 'ce qui est à venir,' 'nous n'avons [aucune prise] sur ce qui est passé'; Montaigne is simply filling in the gap, stating our inability to grasp the present – though this feels unsatisfactory: the feeling that the train of thought has jolted and that we are now seeing this relationship of past and future backwards remains.

We also see a shift from the abstract language of logic and philosophical argument to the more concrete realm of politics. Between these two, Montaigne makes a further addition on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', reinforcing this 'philosophical' quality evident in the first sentence. This [C] addition is, in turn, subject to two further additions, both Latin prose quotations, one from Seneca, the other from Cicero, with the latter being appended with a French summary of an Epicurean teaching, itself taken from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (fig. 13).³⁸⁹ The core of the interpolation focuses on 'ce grand precepte [...] allegué en Platon: Fay ton faict et te cognoy'. This ethical focus reinforces the opening account of 'la plus commune des humaines erreurs', all while

³⁸⁹ Cf. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 3.16.34.

providing a new framework and a new perspective: here, moving away from the authority of ‘nature mesme’, we see the issue through a framework of *auctores* and *auctoritates* as Montaigne calls upon their sayings, teachings, and precepts.

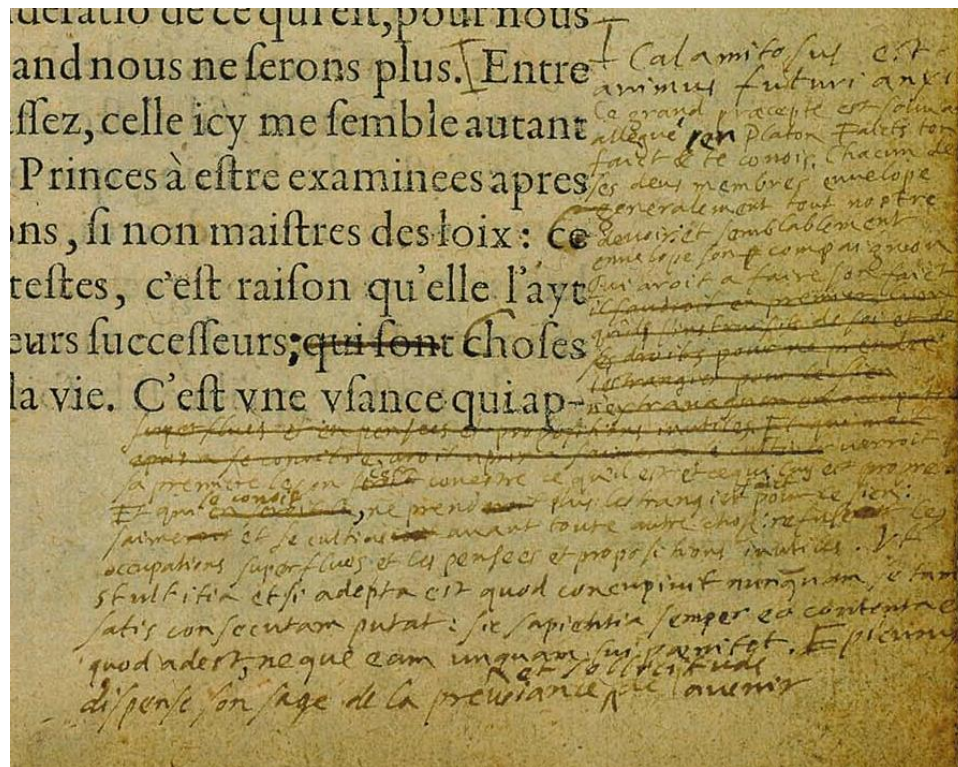


Fig. 13. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 4r. The Latin quotations which open and close this addition are written in different ink from that used for the main body of text and the Senecan quotation is written in a larger hand.

Returning to the discussion in the 1588 text of how and when we ought to pass judgement on princes, we see that this is followed by a long [C] text addition which takes this political vantage-point and diversifies it, associating it with its natural partner: political history. In 1588, Montaigne seems to justify the ways in which the actions of princes seem to be above the law: ‘Ils sont compaignons, si non maistres des loix: ce que la Justice n’a peu sur leurs testes, c’est raison qu’elle l’ayt sur leur reputation, et biens de leurs successeurs’ (I.3.16). Here, we see the link with what has been said before – Montaigne is discussing the difference between ‘biens presens’ and ‘choses futures’ – though this is certainly not a continuation of the preceding argument. Nevertheless, he picks it up again when making his additions to the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ though,

once again, the perspective has changed: ‘Nous devons la subjection et l’obeissance également à tous Rois, car elle regarde leur office: mais l’estimation, non plus que l’affection, nous ne la devons qu’à leur vertu. [...] [C]eux qui par respect de quelque obligation privée espousent iniquement la memoire d’un prince meslouable, font justice particuliere aux despendis de la Justice Publique.’ In 1588, then, Montaigne was arguing that history and posterity will judge princes where the law does not. On the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, however, he makes plain that history often witnesses a continuation of false praise and sycophancy: he cites a precept from Livy – ‘le langage des hommes nourris sous la Royauté est tousjours plein des folles ostentations et vains tesmoignages’ – and two opposing examples taken from Tacitus (Nero – while alive – being judged according to his merits by a soldier and the Spartans’ ‘feinte ceremonie’ at the death of a king). Again, we can see the link to the text which surrounds it – here, we can see a connection with the [A] text which is to come where Montaigne discusses cases of continuity and conformity between how men act or are treated before and after death – though, still again, this is not a continued or sustained argument.

By way of Sparta and these historical kings, Montaigne finds a path to Solon and his saying that ‘nul avant sa mort ne peut estre dict heureux’ (I.3.17). In doing so, he returns to the ethical concerns with which he began these [C] additions to the opening of the chapter, noting that, ‘estant hors de l’estre, nous n’avons aucune communication avec ce qui est’³⁹⁰ and, as such, ‘seroit meilleur de dire à Solon, que jamais homme n’est donq heureux, puis qu’il ne l’est qu’apres qu’il n’est plus’. He has come full circle: we ought not to judge a man or his happiness according to ‘choses futures’. Yet again, however, the framework and the line of argument has shifted and, far from suggesting

³⁹⁰ Compare the very similar phrase which is used at the opening on the Plutarchan conclusion to the ‘Apologie’, studied above in Chapter Two.

that we try to grasp ‘bien presens’, Montaigne suggests that ‘biens’ and happiness are at all points – past, present, and future – out of reach.

These, then, are the additions made only to the opening of this chapter: these are all inserted before the stories of Bertrand du Guesclin and Barthelemy d’Alviane. While we could trace similar functions and relationships in the additions made through the rest of the chapter, such an exposition would be excessively time-consuming and is, in any case, unnecessary: already, in this opening section, we have seen how Montaigne takes this central issue – the relationship between ‘choses futures’ and ‘biens presens’ – and approaches it from multiple perspectives, ‘essaying’ it, revealing a plurality of opinions and a multiplicity of arguments or avenues of thought. Most importantly, we have seen a clear instance of what I have called Montaigne’s ‘collapsed chronology’: in rewriting this chapter – that is, making it longer and more diverse – it is as though he has written a *series* of Senecan epistles on this central theme of present and future concerns. Rather than presenting them sequentially (which would be a linear and monovocal mode), he overlaps them, collapsing the cognitive chronology: we, as readers, think of and through these diverse though associated ideas ‘at once’, holding different and even contradictory notions together. At the same time, he collapses the compositional chronology: Montaigne, writing for a reader who would not have had the [A], [B], and [C] markers of modern editions, presents these ‘diverses pieces’ written ‘à diverses poses’ equally and concurrently, forcing a multiplied perspective into the text as a means by which to compensate for the unavoidable ‘flattening’ of thought by the ‘single’ and monovocal nature of writing. We sense – at the same time – the jolts and ruptures between textual moments *and* the connections, parallels, oppositions which hold them together in suspension, allowing us to consider the different approaches equally and in simultaneous co-existence: the connections which I have traced above reveal a movement through

thought and text which is associative rather than linear, spreading out – we have already noted the shift from ‘fournisse’ to ‘m’y estende’ – rather than neatly unravelling. From its outset, the chapter was ‘divers’, formed of ‘pieces décousues’: in overlaying and rewriting it, Montaigne collapsed both its perspectives and its chronology, rendering it double, *simultaneously* diverse, capable of holding different ideas together and able to keep multiple lines of thought in play at once. ‘Semant icy un mot, icy un autre’, ‘à diverses poses et intervalles’, this plurality of textual moments becomes a unified chapter capable of presenting multiple perspectives at once.

Taking Senecan and Plutarchan Forms; Taking Leave of Seneca and Plutarch

I began this chapter with one of the great problems that Montaigne faced in trying to write his *Essais*: how are we to commit thought, which is ‘sans forme’, to a form of writing? Though ‘sans forme’, it is clear that the essayist sees the progression of thought in spatial as well as temporal terms: the ‘cheval échappé’ does not, as it were, wear blinkers; it does not keep to a single, straight and narrow path. Rather, Montaigne’s thought moves ‘irregularly’, ‘avant et à reculons’, pursuing ‘divers’ perspectives and lines of thought. Most importantly, we have recognised that this diversity is ‘doubled’: it is simultaneous.

In Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne found linear forms of irresolution, presenting the reader with a potentially endless sequence of textual moments or diverse perspectives. These did not, however, serve as generic models. Rather, thinking with – as opposed to simply adopting – these forms, he collapsed their linear and sequential processes. This linearity was precisely what made the texts of Seneca and Plutarch unresolved; it is what made them ‘doubtful’ authors and it is, indeed, what placed them

at the centre of the 'tiers genre'. In razing this sequential structure, however, Montaigne did not 'resolve' these unresolved forms. Instead, he found a way to overlay these multiple perspectives and moments, to achieve the hesitancy of a doubtful 'yes *and* no'. In short, he found a way to make his diversity double. It is precisely this exemplary characteristic of linearity, then, which he adopts *and* rejects when he builds upon the foundations of Seneca and Plutarch.

In tracing this relationship, we have seen yet more evidence that Seneca and Plutarch, far from functioning as stable generic or philosophical antecedents, capable of providing us with static reference points as we attempt to define the *Essais*, instead facilitate Montaigne's practices of thinking with and through text as he attempts to extend his thought onto the printed page. Montaigne is constantly working with and against Seneca and Plutarch: he shapes them just as much as they shape him and his own text. Furthermore, in revealing this 'double and diverse' form, we have begun to see the function of Montaigne's practices of addition, insertion, and overwriting – at both the large and the small scale, from minute to minute as well as from one age to another – in an entirely new light, recognising the importance of simultaneity on top of the more readily recognised issue of diversity. For his writing to be 'double', it is not enough for it to be a full and diverse 'bigarurre': these 'diverses pieces' must be temporally located; they must overlap and be seen at the same time. As he writes in 'De l'inconstance de nos actions', highlighting once more this necessary coupling of space and time, '[A] Nous sommes tous de lopins, et d'une contexture si informe et diverse, que chaque piece, chaque momant, faict son jeu' (II.1.337).

‘La Maniere de dire’: Montaigne’s Truthful Writing

In the preceding chapters, we have seen certain key elements of Montaigne’s practice – a ‘doubling’ way of writing which renders the text doubtful and unresolved – while at the same time identifying the complex relationships between Montaigne’s enterprise and his reading of Seneca and Plutarch. As I have argued throughout, he does not employ these authors in instrumental roles, nor simply as sources of quotations and stories. Neither still are they to be seen solely as ‘influences’, generically or philosophically, or antecedents. Rather, I have shown that Seneca and Plutarch are ambiguous figures, both blending into each other and into Montaigne, with all three shaping each other reciprocally: this is not one-way traffic. I have shown, moreover, how Montaigne’s engagement with these authors informs his own authorial and formal practices.

Montaigne asked, ‘[C] et puis, pour qui écrivez vous?’ (II.17.657), though, given the impossibility of knowledge as testified at length by the ‘Apologie’ coupled with the limitations, shortcomings, and problems inherent in language which have been detailed throughout this thesis, it might be that a more pressing question would be, ‘pourquoi écrivez-vous?’ In this closing chapter, I want to show that this doubtful and destabilising textual praxis is not a negative one: Montaigne’s ‘[C] espineuse entreprinse’ (II.6.378) has a positive objective. Moreover, and in spite of our standard ways of thinking about Scepticism in general and the essayist’s doubtful thought in particular, this objective is one of truthfulness.³⁹¹ I argue that Montaigne’s truthful writing lies in his efforts to make his text perform the movements, manner, and mechanics of his

³⁹¹ Contrast Montaigne’s characterisation of Pyrrhonism as negative and destructive: he calls it ‘[A] ce dernier tour d’escrime [...] auquel il faut abandonner vos armes pour faire perdre à vostre adversaire les siennes’, II.12.558.

thought processes; to think in and with writing such that the text exhibits and is equivalent to the moving and multiple nature of thought. As such, this is a truthfulness which is anchored to the activity of speaking truthfully rather than to the content of what is said or written.

Language, which Montaigne considers an imperfect tool which must be bent and stretched (III.5.873), is made to do double, inconstant, and unresolved thinking. In this chapter, I argue that, for Montaigne, writing becomes ‘truthful’ when it is capable of doing and participating in the cognitive work; that is, when it becomes cognitively ‘transparent’. It is truthful when there is no distinction between Montaigne’s writing and his thoughts, not because the writing ‘describes’ the thought but rather because it is in writing that the thinking is done. The terms I am employing here should be understood in particular ways. When I speak of language or text ‘performing’ thought, I mean simply that the text is used to do thinking – it performs cognitive work – and I do not mean that writing is a ‘performance’, an imitation, or a mimetic echo of thought. Similarly, when I describe language as becoming cognitively ‘transparent’, I do not mean that language becomes a transparent lens through which we might peer into the soul. While Montaigne’s truthful writing – which I suggest is a harmony, equivalence, and congruence of the acts of thinking and writing (these activities become the same) – does allow us as readers to trace and see Montaigne’s thought processes, this is not what makes it ‘truthful’. To suggest that Montaigne presents language as a lens with which to see into the soul implies a divorce between thinking and writing. It is not Montaigne’s writing but rather his use of writing that is ‘transparent’. I am using this term as it is used by Andy Clark when he describes ‘transparent technologies’:

Transparent technologies are those tools that becomes so well fitted to, and integrated with, our own lives and projects that they are [...] pretty much invisible-in-use. These tools or resources are usually no more the object of our conscious

thought and reason than in the pen with which we write, the hand that holds it while writing, or the various neural subsystems that form the grip and guide the fingers.³⁹²

To recall a point made earlier in Chapter Two, it should be understood that I take ideas, terms, and insights from cognitive science and cognitive approaches to the humanities without adopting broad methodologies or viewpoints: in using this term, I make no claims regarding the neurological mechanics of such cognitive transparency. For my purposes, this term is a concise and useful means of conceiving the relationship Montaigne has with (truthful) writing. When Montaigne's 'entreprise' of writing his *Essais* becomes 'transparent' in this sense, writing becomes part of thought. These two activities of thinking and writing – activities which we might be tempted to see as complementary but different – become one and the same and it is this harmony, I argue, which is recognised by Montaigne to be 'truthful'.

Over the course of this study, I have been tracing not simply doubtful thought but also the intimately associated effects of doubles, pairs, and duality: in this chapter, I show how, in the *Essais*, doubt and truthfulness form one such pair. Furthermore, previous studies, in attempting to reconcile Montaigne's engagement with Scepticism with some form of truth, have tended to prioritise Montaigne's legal background and to use notions of 'good faith' as surrogates for 'vérité'. In this regard, Tournon's studies have been exemplary and this is particularly true of his study of 'véracité' in legal testimony: here, he outlines a particularly judicial framework in which one's objective is not to establish the foundations for epistemology but rather to establish the facts of the case. He argues that, 'lorsqu'il [Montaigne] veut s'interroger sur des questions d'ordre existentiel, historique ou religieux, il a plutôt en tête, comme le magistrat qu'il fut, une vérité fondée sur la véracité de la parole qui l'énonce, postulée par la *fides*, tout ensemble

³⁹² Andy Clark, *Natural-born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 28-29.

bonne foi du partenaire et *confiance* qu'on lui accorde'.³⁹³ In this chapter, I take a different tack, showing how, in working with Seneca and Plutarch, the essayist forges a way of writing doubtfully which is capable not simply of interpersonal faith, conviction, and persuasion but of being independently truthful.

So far in my analysis, I have detailed the mechanics of Montaigne's doubtful writing. Here, I will show to what end it is constructed and used. This chapter will, then, focus more specifically on what could be called Montaigne's 'theory' of writing rather than its practice. This 'theory' relies on no single programmatic passage but is rather deduced from a variety of places. I will nevertheless show how this new understanding of writing and its purpose is rendered textually on the page, either through recalling those techniques examined in earlier sections of this study or, particularly in the final third of this chapter, through the use of new examples which are especially illustrative of what I have called 'truthful writing'. I will begin by situating the essayist within his intellectual context, taking the form of philosophical enquiry and its implied conception of truth most readily available to Montaigne – that of Aristotelian or university 'philosophes' – before showing how we can begin to understand his remoulding of and difference from this model through recourse to Plutarch and the Hellenistic practice of *parrhesia*. As we have seen, however, Montaigne's use of Seneca and Plutarch is rarely passive: I show how he places Plutarchan *parrhesia* in combination not only with the philosophical enquiry of the schoolmen but also with Seneca's writings on personal inconstancy. Taking each of these three distinct philosophical contexts in sequence, straightening out a conceptual network which is flattened in the text, I hope to show how Montaigne interrogates and develops the objective of speaking truthfully; to show how he pieces together divergent thought from distinct contexts to create that

³⁹³ *Route par ailleurs*, pp. 276-286 (pp. 278-279).

particularly Montaignean, typically paradoxical marriage of writing doubtfully while speaking the truth.

‘Nous sommes nés à quester la vérité; il appartient de la posséder à une plus grande puissance’: Truth and Truthful Writing

In the ‘Apologie’, Montaigne tells us that truth – as we usually understand it in a philosophical, technical context – is entirely unavailable to man and to human reason. ‘[A] L’ignorance,’ he writes, ‘qui est naturellement en nous, nous l’avons, par longue estude, confirmée et averée’ (II.12.500). Religious truths are of course excepted, though these are ‘un pur present de la liberalité’ of God: ‘[A] La participation que nous avons à la connaissance de la verité, quelle qu’elle soit, ce n’est pas par nos propres forces que nous l’avons acquise’ (ibid.).³⁹⁴ Montaigne sustains this argument throughout the length of the ‘Apologie’,³⁹⁵ insisting that philosophical truth – the sort of truth our reason might be able to claim as its own – is beyond our reach.

The essence of truth, writes Montaigne, which is ‘[A] uniforme et constante’, becomes corrupted whenever Fortune places it in our hands (II.12.553). ‘[C] Aussi ne fay-je pas profession de sçavoir la verité’, he adds: ‘J’ouvre les choses plus que je ne les descouvre’ (II.12.501.). In saying this, he aligns himself with Socrates, ‘[A] le plus sage homme qui fut onques, [qui] quand on luy demanda ce qu’il sçavoit; respondit qu’il

³⁹⁴ See *Dieu à notre commerce et société: Montaigne et la théologie*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Geneva: Droz, 2008).

³⁹⁵ This argument is well-known and is repeated by Montaigne in many places. If the ‘Apologie’ is too unlike the rest of the *Essais* to be considered representative, see, for example, Montaigne’s similar argument in ‘De l’expérience’ that our reason and our intellectual labour work only to show that the truth has slipped through our fingers: ‘[B] Je ne sçay qu’en dire, mais il se sent par expérience que tant d’interprétations dissipent la verité et la rompent. [...] Nous ouvrons la matiere et l’espondons et la destrempant’, III.13.1067. I accept, however, that the ‘Apologie’ frames ‘truth’ very specifically within a context of philosophy/philosophers and we must be careful not to turn to this chapter for authoritative and all-encompassing pronouncements. This is, nevertheless, the obvious place to start, partly because it is formed of the longest (though highly specific and localised) discussion of truth and partly because it has formed the basis of most of our beliefs and assumptions regarding Montaigne’s core thoughts on truth, certainty, and doubt.

sçavait cela, qu'il ne sçavoit rien' (II.12.501). In forming this connection, he constructs an opposing relationship with the 'philosophes'; that is, with those who profess to know the truth. Montaigne is, as he says, not a philosopher himself (III.9.950) or, at least, not really; he is that '[C] nouvelle figure: un philosophe impremedité et fortuite' (II.12.546). When philosophers discuss the truth, they tend to conceptualise truth in broadly similar ways, regardless of whether they are dogmatists, Academics, or Pyrrhonists and this is particularly true of the 'philosophes' as Montaigne portrays them. Within this context, the truth is logical, singular and monadic and this shared conceptualisation can be seen most clearly in Montaigne's adoption of Sextus Empiricus' opening lines to the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*: '[A] Quiconque cherche quelque chose, il en vient à ce point: ou qu'il dict qu'il l'a trouvée, ou qu'elle ne se peut trouver, ou qu'il en est encore en quete. Toute la philosophie est départie en ces trois genres. Son dessein est de rechercher la verité, la science et la certitude' (II.12.502). I have already shown in Chapter One how Montaigne reworks this tripartition, though here we can see that 'toute la philosophie' imagines truth as a thing to be found; as a vantage point to approach; a point on the intellectual journey at which 'the Truth' is achieved. The different groups of philosophers may disagree in terms of whether they have reached this point though the thing they are describing is nevertheless the same. In conceptualising the truth in this way, the 'philosophes' give it an almost physical quality: the truth becomes a 'thing'; it is contained in the content of logical, philosophical thought, a style of thought which finds its archetypal expression in the syllogism, an expression which attempts to strip away everything but the pure mechanics of logic, leaving nothing but this 'thing' that is the truth.³⁹⁶ This is a form of philosophical enquiry which marginalises the enquirer; a

³⁹⁶ On Montaigne and Aristotelianism, see, in addition to the studies by Maclean examined below, Edilia Traverso, *Montaigne e Aristotele* (Florence: F. Le Monnier, 1974).

way of thinking about the truth as a thing which leaves little space for an actor or ‘auteur’.³⁹⁷

This model of truth, in the form in which Montaigne encountered it, was the model employed in early modern schools and universities. This essentially Aristotelian conception of truth has been studied in detail by Ian Maclean who has traced Montaigne’s interaction with and critique of this scholastic inheritance.³⁹⁸ As Maclean explains, Renaissance philosophers held to a correspondence theory of truth, a form of metaphysical realism, wherein the truth requires both *convenientia rei* and *convenientia mentis*: the proposition must correspond to the external, objective reality (*convenientia rei*) and it must correspond to the idea (*convenientia mentis*).³⁹⁹ As these terms make plain, this is a way of thinking which places the pronouncement, rather than its speaker or the context in which it is spoken, at the centre of the interrogation: the proposition reaches out in two directions with its lines of correspondence to, on the one hand, *res* and, on the other, *mens*, though both the focus and the potential vessel of truth lie resolutely in the propositions and statements. Montaigne repeatedly challenges the assumption that we can check a proposition against an objective reality; he rejects the possibility of establishing *convenientia rei*: ‘C’est folie’, he writes at the head of one chapter, ‘de rapporter le vray et le faux à nostre suffisance’ (I.27.178).

A number of critics have studied what might be considered Montaigne’s disregard for or suspension of judgement regarding what is or is not ‘historically true’ or

³⁹⁷ Montaigne seems to gesture towards the problems one encounters when this model of truth is stretched to accommodate a self-reflexive enquirer when he discusses the liar paradox, II.12.527. A contrast may be drawn between the ways in which the ‘philosophe’ renders truth physical and the ways in which Montaigne imagines the ‘esprit genereux’ and its movement in visual, physical terms (see Chapter Three, ‘De la forme de l’imagination’).

³⁹⁸ ‘Montaigne and the Truth of the Schools’, *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, ed. by Ulrich Langer (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2005), pp. 142-162 and *Montaigne philosophe*, esp. ‘Montaigne devant la philosophie de son temps’, pp. 17-58.

³⁹⁹ *Montaigne philosophe*, p. 26.

‘objectively accurate’, with Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani in particular focusing on Montaigne’s claim that ‘[C] les tesmoignages fabuleux, pourveu qu’ils soient possibles, y servent comme les vrais. Advenu ou non advenu, à Paris ou à Rome, à Jean ou à Pierre, c’est toujours un tour de l’humaine capacité, duquel je suis utilement advisé par ce recit’ (I.21.105). Mathieu-Castellani begins by asserting that ‘l’auto-analyste espère mettre au jour quelque vérité sur l’humaine condition, une vérité acquise par l’expérience et l’expérimentation, non par le “discours”’.⁴⁰⁰ She argues that Montaigne’s ‘enquête’ is one ‘qui tente d’évaluer l’importance de l’imagination et de la fantaisie dans la formation du jugement’.⁴⁰¹ Displacing the question of truth, the essayist becomes, in Mathieu-Castellani’s analysis, a figure who ‘argumente ici comme le poète [...], réclamant pour l’épique *licence de feindre*, et distinguant le travail du poète de celui de l’historien, celui-ci soumis à l’absolu respect de la vérité, celui-là revendiquant le droit, non seulement au vraisemblable, mais au possible’.⁴⁰² For Mathieu-Castellani, we see in this blending of the ‘advenu’ and the ‘non-advenu’ the fusion of the ‘philosophe’, the ‘anthropologue’, and the ‘poète’.⁴⁰³ Sébastien Prat has recently restated this argument, showing that ‘Montaigne remet en cause le critère fondamental et incontesté de l’histoire: la vérité du récit’.⁴⁰⁴ He argues that Montaigne’s preference for a history of morals rather than a history of events allows him to make history ahistorical, relocating it ‘au niveau hypothétique, de pure possibilité’.⁴⁰⁵ Taking a similar approach, albeit one which takes legal rather than historical judgement as its starting point, André Tournon has argued that Montaigne seizes upon ‘la vérité judiciaire’ as a truth-system founded on internal coherence rather than correspondence with objective reality before abstracting this even

⁴⁰⁰ ‘Les Témoignages Fabuleux, comme les vrais...’, *Montaigne ou la vérité du mensonge*, pp. 31-43 (p. 31).

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. p. 32.

⁴⁰² Ibid. p. 33.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ *Constance et inconstance chez Montaigne*, p. 250.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 257.

further: ‘il ne s’agit plus de leur [i.e. les arrêts officiels] vérité mais de “leur beauté”’; they are ‘spéculations intellectuelles’, ‘exercices de virtuoses, libres et peut-être plaisants si l’on fait abstractions de leurs “conclusions” en prise sur le réel’.⁴⁰⁶

While I do not disagree with these readings, I intend to show in this chapter that Montaigne, in his reworking of notions of truth and truthfulness, does more than simply reject scholastic objectivity and a belief in *convenientia rei* in favour of this ‘niveau hypothétique de pure possibilité’. I want to suggest that, in working with and on Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne centres his literary and philosophical enterprise around a way of thinking about truth not as the content of a proposition but as the activity of speaking or writing truthfully.⁴⁰⁷ In shifting from a view in which truth is equated with propositional content to one focused on truthfulness as a quality of writing, he finds a means of giving his project a philosophically ‘positive’ outcome: this is not the negative refutation found in the Pyrrhonian ‘tour d’escrime’ (II.12.558) nor, indeed, the ‘mouvement incessant de la “zététique”’ studied by Tournon⁴⁰⁸ wherein the truth is always sought and always out of reach but is instead a form of writing capable of expressing itself in such a way that it is, in its own right, truthful.

The key point in this reworking of truth is found in ‘Du démentir’: it is here that we see Montaigne’s clearest outline of this model in which truth is not a thing to be grasped or something to be in possession of but a thing to do. In an uncharacteristic fashion, Montaigne situates this chapter explicitly within its larger textual framework: it

⁴⁰⁶ ‘La Question du préteur’, *L’écriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne*, pp. 265-274 (p. 272).

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. the opening of ‘Coustume de l’isle de Cea’, studied above in the introduction to Chapter One, in which Montaigne disassociates ‘doubter’ from ‘philosopher’, aligning it instead with ‘niaiser et fantasier’, verbs which privilege activity over philosophical ‘position’.

⁴⁰⁸ *Route par ailleurs*, p. 16. See also Tournon’s conclusion to “‘Il sera dit...’”: *typographèmes dans les Essais de 1592*, *Hermès Typographe: les dispositifs typographiques et iconographiques comme instruments herméneutiques*, ed. by François Lecercle (forthcoming): ‘le tout reste ouvert sur l’avenir que réserveront à l’œuvre des lecteurs virtuels, avec, toujours à l’horizon, le mirage d’une parole définitive, “Il sera dit...”—par qui, au juste?’ (my emphasis).

follows on directly from ‘De la praesumption’ – ‘[A] Voire mais on me dira que...’ (II.18.663) – which, in turn, is a continuation of ‘De la gloire’ – ‘[A] Il y a une autre sorte de gloire’ (II.17.631).⁴⁰⁹ As Tournon has noted, this careful contextualisation situates Montaigne’s discussion of truth and untruth against two questions, neither of which is ‘désignées par ce titre’: ‘mon dessein de me prendre pour “sujet à écrire” est-il “excusable”?’ et croira-t-on un écrivain “parlant de soi [...] vu qu’il en est peu, ou point, à qui nous puissions croire parlant d’autrui”?’⁴¹⁰ Here, as elsewhere, Montaigne reveals an anxiety regarding what he recognises to be novel and idiosyncratic about his literary and philosophical project. This chapter divides neatly into three distinct sections. In the first section, he works to pre-empt any accusations of vainglory or vanity (‘[A] Je ne dresse pas icy une statue à planter au carrefour d’une ville [...]. C’est pour le coin d’une librairie’ (II.18.664)). The long [C] interpolation takes this idea further, suggesting that even if there is not ‘un voisin, un parent, un amy,’ he will not have ‘perdu [s]on temps’ with ‘pensements si utiles et agreables’ having ‘rendu compte de [s]oy si continuellement, si curieusement’ (II.18.665).

The final third, however, takes a different tack. Montaigne’s concern is still, explicitly at least, one of audience response though his focus has shifted from imagined accusations of vanity to those of dishonesty and duplicity: ‘[A] Mais, à qui croyrons nous parlant de soy, en une saison si gastée? veu qu’il en est peu, ou point, à qui nous puissions croire, parlant d’autrui, où il y a moins d’interest à mentir’ (II.18.666). Citing Pindar and Plato, he goes on to say that ‘[A] Le premier traict de la corruption des mœurs, c’est le bannissement de la verité’ and that ‘[A] l’estre veritable est le

⁴⁰⁹ I mention this because I think it helps to show that this is an important section; it is the culmination of a long, three-chapter exploration. Just as we might look at the end of the ‘Apologie’, the ‘Au lecteur’, ‘Par divers moyens on arrive a pareille fin’ or the end of ‘De l’experience’ as key passages, I think we ought to see the final section of II.18 as a central moment, both structurally and with regard to the idea it is putting forth.

⁴¹⁰ ‘L’Eveil au silence’, *Eveils: études en l’honneur de J.-Y. Pouilloux*, pp. 117-135 (p. 129).

commencement d'une grande vertu'. Significantly, while this is certainly not the objective, realist truth of the 'philosophes', Montaigne is here employing the language and terminology of truth though this is truth as sincerity, veridicity, or fidelity to thought. This subtle shift from objective truth-statements to a more commonplace, apparently less 'philosophical' understanding of 'telling the truth' may seem insignificant though, as we will see, this seemingly minor distinction has far-reaching implications for the *Essais*: he recognises there to be different ways of thinking about 'truth' and this notion of sincerity and honesty is recognised and described as 'true' rather than, for instance, simply 'de bonne foy' ('Au lecteur', p. 3). We ought also to note that this form of truth is described as foundational and primary – it is the first casualty of the corruption of morals and the first step towards virtue – and, as we will see, Montaigne builds on this in the closing sections of 'Du démentir'.

Finally, we see in this passage that Montaigne surreptitiously repositions himself as judge where, in the preceding sections, he has presented himself as the accused.⁴¹¹ In both the 1580 text and the post-1588 insertion which comes immediately before this passage, Montaigne's 'je' proliferates as he defends himself from his imagined accusers. Precisely at the point at which the credibility of an individual 'parlant de soy' is brought under scrutiny, he ceases to speak for and of himself and instead speaks for 'nous'. The effect of this shift is ambiguous: on the one hand, we see Montaigne willing to implicate himself in acting with vanity while in this third section attempting to side-step the more difficult problem, less easily dealt with, of his credibility in giving an account of himself; on the other, we see Montaigne showing us the slippery tactics of the individual 'parlant de soy', turning this rhetorical evasion into a performance, exemplifying the problem he describes.

⁴¹¹ On Montaigne's role within the *Essais* as a 'judge', see, in the first instance, *Montaigne: la justice*, a special issue of the *Bulletin de la société internationale des amis de Montaigne*, 21-24 (2001).

This problematic first-person plural takes on a further role as the passage develops: '[A] Nostre verité de maintenant,' writes Montaigne, 'ce n'est pas ce qui est, mais ce qui se persuade à autrui: comme nous appellons monnoye non celle qui est loyalle seulement, mais la fauce aussi qui a mise' (II.18.666). The combination of 'notre' and 'maintenant' removes from this version of 'vérité' all pretence to permanence and monadicity and, given the efforts to make his own text perspectival and temporal, we might assume that this is a form of truth ideally suited to the *Essais*.⁴¹² And yet, his tone is clearly cynical: 'nostre *verité* (my emphasis) is ironic and reveals a concern for the possibility of truth in the absence of objective knowledge. Moreover, this phrase is an inversion of Aristotle's famous definition of truth as correspondence: in William of Moerbeke's scholastic Latin, Aristotle says, 'Dicere namque ens non esse aut hoc esse falsum, ens autem esse et non ens non esse verum; quare et dicens esse aut non verum dicet aut mentietur.'⁴¹³ Without the (false) certainties afforded by Aristotelian correspondence theory, are we ('nous') limited only to that counterfeit of truth, persuasion?

After a brief discussion of the way in which one feels particularly affronted when accused of lying, Montaigne returns to the voice of the first person plural, this time with less cynicism: '[A] Nostre intelligence se conduisant par la seule voye de la parolle, 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' (II.18.666-667). As we saw in his opening comments regarding who we might believe 'parlant de soy', Montaigne places this truthful communication of our thoughts at the foundation of an ethical and virtuous life and, more broadly, at the heart of society. '[A]

⁴¹² See Chapter Three for Montaigne's perspectival and temporal form.

⁴¹³ *Metaphysics*, 1011b25. For Moerbeke's translation, see *Metaphysica, lib. I-XIV. Recensio et Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*. On Montaigne and Augustine's similar phrasing of this Aristotelian definition of truth, see Yves Delègue, 'L'Imitation de la vérité', *Eveils: études en l'honneur de J.-Y. Pouilloux*, pp. 29-43 (esp. p. 37).

S'il nous faut,' he continues, '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.18.667). Bristling with internal rhymes, repeated *n* sounds, and waves of repeating vowels, Montaigne's prose performs the 'liaisons' it describes, all while insisting on the twinned mechanics of social and semantic alliance. In serving as the 'truchement de [l']ame', truthful language allows us to hold on to each other, providing us – plural – with a means of moving beyond the distrust of the individual 'parlant de soy'. As he says in what might be thought of as the parallel chapter to II.18, 'Des menteurs', '[B] Nous ne sommes hommes, et ne nous tenons les uns aux autres que par la parole' (I.9.36), echoing in almost identical terms this idea that the connection between language, personal interaction, and truthfulness is, properly speaking, essential and foundational. The meaning of the term 'truchement' is, moreover, inflected by its pairing with 'util': Montaigne's anaphoric structure pushes us to consider these two terms together to recognise that language is the 'tool' or instrument with which thinking can be done publicly. Most significantly for my purposes, this 'truchement' is a tool which not only communicates our thoughts but also one which 'translates' – which carries across – the seat of the activity of thinking, extending the thinking soul in such a way that others can see it.

Montaigne sees this ideal language as the 'truchement de nostre ame' though it is not entirely clear what exactly he means by 'ame', how he understands this term and/or concept, nor how he places it in relation to those other terms which are frequently employed in these discussions, such as 'esprit', 'raison', 'entendement', and 'intelligence'. His position(s) regarding these issues, along with his bearing in relation to early modern and Aristotelian positions, is a subject much too large to be dealt with in full here and I will therefore restrict myself to a few comments on what is, I think, an

unstable and largely fluid semantic network in the *Essais*. Bernard Sève has argued that ‘âme’ is not rigorously conceptualised by the essayist – ‘il ne construit pas un concept spécifique’ – though he argues, and places at the foundation of his general thesis, that the concept of ‘esprit’ is not the same as ‘entendement’, ‘raison’, or ‘âme’ and is a specific, uniquely Montaignean concept.⁴¹⁴ I find this division to be artificial and unconvincing and, as Sève notes, ‘assez souvent, Montaigne prend ces mots l’un pour l’autre’.⁴¹⁵ He notes accurately, it seems, that ‘âme’ and ‘esprit’ are not the same as ‘raison’, arguing that the former is/are generative of their own matter while ‘raison’ is a ‘faculté’ applied to something else.⁴¹⁶ We might note, however, that ‘entendement’, which we have already seen to be ‘double et divers’, seems to straddle the gap between reason and the productive, self-reflexive, almost autonomic and distinctly more mysterious sphere of the soul: it seems to refer to both the productive locus of thinking while also referring to the ‘tool’ with which one does and processes thinking. Similarly, Floyd Gray has highlighted the metaphors which are shared between ‘raison’ and ‘esprit’ – ‘raison’ is an ‘instrument de plomb’ (II.12.548) while ‘esprit’ is ‘un util vagabond’ (II.12.541); the former a ‘glaive double et dangereux’ (II.17.638), the latter an ‘outrageux glaive’ (II.12.541) – while noting that ‘Montaigne transforme le sens étymologique de *ratio*, “calcul”, “compte”, en quelque chose qui est contraire, c’est-à-dire l’innombrable, l’incalculable’.⁴¹⁷ My point is that these terms, though occasionally used with precision, are broadly, if not quite entirely, synonymous. As such, I use ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ to translate ‘âme’ and ‘esprit’ interchangeably and, on rare occasions when guided by context, I allow myself to use the word ‘mind’.

⁴¹⁴ *Montaigne: des règles pour l’esprit*, p. 46.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ This is in contrast to the scholastic view in which reason/the intellect is a faculty – a constituent part – of the soul and not something in some way ‘separate’. See, in the first instance, articles by Katharine Park and Eckhard Kessler on, respectively, the organic soul (pp. 464-484) and the intellectual soul (pp. 485-534) in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁴¹⁷ Floyd Gray, *La Balance de Montaigne: exagium/essai*, pp. 46-47.

Returning to the closing third of ‘Du démentir’, we have seen that Montaigne establishes a number of key points which are crucial in his repositioning of truth: first, that the Aristotelian model, in which the truth is ‘ce qui est’, is, for better or worse, not ‘nostre verité’; secondly, that ‘la parole’ is the ‘truchement de nostre ame’ and that ‘tout nostre commerce’ and ‘nostre police’ depend on the ability of this ‘truchement’ to make our thoughts public and communicable; and, finally, that if in ‘parlant de soy’ this ‘truchement’ of the soul achieves this end of making thought accessible to others in language it is to be understood as ‘truthful’ and afforded all the qualities of ‘truth’. It is my argument, then, that Montaigne’s aim – the positive element to his project – is to speak ‘truthfully’; to make his *Essais* the tool with which his thinking, his ‘intelligence’, is done in a public arena. For Montaigne, truthfulness is not ‘out there’, awaiting discovery but neither is it simply a matter of persuasion: in making truthful speech the ‘truchement de nostre ame’, he places the burden of truth-telling on the individual rather than requiring the auditor to judge what is or is not true. If truthfulness were simply a matter of persuasion, belief, and ‘good faith’, we would quickly encounter the standard Sceptical aporias of criteria and of appearance and reality. Instead, he situates truthfulness in the congruence, the coincidence, and the equivalence of thinking and speaking/writing.

Writing is a cognitive resource – a tool with which to think and a tool which leaves a ‘public’ trace of its use – and the *Essais* are ‘truthful’ when the use of this tool becomes ‘transparent’. This, then, is what I take Montaigne to mean when he describes language as a ‘truchement de [l’]ame’: language is a tool, a resource, something with which to extend the cognitive processes of the mind (‘ame’). In thinking with and in writing, these thought processes are made available to others – to his readers – but,

more importantly, they are made available to Montaigne himself: truthful writing allows Montaigne to '[A] contempler à [son] aise l'ineptie et l'estrangeté' (I.8.33) of his thought.

In repositioning 'truth' in this way, he shifts from a way of thinking about truth as content to truth-telling as an activity; this is truth as a way of speaking and writing rather than truth as what is said or, in Montaigne's terms, '[B] nous sommes sur la maniere, non sur la matiere du dire' (III.8.928). Seen from this perspective, the frequent descriptions of 'la vérité' as singular or as having only one 'face' – '[B] Si, comme la vérité, le mensonge n'avoit qu'un visage, nous serions en meilleurs termes' (I.9.37); '[A] La verité doit avoir un visage pareil et universel' (II.12.578-9) – take on new significance. Rather than describing the monadic, quasi-physical 'thing' of truth as imagined by the 'philosophes', this uniformity can now be understood to describe the act of truth-telling wherein the truth of the act is continuous even where the content is not: if one person speaks truly, with form and content of thought being performed by 'la parole' truthfully in the form and content of speech, while a second person also speaks truly, the content of what they say need not be the same, even when they are talking about the same thing. As he says immediately before distinguishing between 'manière' and 'matière', '[B] Autant peut faire le sot celuy qui dict vray, que celuy qui dict faux': truth is, in the *Essais*, no longer a descriptor of speech-content but rather of this uniform and constant *act* of truth-telling.

In treating the problem of truth in this way, Montaigne is following in the Hellenistic tradition of *parrhesia*, a tradition often associated with Socrates though one which, as I will argue, is closely intertwined with Plutarch, particularly when understood within the framework of the *Essais*. More recently, however, this concept has become closely aligned with Foucault and his final series of lectures given at Berkeley and the

Collège de France in 1983 and 1984.⁴¹⁸ As Foucault explains, ‘*parrhesia* is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness [...]. In *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.’⁴¹⁹ In speaking ‘freely’, the *parrhesiastes* is seen to speak the truth: ‘*Parrhesia* as it appears in the field of philosophical activity in Greco-Roman culture is not primarily a concept or theme’, Foucault argues, ‘but a *practice* which tries to shape the specific relations individuals have to themselves. [...] The decisive criterion which identifies the *parrhesiastes* is not to be found in his birth, nor in his citizenship, nor in his intellectual competence, but in the harmony which exists between his *logos* and his *bios*.’⁴²⁰

I will have cause to return to Foucault and his study of *parrhesia* in the second section of this chapter though I have introduced this idea here so that we might interrogate this relationship between truth-telling as an activity and the harmony of *logos* and *bios*; of word or discourse and life. Montaigne frequently returns to this classical *topos* and it is precisely this line of equivalence and congruence, binding together the speaker and that which is spoken, which is absent in the conception of truth-as-thing and the form of philosophical enquiry practised by the Aristotelian ‘philosophes’: he says that it is his ‘humeur’ to ‘regarder’ not only ‘[B] autant à la forme qu’à la substance’ but also ‘autant à l’advocat qu’à la cause’ (III.8.928);⁴²¹ he notes ‘[B] les efforts que Senèque se donne pour se préparer contre la mort’, commenting that he would have

⁴¹⁸ *Fearless Speech*, ed. by Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001) and *Le Courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II*, ed. by Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).

⁴¹⁹ *Fearless Speech*, pp. 19-20.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 106.

⁴²¹ Compare the opening to Plutarch’s ‘Les Contredits des Philosophes Stoiques’: ‘En premier lieu je voudrais que lon veist une conformité & accord entre les opinions & les vies des hommes: car il n’est pas tant nécessaire que l’Orateur & la Loy, comme dit Aeschines, sonnent une mesme choses, comme il est requis que la vie d’un philosophe soit conforme & consonante avec sa doctrine & sa parole’, *Œuvres morales et meslees*, fol. 561r.

‘esbranlé sa reputation, s’il ne l’eut en mourant tres-vaillamment maintenue’ (III.12.1040); he dismisses some of what ‘les auteurs’ say of Pyrrhonian doctrine on the grounds that it does not match with how Montaigne imagines Pyrrho’s character to have been, writing that these authors ‘[A] le peignent stupide et immobile, prenant un train de vie farouche et inassociable, attendant le hurt des charretes, se presentant aux precipices, refusant de s’accommoder aux loix. Cela est encherir sur sa discipline’ (II.12.505). What, then, is the ‘manière de dire’ capable of serving as the ‘truchement de nostre ame’, able to perform and extend thought onto the communicable space of the page? What mode of writing works to capture and evaluate this harmony of *bios* and *logos*?

The obvious candidate is the genre of life-writing exemplified by Plutarch’s *Vies des hommes illustres* and, to a lesser extent, by the *Lives of the Ancient Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius as well as the similarly ‘psychological’ histories of Tacitus. Those two well-known passages on this particular form of history, found in ‘Des livres’ and ‘De l’art de conférer’ respectively, show this clearly enough. ‘[A] Or ceux qui escrivent les vies, d’autant qu’ils s’amusent 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’, he writes in ‘Des livres’ (II.10.416). In the same chapter, and in terms echoing the ‘skeletal’ metaphor used to describe his own project in ‘De l’exercitation’,⁴²² he writes: ‘[C] l’homme en general, de qui je cherche la cognoissance, y paroist plus vif et plus entier qu’en nul autre lieu, la diversité et verité de ses conditions internes en gros et en destail, la varieté des moyens de son assemblage et des accidens qui le menacent’ (II.10.416). In the conclusion to ‘De l’art de conférer’, Tacitus’ prose is compared explicitly with Seneca while his style of history is, it seems, implicitly aligned with that of Plutarch: ‘[B] Cette forme d’Histoire est de beaucoup la plus utile. Les mouvemens publics dependent plus

⁴²² See Chapter Three, ‘Collapsing Perspective’.

de la conduite de la fortune, les privez de la nostre. C'est plustost un jugement que [C] deduction [B] d'Histoire' (III.8.941). Like Plutarch, Tacitus is less interested in historical fact than opinions and thoughts, both on the level of the individual and the community: '[B] ils tiennent registre des evenemens d'importance; parmi les accidens publics sont aussi les bruits et opinions populaires. C'est leur role de reciter les communes creances, non pas de les regler' (III.8.942). We may compare this final sentence with one from 'Du repentir': '[B] Les autres forment l'homme; je le recite' (III.2.804). Tsuyoshi Shishimi, glossing this description of Tacitus, has recently suggested that, "reciter" une histoire, cela implique que l'historien rapporte à bon escient le témoignage d'autrui, tout en suspendant son jugement sur sa véracité.⁴²³ It could be suggested, then, that those historians who, like Montaigne, work to 'reciter' are concerned rather with making their texts truthful 'truchements', reflecting the thoughts, beliefs, and sayings of those they recount, than they are with establishing the true – ideal or objective – state of things. In these judgements, Montaigne is following Jacques Amyot's own distinction between 'histoire' and 'vie': 'l'une qui expose au long les faicts & adventures des hommes, & s'appelle du nom commun d'Histoire: l'autre qui declare leur nature, leurs dits & leurs mœurs, qui proprement se nomme Vie. [...] l'une regarde plus les choses, l'autre les personnes: l'une est plus publique, l'autre plus domestique: l'une concerne plus ce qui est au dehors de l'homme, l'autre ce qui procede du dedans: l'une les evenemens, & l'autre les conseils.'⁴²⁴

It would seem, then, that this form of life-writing, which writes the 'conseils', the 'creances', the 'dedans' of the individual all while providing the reader with a way of

⁴²³ 'La *Cyropédie* en pierre de touche: débats sur l'histoire en France et en Europe au seizième siècle', *Seizième Siècle*, 12 (2016), pp. 355-385 (p. 381).

⁴²⁴ 'Aux lecteurs', *Vies des hommes illustres Grecs et Romains*, fol. A7r. See also the opening passage of 'Alexandre le Grand': 'je n'ay pas pris à escrire des histoires, ains des vies seulement [...] nous doibt on conceder que nous allions principalement recherchant les signes de l'ame, & par iceulx formans un portraict au naturel de la vie d'un chacun, en laissant aux historiens à escrire les guerres, les batailles & autres telles grandeurs,' fols. 464r.-v.

thinking about and judging the relationship between the *bios* and *logos* of these ‘hommes illustres’,⁴²⁵ fits precisely the requirements of Montaigne’s own enterprise of truthfully writing his ‘imagination’. We can imagine that he would only need to make this form of life-writing self-reflexive and, immediately, he would have the form he is looking for. Indeed, an argument not unlike this has been made recently by Alison Calhoun who argues that Montaigne found in Plutarch ‘an early prototype for how to construct the transverse self’; a way of ‘using others to demarcate what the self is not’.⁴²⁶ Montaigne would take this further, Calhoun’s argument suggests, placing this ‘indirect self-portrait’⁴²⁷ or ‘transverse self’ at the centre, positioning this ‘self’ as subject as well as authorial judge. And there is certainly evidence to support this: ‘je suis moy-mesme la matiere de mon livre’, wrote Montaigne right at the opening of his text (‘Au lecteur’, p. 3). We also see gestures towards a self-reflexive life-writing in Montaigne’s regret that we lack a ‘Life of Plutarch’ or some ‘memoires de sa vie’ (II.31.716) and in his criticism of Tacitus for not daring to ‘parler rondement de soy’: ‘[B] Il faut passer par dessus ces regles populaires de la civilité en faveur de la verité et de la liberté. [C] J’ose non seulement parler de moy, mais parler seulement de moy’ (III.8.942). It is, then, in drawing a conspicuous contrast with his own mode of writing that he forges a link with writers of historical lives though notably, and particularly in the case of Plutarch, these connections are made as much through points of contrast as similarity; these writers are almost recast in Montaigne’s own image as he stresses what could have been had they been able, in spite of chronology, to follow his example.

So far, then, we can say the following: Montaigne, in writing his *Essais*, sought to make his text a ‘truchement de [l’]ame’ and saw in this enterprise a means of speaking

⁴²⁵ This latter point is, for obvious reasons, particularly true of Diogenes’s *Lives of the Philosophers*. See, for example, Montaigne’s own judgement on the *bios-logos* relationship as related to Pyrrho cited above (II.12.505).

⁴²⁶ *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers: Life-Writing and Transversality in the Essais*, p. 16.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

truthfully. This involved a different way of conceiving truth, one unlike that employed by ‘philosophes’ in academic and educational institutions, wherein truthfulness is seen as a quality of the activity – the ‘manière’ – of speech and writing rather than one where the propositional content – the ‘matière’ – functions as the determiner of truth or falsity. This is a way of thinking about truthfulness which shifts our focus away from quasi-anonymous pronouncements as the product of philosophical enquiry and towards the enquirer. This model of truth is certainly not as impressive as the all-encompassing, monolithic, and monadic ‘Truth’ of the philosophers, though it is, significantly, not guilty of presumption. This new understanding of truth is not, for instance, that which we find expressed by Sebond and yet we may borrow from Montaigne’s translation an apt phrase: this is ‘la vérité, autant qu’il est possible à la raison naturelle’.⁴²⁸ This is a modest truth, but it is also a foundational one. And it seems that Plutarch, with his particular form of writing men’s ‘conseils’, provided Montaigne with an almost ideal means of writing this truth; at a glance, at least, it appears that this form needs only the minor modification of being made to ‘parl[er] de soy’.

‘Mais à qui croyrons nous parlant de soy?’

1. Simply Telling the Truth with Plutarch

Montaigne’s project is not, however, like that of Plutarch’s and he returns repeatedly to the problem of speaking truthfully about oneself: his frequent defences of this project, evident at all stages of composition, testify to a concern regarding the issue of how we are to gauge the truth of someone ‘parlant de soy’ coupled with a clear awareness that this literary and philosophical undertaking is both singular and original. These passages

⁴²⁸ ‘Preface de l’Auteur’, *La Theologie Naturelle de Raymond Sebon, traduite nouvellement en François...* (Paris: Guillaume Chaudiere, 1581), fol. 1v.

are well-known. We see this at length in ‘Du repentir’, where Montaigne employs non-symmetrical binaries of ‘les autres’ or ‘les auteurs’ on one hand and ‘moy’ or ‘Michel de Montaigne’ on the other.⁴²⁹ In ‘De l’exercitation’ he defends himself from accusations of pride and vanity – ‘[C] Il n’est description pareille en difficulté à la description de soy-mesmes, ny certes en utilité’ – while at the same time recognising that such public introspection is uncustomary: ‘[C] La coustume a faict le parler de soy vicieux, et le prohibe obstinement’ (II.6.378). It is in terms of novelty that he describes his attempt to ‘[s]’y pourtraire au vi^e’ (II.8.386) in his address to Madame d’Estissac.⁴³⁰ The point I wish to make is that Montaigne sees this project of writing about himself and writing himself out truthfully and accurately as novel, unusual, and original. Just as we immediately recognise that the *Essais* are not a work of autobiography, the form of ‘life-writing’ we are most accustomed to, Montaigne seems to be fully aware – even more so than some modern readers – that his form of ‘parl[ant] de soy’ is not an organic extension of that classical mode of life-writing, the Plutarchan ‘vie’.

Notably, Montaigne opens ‘Du démentir’ with something approaching a direct comparison of these two forms: ‘[A] Voire mais on me dira que ce dessein de se servir de soy pour subject à escrire, seroit excusable à des hommes rares et fameux qui, par leur reputation, auroyent donné quelque desir de leur cognoissance. [...] Ainsi sont à souhaiter les papiers journaux du grand Alexandre, les commentaires qu’Auguste, [C] Caton, [A] Sylla, Brutus et autres avoyent laissé de leurs gestes. De telles gens on ayme et estudie les figures, en cuyvre mesmes et en pierre’ (II.18.663). This is not quite the

⁴²⁹ ‘[B] Les autres forment l’homme; je le recite’; ‘[C] Les auteurs se communiquent au peuple par quelque marque pariculiere et estrangere; moy le premier par mon estre universel, comme Michel de Montaigne [...]. Si le monde se plaint de quoy je parle trop de moy, je me plains de quoy il ne pense seulement de soy’, III.2.804-805.

⁴³⁰ ‘[A] Madame, si l’estrangeté ne me sauve, et le nouvelleté, [...] je ne sors jamais à mon honneur de cette sotte entreprise; mais elle est si fantastique et a un visage si esloigné de l’usage commun que cela luy pourra donner passage. [...] je me suis présenté moy-mesmes à moy, pour argument et pour subject. C’est [C] le seul livre au monde de son espece’, II.8.385.

Vies... – this is still ‘parlant de soy’ – though the jump from ‘hommes rares et fameux’ to the ‘hommes illustres’ of Amyot’s title is not a large one.

By the end of this relatively short chapter, however, and precisely at the point where Montaigne shifts from concerns regarding accusations of pride to those of untruth, he seems to perform a parallel shift to begin thinking about his project in light of another Plutarchan text, ‘Comment on pourra discerner le flatteur d’avec l’amy’. In the conclusion to this chapter, Montaigne at last approaches the specific subject matter of his title – ‘nos démentirs’ (II.18.667) – only to put it aside to be examined at a later date: ‘[A] et apprendray cependant,’ he writes, ‘si je puis, en quel temps print commencement cette coustume de si exactement poiser et mesurer les parolles, et d’y attacher nostre honneur’. It is plain to see, he says, that ‘elle n’estoit pas anciennement entre les Romains et les Grecs’ where we can ‘les voir se démentir et d’injurer, sans entrer pourtant en querelle’: ‘On appelle Caesar tantost voleur, tantost yvrogne, à sa barbe’.

This ‘liberté des invectives’ (ibid.) is precisely that form of ‘franc-parler’ known in Hellenistic texts – and studied by Foucault – as *parrhesia*. In this ‘free-speaking’, we see the frankness through which the ‘speaker has a specific relation to truth’;⁴³¹ in speaking so openly not only to one’s equal but to ‘Caesar’, to absolute authorities, we see the danger Foucault describes as crucial in the parrhesiastic ‘game’: ‘*Parrhesia*’, Foucault argues, ‘is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger.’⁴³² It is for this reason, Foucault notes, that ‘the king or tyrant generally cannot use *parrhesia*; for *he* risks nothing’.⁴³³ We see the corollary of this risk slightly earlier in ‘Du démentir’ in the passage where Montaigne asks ‘[A] qui

⁴³¹ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, p. 19.

⁴³² Ibid. p. 16.

⁴³³ Ibid.

croyrons nous parlant de soy’: in noting that there is ‘[A] moins d’interest à mentir’ in ‘parlant d’autrui’, he gestures negatively towards the costs or the risks of telling the truth.

Before taking this any further, a few comments ought to be made regarding my use of Foucault. Foucault’s last works and lectures, dedicated to this theme of *parrhesia* and the relationship between the subject and the truth, are situated at the end of a career dedicated to the study of the institutional inter-relation of truth and power. Calling this a ‘régime de vérité’, Foucault asserts that ‘la “vérité” est liée circulairement à des systèmes de pouvoir qui la produisent et la soutiennent, et à des effets de pouvoir qu’elle induit et qui la reconduisent’.⁴³⁴ As Maria Andrea Rojas has commented, Foucault’s ‘objectif était en [un] sens de ressaisir le sujet comme élément et produit d’une histoire plutôt que comme le support de celle-ci’.⁴³⁵ Montaigne’s understanding of truthfulness is one which envisages truth as a practice but Montaigne does not share the Foucauldian view that truth is a social and political construction. Similarly, while Montaigne’s views of what we call the ‘self’ are complex, emergent, and gesturing towards a modern understanding, Foucauldian ‘subjectivation’ posits an individual radically different from that imagined by the essayist. For Foucault, the subject is constituted, constructed, and comes to recognise itself in performing ‘actes de vérité’ within a ‘régime de vérité’; for Montaigne, we have – though we may not be able to see clearly or understand – a human nature, some built-in ‘mœurs’; we do not, as we come

⁴³⁴ ‘La Fonction Politique de l’intellectuel’, *Dits et écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), vol. 3, p. 114. On Foucault’s reading of *parrhesia*, see Maria Andrea Rojas, *Michel Foucault: la ‘parrésia’, une éthique de la vérité*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Université Paris-Est (2012). See particularly ‘De l’histoire politique de la vérité aux régimes de vérité’, pp. 8-24. For a study of some affinities between Montaigne and Foucault in light of Foucault’s relative paucity of comments on Montaigne, see Olivier Guerrier, ‘Michel Foucault et Montaigne: affinités et évitement’, *Montaigne Contemporaneo*, ed. by Nicola Panichi, Renzo Raggianti, and Alessandro Savorelli (Pisa: Edizioni della normale, 2011), pp. 259-272.

⁴³⁵ Rojas, *Michel Foucault: la ‘parrésia’, une éthique de la vérité*, p. 8.

into existence, step into a historically, culturally determined ‘pouvoir-savoir’ structure; we are instead ‘*nais à quester la vérité*’ (III.8.928, my emphasis).

Foucault’s *parrhesia* is not the same as that of Plutarch or indeed of Montaigne. Foucault’s reading of this Hellenistic practice does, however, serve as a useful heuristic tool; as a stepping-stone allowing us to see how Montaigne not only departs from the Greco-Roman practice but also from the broad-brushstroke history or ‘genealogy’ traced by Foucault. Most significantly, however, Foucault’s analysis gives us a way into this ancient practice of truth-telling as an activity performed by an individual. As he says in *Le Courage de la vérité*, ‘la rhétorique, telle qu’elle était définie et pratiquée dans l’Antiquité, c’est au fond une technique qui concerne la manière de dire *les choses* mais ne détermine aucunement les rapports entre celui qui parle et ce qu’il dit’.⁴³⁶ *Parrhesia*, however, ‘établit entre celui qui parle et ce qu’il dit un lien fort, nécessaire, constitutif’.⁴³⁷ In this, we can begin to see how *parrhesia* stands in opposition to the way of thinking about truth associated with the Aristotelian ‘philosophes’, providing an opportunity for the individual ‘parlant de soy’.⁴³⁸

As Foucault notes, one of Plutarch’s texts – ‘Comment on pourra discerner le flatteur d’avec l’amy’ – is ‘explicitly devoted to the problem of *parrhesia*’.⁴³⁹ He summarises the questions which stand behind this text as follows: ‘How is it possible to recognise a true *parrhesiastes* or truth-teller? And similarly: How is it possible to

⁴³⁶ *Le Courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II*, p. 16, my emphasis.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ We might note that this draws our attention back to those questions dealt with in Chapter Two of Montaigne’s ‘place’ in the *Essais*: in both Montaigne and Foucault we see an attempt to reconceive philosophical enquiry with the centre fixed on the enquirer rather than the results of the enquiry; the enquirer does not stand ‘above’ the text, issuing its results and assertions but rather moves around and through it. It is this emphasis on the act of truth-telling as one which needs to be performed by someone which aligns – imperfectly and only partially – Montaigne with Foucault.

⁴³⁹ *Fearless Speech*, p. 133.

distinguish a *parrhesiastes* from a flatterer?⁴⁴⁰ In this opusculum, Plutarch begins with precisely the concerns we have seen in the *Essais*: his focus is not, in the first instance, an understanding of truth-telling as a means of convincing others but is rather centred on the problem of speaking about (and knowing) oneself. ‘Platon escrit, que chascun pardonne à celuy qui dit qu’il s’aime bien soy mesme, Amy Antiochus Philopappus, mais neantmoins que de cela il s’engendre dedans nous un vice, outre plusieurs autres, qui est tres-grand: c’est, que nul ne peult estre juste & non favourable juge de soy-mesme.’⁴⁴¹ With these opening words, Plutarch situates his own discussion of truth-telling not within an arena of flattery so much as one of *philantia*, self-flattery; he aligns the act of truth-telling not with the instruction of another but with knowledge of (and, by implication, discourse upon) oneself. Just as we saw with the essayist, we see here that speaking truly is intimately connected with speaking truly about oneself: ‘Or si c’est chose divine que la verité & la source de tous biens aux Dieux & aux hommes, [...] il fault estimer, que le flatteur doncques est ennemy des Dieux, & principalement d’Apollo, pource qu’il est tousjours contraire à cestuy sien precepte, Cognoy toy mesme.’⁴⁴²

This is one of the most cited of the Plutarchan works in the *Essais*: Konstantinovic has recorded 22 allusions, a number which compares to 21 from the much longer (and much more varied and thus more diversely applicable) ‘Propos de table’. These are exceeded only by the two volumes of the ‘Dicts notables’ – 33 allusions to the ‘Dicts notables des roys anciens’, 38 to the ‘Dicts notables des Lacedaemoniens’ – and 46 allusions to ‘Quels animaux sont les plus advisez’, all of

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 133-134.

⁴⁴¹ ‘Comment on pourra discerner le flatteur d’avec l’amy’, *Œuvres morales et meslees*, fol. 40r. Hereafter abbreviated to ‘Comment on pourra...’.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

which are from the [A] text and confined to the ‘Apologie’.⁴⁴³ Though Montaigne makes no direct reference to this work in ‘Du dementir’ itself, the closing discussion of ‘la liberté des invectives’, coupled with the shared conceptual framework wherein speaking truthfully to another is secondary to speaking truthfully of and to oneself, strongly indicates the subterranean presence of this opusculum, which, given its dispersed presence throughout the *Essais*, clearly had a deep influence on the essayist’s thought. His extensive use of this text which stands out from those other frequently cited opusculum – this is a unified treatise which puts forward a thesis and provides a philosophical, social, and epistemological framework – suggests that Montaigne is working closely and at length with Plutarch’s ideas; in ‘Du dementir’, we see the product of this sustained examination and this is evident in spite of the absence of textual debts and allusions.

For Plutarch, interpersonal truth-telling – that is, telling someone else the truth about themselves – is a means to overcome this ignorance of ourselves which takes the form of self-flattery. As Foucault puts it, ‘*We are our own flatterers, and it is in order to disconnect this spontaneous relation we have to ourselves, to rid ourselves of our philautia, that we need a parrhesiastes.*’⁴⁴⁴ What we need is a ‘vray amy’: someone who will praise us for what ought to be praised and who will criticise what ought to be criticised; in short, someone who will speak truly. ‘*Pourtant ne fault pas souspeçonner universellement, que tous ceulx qui louënt autruy soient incontinent flatteurs: car le louer quelquefois, en temps & lieu, ne convient pas moins à l’amitié, que le reprendre & le blasmer: & à l’opposite, il n’y a rien si contraire à l’amitié, ne si mal accointable, que l’estre fascheux, chagrin, toujours reprenant, et tousjours se plaignant.*’⁴⁴⁵ The problem, then, lies in distinguishing the ‘vray amy’ from the ‘flatteur’, ‘chose bien fort mal-aisee

⁴⁴³ Isabelle Konstantinovic, *Montaigne et Plutarque*, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁴⁴ *Fearless Speech*, p. 135.

⁴⁴⁵ ‘Comment on pourra...’, fol. 40v.

[...] puis qu'il n'y a difference entre eulx'.⁴⁴⁶ This is particularly true of the type of flatterer against whom we must most diligently 'se garder': 'celuy qui ne semble pas flatter, & ne confesse pas estre flatteur'.⁴⁴⁷ 'Le flatteur', Plutarch notes, 'se compose comme une matiere propre à recevoir toutes sortes d'impressions, s'estudiant à se conformer & s'accommoder à tout ce qu'il entreprend de ressembler par imitation'; 'la plus grande ruze & plus fine malice qui soit en luy' is his imitation of 'la franchise de parler librement' – *parrhesia* – 'la propre voix & parole de l'amitié'.⁴⁴⁸

The key question, then, and the crucial point for our reading of Montaigne is how, if the flatterer is capable of imitating the 'parrhesiastic' or truth-telling qualities of the friend, are we to determine who is telling the truth? How are we to recognise truth-telling? For Plutarch, the answer lies in personal constancy: if an individual's actions (which include his or her speech) are consistent across an axis of time, we can, Plutarch argues, assume that there is a similar relationship of equivalence across a different axis – an equivalency of thought and action.

Premierement il fault considerer s'il y a egalité uniforme en ses intentions & actions, s'il continue de prendre plaisir à mesmes choses, & s'il les loue de mesme en tout temps, s'il dresse & compose sa vie à un mesme moule, ainsi comme il convient à homme libre amateur de semblables meurs & semblables conditions à la siene: car tel est le vray amy, là où le flatteur au contraire, comme celuy qui n'a pas un seul domicile en ses meurs, & qui ne vit pas d'une vie qu'il ait eleve à son gré, mais qui se forme & compose au moule d'autrui, *n'est jamais simple, uniforme, ne semblable à soy-mesme, ains variable & changeant tousjours d'une forme en une autre*, comme l'eau courante qui tousjours coule sans cesse.⁴⁴⁹ (My emphasis.)

According to Plutarch, the 'vray amy' is characterised by simplicity, uniformity, constancy and these qualities describe simultaneously both the 'intentions' and the 'actions' of the individual: the argument is that consistent action mirrors an 'internal'

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid. fol. 41r.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. fol. 41v.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. fols. 41v.-42r.

constancy of ‘meurs’ and that this double constancy results in the ‘égalité’ required of the truth-teller.⁴⁵⁰

Significantly, we can recognise in this Plutarchan passage some of the metaphors and ‘refreins’ which were to be picked up and exploited by Montaigne: the references to moulds recalls the discussion of the ‘esprit genereux’ – described as ‘sans forme’ and in a ‘mouvement irregulier’ – in ‘De l’experience’, studied in Chapter Three; the comparison of the movement of the soul to that of flowing water ‘qui coule sans cesse’ draws our attention to that other Plutarchan borrowing at the end of the ‘Apologie’ where, in apparent contradiction to the argument in ‘Comment on pourra discerner le flatteur d’avec l’amy’, Plutarch/Montaigne use this ‘Heraclitean’ image of instability and flux in their demonstration that ‘nous n’avons aucune communication à l’estre’ (II.12.602).⁴⁵¹ We can already begin to see, then, that Montaigne is working closely with this text and thinking with its arguments on the activity of truth-telling and yet it is equally apparent that Montaigne is not simply adopting an ethico-epistemological perspective.

As Foucault puts it, ‘If we raise the question of how can we know whether someone is a truth-teller, we raise two questions. First, how is it that we can know whether some particular individual is a truth-teller; and secondly, how it is that the alleged *parrhesiastes* can be certain that what he believes is, in fact, the truth.’⁴⁵² With characteristically broad historical brushstrokes, he argues that, ‘the first question [...] was a very important one in Greco-Roman society [...]. The second sceptical question,

⁴⁵⁰ As I will show, notions of thought or the ‘soul’ as ‘interior’ are problematic in the *Essais* and I have therefore opted to avoid such terminology when discussing Montaigne’s conception of the relationship between thought and language.

⁴⁵¹ Notably, this ‘Heraclitean’ image wherein water is used to figure a world ‘coulant et roulant sans cesse’ (II.12.602) seems to be associated, for Montaigne at least, much more closely with Plutarch than Heraclitus. Of the 11 references to Heraclitus in the *Essais*, only one refers to water and this is the reference taken from Plutarch and used at the end of II.12.

⁴⁵² *Fearless Speech*, p. 15.

however, is a particularly modern one'.⁴⁵³ There is certainly some truth in this: Plutarch's reasoning – that consistency of action reflects consistency of intention which equates to true and sincere belief – has no consideration for the possibility that a consistently held belief may be objectively false. Moreover, Montaigne does, in some way, approach this second question, turning the problem of identifying *parrhesia* onto oneself and making this interrogation reflexive. But Montaigne goes beyond even this second question, approaching this issue according to the terms and rationale established by Plutarch's text though seeing this from an entirely novel angle, privileging a problem which is otherwise universally overlooked: how, Montaigne asks, am I to speak truly – that is, to truly, faithfully, accurately perform and extend my inner 'meurs', 'intentions', and 'cogitations' in the realm of 'action' and 'parole' – when this world of thought is seen not to be one of constancy but is rather characterised by those qualities with which Plutarch would have us identify the false friend and the lying 'flatteur'? Montaigne is not engaging so much with what Foucault calls the 'second sceptical question' – is what I know the 'truth'? – but rather with the problem of how one can be a truth-teller when one speaks from a position of inconstancy: his 'esprit', as we saw in detail in Chapter Three, is moving and double; it is precisely the inverse of Plutarch's 'vray amy' who is 'simple, uniforme, [...] semblable à soy-mesme' and yet, having made this interrogation of *parrhesia* reflexive, Montaigne cannot easily tally this experience of personal flux with a means of thinking about himself that he is a truth-teller. '[B] Qui pour me voir une mine tantost froide, tantost amoureuse envers ma femme, estime que l'une ou l'autre soit feinte', he notes, 'il est un sot' (I.38.235). Here, he highlights the necessary ignorance of his would-be interrogator: he recognises himself to be diverse, changing, and multiple though he also knows that this is not the result of lying or pretending to be other than he is.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

It is in recognising the centrality of this problem that I hope to build upon and push in a new direction the small though not insignificant wave of scholarship which has, in recent years, sought to approach the *Essais* through Foucault's work on *parrhesia*. A number of these studies have focused on ways of reading Montaignean 'conférence' or dialogue: Reinier Leushuis has argued that 'Montaigne's staging of himself as *parrhesiastes*' in 'De l'art de conférer' and 'Sur des vers de Virgile' testifies to his 'use of *parrhesia* as a (dialogical) *practice* that paradoxically grants a place to scepticism in the parrhesiastic contract with the reader'.⁴⁵⁴ Tracing the way in which Foucault increasingly emphasised the political aspects of *parrhesia* in rewriting the Berkeley seminars for his course at the Collège de France, John O'Brien has argued that '*parrhesia* politique' functions in the *Essais* as a 'charnière entre la *libertas loquendi* et la *libertas philosophandi*'.⁴⁵⁵ Noting the motif of 'parler ouvert' with which Montaigne opens Book III – 'Je parle au papier comme je parle au premier que je rencontre' (III.1.790) – O'Brien situates this free-speech and free-thought within the arena of 'la relation aux autres' and, more specifically, of Montaigne's experience in 'negoti[ant] entre nos Princes' (III.1.791). Virginia Krause has investigated the relationship between confession – both juridical and ecclesiastical – and the form of *parrhesia* practised by Montaigne: Krause argues that Montaigne, like Foucault, is 'distrustful' of the 'ways institutions elicit and exploit confession'.⁴⁵⁶ Krause suggests that Montaigne found in *parrhesia* a form of critical, even 'administrative'⁴⁵⁷ self-examination with which to balance the 'more specifically Christian

⁴⁵⁴ 'Montaigne *Parrhesiastes*: Foucault's *Fearless Speech* and Truth-Telling in the *Essays*', *Montaigne after Theory/Theory after Montaigne*, ed. by Zahi Zalloua (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 100-121 (p. 109).

⁴⁵⁵ '*Parrhesia* politique et *libertas loquendi*: le franc-parler des *Essais*', *Foucault et la Renaissance*, ed. by Olivier Guerrier (Paris: Garnier, forthcoming).

⁴⁵⁶ 'Confession or *Parrhesia*? Foucault after Montaigne', *Montaigne after Theory/Theory after Montaigne*, pp. 142-160 (p. 143). See also Krause, *Witchcraft, Demonology, and Confession in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). See, in particular, 'Chapter Three: Dismantling Demonology's Confessional' on Montaigne's assessment of the (lack of) truth-telling in confessions of witchcraft.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 153.

tradition',⁴⁵⁸ intimately associated with shame rather than examination, of confession to a judge, celestial or otherwise. Similarly, though not working within this Foucauldian context, Jan Miernowski's analysis of truth through the notion of *fides* has yielded broadly similar conclusions. Beginning with the phrase used at the opening of the 'Au lecteur', he asserts that 'good faith' in the sixteenth century 'denotes not merely a subjective truth, an individual opinion, but refers to a belief [...] that, in fact, may not be true at all. It pertains to interpersonal, more specifically, contractual relationships between people'.⁴⁵⁹ He goes on to argue that the claim to have written a 'livre de bonne foy' is not just a statement on how the book has been written 'but also asks the reader for his or her good faith in *reading* the book that follows. [...] The incipit of the *Essays* is indeed more a plea than a claim,' he notes, before finally agreeing with 'interpretations that see truth in the *Essays* as an interpersonal and ethical relationship between two people'.⁴⁶⁰

These studies have tended to view the problem of truth-telling from this interpersonal perspective: How can I guarantee that someone is telling the truth? How can I convince someone that I am telling the truth? As we have seen, however, Montaigne is cynical with regard to that counterfeit of truth which relies on no more than 'ce qui se persuade à autrui' (II.18.666). His real concern is more fundamental, asking not if or when one might tell the truth nor whether or not someone is telling the truth but instead asking the deceptively difficult question of *how* to tell the truth. It is for this reason that Montaigne's project of truth-telling is not, strictly speaking, centred on issues of honesty or sincerity and the problems which govern this enterprise are accordingly quite different. Montaigne is not trying to convince us or to express to us

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 154.

⁴⁵⁹ 'On Truth and Skepticism', *The Oxford Handbook to Montaigne*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 544-561 (pp. 544-545).

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 559.

‘honestly’ what he thinks; he is rather engaging with problems of thought and language in an attempt to accurately and truthfully think on the page; to make the activity of writing the activity of thinking and, consequently, to make his text both perform and – by virtue of thinking in and with writing – record his doubtful, unresolved thought.

In introducing his project, Montaigne tells us that, were it not for ‘[A] la publique reverence’, ‘je m’y fusse tres-volontiers peint tout entier, et tout nud’ (‘Au lecteur’, p. 3). With this apparent pleonasm, his text reveals some of the conceptual assumptions regarding truth-telling while gesturing towards their instability: does the truth-teller, using language as a ‘truchement’ to depict the soul ‘tout entier’, supply *more* of himself or, abandoning rhetorical techniques and ‘[A] cette coustume de si exactement poiser et mesurer les parolles’ (II.18.667) in order to show himself and his soul ‘tout nud’, does he *subtract* falsities, revealing the true image of the soul? In short, does the truth-teller say more or less? We see this same duality in the language of free-speech, with *franc-parler* and *libertas loquendi* implying freedom from constraints, societal demands, and the customs of address which Montaigne frequently scorns while, on the other hand, the etymological root of *parrhesia* – *pan*, everything; *rhema*, that which is said⁴⁶¹ – implies the opposite conception of truth-telling as ‘telling the whole truth’. Further, as Olivier Guerrier has recently argued, *parrhesia* is defined in opposition to ‘l’empire rhétorique’⁴⁶² and can be seen as a way of speaking which removes falsity in order to reveal the truth: this is a ‘langage ordinaire, langage tel qu’il se présente, langage de foi, de fidélité et de créance’.⁴⁶³ A similar case has been argued by Bérengère Basset,

⁴⁶¹ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, p. 12.

⁴⁶² ‘Le Socrate de Foucault et le “Socratisme” de Montaigne: autour de la parrhêsia’, *Le Socratisme de Montaigne*, ed. by Thierry Gontier and Suzel Mayer (Paris: Garnier, 2010), pp. 57-69 (p. 60).

⁴⁶³ Ibid. p. 62. Guerrier goes on to argue for Montaigne’s ‘radicale originalité’: ‘La *parrhesia* chez Montaigne engage en effet une conception de la parole littéraire qui n’est pas réductible aux caractéristiques d’un discours adressé à un interlocuteur’ (p. 69) but instead attempts to ‘inscrire la parole vive et fortuite dans le travail de relecture, que ce soit par la ponctuation et les majuscules de segmentation autographes [...] ou par le caractère aléatoire de l’ajout’ (pp.67-68).

who explores the linguistic and conceptual slippage between ideas of simplicity and truth, *libertas* and *veritas*, in Erasmus' use of 'simpliciter loqui'.⁴⁶⁴

This is the assumption which stands behind Plutarch's model of truth-telling and, indeed, behind this concept as we encounter it in the broader context of Classical and early modern thought: the assumption is that neutral, unaltered speech reveals fully the 'heart and mind' of the speaker and that we have to do something – apply rhetorical figures or conceal what we know to be the case, for example – in order to pervert, change, or distort this otherwise clear and transparent medium. (This is language itself as a transparent lens, as a medium through which we see into the soul, and it is therefore not to be confused with the cognitive 'transparency' I have discussed elsewhere in this chapter in which the use of language as a tool is 'transparent'. The idea of language itself as a transparent medium – rather than being used as a tool in a way which is 'transparent' – implies a disconnect between thought and language in which thought is anterior to its expression. Such a model requires thought to be done before language can be employed to describe it.) The idea that language, provided it is not deceptive, reveals clearly the workings of the soul was widespread and deeply ingrained. We see in Horace, for instance, that this transparency is more than an ethical ideal; it is deemed natural and normal:

While I agree with Guerrier, it seems that these textual techniques demonstrate precisely the inverse relationship to rhetorical artificiality argued for at the opening of his article, a point which I will build on in this chapter. See also Guerrier's 'Les Leçons du menteur', *Poétique de la pensée: études sur l'âge classique et le siècle philosophique. En hommage à Jean Dagen*, ed. by Béatrice Guion, Maria S. Seguin, Sylvain Menant and Philippe Sellier (Paris: Champion, 2006), pp. 437-451. Guerrier sees Montaigne's *parrhesiastic* claims to speak the truth both as a simultaneous unveiling and disarming and, returning to my prior point, as interpersonal: '[le "parler ouvert"] donne immédiatement crédit à Montaigne auprès des étrangers, et qui implique la croyance en une sorte de mystique du lien, selon laquelle celui qui se dévoile sans calcul ni fard oblige l'autre à rendre les armes et à en faire de même', p. 445.

⁴⁶⁴ 'Erreur/vérité, mensonge/sincérité, d'Erasmus à Montaigne', *Bulletin de la société internationale des amis de Montaigne*, 63 (2016), pp. 73-92.

format enim natura prius nos intus ad omnem
fortunarum habitum: iuvat aut inpellit ad iram
aut ad humum maerore gravi deducit et angit:
post effert animi motus interprete lingua.⁴⁶⁵

Gérard Defaux, describing what he sees as the ‘logocentrisme’ of the sixteenth-century, has drawn a parallel with *sermo dei*, noting that ‘l’époque croit [...] que le Verbe est Présence’.⁴⁶⁶ ‘Oratio speculum animi’, he reminds us, asserting that, in the Renaissance, ‘chacun sait que le discours est le miroir de l’âme’.⁴⁶⁷ Defaux’s argument is that, for early modern humanists, ‘l’écriture’ is ‘présence’ and he argues that this is as much the case for Montaigne as it was for his contemporaries: outlining a perceived dichotomy in the *Essais* between ‘l’impossible présence de l’autre’ and ‘la présence recouvrée du moi’,⁴⁶⁸ he argues that, ‘en ce domaine précis du “commandement paradoxique” de l’oracle de Delphes, tout se passe comme si Montaigne avait décidé d’ignorer, dans toute la mesure du possible, les conclusions univoques de [l’“Apologie”]’;⁴⁶⁹ ‘selon toute apparence, et en dépit des conclusions de l’“Apologie”’, Montaigne sait ce qu’il peint’.⁴⁷⁰ For Montaigne, Defaux argues, self-knowledge is not only possible but intuitive and, more than that, his view of language is one of ‘présence’; one wherein writing reflects, encapsulates, and transparently reveals the inner ‘Moi’.

And yet, as we have already seen throughout this thesis and particularly in Chapter Two, Montaigne’s view of language is by no means one of clarity and transparency. More significantly still, he repeatedly makes plain the difficulty inherent in attempting to uncover or to gain access to the ‘interior’ world of thought. ‘[C] Ceci

⁴⁶⁵ Horace, *Ars poetica*, in *Satires, Epistles, The Art of Poetry*, ed. and trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), ll. 108-111.

⁴⁶⁶ Marot, *Rabelais, Montaigne: l’écriture comme présence* (Paris: Slatkine, 1987), p. 22

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 27.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 177.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 180.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 183. Cf. p. 194: ventriloquizing Montaigne, Defaux writes, ‘je sais bien que la connaissance n’est qu’une illusion, que toute communication de l’homme à l’être est impossible, mais quand même, je me connais, je me regarde. [...] En ce domaine de l’inscription du Moi dans le tissu serré de l’écriture, le doute est impensable, il est d’autorité exclu.’

m'advient aussi', he writes, 'que je ne me trouve pas où je me cherche; et me trouve plus par rencontre que par l'inquisition de mon jugement' (I.10.40). As J.-Y. Pouilloux argues, the account given of Montaigne's fall from his horse in 'De l'exercitation' – an extract which serves as the prime investigation of what we would call 'consciousness' – 'se fonde non exactement sur l'expérience intime de soi, mais se reconstruit sur les regards des assistants et sur leurs récits': it is 'par définition marquée de blancs, d'absences, que la narration à soi seule, quelle que soit l'honnêteté de Montaigne, par un mouvement autonome, comble'.⁴⁷¹

The point I wish to make is that, for Montaigne, truth-telling is not a case of simply 'saying it how it is', revealing the 'inner-world' of thought without interfering or distorting its transparent medium of language: our 'selves' are not immediately accessible, awaiting our introspection, and nor are 'we' – or perhaps 'they' – clear and distinct to ourselves. It is no longer clear even that thought or the soul is properly 'interior' for Montaigne as it so clearly was for Plutarch. It is for this reason that Montaigne could not have simply taken the 'vie' genre he found in Plutarch and made it self-reflexive: to do so would require the form of introspective clarity he so frequently refutes. We see an awareness of this problem of introspection written into the pronouns of 'De l'oysiveté': in the opening discussion of cultivation, application, and employment as means of control – a discussion from which Montaigne draws general principles – he uses 'nous' and 'on'; in turning to his plans to apply these principles to himself, he uses 'je' and 'moy'; and finally, around the hinge provided by Lucan, where it becomes apparent that his plans of 'oysiveté' have, like his soul, escaped him, he begins describing his soul, his thoughts, and all of this seemingly interior space with 'il' and

⁴⁷¹ *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*, pp. 64-65.

‘soy’ (I.8.32-33).⁴⁷² [B] Ainsin en cette-cy de se cognoistre soy-mesme’, he writes, ‘ce que chacun se voit si resolu et satisfait, ce que chacun y pense estre suffisamment entendu, signifie que chacun n’y entend rien du tout’ (III.13.1075): the repeated insistence that this pertains to ‘chacun’ stresses not only the ubiquity of this false presumption but also imbues the text with a sense of deflation as the final iteration collapses the ever-increasing ‘everyone’ into a diminutive ‘no-one’. As Plutarch himself writes in ‘Comment on pourra discerner le flatteur d’avec l’amy’, ‘nul ne peult estre juste & non favorable juge de soy-mesme’: our ‘selves’ are elusive, blurry, and other than they seem even to ourselves and one of the implications of this is that the ‘vie’ genre, which both Montaigne and Amyot laud for its ability to see into men’s minds and to perceive their ‘conseils’, fails in this regard precisely when one would expect it to succeed.⁴⁷³ Language is not a lens through which we observe the soul; nor is it an account of one’s ‘inner’ cogitations: both of these conceptions would require an introspective capacity greater than that which Montaigne recognises. It is for this reason that the ‘truchement’ does not simply ‘translate’ thoughts into language, allowing Montaigne to describe what he has thought and allowing us to see what he was thinking. If truthfulness requires, as Montaigne suggests in ‘Du démentir’, some sort of equivalence between thought and writing, this cannot be an equivalency conceived in terms of mimesis: if language and writing were to come ‘after’ thought, they would be incapable of expressing it. The ‘truchement’ does not recount his thoughts; it is instead an ‘util’ which forms part of his

⁴⁷² In *Montaigne en mouvement*, Jean Starobinski approaches the diversity of pronouns in I.8 somewhat differently: he notes that the reader is ‘frappé’ by the ‘multiplicité’ of grammatical persons used to describe Montaigne and his spirit but nevertheless asserts that Montaigne’s psychological ‘unité’ can indeed ‘trouver refuge [...] dans la permanence du premier sujet’, p. 32.

⁴⁷³ ‘Comment on pourra...’, fol. 40r. Cf. II.31.716: ‘Les escrits de Plutarque, à les bien savourer, nous le descouvrent assez, et je pense le connoistre jusques dans l’ame.’ While it is unclear whether ‘escrits’ refers to the *Œuvres morales*, the *Vies*, or both, it is immediately apparent that this quality of Plutarch’s writing—this ability to make his soul known to his reader—is not related to his practice of the ‘life-writing’ genre.

cognitive process. It does not translate thoughts; it is a ‘truchement *de nostre ame*’: it serves, facilitates, and makes communicable the activities of thinking.

Montaigne is, in spite of these introspective and linguistic problems, anxious to speak truthfully and we have seen that he engages with Plutarch’s means of judging whether or not an individual is a truth-teller. Turning now to Seneca, I will show that Montaigne situates this ambivalent, double-edged engagement with ‘Comment on pourra discerner le flatteur d’avec l’amy’ alongside a similarly productive and engaged reading of Senecan constancy as found both in the epistles and in *De Tranquillitate Animi*. I argue that it is in combining these two areas of thought – the Plutarchan idea of truth-telling as consistency and coincidence of thought and language; the Senecan exploration of personal (in)constancy – that Montaigne finds a way to envisage a project of truthfully writing his double and diverse ‘esprit’.

2. ‘De l’inconstance de nos actions’: Seneca and Personal (In)constancy

As we saw in Chapter One, Montaigne’s accounts of Seneca and Plutarch tend towards an interlocking hybridity: in ‘De la phisionomie’, he tells us that Plutarch, whom we have just seen providing a conception of truth-telling as personal stability and uniformity, is said to be ‘[B] plus [C] rassis’; he ‘[B] nous informe, établit, et conforte constamment’ (III.12.1040). Seneca, on the other hand, ‘[B] nous pique et eslance en sursaut’ (ibid.). As I argue in this section, this effect of Seneca’s text on the reader reflects a way of thinking about the soul as unstable, moving, and inconstant though the crux of Seneca’s Stoic doctrine – that we are ethically bound to moderate or even master this inconstancy – is radically reworked in the *Essais*.

As with Plutarch’s treatise on flattery, Seneca’s major work on spiritual constancy, *De Tranquillitate Animi*, has also been highlighted by Foucault as a

parrhesiastic text. As Foucault notes, ‘tranquillitas’, along with the Greek word it serves to translate, εὐθυμία, not only ‘denotes stability of soul or mind’ but also ‘self-sovereignty, and independence.’⁴⁷⁴ Seneca’s text opens with a full quotation of a letter addressed to him by Annaeus Serenus in which the author appeals to Seneca as though to a doctor to diagnose and help to cure his ‘bonae mentis infirmitas’ (1.15). In terms that Montaigne would later echo, Serenus situates himself very much in the middle of things, in the in-between spaces, both with regard to his ethical progression towards sagacity, between ‘health’ and ‘sickness’, and his place between, on the one hand, the ignorant and, on the other, Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus and his ‘praeceptores’ (1.10), among whom we may count Seneca: ‘Illum tamen habitum in me maxime deprendo [...] nec bona fide liberatum me iis [i.e. vitia sua], quae timebam et oderam, nec rursus obnoxium; in statu ut non pessimo, ita maxime querulo et moroso positus sum: nec aegroto nec valeo’ (1.2-3). ‘Haec animi’, he continues, ‘inter utrumque dubii nec ad recta fortiter nec ad prava vergentis infirmitas qualis sit’ (1.4).

Foucault’s study limits itself to this opening letter from Serenus, stressing the theme of self-diagnosis as he divides Serenus’ letter into three ‘paragraphs’ dealing with private life, public life, and afterlife respectively. Foucault shows that each of these sections turns around ‘a transitional moment when he begins to make an objection to himself, when his mind begins to waver. These transitional moments are marked by his use of the word *animus*’.⁴⁷⁵ In each of these three passages, Serenus describes his resolutions and plans, detailing his knowledge of what he ought to do and how he ought to act before showing how some event or circumstance steals away his mind and his good intentions: he describes, for example, his ‘amor parsimoniae’ (I.5) before

⁴⁷⁴ *Fearless Speech*, p. 150. Cf. *De Tranquillitate Animi*, in *Moral Essays: Volume II*, ed. and trans. by John W. Basore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 2.3: ‘Hanc stabilem animi sedem Graeci euthymian vocant’. All further references to *De Tranquillitate Animi* will be given parenthetically.

⁴⁷⁵ *Fearless Speech*, p. 159.

noting, ‘Cum bene ista placuerunt, praestringit animum apparatus paedagogii, diligentius quam in tralatu vestita et aura culta mancipia et agmen servorum nitentium; iam domus etiam qua calcatur pretiosa et divitiis per omnes angulos dissipatis’ (1.8). As Foucault puts it, ‘Serenus knows the theoretical principles and practical rules of Stoicism, is usually able to put them into operation, yet he still feels that these rules are not a permanent matrix for his behaviour, his feelings, and his thoughts. Serenus’ instability does not derive from his “sins” [...]. It stems from the fact that he has not yet succeeded in harmonizing his actions and thoughts.’⁴⁷⁶

In his response, Seneca attempts to placate his friend’s concerns, assuring him that he is on the right path (‘recta via’, 2.2): continuing the medical metaphor initiated by Serenus in his account of his ‘infirmitas’, Seneca compares those in Serenus’ position to those ‘qui longa et gravi valetudine expliciti motiunculis levibusque interim offensis perstringuntur et, cum reliquias effugerunt, suspicionibus tamen inquietantur medicisque iam sani manum porrigunt et omnem calorem corporis sui calumniantur’ (2.1). ‘Horum non parum sanum est corpus’, he argues, ‘sed sanitati parum adsuevit’ (2.1). Seneca’s position is that this personal instability, the inability to pursue accurately and maintain the goals set by oneself, and the difficulty inherent in attempting to put what one knows to be proper – the ‘imperia praeceptorum’, for example (1.10) – into practice, while most certainly not morally good, are nevertheless perfectly natural: ‘Quod desideras autem magnum et summum est deoque vicinum, non concuti’ (2.3); ‘Natura enim humanus animus agilis est et pronus ad motus’ (2.11). As in the epistles, Seneca’s focus, along with his audience, is not the godlike sage but is, rather, the ‘proficiens’: ‘Ad imperfectos et mediocres et male sanos hic meus sermo pertinet, non ad sapientem’ (11.1). The lot of the ‘proficiens’, then, is to recognise that these experiences of fluctuation are normal and natural while at the same time attempting to

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. pp. 159-160.

reduce their grip on us as we strive as far as we might to the status of the ‘sapientem’: ‘Habes, Serene carissime, quae possint tranquillitatem tueri, quae restituere, quae subrepentibus vitiis resistant. Illud tamen scito, nihil horum satis esse validum rem imbecillam servantibus, nisi intenta et adsidua cura circumit animum labentem’ (17.12).

‘[A] Ceux qui s’exercent à contreroller les actions humaines’, writes Montaigne, ‘ne se trouvent en aucune partie si empeschez, qu’à les r’appiesser et mettre à mesme lustre’ (II.1.331). For Montaigne, the difficulties attached to this ‘intenta et adsidua cura’ lie in the way in which our actions ‘se contredisent communément de si estrange façon, qu’il semble impossible qu’elles soient parties de mesme boutique’ (ibid.). The relationship between attempts to ‘contreroller’ – to examine and still – the movements of the soul and the diversity, inconstancy, the whole ‘branloire perenne’ of the world which Montaigne witnesses both in himself and in others – a theme which Montaigne returns to insistently⁴⁷⁷ – receives sustained attention in ‘De l’inconstance de nos actions’ (II.1). Significantly, as Neil Kenny has shown, the ‘inconstance’ examined in this first chapter of Book Two is not one of interpersonal differences but is rather internal and sited within one individual: ‘pour Montaigne de même que pour ses contemporains, la part du dire dans le contredire est importante: [...] ce qui est extraordinaire dans la phrase qui ouvre II.1 [...] c’est que Montaigne étend la notion de contradiction non seulement au sens non-oral et donc figuré de “contraste”, qui était banal, mais aussi au contraste entre les actions d’une seule personne.’⁴⁷⁸ This is diversity and difference not between the Old World and the New nor even between one member of a society and another; this is an internal, interior conflict which threatens to destabilise the unity of the individual.

⁴⁷⁷ The most famous instances are ‘De l’oysiveté’ and the opening of ‘Du repentir’. See also ‘De la praesumption’, esp. pp. 634-635, in which he describes his ‘[A] estude [...] duquel le subject c’est l’homme’ wherein he finds ‘une si extreme varieté de jugemens’.

⁴⁷⁸ Neil Kenny, ‘La Part du dire dans le contredire, ou l’inconstance des paroles humaines: Léry, Montaigne, Colletet’, *Seizième Siècle*, 4 (2008), pp. 255-287 (p. 268).

Opening with this concise summary of his point of view supported by two examples from ancient history and one modern illustration, this chapter looks at first to part of the tradition of ‘diverses leçons’ gathered on a theme though Montaigne quickly makes clear his distance from such modes of common-placing: ‘[A] Tout est si plein de tels exemples, voire chacun en peut tant fournir à soy-mesme, que je trouve estrange de voir quelquefois des gens d’entendement se mettre en peine d’assortir ces pieces’ (II.1.332). He continues, of course, to give us examples, sayings, and quotations taken from his reading though, in the pages that follow, he employs again and again the language of ‘nous’ and ‘nostre’: ‘[A] Nostre façon ordinaire, c’est d’aller apres les inclinations de nostre apetit, à gauche, à dextre, contre-mont, contre-bas [...]: Nous ne pensons ce que nous voulons, qu’à l’instant que nous le voulons. [...] Ce que nous avons à cett’heure proposé, nous le changeons tantost, et tantost encore retournons sur nos pas’ (II.1.333). In this, Montaigne is echoing the words of Seneca: ‘Nesciunt ergo homines, quid velint, nisi illo momento, quo volunt’ (*Ep.* 20.6); ‘nemo proponit sibi, quid velit, nec si proposuit, perseverat in eo, sed transilit; nec tantum mutat, sed redit et in ea, quae deseruit ac damnavit, revolvitur’ (*Ep.* 20.4). In adapting these extracts, however, Montaigne makes a significant change in shifting from a discussion of ‘homines’ in general and of an anonymous ‘nemo’ to a discussion of himself and of us, of ‘nous’ and ‘nostre façon ordinaire’.

Montaigne draws on Seneca in this way throughout the course of this chapter.⁴⁷⁹

There are moments where this intertextual interaction is more explicit: after noting that ‘[A] Nous sommes tous de lopins’ and that ‘[on] trouve autant de difference de nous à

⁴⁷⁹ There is a further point in this intertextual network: in *De Tranquillitate Animi*, 2.14, Seneca quotes Lucretius, ‘Hoc se quisque modo semper fugit’, *De Rerum Natura*, III.1068. Montaigne does not quote this line anywhere in the *Essais* though, if we look at his copy of Lucretius (p. 269), we see that he has highlighted this line and those surrounding it along with a summary gloss: ‘l’inconstance de nos actions’, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, ed. by M.A. Screech (Geneva: Droz, 1998), p. 324. Montaigne does quote from this highlighted section – III.1057-1059 – on p. 333 of ‘De l’inconstance de nos actions’.

nous mesmes, que de nous à autrui' (II.1.337), he quotes epistle 120 ('[C] Magnam rem puta unum hominem agere', II.1.337); he refers, towards the beginning, to 'un ancien' and his definition of 'la sagesse' ('[A] c'est vouloir et ne vouloir pas, tousjours, mesme chose', II.1.332) which is taken from epistle 20 ('Quid est sapientia? Semper idem velle atque idem nolle', *Ep.* 20.5). A second reference to 'un ancien' further emphasises the first-person plural as well as introducing the sort of authorial ambiguity studied in Chapter Two in which the examples which gloss the sententious assertion are not obviously attached to the reference to Seneca:

[A] Ce n'est pas merveille, dict un ancien, que le hazard puisse tant sur nous, puis que nous vivons par hazard. A qui n'a dressé en gros sa vie à une certaine fin, il est impossible de disposer les actions particulieres. Il est impossible de renger les pieces, à qui n'a une forme du total en sa teste. A quoy faire la provision des couleurs à qui ne sçait ce qu'il a à peindre? Aucun ne fait certain dessein de sa vie, et n'en deliberons qu'à parcelles. L'archier doit premierement sçavoir où il vise, et puis y accommoder la main, l'arc, la corde, la flesche et les mouvemens (II.1.337).

We are, Seneca and Montaigne tell us, at the mercy of chance and Fortune and, without taking a look at the bigger picture – without looking at one's life 'en gros', holding the 'forme du total' in mind – we are necessarily destined to live lives of discord, mutability, change. The whole of this passage is translated from epistle 71, though Montaigne has reordered Seneca's text: 'Necesse est multum in vita nostra casus possit, quia vivimus casu' (*Ep.* 71.4); 'Quotiens, quid fugiendum sit aut quid petendum, voles scire, ad summum bonum, *propositum totius vitae tuae, respice. Illi enim consentire debet, quicquid agimus; non disponet singulam nisi cui iam vitae suae summa proposita est*' (*Ep.* 71.2, my emphasis). Montaigne's shift on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' from 'du tout' to 'du total' (*fig.* 14) brings his text into closer alignment with Seneca's Latin: 'peccamus, quia de partibus vitae omnes deliberamus, de tota nemo deliberat' (*Ep.* 71.2). The images of the archer and painter are also lifted whole from this epistle: 'Nemo, quamvis paratos habeat colores, similitudinem reddet, nisi iam constat, quid velit pingere' (*Ep.* 71.2);

‘Scire debet quid petat ille, qui sagittam vult mittere, et tunc derigere ac moderari manu telum. Errant consilia nostra, quia non habent, quo derigantur’ (*Ep.* 71.3).

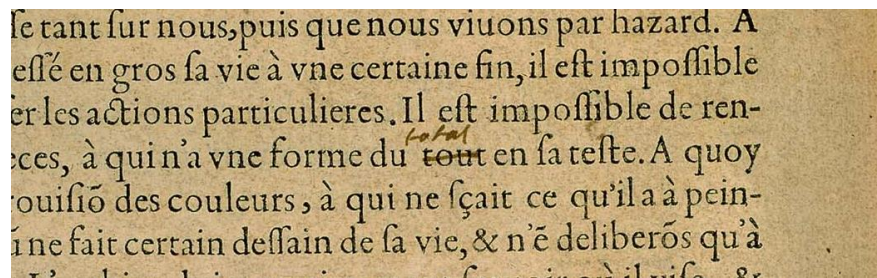


Fig. 14. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 139v.

Montaigne frequently takes Seneca’s second- and third-person assertions and makes them reflexive; here, in epistle 71, Seneca is already using this ‘Montaignean’ register, though we might say that Seneca’s first-person plural – ‘peccamus’, ‘deliberamus’, ‘consilia nostra’ – is implicitly and primarily a means of addressing – if not a general, anonymous third-person – the second person, Lucilius. In the *Essais*, however, the use of ‘nous’ and ‘nostre’ performs the reverse, emphasising not the ‘vous’ of this pairing of ‘nous’ but the ‘moi’, a point of emphasis which becomes increasingly clear when we look at the passage which sits at the centre of this chapter:

[B] Je donne à mon ame tantost un visage, tantost un autre, selon le costé où je le couche. Si je parle diversement de moy, c’est que je me regarde diversement. Toutes les contrarietez s’y trouvent selon quelque tour et en quelque façon. [...] Tout cela, je le vois en moy aucunement, selon que je me vire; et quiconque s’étudie bien attentivement trouve en soy, voire et en son jugement mesme, cette volubilité et discordance. Je n’ay rien à dire de moy, entierement, simplement, et solidement sans confusion et sans meslange, ny en un mot. Distingo est le plus universel membre de la Logique (II.1.335).

Seen in the light of the argument I have been developing, this well-known passage reveals previously unseen characteristics. We see the conceptual and semantic frameworks of Seneca and Plutarch being employed together: Montaigne’s penultimate sentence in which he describes his way of ‘parl[ant] de soy’ echoes Plutarch’s

characterisation of the liar as ‘jamais simple, uniforme, ne semblable à soy-mesme’,⁴⁸⁰ while the language of self-study – ‘quiconque s’étudie bien attentivement’ – coupled with the sense of discordance is resolutely Senecan. Significantly, however, Montaigne has given new emphasis and new meaning to Seneca’s pronouncement, ‘non disponet singulam nisi cui iam vitae suae summa proposita est’ (*Ep.* 71.2): like Seneca, he recognises that, without seeing our lives ‘en gros’, we cannot make sense of the particulars; unlike Seneca, however, he does not set this totalising view as an objective.⁴⁸¹

Approaching this according to the terms established by Seneca and Serenus, we might say that Montaigne uses Seneca to ‘diagnose’ the problem – to explain and detail this state of inconstancy and discordance – and to support his view that this is the default position and the ‘normal’ state of affairs while dismissing absolutely not only the proposed cure but also the idea itself that he requires a cure or that a cure might even be possible. In doing this, he departs significantly not only from Seneca and Stoic doctrine but, as Sébastien Prat has recently argued, from the contemporary fixation on constancy as a moral ideal. Prat argues that, around the turn of the seventeenth century, ‘la notion de constance prend, dans le néostoïcisme qui domine la vie philosophique [...], une extension conceptuelle, qui la rend synonyme de la vertu en général’.⁴⁸² As in antiquity, inconstancy was, in early modern Europe, condemned as ‘une attitude

⁴⁸⁰ ‘Comment on pourra...’, fol. 42r.

⁴⁸¹ Similarly, we might compare Montaigne’s account of idleness in I.8 with Seneca’s description in epistle fifty-six: ‘Otiosi videmur, et non sumus. Nam si bona fide sumus, si receptui cecinimus, si speciosa contemnimus [...] nulla res nos avocabit, nullus hominum aviumque concentus interrumpet cogitationes bonas, solidasque iam et certas. Leve illud ingenium est nec sese adhuc reduxit introrsus, quod ad vocem et accidentia erigitur’ (*Ep.* 56.11-12). Both recognise that adopting the life and circumstances of a retiree does not equate to a stable, tranquil mind though the crucial difference is that, while Montaigne recognises that the spiritual ‘horse’ has already bolted, Seneca exhorts us to ‘esse compositum’ (*Ep.* 56.14).

⁴⁸² *Constance et inconstance chez Montaigne*, p. 9.

impropre, combattue par la philosophie avec mépris’,⁴⁸³ though Prat suggests that, with texts like Lipsius’ *De Constantia* (1583) and other such Christian accommodations of Stoic doctrine, inconstancy went from being considered an impediment to virtue or a sign of the absence of virtue to its obverse. Describing Montaigne as a ‘voix dissidente’,⁴⁸⁴ Prat seeks to show how Montaigne, ‘qui hérite de cette conception négative de l’inconstance, en vient à lui donner une place centrale dans son œuvre’.⁴⁸⁵

Prat’s analysis serves to situate and contextualise Montaigne’s comments on and discussions of inconstancy though we might note that he describes his methodology as ‘une approche des *Essais* par notions’.⁴⁸⁶ Drawing a comparison with Sylvia Giocanti’s *Penser l’irrésolution*, he states that his work is an ‘analyse d’un couple de notions ou plutôt d’une dichotomie et du vocabulaire qui se déploie autour d’elle’⁴⁸⁷ and, in this regard, my comments in Chapter Two regarding Giocanti’s study apply equally here: Prat’s thesis tends to prioritise discussions of inconstancy without giving due attention to inconstancy in the ‘manière’ of the text itself. He notices the problem of expecting a constant and stable treatment of inconstancy in the *Essais*⁴⁸⁸ though he quickly side-lines this problem by making this a question of definition: we must not ‘définir trop précisément’ but rather ‘resituer l’expression dans un réseau de termes qui lui sont liés’.⁴⁸⁹ In response to Prat’s study, we might remember Tournon’s remark that, ‘pour étudier les *Essais*, il ne faut pas travailler sur des concepts, mais sur des configurations textuelles’.⁴⁹⁰ Nevertheless, in reading the *Essais* through this ‘notion’ of inconstancy, Prat situates Montaigne’s statements on this theme within their philosophical context to

⁴⁸³ Ibid. p. 10.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 9.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 32.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 12.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 14-15.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. pp. 16-17.

⁴⁹⁰ *Essais de Montaigne, Livre III*, p. 35.

show that, for the essayist, ‘l’inconstance devient naturelle. Elle n’est plus le signe d’une irréflexion coupable ou d’une dépravation contre nature’;⁴⁹¹ ‘[il] considère bien l’inconstance psychologique comme un “vice de notre nature”, mais pas comme un état contre nature, c’est-à-dire un état anormal’.⁴⁹²

We may be inclined to align this novel, dissident approach to inconstancy with the rhetorical figure of *paradiastole* as studied by Terence Cave.⁴⁹³ As Cave notes, this term for ‘la redescription éthique’ ‘traverse l’antiquité tout entière’ and, similarly, ‘les préoccupations qui s’y associent connaissent une fortune remarquable à la Renaissance’.⁴⁹⁴ Cave gives us Quintilian’s definition of this term, commenting that this rhetorical technique relies on ‘l’ambivalence des catégories éthiques’: ‘Huic diversam volunt esse distinctionem, cui dant nomen παραδιαστολήν, qua similia discernuntur: “cum te pro astuto sapientem appelles, pro confidente fortem, pro inliberali diligentem”. Quod totum pendet ex fixatione.’⁴⁹⁵ The technique, Cave explains, exploits the Aristotelian notion of the golden mean wherein the virtuous act is placed on a spectrum between extremes and certain of Aristotle’s examples ‘reviennent sans cesse’ in later Latin texts: ‘le vol d’un objet dans un temple n’est pas un acte de sacrilège si ce n’est pas un objet consacré; on peut inculper un homme qui est censé avoir été courageux en disant qu’il n’était que téméraire, ou redéfinir la prodigalité en la nommant libéralité.’⁴⁹⁶

It seems, however, that Montaigne is doing something different: he is not relocating the ethical ideal, pushing virtue along the spectrum away from constancy and

⁴⁹¹ *Constance et inconstance chez Montaigne*, p. 34.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.* p. 41.

⁴⁹³ See also Quentin Skinner, ‘The Techniques of Redescription’, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 138-180.

⁴⁹⁴ *Pré-histoires*, pp. 100-102.

⁴⁹⁵ *Institutio Oratoria*, ed. and trans. by Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 9.3.65.

⁴⁹⁶ *Pré-histoires*, p. 101.

towards inconstancy; he is not ‘re-describing’ inconstancy as a moral good in the way that Seneca and (neo-)Stoics saw constancy as synonymous with virtue. Rather, he comes very close to removing the ethical element altogether, as the opening to ‘Du repentir’ demonstrates: ‘[B] Les autres forment l’homme; je le recite et en represente un particulier bien mal formé [...]. Meshuy c’est fait’ (III.2.804). Further, Neil Kenny argues that this becomes increasingly true as II.1 is developed and reworked: ‘les additions ultérieures tendent non seulement à rendre l’inconstance plus inévitable mais aussi à la moins blâmer.’⁴⁹⁷ Montaigne’s ‘traits’ ‘[B] se changent et diversifient’ (III.2.804) but he makes no claim to approve of this, stating that this simply is the case. Montaigne, then, is markedly unlike both his contemporaries and the classical tradition as exemplified by Seneca: where others see inconstancy as normal but bad, he abstains from such value-judgements; he takes Seneca’s cures and exhortations to get better and reduces them to no more than a diagnostic observation.

In her study of the Senecan and Plutarchan debt which stands behind Montaigne’s ‘languages of the self’, Felicity Green has noted that Seneca’s ‘emphasis on rational self-mastery and invulnerability is strikingly absent from the *Essais*, even in their earliest incarnation’.⁴⁹⁸ She goes on to argue, however, that ‘what Montaigne takes from Seneca is not a triumphant ethics of self-overcoming, but a way of separating that which is fully our own from that which is merely accidental. [...] Instead of living for the sake of outward favour and glory, we should regulate ourselves from within’.⁴⁹⁹ While Green recognises this shift away from an ideal of self-mastery, she argues that the essayist replaces this model with one of self-ownership though this is still – and in spite of his claim not to ‘form[er] l’homme’ – one which tries to ‘s’arrester et rasseoir en soy’ the ‘cheval eschappé’ (I.8.33) of the mind: ‘For these writers [Seneca and Plutarch], as for

⁴⁹⁷ Neil Kenny, ‘La Part du dire dans le contredire’, p. 267.

⁴⁹⁸ *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom*, p. 74.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Montaigne, we should withdraw into ourselves and live for ourselves, not to realise our most individual and truthful being but to achieve tranquillity and wisdom [...]. This practice of withdrawal and reflection, turning our attention and will away from the world and towards ourselves, is presented as a vindication of our liberty.⁵⁰⁰

As we have seen, however, Montaigne's relationship with Seneca, particularly in this regard, is much less one of 'inheritance'⁵⁰¹ but rather one wherein Montaigne thinks *with* Seneca's conceptual frameworks or even in opposition to them, recognising the state of ontological instability described in the epistles and in *De Tranquillitate Animi* without adopting whole-sale – or, indeed, at all – the attached doctrine of overcoming oneself or stabilising one's fluctuating impermanence. André Tournon, discussing the distinct though clearly related topic of alterity, has argued that, for decades, 'la mode est de réduire autant que possible ces figures agressives de l'altérité, en s'efforçant d'établir que Montaigne, en dépit de ses propres intentions, les conçoit selon des modèles familiers, empruntées au fonds gréco-latin'.⁵⁰² As I hope I have shown, however, this is not a case either of borrowed ancient models or of Montaigne alone with his 'propres intentions': he is working with these classical texts and their conceptual frameworks though, in his hands, these models quickly become unfamiliar as they are stripped down, reworked, recombined, juxtaposed, and blended into one another.

In drawing this encounter with Senecan inconstancy alongside his reading of Plutarch, we can say that Montaigne, seeking in his *Essais* to speak truthfully, finds in Plutarch a way of thinking about truth not as a property of a proposition but as an

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 46. We might also note that Green's analysis of Montaigne's 'withdrawal' into himself implies an ability to overcome the problems of introspection and the issues of interior fracture and schism which have been detailed across this thesis and particularly in this chapter.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. p. 45.

⁵⁰² André Tournon, 'Soit que je sois autre moy mesme...', *Self and Other in Sixteenth Century France*, ed. by Kathryn Banks and Philip Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 2004), pp. 189-212 (p. 192).

activity. This model of truth-telling as found in Plutarch is, however, one which equates constancy and uniformity with truthfulness: according to this line of thinking, inconstancy is abnormal and indicative of falsity. Placing this model of truth alongside his reading of Seneca's diagnosis of normal ontological experience – that is, the experience of all who are not 'sapientes' – Montaigne not only finds a means of expression but also support and justification in his sense that inconstancy is, in contrast to Plutarch's argument, the default position and is not, as the latter would have us believe, incompatible with truth. The result is a problem or tension wherein Montaigne takes selectively certain aspects of Senecan and Plutarchan thought on different topics and places them together in combination in order to interrogate this problem of truthfully writing thought.

His solution is what might be called an 'inconstant truth'. In the 'Apologie', he writes:

[A] Ce que je tiens aujourd'huy et ce que je croy, je le tiens et le croy de toute ma croyance; tous mes utils et tous mes ressorts [C] empoignent [A] cette opinion et m'en respondent sur tout ce qu'ils peuvent. Je ne sçaurois embrasser aucune verité ny conserver avec plus de force que je fay cette cy. J'y suis tout entier, j'y suis voyrement; mais ne m'est il pas advenu, non une fois, mais cent, mais mille, et tous les jours, d'avoir embrassé quelqu'autre chose à tout ces mesmes instruments, en cette mesme condition, que depuis j'aye jugée fauce? (II.12.563).

Montaigne seeks to speak his beliefs and opinions, his thoughts and ontological experiences, truthfully and this means recognising that the content, 'la matiere' though not 'la maniere', of what he says or thinks will change and that at some point he may – or perhaps even certainly will – cease to see as true what he once held to firmly. On the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', he replaces 'saisissent' with 'empoignent' (*fig.* 15), perhaps gesturing towards the 'Heraclitean' image of the individual who tries to '[A] empoigner l'eau: car tant plus il serrera et pressera ce qui de sa nature coule par tout, tant plus il perdra ce qu'il vouloit tenir et empoigner' (II.12.601). A further watery metaphor

follows immediately from this passage – ‘[A] la fortune nous remue cinq cens fois de place, qu’elle ne face que vuyder et remplir sans cesse, comme dans un vaisseau, dans nostre croyance autres et autres opinions, tousjours la presente et derniere c’est la certaine et l’infallible’ (II.12.563) – linking back to Montaigne’s use Seneca and Plutarch whom ‘[C] je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse’ (I.26.146), while reinforcing this idea that, though our opinions and perspectives may be constantly changing, their grip on us as we experience them is no less strong.

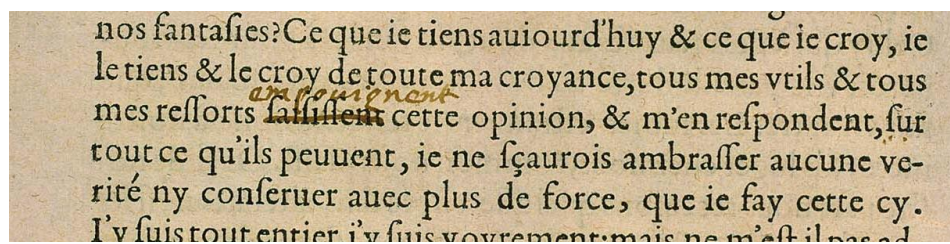


Fig. 15. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 244v.

Though he recognises that he will almost certainly hold a different or contradictory opinion in the future, he cannot use this to qualify, moderate, or distance himself from what he currently believes: his awareness of the infirmity of ‘raison’ has no purchase on the actual experience of belief and, as such, cannot be used to ‘step outside’ of this cognitive and ontological flux. As Pouilloux puts it, ‘cette considération rétrospective ne me délivre en aucune façon de ce que je crois aujourd’hui, j’ai beaucoup de difficulté pour échapper à ma croyance de maintenant qui représente pour moi les choses mêmes, telles que pour moi elles sont dans leur évidence.’⁵⁰³ It is with this in mind that we can properly understand Montaigne when he writes in ‘Du repentir’, ‘[B] Tant y a que je me contredits bien à l’aventure, mais la verité, comme disoit Demades, je ne la contredy point’ (III.2.805): with truth-telling as the act of doing thought – with all of its movement, doubleness, and instability – in language, Montaigne recognises that, given his ontological and cognitive inconstancy, his text must also be inconstant

⁵⁰³ *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*, p. 182.

and contradictory if it is to serve as this much-needed ‘truchement’. Unable to step outside of himself, he cannot simply describe his moving and changing mental state; rather, he must capture it as it moves through its different iterations – he seeks to ‘reconnoistre’ in writing ‘le train de [s]es mutations’ (II.37.758) – writing that which, at that point in time, he firmly believes.⁵⁰⁴ This further demonstrates that the ‘truchement de nostre ame’ must do more than describe or ‘translate’ thoughts: we lack both the introspective clarity to see our ‘selves’ and the requisite detachment; that is, the ability to step outside of the ‘here and now’ of thinking. Language becomes a truthful ‘truchement’ when it becomes part of Montaigne’s thinking – when the movements and shape of the text become those of his ‘ame’.

It is clear already that the temporal nature of Seneca’s epistolary form and the temporality with which Montaigne imbues his own text plays an essential role in this project of writing an inconstant truth. Before moving on to my final section, I would like to pause briefly to consider one example in which we see Seneca’s influence on the textual techniques with which Montaigne attempts to write his ontological and introspective instability.

In ‘De l’experience’, Montaigne writes: ‘[B] Or je trete mon imagination le plus doucement que je puis et la deschargerois, si je pouvois, de toute peine et contestation. Il la faut secourir et flatter, et piper qui peut’ (III.13.1090). Here, Montaigne returns to this theme of the inconstancy of the soul, with the conditional ‘si je pouvois’ highlighting yet again the impossibility of Senecan ‘tranquillitas’. We do what we can, notes Montaigne, and for some this includes lying to oneself: ‘[B] Mon esprit est propre

⁵⁰⁴ Tournon’s argument that the seemingly anodyne changes to punctuation and particularly the insertion of uppercase letters serve as a form of ‘profération’, re-signing and re-affirming his prior testimony, may be considered relevant here if we suggest that this forms part of a mechanism allowing him to over-write his text, inscribing new mental states, while with this act of ‘profération’ maintaining and re-authorising older, potentially contradictory statements. See Tournon’s ‘Les Marques de profération dans les *Essais*’.

à ce service: il n'a faite d'apparences', he adds though, crucially, 's'il persuadoit comme il presche, il me secourroit hereusement'. Montaigne lies to himself though he does not really believe these lies; clearly he is not, properly speaking, one of those 'qui peut' 'piper' to themselves. We see here the same pronominal schism noted earlier in relation to 'De l'oyseté' – his 'esprit' is not so much a part of 'moy' as something that 'moy' looks out at and speaks of with 'il' – and this binary relationship is then complicated by a direct address to the reader: '[B] Vous en plaict-il un exemple?'⁵⁰⁵ What follows is a long prosopopoeiac declamation, almost one thousand words in length, though this is not an address by Montaigne to his 'esprit' or 'imagination' but is, rather, the reverse.

It begins with Montaigne reporting his spirit in indirect speech: 'Il dict que c'est pour mon mieux que j'ay la gravele' (ibid.). Following the punctuation as we find it on the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', we see that the long string of claims which follows divides neatly into three groups, each of which begins with a capitalised 'Que' after a full-stop: 'Que les bastimens de mon aage, ont naturellement à souffrir quelque goutiere [...]. Que la compagnie me doibt consoler, estant tombé en l'accident le plus ordinaire des hommes de mon temps [...]. Que des hommes qui en sont frapez, il en est peu de quitte à meilleure raison' ('Exemplaire de Bordeaux, fols. 483v.-484r.). This then shifts, however, when the 'esprit' begins speaking for itself: 'C'est un mal, qui te bat les membres, par lesquels tu as le plus failly: Tu es homme de conscience' ('Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 484r.). With this development, the 'il' ceases to describe the spirit, referring rather to 'le mal', but more significantly the 'moy' which was 'Montaigne' reporting the ambiguously interior-exterior object of the 'esprit' has become the 'esprit'

⁵⁰⁵ That Montaigne externalises the/his soul is not in and of itself particularly unusual (this is relatively common in poetry; see, for instance, Maurice Scève's first dizain: 'Mon Basilisque avec sa poignant' veue | Perçant Corps, Cœur, & Raison despourveue, | Vint penetrer en l'Ame de mon Ame', *Délie*, ed. by I. D. MacFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 1.4-6). My point here is that Montaigne constructs shifting, ambiguous, and unstable relationships with his use of changing pronouns and layered, nested acts of ventriloquism.

itself addressing a now marginalised, distanced ‘Montaigne’ in the form of ‘tu’: the ‘centre’ – the place from which this speech is generated – may now be the ‘esprit’ but it is not situated within Montaigne’s interior; it seems that Montaigne and his ‘esprit’ cannot overlap. This uneasy relationship between ‘Montaigne’ and the ‘esprit’ is made even more problematic by the following use of the imperative: ‘Regarde ce chastiment: il est bien doux au pris d’autres, & d’une faveur paternelle. Regarde sa tardifveté: Il n’incommode & occupe que la saison de ta vie, qui ainsi comme ainsin est mes-huy perdue & sterile’ (ibid.). Here, the text echoes the ‘commandement paradoxe’ of the Delphic imperative: ‘[B] Regardez dans vous, reconnoissez vous, tenez vous à vous’ (III.9.1001) though, in placing this imperative in the mouth of the ‘esprit’, the whole schema has been turned upside down, further destabilising notions of interiority and introspection: rather than having an external, even celestial, force command us to look inwards, our supposedly ‘inner’ spirit tells us to look at our actions but, significantly, to look at them in comparison with those of others; to look outwards, towards the world.

The spirit then adopts, albeit briefly, the voice of an imagined other, providing a further layer to this nested sequence of ventriloquisms: ‘Il y a plaisir à ouyr dire de soy: Voyla bien de la force: Voyla bien de la patience’ (‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 484r.). After describing Montaigne/himself in terms reminiscent of those used to describe Seneca as he tried to ‘se preparer contre la mort’ – ‘[B] à le voir suer d’ahan pour se roidir et pour s’asseurer’ (III.12.1040); ‘On te voit suer d’ahan, pallir, rougir, trembler, vomir jusques au sang’ (‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fols. 484r.-484v.) – the spirit tells him to ‘Mets le cas que nature te porte, & pousse à cette glorieuse escole: en laquelle tu ne fusses jamais entré de ton gré’ (EB. 484v). At this point, the spirit says, ‘Si tu me dis, que c’est un mal dangereux & mortel, Quels autres ne le sont?’ If we look back to where we started with this speech, we see that, by this point, the pronouns as well as the

placement of the power of speech have flipped entirely: the spirit is now capable of speaking for and ventriloquizing ‘Montaigne’ though, of course, Montaigne-the-essayist is writing all of this, meaning that Montaigne-the-essayist is ventriloquizing the spirit who, in turn, ventriloquizes Montaigne-the-would-be-introspector.

Into the proliferation of ‘tu’ and ‘te’ which follows is inserted a [C] passage in which we can see Montaigne consciously reinforcing this singular address to the ‘tu’ which is, in fact, himself: ‘Mais ~~vous~~ tu ne meurs pas de ce ~~vous~~ tu estes malade, ~~vous~~ tu meurs de ce que ~~vous~~ viviez tu es vivant’ (‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 484v., *fig.* 16). This is not a general, anonymous ‘vous’; this is ‘tu’, Montaigne himself as addressed by his own spirit. And yet, in some way, it is general: we cannot help but see ourselves in this description of the circumstance and condition of all living things and, if this is the case, this ‘tu’ – which principally describes the author of the text – becomes us as readers, returning us to the ‘vous’ of ‘Vous en plaict-il un exemple?’ with which this extract begins while the implied ‘moy’ of Montaigne’s ‘esprit’ seems to be dislocated back into alignment with ‘Montaigne’, temporarily collapsing the distance and tension which has been sustained, in spite of commonplace assumptions, throughout.

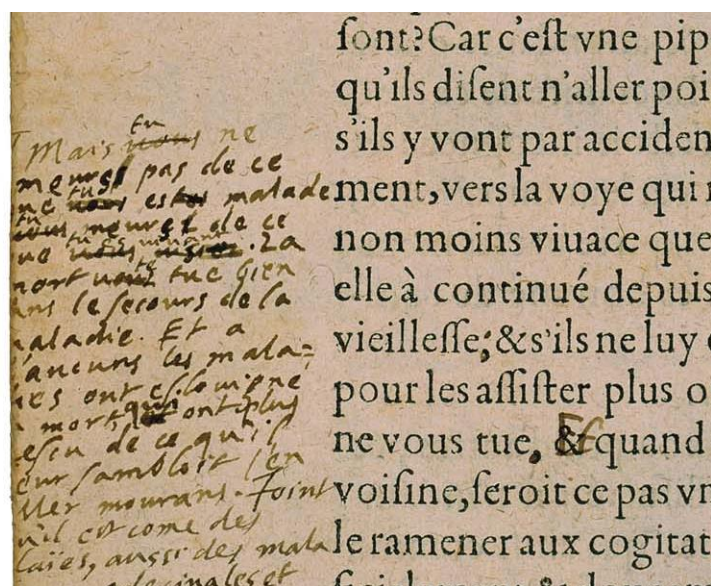


Fig. 16. ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 484v.

There is, however, still a further modulation and another layer to this increasingly plural and unstable interplay of pronouns: this line – ‘tu ne meurs pas de ce que tu es malade, tu meurs de ce que tu es vivant’ – is a translation of a phrase in Seneca’s seventy-eighth epistle, ‘moreris, non quia aegrotas, sed quia vivis’ (*Ep.* 78.6). Indeed, this whole declamation in praise of ‘la gravelle’ seems to take Seneca’s letter on his (and Lucilius’) sufferings with ‘destillationibus’ – phlegm and catarrh – as its crib. Montaigne’s opening offer of an example to his reader mirrors Seneca when he writes, ‘Quare mihi tunc fuerint solacio dicam, si prius hoc dixero, haec ipsa, quibus adquiescebam, medicinae vim habuisse’ (*Ep.* 78.3). Seneca’s list of consolations is much the same – the company of his friends, for instance, and the knowledge that one’s suffering is natural, or that it must find an end – and the technique of projecting and ventriloquizing imagined responses which is so common in Seneca’s epistles is also to be found here when he notes, “Sed molestum est,” inquit, “carere adsuetis voluptatibus, abstinere cibo, sitire, esurire”. And yet, in the epistles, these techniques produce a stable, coherent dialogue, either between Seneca and Lucilius or, occasionally but always within clearly identified outlines, between Seneca’s argument and an imagined response. Moreover, Seneca’s text may be full of self-reflexion and the pronoun ‘mihi’, but it is at every instance clear that Seneca works to console himself and that these two – Seneca the consoler and Seneca the consoled – are perfectly congruent: there is no trace of the ambiguous schism evident in the *Essais* in which ‘Montaigne’ and his ‘esprit’ are distinct, unstable, and moving. Twisting and inverting these Senecan forms, then, Montaigne uses this ‘coulant et roulant’ flood of shifting pronouns not only to show the instability and plurality of his spirit but also to undermine the Senecan exhortation to steady this inconstancy through introspection: ‘Ad haec ergo remedia te confer’, writes Seneca (*Ep.* 78.5) but, as Montaigne has made abundantly clear, these remedies are entirely without efficacy: as we have already seen, this lengthy speech is

preceded by a declaration that ‘s’il persuadoit comme il presche, il me secourroit heureusement’ (III.13.1090).

A passage such as this one exhibits clearly the qualities I have described in this thesis as essential to doubtful writing. It is less immediately apparent, however, that Montaigne is engaging here with issues of truthfulness or veridiction. I suggest that we must recognise this affinity between doubtful writing and truthful writing. Here, we see Montaigne ‘parlant de soy’, attempting to make the movements of his thought processes, his ‘intelligence’, public. Thinking on the page has two effects: the first is that the page and the activity of writing serves as a tool with which to think (we might describe this as Montaigne writing thought truthfully for himself) and the second is that this is a tool which leaves its mark in such a way that others can follow and trace these patterns of thought (Montaigne writing thought truthfully for others, for his readers). Thus, if we think of the ‘truchement’ as a tool with which one interprets or translates thought, we must recognise that this is neither separate nor posterior to the activity of thinking itself. Montaigne employs these literary, textual techniques of ambiguity, prosopopoeia, and repetition not simply to represent doubtful and double thought but to make the activity of thinking doubtful and, significantly, doubtful both for himself as he is thinking/writing and for his reader as he or she is thinking/reading. It is when thinking and writing become simultaneous and equivalent that the text becomes truthful.

‘Un commandement paradoxé’, ‘un discours paradoxé’: Arrested Motion in the *Essais*

1. Non-oppositional Duality in the ‘discours paradoxé’

‘Ante omnia’, wrote Seneca, ‘necesse est se ipsum aestimare’ (*De Tranquillitate Animi*, 6.2). In Plutarch, ‘la verité’ is a ‘chose divine’ while ‘le flatteur doncques est ennemy de Dieux, & principalement d’Apollo, pource qu’il est tousjours contraires à cestuy sien precepte, Cognoy toy mesme’.⁵⁰⁶ In both authors, truth-telling is closely aligned not only with self-knowledge but also with tranquillity. This is particularly true of Seneca – ‘se ipsum aestimare’ is a constant refrain, always attached to the end of ‘tranquillitas animi’ – though, in Plutarch and, more specifically, in the closing sections of ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’, this connection between self-knowledge and ontological calm is less clear cut: ‘Au demourant il semble que ce mot E’i, est aucunement contraire à ce precepte, Cognoy toy mesme, & en quelque chose aussi accordant & convenable: car l’un est parole d’admiration & d’adoration envers Dieu, comme estant eternel, & tousjours en estre, & l’autre est un advertissement & un records à l’homme mortel de l’imbecillité & debilité de sa nature.’⁵⁰⁷

This closing assertion of the duality of ontological knowledge – knowledge that God is eternal, that God ‘is’; knowledge that we are moving, fleeting, always subject to change – is a recapitulation of that long passage with which Montaigne closes his ‘Apologie’ though, placing these two Plutarchan discussions of the Apollonian precept alongside one another, we can draw further connections within the *Essais*, returning our attention to another concluding passage, referred to in the previous section, in which Montaigne restates the [B] commandement paradoxé que nous faisoit anciennement ce Dieu à Delphes’ (III.9.1001). A tangled network of recurring ideas begins to emerge, though their relationships remain indistinct: self-knowledge, introspection, the moving,

⁵⁰⁶ ‘Comment on pourra...’, fol. 40r.

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’, fol. 358r.

erratic soul, and Apollonian discourse which is '[B] parlant tousjours [...] doublement, obscurement et obliquement' (III.13.1068). In Montaigne, Plutarch, and – to a lesser extent – Seneca (where we do not find this Apollonian element of obscure speech), these notions form points on a philosophical trajectory, though, in spite of the essayist's clear engagement with Plutarch on these issues, these do not follow the same itinerary. For the ancients, the *parrhesiastes*/oracle speaks freely/obscurely; in either case, the speech is 'true'; this true speech pushes us to introspect and this leads to self-knowledge; self-knowledge leads then to tranquillity, either because the soul is stabilised (Seneca) or because we recognise ourselves to be as we truly are (Plutarch). In this final section, I examine the relationships between self-knowledge and form, suggesting that Montaigne inverts this classical model: in the *Essais*, the soul or spirit is moving, erratic, multiple, and unstable; we recognise this through self-study and, as a result, we are able to engage in a new form of truth-telling, one which is truthful about thought itself; a truth of form and content. Given that Montaigne's form of truth is not one of propositional content ('matiere') but rather one which depends on the congruence of thought and language, Montaigne's truth cannot be extracted from its form, its 'maniere'. As we saw in Chapter Three, Montaigne's attempt to find a form capable of writing the 'entendement' 'sans forme' precludes the later attempts to extract and synthesise as found in Charron and the editors of *L'Esprit des Essais de Montaigne* (1677) and *Les Pensées de Montaigne propres à former l'esprit et les mœurs* (1700). Building on these ideas, this final section asks how Montaigne combines the model of truth-telling examined in this chapter with that problematic notion of self-knowledge, suggesting that 'doubtful writing' is both beginning and end, means and product of this enterprise.

The 'paradoxical' epithet attached to the commandment issued by a god who speaks doubly is, on a number of occasions, echoed in Montaigne's self-assessment:

speaking in terms of contradiction – a term intimately associated with paradox – he notes that, '[B] Tant y a que je me contredits bien à l'adventure, mais la verité, comme disoit Demades, je ne la contredy point' (III.2.805). The echo is most explicit in 'Sur des vers de Virgile': '[B] Voilà un discours ignorant: Voilà un discours paradoxe, en voilà un trop fol [...]. Est-ce pas ainsi que je parle par tout?' (III.5.875).⁵⁰⁸ In speaking of his philosophical enterprise and/as his text in these terms, he seems to be suggesting that mental processes are not strictly true or false, they simply 'are'. The parallel with ontological experience – '[A] Nous n'avons aucune communication à l'estre' (II.12.601) – suggests that 'we' (taken to signify a static, stable, continuous ontological base) have no existence, while our individual, fleeting, transitory thoughts have precisely that existence which 'we' lack.

In recognising that thought is beyond truth and falsity, Montaigne can allow one thought to contradict another while still remaining 'true' to the patterns and form of thought as it is experienced. The result is this contradictory way of thinking and writing or, in Montaigne's terms, this 'discours paradoxe'. But in what sense is Montaigne using this key term? As Agnieszka Steczowicz has argued, the primary understanding of 'paradox' in the Renaissance was as an argument against received opinion (*doxa*), with notions of contradiction occasionally, though by no means necessarily, being brought under the umbrella of this pliable and broadly used term.⁵⁰⁹ In Chapter Three, I examined one of Pierre de Saint-Julien's paratextual introductions to his *Meslanges historiques et recueils de diverses matieres pour la plupart Paradoxaes, & neantmoins vrayes* (1588) in the context of fragmentary and 'diverse' forms; here, we can return again to this text,

⁵⁰⁸ Punctuation following the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 383v.

⁵⁰⁹ Agnieszka Steczowicz, *The Defence of Contraries: Paradox in the Late Renaissance Disciplines*. See also Steczowicz, "'Au rebours des autres": The "Know Thyself" Motif in "De la vanité"', *Revelations of Character: Ethos, Rhetoric, and Moral Philosophy in Montaigne*, pp. 121-132. Jonathan Patterson, *Representing Avarice in Late Renaissance France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. 'Paradoxical Redefinition', pp. 188-193.

this time looking at his ‘Advertissement au Lecteur’ where he writes: ‘Le mot de Paradoxe n’a pas sa signification si ample que quelques-uns l’ont voulu estendre. L’exercice en la preuve du faux n’est pas bien proprement Paradoxe.’⁵¹⁰ A false encomium, according to Saint-Julien, is not a paradox or at least not necessarily a paradox: a paradox does not make the false appear true (either through rhetorical or logical techniques) but is instead a statement which is true in spite of its shocking departure from common opinion: ‘il ne signifie pas seulement chose contre la commune opinion: ains une proposition vraie, & qui neantmoins cause esbâissement, comme contraire à ce qu’est communement creu.’⁵¹¹ In juggling this vocabulary of ‘contre’, ‘contraire’, ‘commune’, and ‘communement’, Saint-Julien is making a careful distinction between a contrary or dissident opinion and a true statement which is (almost literally) incredible precisely because it goes against what is commonly believed. Once again we find the key, central idea of speaking and writing truthfully and, as in the *Essais*, this involves speaking in ways that are unusual, strange, and shocking.

In this, Montaigne and Saint-Julien are following a tradition which goes back at least as far as Quintilian: ‘nam contra frequenter, cum exspectationem gravissimorum fecimus, ad aliquid quod sit leve aut nullo modo criminosum descendimus. Sed quia non tantum per communicationem fieri solet, παράδοξον alii nominarunt, id est inopinatum.’⁵¹² For Quintilian as indeed for Cicero, who translates ‘παράδοξα’ as ‘admirabilia’,⁵¹³ the key characteristic of ‘paradox’ is not simply that it is contrary to common opinion but rather that it is surprising, shocking, wondrous. Furthermore, Quintilian’s example shows that this is as much to do with subject matter, tone, ‘dispositio’, and ‘discours’ as it is to do with logical or propositional harmony: a

⁵¹⁰ *Meslanges historiques...*, fol. E7r.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.* fol. E7r.-E7v.

⁵¹² *Institutio oratoria*, 9.2.23.

⁵¹³ *De finibus*, 4.74.

discourse is ‘paradoxe’ not only because it contradicts itself and not only because it contradicts common opinion but also because it contradicts the audience’s expectation. This is further evidenced by Henri Estienne, who provides the following in his *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*: ‘Qui est praeter seu contra omnium opinionem, Inopinatus. Vnde & Admirabilis, item Incredibilis ex consequente redditur.’⁵¹⁴ Saint-Julien, however, pushes this in a slightly different direction – one which seems to correlate with Montaigne’s own view – when he stresses that paradoxes are not only contrary to common opinion, not only surprising, but also true.

This term, ‘paradoxe’, is less easily defined than we might think. It is not, as Steczowicz makes clear, our modern understanding of logical contradiction. But we must be careful not to eliminate this latter sense altogether: the early modern understanding of ‘paradox’ has these ideas of surprise, shock, perhaps even perplexity at its core; an uncommon opinion is not a paradox unless it is surprising, ‘incredible’ and yet true and it seems that these effects are closely associated – though perhaps not equated – with ideas of internal self-contradiction (paradox as we understand it today). It is evident that this notion of contradiction is certainly part of Montaigne’s understanding of the term ‘paradoxe’: following Plutarch, he describes the Delphic imperative as ‘paradoxe’ because it commands us to know ourselves, to know that which we are, and this is as much as requiring us to know that we are not.⁵¹⁵ This is, then, paradoxical in that it is both contradictory – it breaks the Aristotelian law of non-contradiction – and in that it is shocking and yet true.

⁵¹⁴ *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (Geneva: Henri Estienne, 1572).

⁵¹⁵ Cf. ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’’, fol. 357v. It might be suggested that it is a ‘paradoxical’ commandment in the sense of being contrary to common opinion in that it commands us not to seek knowledge of things or concepts but to seek knowledge of ourselves. This interpretation is briefly considered by Jean-Yves Pouilloux in *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*, p. 44. Neither Plutarch nor Montaigne privileges this interpretation and both, as I have shown, situate the commandment primarily in opposition to God’s ‘being’.

There is a similar connection between logical, self-referential contradiction and the term ‘paradoxe’ in Amyot’s use of the term. Towards the beginning of ‘Des communes conceptions contre les Stoiques’, he turns to ‘leurs [les Stoiques] plus renommes propositions qu’ils appellent eulx mesmes Paradoxes[,] c’est-à-dire estranges opinions, advouans eulx mesmes facilement qu’elles sont estranges & exorbitantes’.⁵¹⁶ This gloss accords with the understanding found in Cicero and Quintilian and described by Steczowicz (there is, in this context, none of Saint-Julien’s insistence on truth). And yet Diadumenus, Plutarch’s speaker in this text, arrives at this topic of Stoic paradoxes via an extended discussion of the liar paradox. He begins by discussing Chrysippus, the early Greek Stoic, ‘voulant renverser la vie humaine, & mettre le dessus dessous, et au contraire le dessous dessus’⁵¹⁷ before turning to his work on ‘le menteur’:

car de dire que ce qui est composé de positions contraires, ne soit pas notoirement faux: & derechef de dire aussi que des Syllogismes aiant les premisses vrayes, & les inductions vrayes, puissent encore avoir les contraires de leurs conclusions vrayes, quelle conception de demonstration, & quelle anticipation de foy est-ce que cela ne renverse?⁵¹⁸

He adds: ‘la Dialectique de Chrysippus ostant & subvertissant les principales parties d’icelle, quelle autre conception laisse elle qui n’en devienne suspecte?’⁵¹⁹ Chrysippus’ dialectic is *self*-contradictory; it is paradoxical in our modern sense and it is with this understanding of contradiction that Plutarch/Amyot frames the subsequent discussion of the ‘paradoxes’ of the Stoics. In both Montaigne’s description of the ‘commandement paradoxe’ and in Amyot’s/Plutarch’s framing of Stoic paradoxes, there is at least a point of connection between contradicting someone or something else (common opinion) and self-referential, logical contradiction. It is worth repeating, then, that while, as Steczowicz has shown, the early modern understanding of ‘paradox’ was

⁵¹⁶ ‘Des communes conceptions contre les Stoiques’, fol. 575r.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. fol. 574v.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

concerned primarily with arguments against common opinion, we must be careful not to dismiss altogether what might be seen as the ‘modern’ meaning of this term.

We might say, then, that the understanding of the phrase ‘discours paradoxe’ in the *Essais* is, fittingly, one in which the discourse is paradoxical both in its matter and its form: what Montaigne says may be ‘contre la commune opinion’⁵²⁰ or the *doxa* but it is also internally contradictory and double: ‘je me contredits bien’, ‘la verité [...] je ne la contredy point’. With this chiasmic repetition, Montaigne points towards a key aspect of this paradoxical discourse: the non-oppositional pairings of traditionally and typically intertwined epistemological concepts. In this instance, we see that truth can exist alongside contradiction; we saw earlier Montaigne’s inconstant truth – ‘[A] ce que je croy, je le tiens et le croy de toute ma croyance’ (II.12.563) – which reveals a similar, and similarly surprising, pairing of certainty and doubt; in ‘De l’experience’, he refers to the ‘[C] Platonique subtilité que, ny ceux qui sçavent n’ont à s’enquerir, d’autant qu’ils sçavent, ny ceux qui ne sçavent, d’autant que pour s’enquerir il faut sçavoir de quoy on s’enquiert’ (III.13.1075), pulling apart the usually interlocked ideas of ‘quête’ and ‘sagesse’; and, also in the final chapter and in a passage studied in Chapter Three, he shows that truth sits comfortably alongside doubt while definition breeds unhelpful ambiguity and uncertainty:

[B] Je demande que c’est que nature, volupté, cercle, et substitution. La question est de parolles, et se paye de mesme. Une pierre c’est un corps. Mais qui presseroit: Et corps qu’est-ce? Substance. Et substance quoy? [...] On eschange un mot pour un autre mot, et souvent plus incogneu. Je sçay mieux que c’est qu’homme que je ne sçay que c’est animal, ou mortel, ou raisonnable. (III.13.1069).

In these instances, ideas which are usually antithetical begin to correspond while terms which traditional philosophy would have us believe are linear and causal – such as ‘quête’ and ‘sagesse’ – are disassociated: in both forms, the two terms are still seen as a

⁵²⁰ *Meslanges historiques...*, fol. E7r.

pair though their standard relationships of opposition or equivalence/attraction have changed and become troubling. As Mathieu-Castellani notes, ‘la parole confuse, mêlée, contradictoire, a chance d’être plus authentique que la fausse rigueur ou l’excessive “pureté” d’une sentence énoncée avec autorité’, though here we see the key terms and meta-discursive language of philosophy itself threatening to collapse.⁵²¹

Montaigne’s ‘discours’ is doubly ‘paradoxe’ in that it goes against the *doxa* of philosophical practice and conventional, scholastic logic – ‘paradox’ as unconventional and surprising – while also following the contradictions and the ambiguous admixtures of thought – ‘paradox’ as contradictory – destabilising, as O’Brien puts it, ‘le passage de “topique” en “topique” qui relèverait du programme scholastique en lui substituant une “progression” qui est en même temps un mouvement titubant, zigzaguant’.⁵²² Sébastien Prat has situated this within a Sceptical context, showing how Montaigne has departed from Pyrrho and Sextus: ‘Il n’y a pas chez Sextus d’inconstance de la faculté de penser, il y a une inconstance des expériences ou des représentations. [...] En d’autres mots, alors que chez Sextus la raison ne peut dominer le contenu de ses représentations par le biais de l’antilogie, chez Montaigne la raison n’a pas le contrôle d’elle même.’⁵²³ For Montaigne, then, not just the content of his – or anyone else’s – philosophical thought, but also the epistemological framework, terminology, and logic of traditional philosophy are all subject to this constant inconstancy in which we find contradiction, paradox, and non-oppositional pairs.

Montaigne discusses this paradoxical – in both senses – non-binarism explicitly in the ‘Apologie’ when he recounts the liar paradox – ‘[B] Si vous dictez: Je mens, et que vous dissiez vray, vous mentez donc. L’art, la raison, la force de la conclusion de

⁵²¹ Mathieu-Castellani, *Montaigne ou la vérité du mensonge*, p. 47.

⁵²² John O’Brien, ‘Question(s) d’équilibre’, *Lire les Essais de Montaigne*, pp. 107-122 (pp. 114-115).

⁵²³ *Constance et inconstance chez Montaigne*, p. 95.

cette cy sont pareilles à l'autre; toutes fois nous voylà embourbez' (II.12.527) – though we also find it written into his prose, as André Tournon, among others, has shown: drawing our attention to the punctuation in 'De l'inconstance de nos actions', Tournon notes that, in editions which do not follow the punctuation of the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', 'les couples de prédicats contraires sont séparés par des virgules [...] ce qui donne à l'accumulation d'oxymores l'allure d'une simple énumération de qualités diverses'. Following Montaigne's punctuation, however, the adjectives form not a list but a sequence of opposing but simultaneously sustained pairs (*fig. 17*).⁵²⁴ We have already seen a large number of instances of duality and contradictory thought throughout this thesis. My point here is that Montaigne is revealing this paradoxical quality in the language, assumptions, methodology, and mechanics of philosophy itself: once again, we see that form and content of thought align as he seeks to show that it is not simply that certain philosophical ideas or a given epistemological framework is paradoxical but rather that the overarching, governing structures of philosophy are built on ambiguous, shifting terms and these unusual pairs which I have been describing as non-oppositional.

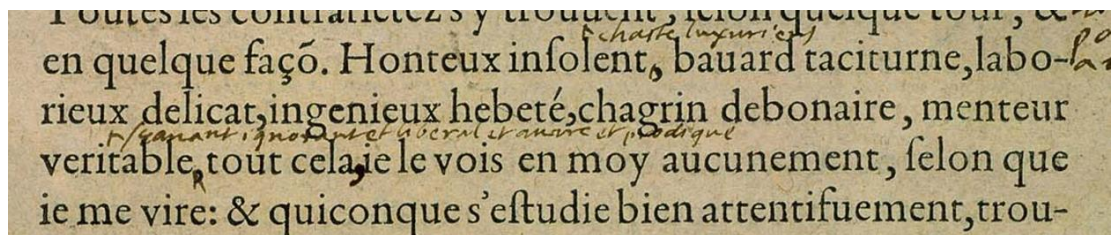


Fig. 17. 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 139r.

In the opening lines of 'Que nostre desir s'accroit par la malaisance', for instance, he writes: '[A] Il n'y a raison qui n'en aye une contraire, dict le plus sage party des philosophes' (II.15.612). This inconspicuous phrase seems to be no more than

⁵²⁴ André Tournon, 'Soit que je sois autre moy mesme...', p. 194. See also Olivier Guerrier's analysis of this passage where he notes that 'Montaigne invente une position où les pôles antagonistes sont susceptibles de coexister', 'Les Leçons du Menteur', p. 450.

further evidence – supplied shortly after the ‘Apologie’ – of Montaigne’s support for Pyrrhonian Scepticism: this is a translation of one of Sextus’ expressions, ‘παντὶ λόγῳ λόγος ἴσος ἀντίκειται’, and one, moreover, which is found on one of the beams in the ‘librairie’.⁵²⁵ And yet it is followed by an allusion – or rather a double allusion – to Seneca wherein the [C] addition renders the reference to ‘ce beau mot’ somewhat doubtful, seemingly referring to both the translated [A] text and the Latin [C] insertion: ‘[A] Je remachois tantost ce beau mot qu’un ancien allegue pour le mespris de la vie: Nul bien nous peut apporter plaisir, si ce n’est celuy à la perte duquel nous sommes preparez: [C] *In aequo est dolor amissae rei, et timor amittendae*’ (ibid.). Montaigne’s rumination on these ‘beau(x) mot(s)’ causes us to rethink and question his professed support of the Pyrrhonians as ‘le plus sage party des philosophes’. And yet, as soon as we do so, we notice the unusual choice of words: those who practise Pyrrhonism – ‘[A] une perpetuelle confession d’ignorance’ (II.12.505) – are ‘plus sage’ than those who expressly seek ‘sagesse’ and ‘sapientia’, the Stoics. But even then, Seneca seems to slip into this category of ‘Pyrrhonian’ or, at least, into the category of the ‘plus sage party des philosophes’. Furthermore, in this passage Montaigne is discussing the logic of opposition – ‘Il n’y a raison qui n’en aye une contraire’ – all while subtly blurring distinctions and erasing borders: the ‘sagesse’ of Stoicism slips ambiguously onto the paradoxical, ‘Socratic’ ‘sagesse’ of the Pyrrhonians; text and textual attribution is multiple and uncertain; the binary structures in each of the three allusions shifts almost imperceptibly from one of contraries to one of presence and absence and finally, in polar opposition to the opening structure, to one of equivalence. Though he may be discussing a simple binary opposition, the textual practices at work allow him to

⁵²⁵ Alain Legros, *Essais sur poutres*, pp. 377-379. See also Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, ed. and trans. by R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), I.27. On Montaigne’s use and translation of this phrase, see John O’Brien, ‘Translating Scepticism and Transferring Knowledge in Montaigne’s House,’ *The Culture of Translation in Early Modern England and France, 1500-1660*, ed. by Tania Demetriou and Rowan Tomlinson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 162-174.

multiply exponentially the cognitive network of connections, pulling the text apart and stitching it together, such that it becomes increasingly unstable and unbalanced with greater scrutiny: '[B] les gloses,' he writes, 'augmentent les doubtes' (III.13.1067).⁵²⁶

As Pouilloux argues, Montaigne is trying to 'se déprendre d'une logique alternative du "ou bien... ou bien" (qui placerait la vérité d'une côté et l'erreur de l'autre) pour adopter une logique du "et... et..."', dans laquelle peuvent coexister des formulations antagonistes.⁵²⁷ We might note that, just as this is in opposition to Aristotelian logic,⁵²⁸ this stands in clear contrast also to the 'et... et...' – or rather 'ni... ni...' – of classical Scepticism: Pyrrhonism is, as Terence Cave puts it, 'construit sur un principe de contradiction ou de négation'.⁵²⁹ Sextusian antitheses and the suspension of judgement more broadly may be seen as an attempt to attain and express this 'et... et...' simultaneity – snow is white *and* black; honey is sweet *and* bitter⁵³⁰ – and, as we have already seen, Rabelais' Trouillogan says that it is 'ne l'un, ne l'autre et *tous les deux ensemble*' (my emphasis) though this is, as Sextus states, for the sake of opposition: working to counter the dogmatists, the Pyrrhonian adopts these positions alternately; these contradictory positions are available simultaneously only as options and the

⁵²⁶ Further open-ended instability can be seen throughout II.15. Approaching this chapter primarily through Montaigne's post-1588 *allongéail* regarding the 'durée' of his house amid a constant state of war, O'Brien picks up on the paradoxical, antiperistatic logic—'Car il se sent évidemment, comme le feu se picque à l'assistance du froid, que nostre volonté s'esguise aussi par le contraste' (II.15.612)—noting that the 'overtones behind Montaigne's description of his "durée" are potentially far reaching, yet how exactly these different elements fit together is left dangling, purposely uncertain', 'Translating Scepticism and Transferring Knowledge in Montaigne's House', p. 168. He goes on to explore the role of the house which surprisingly achieves 'stasis' amid civil unrest, providing a 'contrary' or 'un contraste' even to the idea that all is flux and movement, pp. 169-172.

⁵²⁷ *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*, p. 211.

⁵²⁸ On Montaigne and Aristotelian logic, see Ian Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, pp. 32-35. Maclean notes that 'la logique ne s'arrête pas aux procédés syllogistiques; il y a aussi une doctrine d'opposés, une doctrine de la distinction ou de la division, et une doctrine de la définition', p. 33. Neil Kenny has argued that Montaigne's form of contradiction in II.1 is anti-Aristotelian though he suggests that, 'tout comme les pyrrhoniens, Montaigne inclut parmi les éléments qu'il se propose de juxtaposer autant les phénomènes que les discours sur ces phénomènes', 'La Part du dire dans le contradictoire', pp. 275-276.

⁵²⁹ *Pré-histoires*, p. 25.

⁵³⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniæ Hypotyposeson*, I.13.411, I.29.439.

duality is collapsed in order to make an oppositional argument.⁵³¹ Instead of performing the Pyrrhonian double-negation – undermining one’s own argument to destroy another’s; purging, like rhubarb, the counter-argument along with the argument – Montaigne’s new logic is one of plurality and multiplicity in which these non-oppositional binaries sit together though without assimilating one another. Where Pyrrhonism is, like Aristotelian logic, founded on notions of opposition, Montaigne forges a positive, inclusive pluralism.⁵³² With this new logic, he finds a way of allowing ontological inconstancy and the diverse plurality of thought to exist on the page: this logic, then, allows him to speak truthfully while speaking in contradictions, to contradict himself without contradicting the truth.

2. Arresting Motion: ‘Un commandement paradoxé’

It is through the process of the ‘essai’ – both as a literary form, a ‘discours paradoxé’, capable of going beyond logical binaries and as an ‘assay’ of himself as a fleeting, moving, double thing – that Montaigne attempts to grasp at his particular form of truth-telling. As we have already seen, he recognises that ‘[B] nous sommes nais à quæster la verité’ (III.8.928) while being equally aware that this ‘quête’ is endless: ‘[B] Et quand seray-je à bout de représenter une continuelle agitation et mutation de mes pensées, en quelque matiere qu’elles tombent[?]’ (III.9.946). This perpetual, recursive *zététique* has been the subject of numerous studies by André Tournon who situates this search for the elusive ‘au-delà’ of truth – that is, truth-as-thing – within a distinctly Pyrrhonian setting, suggesting that ‘Montaigne débarrasse le langage sceptique de ses apories, mais

⁵³¹ Montaigne, in the ‘Apologie’, translates one of the *phonai skeptikai* as ‘[A] il n’est non plus ainsi qu’ainsin, ou que ny l’un ny l’autre’, II.12.505. The Rabelaisian ‘et tous les deux ensemble’ is notably absent.

⁵³² Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniæ Hypotyposeson*, I.4.406. ‘Quid sit Sceptis. Est autem Sceptica Δύναμις, id est, vis & facultas, quæ ea quæ sunt φαίνόμενα, id est, sub sensum cadunt, iis quæ sunt νοούμενα, id est, quæ mente & intellectu percipiuntur, opponit.’

surtout [il] lui restitue la possibilité de signifier à titre transitoire, ou provisoire, au cours d'un trajet heuristique jamais achevé'.⁵³³

The quest for the truth and the process of essaying certainly are endless and infinite – at least until the ink and paper run out – but their product does coalesce and the result is something which is tangible and which, importantly, can be said to be 'truthful': it is the coalescence of the form of thought and the form of writing. It is for this reason that the textual, literary elements of the *Essais* which have been at the centre of this thesis are so essential: the truth of the *Essais* is the marriage of textual form and cognitive form. The truth is not 'au-delà'; indeed, standard metaphorical ideas of the 'place' or 'space' of truth seem to fail. This is instead a distinctly 'literary' or, at least, 'textual' understanding of truth – the slippage between 'reasoning' and 'discourse' in the meaning of 'discours paradoxé' is perhaps revealing – and, in this, we may turn to Terence Cave's comments on 'philosophical fictions', a genre which he recognises to be chimeric while noting that such 'hybrids are familiar, in a sense, to all readers of Renaissance literature, yet they are also epistemologically strange [...]. [L]ike all literature, they propose a mode of knowledge that cannot strictly be paraphrased'.⁵³⁴ Cave goes on to note that 'we need a theory – or at least a method – that will draw attention to moments when the coherence of an explicit sixteenth-century discourse breaks down, to instances where a writer seems to be trying hard to do something that cannot be done in the philosophical languages he or she knows'.⁵³⁵ Montaigne pushes his 'discours' to its limits, pulling at its threads and twisting it into contradictory, doubtful, and ambiguous shapes and the product is a truthfulness which is inextricable from this form.

⁵³³ *Route par ailleurs*, p. 17.

⁵³⁴ 'Epilogue', *Philosophical Fictions and the French Renaissance*, ed. by Neil Kenny (London: The Warburg Institute, 1991), pp. 127-132 (p. 127).

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 131.

It is with this ‘discours paradoxe’, imbued as it is with a particular, unfamiliar logic and privileged with a unique grasp on this form of truth-telling, that he rethinks the ‘commandement paradoxe’. Montaigne knows himself to be a moving, unstable figure, a double and changing ontological being; recognising this, he attempts, as we have seen, to write doubly and doubtfully. It is, however, in writing this double and unresolved text and in reading and re-reading his shifting writing that Montaigne comes to ‘know himself’ and to see that which is essential to him: that is, that he is a moving, erratic being, constantly changing his opinions and perspectives. This is, of course, paradoxical: there is a cyclical causality in which Montaigne knows himself as a result of knowing himself and where doubtful writing is both the product of self-knowledge and the means of attaining it, but it is precisely these logical impossibilities and such problematic and non-sequential causal structures that Montaigne accommodates in creating his ‘discours paradoxe’. Pouilloux, who has studied this ‘commandement paradoxe’ in thinking about the practice of writing and rewriting, has noted that ‘L’écriture – la transcription d’un constat quotidien, au jour le jour, de minute en minute – devient ainsi le lieu privilégié où peut s’enregistrer la différence de soi à soi’.⁵³⁶ He goes on to argue that this ‘transcription’ persists and remains, providing us (and Montaigne) with ‘des traces d’un état, fugitif peut-être, mais qui fut un jour, une certaine heure, inscrit’. One can re-read them, he says, and compare what was with what is, following the daily movements and the changing nature of the ‘esprit’: ‘Ni meilleur, ni pire, simplement différent.’⁵³⁷

Writing doubtfully and, as a result of thinking on the page, leaving a trace of one’s thoughts – ‘[A] Je veux représenter le progrès de mes humeurs et [...] reconnoître le train de mes mutations’ (II.37.758) – reveals this personal, ontological

⁵³⁶ *Montaigne: une vérité singulière*, p. 51.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 90.

change; it forms a means of recognising inconstancy. But, Pouilloux continues, in re-reading these temporally located and temporarily held beliefs committed to writing, ‘on entend résonner une tonalité [...] qui curieusement ne se modifi[e] guère. Par une sorte de diversion, le “moi” qui je cherchais [...] et que j’ai été obligé de renoncer à attendre, voici qu’il se manifeste, non dans la forme de son être, mais dans ses façons de parler’.⁵³⁸

‘[B] Je ne peints pas l’estre’, wrote Montaigne, ‘Je peints le passage’ (III.2.805). He places these two concepts in an antithetical partnership. Returning to the idea of non-oppositional pairs, we see however that ‘passage’, just as much as ‘estre’, is the corollary and the answer to ‘Cognoy toy mesme’ precisely because our state of being is not a state of ‘being’ but of movement. We may have no ‘communication à l’estre’ (II.12.601) but ‘nostre verité [...] n’est pas ce qui est’ (II.18.666); as Plutarch says, ‘il semble que ce mot E’i, est aucunement contraire à ce precepte, Cognoy toy mesme’.⁵³⁹ Just as the ‘[B] plus universel membre de [sa] Logique’ is ‘Distingo’ (II.1.335), the essential characteristic of his being is change and movement. Most significantly, this perceived identity – this knowledge of himself – found through and in the writing of the *Essais* is not a sage- or god-like *image* of constancy and stasis but is, rather, *heard* in the patterns of speech, the linguistic techniques, and the duality and ambiguity of this doubtful language: it is found in the ‘manière de dire’.

With this ‘manière de dire’, Montaigne can paradoxically come to know himself as moving and unresolved; he can speak doubtfully and in contradictions without contradicting the truth; he can truthfully think on the page in a way that is plural and inconstant. He can, most significantly, arrest the motion and movement of thought on the page. ‘[B] Le monde n’est qu’une branloire perenne’, he writes. ‘Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse: la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d’Aegypte, et du

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’, fol. 358r.

branle public et du leur. La constance mesme n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant' (III.2.804-5). As he notes at the end of 'De l'inconstance de nos actions', we ought not judge ourselves according only to our outward actions but rather sound out and examine ('sonder') the 'dedans' and see what motivates and moves this inward 'bransle' (II.1.338). Montaigne's text, like the pyramids of Egypt and the Caucasus Mountains, may seem static and stable but, provided we look closely, we see its constant movement, a movement which reflects – for both reader and author – the inconstancy and instability of his 'esprit'.⁵⁴⁰ Montaigne has to engage in self-reflection to 'know himself' to be double, dual, inconstant; he has to 's'espier de pres' (II.1.337). Similarly, we have to 'regarder de pres' – a phrase which he applies not only to his own text but also to those of Seneca and Plutarch, those seemingly dogmatic texts which are revealed to be doubtful and unresolved upon closer inspection – to see the 'branle plus languissant' of Montaigne's writing.⁵⁴¹

In this section, we have seen that Montaigne pulls apart the standard operational mechanics of philosophy, disassociating foundational pairings such as truth and constancy while finding a way for conventionally antithetical terms – doubt and certainty, for instance – to sit alongside one another. This is the 'discours paradoxe'; a 'discours' which challenges not simply the content of philosophical systems but also the logic upon which they are based and by which they express themselves. With this

⁵⁴⁰ Montaigne describes Homer's writing in similar terms: 'Ses parolles, selon Aristote, sont les seules parolles qui ayent *mouvement et action*; ce sont les seuls mots substantiels', II.36.753, my emphasis. Notably, this idea of a text in movement/capable of rendering movement is not taken from Aristotle, who says Homer's text makes inanimate things 'ἐμψυχὰ' and speaks not of movement but of 'ἐνέργεια' (*Art of Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. by J. H. Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), III.11), but seems, rather, to come from Plutarch: 'Aristote souloit dire qu'Homere estoit celuy seul qui faisoit des noms & de termes qui avoient mouvements pour la vivacité de leur expression', 'Pourquoy la prophetisse Pythie ne rend plus les oracles en vers', fol. 629v.

⁵⁴¹ II.12.509: 'Combien disent ils, tantost d'un visage, tantost d'un autre, pour ceux qui y regardent de prez!' Note that this phrase is also used in the description of the 'langage coupe' in the list of instructions to the printer, 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. Ai-v.

paradoxical framework, he constructs a paradoxical text capable of the ambiguity, duality, and irresolution which has been the subject of this thesis. Approaching the project of writing in this way – in attempting to write ‘truthfully’ in this particular, Montaignean sense – he inverts the Senecan and Plutarchan (and more broadly Classical) relationship between truth-telling and self-knowledge, positioning truth-telling not as a curative but instead as an end-point; as a product of recognising, without flattening, the moving and unstable nature of thought. But it is not simply a product and, indeed, this process of inversion is not so simple: Montaigne’s ‘discours paradoxe’ leads to a ‘double’, ‘paradoxical’ response to the ‘commandement paradoxe’. Tracing the movement of his mind, he writes doubtfully and doubly but, in returning to his text, he finds himself to be different; the doubtful, temporary, and unresolved writing is certainly the issue of introspection and the resulting self-knowledge but it is also a tool of introspection. This doubtful form of writing is, then, the fusion of the ‘discours paradoxe’ and the ‘commandement paradoxe’.

‘Encore un mot pour clorre ce pas’: Truth-Telling and Doubtful Writing

In ‘De la praesumption’, Montaigne writes: ‘[A] La philosophie ne me semble jamais avoir si beau jeu que quand elle combat nostre presumption et vanité, quand elle reconnoit de bonne foy son irresolution, sa foiblesse et son ignorance’ (II.17.634). With Seneca and Plutarch, he works to find a means of speaking truthfully, of salvaging some positive, accessible conception of truth which is not subject to this vanity and presumption. These authors provide him with a way to think about truth-telling as an activity or a relationship between ‘esprit’ and ‘parole’, between ‘dehors’ and ‘dedans’. Significantly, it is in working with their texts that Montaigne develops his own approach to the difficult, even paradoxical relationship between (in)constancy and truth: one

wherein notions of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ become problematic and one wherein truthfulness bears the hallmarks of uncertainty and doubt. Thinking with Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne thinks about truth in a non-oppositional manner. Following his custom of thinking in pairs, he finds a perspective from which inconstancy is compatible with truth, doubt compatible with certainty, doubt compatible with truth-telling. This is a model of truth-telling which does not attempt to resolve the movement, uncertainty, and plurality of thought but is, rather, one which is true precisely in that it performs and, for the reader, makes apparent this ‘double et divers’ thought. Thinking on the page, the text is truthful not because it describes doubtful thought but because it is doubtful thought. And it is, moreover, a way of thinking that leaves a trace allowing others to see and engage with that thinking. It is, then, a way of writing with which ‘[A] nous [...] nous tenons, nous [...] nous entreconnoissons’ (II.17.667).

As we have seen in every chapter of this thesis, neither Seneca nor Plutarch is used in a way that is purely instrumental: I have shown in this chapter how Plutarch provides Montaigne with a way of thinking about truth-telling as an activity though this is a model which Montaigne flips upside down, rethinking and reworking the Plutarchan understanding of the *parrhesiastes* as constant, simple, and stable; similarly, Seneca offers Montaigne a model of ideal, transcendental *constantia* coupled with a diagnosis of everyday inconstancy but Montaigne removes Seneca’s value judgements, accepting inconstancy as normal and natural without attempting to settle or stabilise it. Moreover, we see that, once again, it is in combining these two classical authors, in working with their texts productively, actively, that Montaigne forges a new way of thinking. In working with these authors, repositioning truth not as a body of knowledge but as an activity and, importantly, restructuring this model of truth-telling so that it

accommodates rather than excludes inconstancy and contradiction, Montaigne seizes upon the importance of the ‘manière’ as well as the ‘matière du dire’. The result is the ‘discours paradoxe’ of the ‘essai’: a form capable of truthfully extending and facilitating double, diverse, and moving thought, capable of ‘arresting’ motion on the page in such a way that one need only look closely to see its movement and vitality.

This is a modest truth, a truthfulness which evades the presumption of the ‘philosophes’ while also being a foundational truth upon which knowledge of oneself and of one another is based. On the penultimate page of the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, we read a damning criticism of all those ‘philosophes’ who over-stretch themselves, striving for an objective, objectified ‘Truth’: ‘[B] Ils se veulent se mettre hors d’eux et échapper à l’homme. C’est folie: au lieu de se transformer en anges, ils se transforment en bestes’ (III.13.1115). We cannot step outside of ourselves; the only truthfulness available to us is this form of speaking truthfully, faithfully rendering our thoroughly humane, uncertain, unresolved thought in an equally doubtful prose. Turning to Plutarch one last time, Montaigne then quotes from the ‘Vie de Pompée’, drawing together yet again those key ideas of a modest truth, self-knowledge, paradox, and knowledge of one’s (non-)being in opposition to the static ‘estre’ of God:

[B] D’autant es tu Dieu comme
Tu te recognois homme (Ibid.).

‘C’est’, he writes, ‘une absolue perfection’ (ibid.).

Conclusion

‘[B] La dissimilitude’, wrote Montaigne, ‘s’ingere d’elle mesme en nos ouvrages; nul art peut arriver à la similitude’ (III.13.1065). If Montaigne were to make his *Essais* record, trace, or in some other way express his thought and his ways of thinking, he would be in need of a way of writing which is not simply as doubtful, multiple, or capable of change as his thought but which is itself part of that practice of thinking. If the writing were to come after the thought, it would never catch up; it would forever struggle with this problem of ‘dissimilitude’, with the problems caused by the limitations of imitation and mimetic copying. As I have argued in this thesis, the *Essais* constitute a form of writing which is doubtful and unresolved, double and diverse, precisely because it is in writing that Montaigne does his thinking: the literary, formal, and compositional techniques which I have been attending to do not recount his ideas or his patterns of thought; rather, they are tools with which he thinks, tools which afford (for the author, certainly, but also for the reader) a plurality of thought, a doubleness which is sustained and left unresolved.

Half a century ago, Jean-Yves Pouilloux’s landmark study, *Lire les Essais de Montaigne*, stressed the importance of reading Montaigne’s text with a literary eye, reading his assertions and comments, frequently disarticulated and made to stand alone as maxims, within their discursive and formal context. He criticised the way in which readers pass ‘trop vite, ou trop facilement, du particulier (la phrase) au général (la pensée). D’une citation, ou d’un ensemble de citations, on compose un portrait total, on dessine les traits d’une philosophie’.⁵⁴² His point was that Montaigne’s ‘philosophy’ is

⁵⁴² In *L’Eveil de la pensée*, pp. 23-24.

ingrained in his style; that his thought is literary and demands a literary interpretation.⁵⁴³ One of the aims of this thesis has been to push this insight further, a development which can be summarised with a subtle but, I would contend, significant shift in terms: it is not simply the case that Montaigne's thought is literary but also that his thinking is textual. By this, I mean that the essayist does more than describe and illustrate his thought with the tools and techniques of literature. Doubtful writing is not, or at least not predominantly, an attempt to communicate his thought; it is, in a very real sense, an attempt to generate, shape, and give birth to that thought. Rather than being conceived of as a means of conveying pre-existent thought, we ought to recognise that this form of writing is a mode of thinking in itself. In this regard, I concur with Terence Cave's description of literature as an '*instrument* of thought': 'thinkers', he observes, 'use salient metaphor and other procedures normally associated with literature in order to perform thought, not just to exemplify it. If you removed those features, the thought would be different.'⁵⁴⁴ This foundational point – that Montaigne's thinking is textual; that thought is indebted to language and is done in and with language – is one which, to various degrees, has been gestured towards in previous studies⁵⁴⁵ but it is crucial that we start here, for it is from this perspective that I present the arguments concerning doubtful writing which have been the core of this thesis. Rather than looking for Montaigne's thought(s) as it or they are represented by his style, we must recognise his thinking – continuous, present, and unresolved – as it is done in and with writing. Having established this central principle, this study has worked to show the complex

⁵⁴³ A similar argument has been made by Ian Maclean in *Montaigne philosophe*: Maclean's point is that Montaigne's 'discours philosophique (si peu philosophique) qui lui est propre' (p. 16) creates new ways of 'philosophical' thinking.

⁵⁴⁴ *Thinking with Literature*, p. 150 (author's italics).

⁵⁴⁵ In addition to those works cited above by Pouilloux and Maclean, see Terence Cave's *How to Read Montaigne*. On the ways in which (literary) language is used to do particular types of thinking in the early modern period more generally, see Kathryn Banks, *Cosmos and Image in the Renaissance: French Love Lyric and Natural-Philosophical Poetry* (Oxford: Legenda, 2008), esp. 'Introduction', pp. 1-29.

idiosyncrasies of Montaigne's textual thinking; to show how he uses writing not simply as a tool for thought but as a tool for doubtful, double, and paradoxical thinking.

This thesis, then, has shown that Montaigne constructs and engages with a way of writing that is doubtful. I have argued for the centrality of Seneca and Plutarch in this enterprise of writing doubtfully, showing how the essayist thinks with these authors and their texts, remoulding them, placing them in combination with each other so as to create a hybrid figure which is neither one nor the other. He then thinks with this figure of his creation as he creates his own form – a form intimately bound up with theirs and yet not simply a development, a mutation, or a descendant of these ancient ways of writing. His form is like theirs in certain aspects but fundamentally his own; it is the product of his engagement with these authors, not of a return *ad fontes*, to the wellsprings from which he might draw a (more or less) ready-made practice: the leaky bucket with which he draws from Seneca and Plutarch, '[C] remplissant et versant sans cesse' (I.26.146), necessarily reshapes them in ways which make them radically different.

I maintain that Seneca and Plutarch are central to Montaigne's project though it should be clear that 'doubtful writing' is at work when he is not using these authors and, indeed, when he is using other authors. This doubtful writing is a constant practice, one which is synonymous with the enterprise of the *Essais* and not one which is found only at certain key points. The roles of Seneca and Plutarch are primarily not concerned with localised uses of particular passages but with the textual, philosophical, and literary frameworks they afford Montaigne's practices of thinking and of writing. This is not to say that he does not write doubtfully with passages or borrowings from these authors (as my numerous examples and close analyses in this thesis have shown) but that this practice is to be found throughout the text, regardless of whether the texts of Seneca and Plutarch are employed or under discussion. We can say, then, that while Montaigne

might practise doubtful writing with the texts of Cicero or Pliny, Caesar or Xenophon, it was not with these other writers but with Seneca and Plutarch that he developed doubtful writing as a practice. It was in working and thinking with these two figures that he created his own 'forme d'écriture douteuse et irresolue'. Put another way, Seneca and Plutarch have an active role in doubtful writing as they assist Montaigne in the construction of this form whereas an author like Caesar, for example, is used in the application of the form.⁵⁴⁶ I contend, then, that Montaigne's doubtful writing is the product of his special engagement with Seneca and Plutarch and that, were it possible to insert another author or pair of authors in their place, the essayist's doubtful writing would be substantively different.

Doubtful writing is not to be equated with Scepticism and nor is it to be considered an off-shoot of Montaigne's Scepticism though his relationships with and understanding of Sceptical ideas and texts certainly play their part. Rather, it is a particular branch of Montaigne's doubtful thought, one which stands alongside his Scepticism, interacting with it and yet not reduced to or co-opted by it. This case has been made throughout the thesis though most explicitly in Chapter One. The *Essais* constitute a form of doubtful thought which is, by its textual nature, doubtful writing and it is in this regard that its distinction from Scepticism can be seen most clearly: where Montaigne presents the Pyrrhonians as unable to speak (II.12.527), unable to put their thoughts into language, doubtful writing is a form of thinking which is done entirely in language. Approaching this central concept of doubt in the *Essais* through the double lens of writing and of Seneca and Plutarch reveals a relationship with uncertainty and irresolution quite different from that which we typically identify when we adopt a framework governed by notions of Scepticism.

⁵⁴⁶ This is not to say that Caesar does not play any number of active roles in Montaigne's thinking and writing but simply that he and his texts are not used in the thinking through and construction of the particular practice of doubtful writing.

The four chapters which make up this study can be seen as answers to four questions: why does Montaigne privilege this particular pair of authors? Where is his place in respect of this relationship and in respect of his book, built entirely of their ‘despouilles’? What form of writing does Montaigne construct as a result of working with these authors? And to what end is it constructed? Answering these questions and, in the process, examining the place and functions of doubtful writing in the *Essais* has revealed significant and previously unrecognised aspects of Montaigne’s textual and philosophical enterprise: I suggest that it goes some way towards reshaping our understanding of two key areas of the *Essais* and, notably, areas which twentieth century approaches dismissed or marginalised. These are issues of authorship and of truth. Critical interest in the status and meaning of ‘truth’ in relation to the *Essais* has, in recent years, been in the ascendant though it would be misleading to suggest that it has become a major strand in Montaigne studies. Pouilloux’s *Une vérité singulière*, published in 2012, sought to combat the view of the essayist ‘dans la retraite au sein des Muses’.⁵⁴⁷ For Pouilloux, Montaigne’s grappling with truth is fully engaged with the violent politics of the late sixteenth century: ‘Dès l’instant où l’on croit savoir, où l’on s’imagine détenir la “vérité”, il y a risque d’intolérance, de tyrannie, d’oppression.’⁵⁴⁸ In addition to Pouilloux’s study, there are the numerous analyses, examined in Chapter Four, which approach Montaigne through the lens of *parrhesia* and, most recently, Olivier Guerrier’s book-length study on the relationship between chance and truth.⁵⁴⁹

My own approach emphasises the paradoxical nature of Montaigne’s truth – by which I mean both its employment of paradoxes and the ways in which it departs, often shockingly so, from conventional understandings of truth as constant, singular, unchanging – all while insisting that this is, and is for Montaigne, real truthfulness. A

⁵⁴⁷ *Une vérité singulière*. p. 9.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁵⁴⁹ *Rencontre et reconnaissance: les Essais ou le jeu du hasard et de la vérité* (Paris: Garnier, 2016).

contrast can be drawn with Pyrrhonism: for these Sceptics, discourse serves either as a destructive practice, a '[A] dernier tour d'escrime' (II.12.558) in which there are no winners, or as an endless quest, a perpetual 'zététique' where the end is forever out of reach.⁵⁵⁰ For the Pyrrhonians, the objective was 'ataraxia', an ethical goal, not a discursive one. In his *Essais*, Montaigne restores a positivity to discursive and linguistic activities: his writing has a positive objective and it is one of being truthful.

Building on the work that has been done with regard to *parrhesia*, Chapter Four revealed a different side of Montaigne's truth-telling: one concerned not with speaking truthfully to others but concerned with speaking truthfully of and for oneself. I have, moreover, shown how truth-telling and doubtfulness are seen to co-exist in the essayist's 'discours': Montaigne, uncertain and doubtful even about the subject he is describing (himself and, more importantly, his doubtful thought), writes in such a way that he can write truthfully. This is more than asserting that he speaks truthfully in saying that he is uncertain: it is not simply that Montaigne's profession of uncertainty is true. Rather he speaks in such a way as to conduct and make apparent his uncertain and doubtful thought. He is uncertain of the movements and patterns of his uncertain thought and yet he has found an approach to writing which allows him to make this thought legible, to put it on the page, and – consequently – to write truthfully. In recognising the coincidence of thinking and writing, we see this previously unidentified aspect of Montaigne's relationship with truthfulness.

This understanding of truth-telling emerged from Montaigne's active and creative reading of Seneca and Plutarch, particularly Seneca's writings on the natural state of personal inconstancy and Plutarch's assessment of the 'vray amy', in opposition to the 'flatteur' as 'simple, uniforme'. His readings cut across the theses and positions of

⁵⁵⁰ On the *Essais*/the 'essai' as 'zététique', see Tournon's *Route par ailleurs*.

these authors: his position is not theirs; it is the product of thinking with – and against – them. The resulting model of truth-telling found in the *Essais* is one where truth is inconstant, paradoxical, multifaceted. It is a model of truth which privileges the speaker rather than the content of that which is spoken, one grounded in the ‘maniere’ rather than the ‘matiere’ of the text. It is, as I concluded in Chapter Four, a form of truth-telling which not only inverts the traditional relationship between self-knowledge and truth-telling but makes it double and paradoxical, placing doubtful writing as both beginning and end, objective and method. In writing doubtfully, Montaigne writes truthfully and it is in writing truthfully that he forges a ‘discours paradoxe’.

This thesis has also worked to reassess our understanding of authorship as it functions in the *Essais*, a concept problematized by twentieth century theory. Without returning to a positivistic understanding of Montaigne as an overseer of his text, directing it to express his authorial intention, Chapter Two proposed that authorship in the *Essais* is found on the page, in the spaces between authors, in the actions of thinking with texts and doing this thinking textually, in writing. It is here that we see the opportunities afforded by cognitive approaches to texts: with the ‘extended mind’ thesis, we can locate ‘authorship’ in the text and on the page but without dismissing the roles of authors. These authors are not absolute sources of meaning but neither are they ‘dead’: we see them instead as thinking agents, engaging with texts and with other authors and, again, this engagement with texts – this cognitive work – is done textually in the writing of the *Essais*. Rather than simply manipulating anterior works as sources of ideas or of quotations and phrases, Montaigne works alongside his fellow authors: he uses them to think and he thinks with them, placing one position – say, from Augustine – alongside another – from Cicero – but without reducing these figures to the roles of

plaintiff and defendant, *pro* and *contra*.⁵⁵¹ He sustains the multiple lines of similarity and difference between these authors and between these authors and himself such that the text and the act of thinking in writing produces a nuanced, collaborative, and unresolved examination of the subject at hand. These cited figures retain something of their independence: they partake in the cognitive work of the *Essais*, allowing Montaigne not simply to think against them or in agreement with them – this is not a dialectic or a dialogue – but to think with them in complex ways where the lines of distinction between ‘Montaigne’ and ‘not-Montaigne’ are unstable and move as we think through the passage from diverse perspectives. It is in this multiple and moving network of authors that Montaigne thinks and it is partly in authoring ‘in-between’, in locating authorship on the page, between these many authorial ‘visages’, that he found a means of writing tentatively and without conclusion or resolution: a way of writing which serves as a tool for doing continuous, open-ended, and doubtful thought.

This thesis argues, then, that Montaigne uses Seneca and Plutarch to create a way of writing that is doubtful and that this doubtful form is a means of writing his ‘double et divers’ thought. In addition to unveiling new approaches to the essayist’s relationship with doubt and to these two key areas of truth and authorship, this study can also be seen as an argument for the importance of doubleness in the *Essais* and in Montaigne’s thinking. The theme of doubles and duality serves as a thread which runs through my analysis and the most obvious is the partnership of Seneca and Plutarch: Montaigne thinks in pairs and this cognitive habit produces a relationship wherein these authors are given meaning and are understood in the context of each other. We saw in Chapter One that, with some rare exceptions, Montaigne’s discussions of and reflections on Seneca and Plutarch as authorial figures rely on this mutual definition of

⁵⁵¹ I have in mind the example from ‘De ne communiquer sa gloire’ studied in detail in Chapter Two.

identity. I have argued that he thinks with Seneca and Plutarch as he works to write his similarly ‘double’ thought, pursuing yet a further double, the harmony or congruence of thinking and writing. We see Montaigne ‘thinking in twos’ at every level: the pairing of Seneca and Plutarch; his ‘double’ thought, capable of seeing things one way and another; the habits of thinking in contradictions;⁵⁵² the practice of writing here and there, across the text, or of overlaying writing from ‘then’ and ‘now’; the ambiguity of ‘mine’ and ‘not-mine’ as Montaigne’s intertexts seem to move along this authorial continuum. Chapter Three in particular stressed the importance of recognising doubleness as a corollary to diversity, showing how Montaigne’s characterisation of his ‘entendement’ as ‘double et divers’ informs his approach to, and conception of, writing. Doubleness pervades his ways of thinking, the methods and techniques he employs in writing, and the resultant text as we, the reader, experience it. The text, along with the thought it performs, is multiple and ‘ambiguous’ but it is also clear and precise: we see these doubles as they are employed to practise an uncertain and moving ‘imagination’ and yet we see the contradictory positions, the paradoxical relationships, with clarity. Montaigne told us that ‘nostre entendement’ is ‘double’ (III.11.1034). He also told us that its ‘aliment’, ‘c’est admiration, chasse, ambiguïté’ (III.13.1068). Echoing Plutarch and his account of Apollo and Apollonian speech, Montaigne drew a link to an equally ‘double’ discourse: a way of speaking ‘doublement, obscurément, obliquement’ (ibid.). Montaigne’s doubtful writing is all of these things: it is double, obscure, and oblique and yet it is, at the same time, a way of writing which clearly and truthfully reveals the doubtful and unresolved patterns of his thought.

⁵⁵² See, for instance, ‘[B] je me contredits bien à l’aventure, mais la vérité, comme disoit Demades, je ne la contredy point’ (III.2.805) or ‘[B] Je m’esgare, mais plustot par licence que par mesgarde’ (III.9.994), both of which have been studied in detail above in Chapters Four and Three respectively.

Doubt in the *Essais* works through these many doubles: epistemological doubles of equivocation and uncertainty, of thinking this and/or that, of seeing one ‘visage’ and another but also the doubles of thinking and writing, of writing and overwriting, of reading and rewriting. This doubleness – Montaigne’s habit of ‘thinking in twos’ – has a natural place in a work of doubt: to be uncertain is to be unable to determine things one way or the other. But it is also to be found in those key phrases in which Montaigne describes not only a way of thinking but also a way of writing, phrases which have served as refrains throughout this analysis: it is with Seneca and Plutarch that Montaigne, ‘niais[ant] et fantastiqu[ant]’ (II.3.350), constructs a way of writing that is ‘douteuse et irresolue’ (II.12.509), a form capable of writing his ‘double et divers’ thought (III.11.1034).

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