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## MONTAIGNE'S LOST YEARS

After Montaigne left the Collège de Guyenne, probably upon completing two post-secondary years as an *artiens* student from 1546 to 1548, he disappeared for a decade from the historical record. No trace would appear again until, as a member of the defunct *Cour des Aides* in Périgueux, he was incorporated into Bordeaux's Parlement in 1557. Nearly ten years remain unaccounted for, despite the fact that they should have proven formative ones for Montaigne as he moved beyond his schooling and began to explore professional life. Where was he? What occupations did he engage in? What did the young Montaigne hope to accomplish, before becoming the author we know today?

The few indications we possess regarding Montaigne at the end of this studies come from ex-libri and notes he made in several books purchased in 1549 through 1553. These purchases were not limited, as one might have expected, to locally-printed quarto school texts or inexpensive octavo volumes. Although still only sixteen, Montaigne splurged on luxury quarto or magnificent folio editions. His reading of Terence at this time shows him carefully noting an impressive list of cross-references references to Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Theocritus, Plautus, Cicero, Tite-Live, Ovid, Aulus-Gellius, Lactantius, Ausonius, Servius Honoratus, Donatus, Cælius Rhodiginus, Linacre, and Budé<sup>1</sup>.

Alain Legros discerns “a passion for study, a methodical approach, a desire to understand and assess everything<sup>2</sup>”. Beyond styling himself as a scholar. Montaigne also picked up a rudimentary but nonetheless respectable knowledge of Greek<sup>3</sup>. These pretensions appear still intact in Montaigne's painstaking notes to his reading of Lucretius fourteen

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1 Alain Legros, *Montaigne manuscrit, Études montaignistes*, 55, Paris, Garnier, 2010, p. 6, 61-6, 77-80, 161-205.

2 *Ibid.*, 138.

3 Alain Legros, “La main grecque de Montaigne», *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance*, 61/2, 1999, p. 461-78

years later, fussily divided into three categories that detail Lucretius's and more technical points of his prosody. Given that the 1563 Lucretius notes pick up where the 1549 *ex-libri* left off, albeit with a greater freedom of judgment, we should neither discount the youthful self-seriousness of Montaigne's signatures as a passing fancy nor attribute the later application in studying *De rerum natura* to a fit of exceptional bookishness. However much he later downplayed it, he seems to have hatched the same ambitions that so many of his peers formulated at the knees of their humanist professors and who dreamed, as apparently Montaigne did at times, of becoming a scholar of renown.

The three vocations with which Montaigne was most reluctant to identify himself, those of "a grammarian or a poet or a jurist", comprised the three pursuits that lay before him upon completion of his studies in Bordeaux<sup>1</sup>. His early book purchases reflected genuine interest in poetry and classical scholarship but, like many of his peers, he eventually pursued legal training of some sort, for the 1560s would find him versed in the practice of drawing up legal opinions, even if he had not earned a legal degree in the meanwhile. Katherine Almquist has reminded that Montaigne could have easily picked up the essentials of law at the elbow of his uncle Raymond de Bussaguet, with whom he very likely travelled to Paris on business for Bordeaux's Parlement<sup>2</sup>.

Were Montaigne to have pursued any formal legal education, it has been supposed that he would have trained in Toulouse<sup>3</sup>. His uncle had studied law there in the 1520s on an extremely tight budget<sup>4</sup>. Thirty years later, a number of family members would have been on hand to

1 "grammarien, poëte, jurisconsulte", *Essais*, III, 2, p. 805c, p. 611. Quotations from Villey-Saulnier, PUF, 1965, in first place; then from the english translation by Donald Frame, Stanford UP, 1958.

2 "Montaigne, écrivain juriste", *Écrivains juristes et juristes écrivains : du Moyen-Âge au siècle des Lumières*, éd. Bruno Méniel, Paris, Classiques Garnier, forthcoming.

3 *Dictionnaire Montaigne* (désormais abrégé en *DM*), éd. Philippe Desan, 2<sup>e</sup> éd., Paris, Champion, 2007, p. 1149, p. 1208; "the good one I heard at Toulouse", "le bon mot que j'apprins à Toulouse", *Essais*, II, 3, p. 357a, p. 257, and other allusions, *Essais*, I, 14, 52; I, 21, 103.

4 Archives de la Haute-Garonne, rég. 4317, fos 60-1, Corraze (1938-40), 195-6, misidentified as Montaigne's father, Roger Trinquet, *La Jeunesse de Montaigne*, Paris, Nizet, 1972, p. 519; *DM*, p. 786. Trinquet's reasons for dismissing Montaigne's study in Toulouse are even less convincing than those for endorsing it, which, though circumstantial, remain of interest, p. 515-18.

host the young Montaigne more comfortably, grandmother Honorette Dupuy, uncles Pierre and Claude de Lopez, Jean de Saint-Pierre and François de Beynaguët, and cousin Jean de Lopez-Villeneuve—now members of the city's ruling elite. Toulouse's law school acted as a feeder for the realm's high administrative posts: Henri de Mesmes, Guy du Faur de Pibrac, Paul de Foix, and many other of the century's highest officers moved from the university's lecture halls to the corridors of the Paris's *Palais Royal*<sup>1</sup>.

Had he arrived early enough in Toulouse, Montaigne might have been drawn into the circle of one such ambitious law student who hailed, like him, from Gascony. Though technically only a year further advanced in his studies than Montaigne, the young Henri de Mesmes had already won celebrity for his oratorical gifts. Like Montaigne, Mesmes had received an exceptional early education; unlike him, he was not shy about putting it on display. Although Mesmes became a friend, professional colleague, and even patron, Montaigne never mentioned his studies in Toulouse. This should not surprise us, for he never mentioned later serving a decade in Bordeaux's Parlement. In fact, he never mentioned anything that associated himself too closely with a career in law. It was no accident that one of the only pieces of evidence that links him to Toulouse, a passing mention of one of Mesmes's associates, Simon Thomas, places him in the company of a doctor rather than a lawyer<sup>2</sup>.

He would praise Thomas, the one person from Toulouse of the 1550s whom he chose to remember in the *Essays*, somewhat roundly and, in the same breath, condescendingly as “a great doctor in his time<sup>3</sup>”. Montaigne would extend the same enthusiasm and slightly uncharitable qualification to his old German preceptor “since died a famous doctor in France”, though Hortansus' practice—if he practiced at all—proved so unremarkable that it has left no trace<sup>4</sup>. The pattern repeated itself in Paris, where Montaigne's closest uncle, Raymond Bussaguët traveled in the spring of 1551 to represent Bordeaux's Parlement before the king. During the forty-day stay in the nation's capital and over subsequent

1 Henri de Mesmes, *Mémoires inédits*, éd. Édouard Frémy, Paris, E. Leroux, 1886, Geneva, Slatkine, 1970, p. 149.

2 Mesmes, *Mémoires*, 1970, p. 141.

3 “grand medecin de son temps”, *Essais*, I, 21, p. 98c, p. 68.

4 “dépuis est mort fameux medecin en France”, *Essais*, I, 26, p. 173a, p. 128; *DM*, p. 949.

visits at his uncle's side, and then at his father's in 1554, Montaigne made time to attend not lectures in law, but those of the Galenist doctor and leading exponent of the Parisian school of anatomy, Jacques Dubois<sup>1</sup>.

Nearly every biography confronts a span of years in which time seems to have swallowed its subject. These are Montaigne's "lost years": no documentary record of any sort remains to corroborate the brief mentions Montaigne makes of his life between leaving the Collège de Guyenne and the time when he began work in Parlement some ten years later—and these mentions are themselves so minor that they would hardly fill a paragraph. One thing seems clear, however: on the path leading to a career as magistrate that his father seems to have chosen for him, something had gone terribly awry.

Montaigne did recall a number of figures in Paris who left an indelible impression: besides Dubois, "excellent doctor from Paris," there was the most accomplished scholar "that has been in a thousand years," Adrien Turnèbe, who lectured at the Collège Royal; the mathematician Pierre de Montdoré, incongruously remembered among the "good craftsmen" of Neo-Latin poetry<sup>2</sup>. The last two names appear alongside those of the other figures for which Montaigne confesses admiration toward the end of "Of presumption," including a list of France's finest neo-Latin poets, "Daurat, Beza, Buchanan, L'Hôpital, Montdoré, Turnebus<sup>3</sup>".

One thing united these men—or, rather, one figure: George Buchanan. Their seemingly random assortment comes into focus around Buchanan, to whom all stood as close friends. When Buchanan returned to France in 1552, somewhat bruised from a brush with the Inquisition in Portugal, his mind must have turned to the family who had graciously hosted him in summers past, and whose three sons he had tutored<sup>4</sup>. He composed

1 *DM*, p. 1208.

2 "Silvius, excellent medecin de Paris", *Essais*, II, 2, p. 342a, p. 246-7; "le plus grand homme qui fut il y a mil' ans", *Essais*, I, 25, p. 139a, p. 102; "bons artisans [...] Mont-doré", *Essais*, II, 17, p. 661a, p. 502.

3 "Aurat, Beze, Buchanan, l'Hospital, Mont-doré, Turnebus", II, 17, p. 661a, p. 502; Léon Dorez, "Pierre de Montdoré, maître de la librairie de Fontainebleau (1552-1567)", *École française de Rome, Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 12, 1892, p. 179-94.

4 Philip Ford, "George Buchanan et Montaigne", *La Familia de Montaigne*, éd. John P. O'Brien et Philippe Desan, *Montaigne Studies*, 13/1-2, 2001, p. 45-63; Michel Simonin, "Montaigne et ses frères : un poème inédit de George Buchanan conservé par Henri de Mesmes", *Sans autre guide : Mélanges de littérature française de la Renaissance offerts à Marcel Tetel*, éd. Philippe Desan et al., Paris, Klincksieck, 1999, p. 97-115; Trinquet, *Jeunesse*, 1972, p. 409-507.

a Latin poem “To Michael, Thomas, and Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne, from Bordeaux” in which he fondly recalled their “home, always so hospitable to my poor talents<sup>1</sup>”. Although he never availed himself of the renewed invitation that such praise seems aimed to elicit, he did secure a similar position in the Brissac household, allowing Montaigne later to insinuate that the example of his own education had served as model for the Marshal’s son, Buchanan having “told me that he was writing on the education of children and that he was taking my education as a model; for he was then in charge of the Count of Brissac who later showed himself so valorous and brave<sup>2</sup>”. Whether or not Buchanan actually showed off his former pupil in Paris, he does seem to have cultivated the family’s continued good will by introducing Montaigne to his circle of friends—the circle of scholars and writers whom Montaigne would later glowingly remember, nearly the *only* figures Montaigne singles out from the century’s bountiful harvest of humanists.

Jean Dorat, Théodore de Bèze, Michel de L’Hospital, Pierre de Montdoré, and Turnèbe all counted among Buchanan’s closest friends in France. Together, they shared dinners and collaborated on projects such as the liminary verse that adorned L’Hospital’s 1558 *Epistola*, the collection of poems dedicated to Marguerite de Savoie that accompanied Buchanan’s 1568 *Franciscanus*, or the poetic celebration of L’Hospital at the height of his influence in 1564<sup>3</sup>. These collections explain the

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- 1 “Semper ut Indoctis domus officiosa camænis”, Bnf ms latin 8141, fol. 59r, Ford, “Georges Buchanan, 2001, p. 53-4, 60-1.
  - 2 “me dit qu’il estoit apres à escrire de l’institution des enfans, et qu’il prenoit l’exemplaire de la mienne : car il avoit lors en charge ce Comte de Brissac que nous avons veu depuis si valeureux et si brave”, *Essais*, I, 26, p. 174a, p. 129.
  - 3 I. D. McFarlane, *Buchanan*, London, Duckworth, 1981, p. 172-3, 297-9, 357; *Ad Margaritam, regis sororem, Michaelis Hospitalii epistola*, Paris, F. Morel, 1558; *Variorum pœmatum silva in Franciscanus et fratres*, Basel, T. Guarinus, 1568; *Diversorum Poëtarum lusus in argenteam, Aristotelis imaginem antiquo numismate expressam, quae eadem videtur effigies esse Michaelis Hospitalis Galliae Cancellarii, cui donata est a Memmio*, BN Lat. 8138, fols. 57v-61v, 8139, fols. 90v-98r; Mesmes, *Mémoires*, 1970, p. 51; Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et l’évolution des ‘Essais’ de Montaigne*, 2 vols., 1908, Paris, Hachette, 1933, t. 1, p. 176-7; Alain Legros, “Apostille aux *Essais sur pontres*”, *BSAM* VIII, 31-2, 2003, p. 39; Loris Petris, *La Plume et la tribune : Michel de l’Hospital et ses discours (1559-1562)*, Geneva, Droz, 2002, p. 5, 489-90, 520, 539, 544; Émile Dupré-Lasale, “Les amis et les protégés de L’Hospital”, *Bulletin du Bibliothécaire et du Bibliophile*, 63, 1896, p. 463-72; Janet G. Espiner-Scott, “Note sur le cercle de Henri de Mesmes et sur son influence”, *Mélanges offerts à M. Abel Lefranc*, Geneva, Droz, 1939, p. 354-61.

presence in Montaigne's list of Montdoré, decidedly minor and long since forgotten. When, on the same page, he picks out Chancellors L'Hospital and Oliver as France's greatest public figures, he seems to rehearse the same judgment made by Mesmes, by then L'Hospital's understudy who inherited stewardship of the circle after Buchanan's definitive departure from France in the early 1560s<sup>1</sup>. Montaigne might even have had in mind Mesmes' ready association of François de Guise and Pierre Strozzi when he proceeds to name them as France's most accomplished military heroes<sup>2</sup>.

Buchanan had begun the practice of lodging at the printer Michel de Vascosan's home in 1544 in order to see through the presses his translation of the *Medea*<sup>3</sup>. Upon Buchanan's return to Paris in the 1550s, Vascosan republished this and two other of the plays that Buchanan had produced for his pupils in Bordeaux and in which Montaigne had taken leading roles<sup>4</sup>. Vascosan proved, in fact, the preferred printer not only of Buchanan but of the entire circle. Nicholas de Grouchy, another former teacher of Montaigne's and friend of Buchanan, published there his influential political study of the ancient Roman *Comices*<sup>5</sup>. Montaigne made a number of his first book purchases from Vascosan, the only French printer he would ever identify by name in the *Essays*: those that survive include a 1543 edition of Caesar's *Commentaries* purchased for nearly 11 with a group of friends on 16 January 1549, both volumes of a 1553 work of modern history by Paolo Giovio, and Turnèbe's 1556 translation, edition, and commentary of Theophrastus' *Book of Odors*, which would inspire, some fifteen years later, one of Montaigne's shorter

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- 1 "Pour gens suffisans, et de vertu non commune, Olivier et l'Hospital, Chanceliers de France", *Essais*, II, 17, p. 661a; cf. "Olivier et luy [L'Hospital] tous deux, les plus capables qu'on aît veu en tel estat", Mesmes, *Mémoires*, 1970, p. 167.
  - 2 "pour le fait de la guerre et suffisance militaire, le Duc de Guyse, qui mourut à Orleans, et le feu Mareschal Strozzi", *Essais*, II, 17, p. 661a; cf. "M' de Guyse, le Mareschal Strozzi", Mesmes, *Mémoires*, 1970, p. 154-5; Jean Balsamo, "'Ma fortune ne m'en a fait voir nul' : Montaigne et les grands hommes de son temps", *Travaux de Littérature*, 18, 2005, p. 139-55.
  - 3 "Acta fuit Burdegalae an. M.D.XLIII", *Euripides. Hecuba, et Iphigenia in Aulide [...]* Erasmo Roterodamo interprete. *Medea, Georgio Buchananano Scoto interprete*, Paris, M. de Vascosan, 1544.
  - 4 *Essais*, I, 26, p. 174a, p. 129; in 1556, Vascosan published his *Alcestis* and, in 1557, a second edition of his *Jephthes*, reissuing the *Medea* in those years as well.
  - 5 *De comitiis romanorum*, 1555; I. D. McFarlane, "George Buchanan and France", *Studies in French Literature Presented to H. W. Lawton*, éd. J. C. Ireson et al., Manchester, Manchester UP, 1968, p. 229; McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 1981, p. 92, 96, 118-19, 168-9, 356-8, 401, 404-5.

essays, "Of smells"<sup>1</sup>. On several other books he purchased, Montaigne signs with a motto ("Mentre si puo") that was also used by the young Vauquelin de la Fresnaye who was studying at this same time with Turnèbe and Muret<sup>2</sup>.

Extraordinarily, despite Montaigne's remarkable Latin, consummate early education, and Buchanan's personal seal of approval that had afforded him an entrée to one of the most prestigious intellectual circles that the century was to witness, Montaigne seems to have left no lasting impression upon the members of Buchanan's circle: none of Buchanan's associates ever mentioned Montaigne in their surviving letters and works. Nor did Montaigne elbow his way into print by composing liminary verse for their works. Now, this was perhaps the easiest time that ever had been, or ever again would be, to become a published writer. All one had to do was to pen verse in praise of an author who could use it as self-promotion to adorn the opening pages of his next book. Montaigne would confess to having tried poetry and found himself indifferent at it; but that certainly did not stop hundreds of others with far fewer credentials and talent.

At precisely the same time as Du Bellay was creating the verse that famously portrayed him discontent and working in Rome for *his* uncle (actually his father's cousin), Montaigne held back, watching, learning, but not participating. He seems to have held a cautiousness toward publication, unusual in his time, and rare among his peers still flushed with enthusiasm for the exponential increase of outlets for writing that printing had afforded. The daring, even exhibitionistic turn that the *Essays* would take twenty years later can make it difficult to imagine a shy Montaigne at any age. But the care with which he shielded his literary debut behind others' works, first the translation of Raymond Sebond, then the edition of La Boétie's writings, would betray this reluctance to expose himself in print. As Gertrude Stein once remarked about the young Hemingway in Paris, he proved interested more than he himself was interesting.

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- 1 *Essais*, III, 13, p. 1081b, p. 828; John Lewis, *Adrien Turnèbe (1512-1565): A Humanist Observed*, Geneva, Droz, 1998, p. 192; Villey notes that Montaigne took little or nothing from Turnèbe's notes, *Sources*, 1933, t. 1, p. 230, but the choice of subject nonetheless echoes this earlier work. There are strong grounds to think he owned Vasconan's 1549 edition of Callimachus' *Hymns*, Legros, "Michaelis Montani annotationes decem", 2000, p. 43.
  - 2 Legros, *Montaigne manuscrit*, 57, 64-6.



A quarter century later, as Montaigne struggled to live up to his new status of knight and distance himself from his earlier bookishness, he recast conversations he had overheard into interviews he had conducted with the aim of testing Turnèbe. Their spirit corresponds to the one in which Montaigne would portray his education as a model fit for a Marshal's son, one capable of inspiring military valor later in life. In a spectacular reversal of roles, he now makes it seem as though he acted as pedagogue for Turnèbe. Although in fact merely a twenty year-old paralegal interning for his family, Montaigne now paints himself quizzing his celebrated professor's aptitude for nobility, "I often knowingly led him toward topics far from what he was used to, and he was so clear sighted, so quick to catch on, that it seemed he had never exercised any other profession than war and affairs of state<sup>1</sup>".

Soft-featured, sweet-tempered, and small in stature, Turnèbe lacked the forceful presence to serve as the group's focal point; rather, friends extolled his exceeding "modesty," which apparently extended to taking refuge in his study on his wedding day<sup>2</sup>. Buchanan would have dominated the circle with his garrulousness and, if his 1579 *De jure regni apud Scotos dialogus* gives any indication, his strong political views. Yet, when it came time for Montaigne to write himself into the golden age of French humanism, Montaigne singled out Turnèbe as someone who "knew more, and knew better what he knew, than anyone else in the century or far beyond<sup>3</sup>". It is easier to lay claim to the heritage of the dead than the living; easier, too, to characterize that heritage as one wished—learning turned toward action, as a resource for the exercise of prowess and, thus, a fitting accessory to the portrait of the noble as a young man that Montaigne undertook in the *Essays's* first phase.

Today, this men are most often cited in footnotes to the rise of the Pléiade poets. It does seem likely that Buchanan, and through him, Marc-Antoine de Muret, another of Montaigne's former teachers, led their protégé to an early appreciation of Pléiade poetry. Muret published

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1 "Je l'ay souvent à mon esciant jetté en propos eslongnez de son usage; il y voyoit si cler, d'une apprehension si prompte, d'un jugement si sain, qu'il sembloit qu'il n'eut jamais faict autre mestier que la guerre et affaires d'Etat", *Essais*, I, 25, p. 139a.

2 Lewis, *Adrien Turnèbe*, 1998, p. 17, 23.

3 "sçavoit plus et sçavoit mieux ce qu'il sçavoit, que homme qui fut de son siecle, ny loing au delà", *Essais*, II, 17, 661a.

two works that influenced and promoted the group's poetry in 1553, his *Juvenilia* in January and his *Commentaires* on Ronsard's *Amours* in May. Montaigne would later recite from memory this concerted publicity effort, "As for those writing in French, I think they have raised its poetry to the highest point it will ever reach; and in the respects in which Ronsard and Du Bellay excel, I do not consider them far removed from the perfection of the ancients<sup>1</sup>". Buchanan's circle seems not only to have fixed Montaigne's literary tastes but those of France, and this coupling of the polyphonic Ronsard with the diatonic Du Bellay survives, little altered, to the present.

But the Pléiade have become so ensconced in the literary pantheon that they can too easily seem to dominate the literary and intellectual scene in Paris of the 1550s. One can too quickly overlook a wider range of interests and accomplishments that might have attracted Montaigne more influentially. Insofar as poetry grew out of music, it could be seen to have a numerical or mathematical dimension, related through the music of the spheres to the structure of the cosmos. Typical of this mixture of science and literature were Ronsard's *Hymnes*, Pontus de Tyard's philosophical poems, and, especially, the early scientific poetry of Jacques Peletier, poet and mathematician whom Montaigne would later welcome for an extended stay in his home, and who published his *Œuvres poétiques* through Vascosan in 1547.

The gossamer of neo-Platonic thinking that held such interests together may seem thin in historical hindsight, but the nascent scientific interests it inspired were not. In particular, the notion that one could apply mathematics to natural phenomenon, which neo-Platonism sponsored, stands as one of the signal developments leading to the rise of science in the following century<sup>2</sup>. Vascosan's publishing lists reflected this evolution of interests among Buchanan and his colleagues. In 1550, he printed Juan de Rojas' study of the astrolabe; the following year saw Montdoré's Latin translation of Euclid's *Elements*. Grouchy produced

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- 1 "Quant aux François, je pense qu'ils l'ont monté au plus haut degré ou elle sera jamais; et, aux parties en quoy Ronsard et Du Bellay excellent, je ne les treuve guieres esloingez de la perfection ancienne", *Essais*, II, 17, p. 661a, p. 502; "Since Ronsard and Du Bellay have brought honor to our French poetry [...]", "Depuis que Ronsard et du Bellay ont donné credit à nostre poésie Française [...]", *Essais*, I, 26, p. 171a, p. 126.
  - 2 Ann Blair, "Natural Philosophy and the 'New Science'", *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 3, éd. Glyn Norton, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1999, p. 449-57.

popular editions of Aristotle's *De cælo*, *De generatione et corruptione*, and the *Meteorologica* from 1552 to 1554. Oronce Finé added a *Practical Arithmetic* in 1555. the following year witnessed the most ambitious scientific list yet; in addition to the release of Turnèbe's *Theophrastus* and Finé's last work, *On Mathematical Matters*, Vascosan published Turnèbe's copious annotations to Pliny's preface to the *Natural History*, a study that had been in the works for at least three years<sup>1</sup>. Vascosan also released Francesco Vicomercati's commentary of Aristotle's *Meteorologica* and Jules-Cesar Scaliger's edition and study of Aristotle's *De plantis*. The year following, Scaliger produced a criticism of Cardano, *Exoterimus de subtilitate*.

The circle eagerly awaited Buchanan's completion of an ambitious scientific poem, the *Sphaera*, that broadly participated in the anti-Copernican polemic of the time<sup>2</sup>. In the same spirit, Finé published his *Sphaera mundi* (reedited in 1554 and 1555) and his *Twelve Houses of the Heavens* in 1553. Henri de Mesmes' cousin and one of the Pléiade's close associates, Jean-Pierre de Mesmes, produced the magnificent vernacular *Institutions astronomiques* in 1557, taking advantage of the opportunity opened by debates against Copernicus—which often, as in this case, barely concealed real admiration for the achievements of *De revolutionibus*<sup>3</sup>. The same occasion had inspired Melanchton's *Initiation to the Elements of Physics* that Montaigne purchased and read most likely during one of his first visits to Paris<sup>4</sup>. The renewed French interest in astronomy would create the conditions that ultimately led Joseph-Juste Scaliger to produce the Gallican masterpiece of textual criticism, his edition of Manilius' *Astronomica* in 1579<sup>5</sup>.

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- 1 *In XXXVI libros Naturalis historiae praefatio*, Paris, M. de Vascosan, 1556, with a privilege dating from 9 February 1553. Vascosan had long been interested in Pliny, printing Francesco Massari's annotations and emendations to the text in 1542, *In nonum Plinii De naturali historia librum castigationes & annotationes*, and an even earlier, more modest edition of the second book of the *Natural History* in 1540.
  - 2 McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 1981, p. 355-78, et du même, "The History of George Buchanan's *Sphaera*", *French Renaissance Studies, 1540-70: Humanism and the Encyclopedia*, éd. Peter Sharratt, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 1976, p. 194-212.
  - 3 Isabelle Pantin, "Jean-Pierre de Mesmes et ses *Institutions astronomiques* (1557)", *Revue de Pau et du Béarn*, 13, 1986, p. 67-82.
  - 4 Alain Legros, "Michaelis Montani annotationes decem : Le *Giraldus* de Montaigne et autres livres annotés de sa main", *Journal de la Renaissance*, 1, 2000, p. 43.
  - 5 Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1983, p. 180-226.

Vascosan also distinguished himself with an impressive medical catalogue that could hardly have failed to attract Montaigne's budding interest in medicine. Vascosan had already printed Jean de Gorris' bi-lingual Greek and Latin edition Hippocrates' *On Generation* and *On the Nature of the Child* in 1545. In addition to Turnèbe's translation of Theophrastus' study of smells, he edited Jean de Lyège's 1555 *On the Harmony of the Human Body*. Meanwhile, Turnèbe published editions of the medical writings of a contemporary of Galen, Aretaeus of Cappadocia, in 1553, and a predecessor, Rufus of Ephesus in 1554. These works bore a shared preoccupation with natural philosophy as it was often pursued at the time, through medical investigation<sup>1</sup>.

Montaigne never shed the habits he acquired over these formative years among Buchanan's circle. When Vascosan died, he continued to purchase books at the shop now run by the son-in-law, Frédéric Morel, son of a printer through whom Turnèbe had published<sup>2</sup>. When it came time to edit posthumously La Boétie's works, Montaigne turned to this same Morel, neighbor of L'Hospital in the rue Pavée<sup>3</sup>. Montaigne dedicated four of La Boétie's works to L'Hospital, Mesmes, and their immediate political allies in advancing the Saint-Germain Peace treaty, Paul de Foix and Louis de Lansac. In drawing the mantle of the ex-Chancellor and his understudy's high credit over his edition of La Boétie, Montaigne was retracing a well-worn social itinerary familiar to Buchanan's old acolytes. Grouchy had leaned heavily on his intimacy with Mesmes, to whom he had dedicated a work in 1565, to justify dedicating a work to L'Hospital in 1567<sup>4</sup>. Turnèbe had also dedicated the first two parts of his philological miscellany, the *Adversaria*, to the pair in 1565, and Denys Lambin two books of his Lucretius to them in 1563<sup>5</sup>.

Nor would it be a surprise that the Lambin edition of the *De rerum natura*, so important for Montaigne's later intellectual development, found

1 Blair, "Natural Philosophy", 1999.

2 In particular, he acquired there Du Bellay's 1565 *Regrets*, Armelle Andrieux, "Compte rendu : Gilbert de Botton et Francis Portiée-Sperry, À la recherche de la 'librairie' de Montaigne", *BSAM* VIII, 31-2, 2003, p. 78.

3 Joseph Dumoulin, *Vie et œuvres de Frédéric Morel, imprimeur à Paris depuis 1557 jusqu'à 1583*, Paris, A. Picard, 1901.

4 See his warm dedication to Mesmes in the *Responsio ad binas Caroli Sigonii*, 1565, followed by a dedication to L'Hospital, *Nicolai Gruchii ad posteriorem Caroli Sigonii*, Paris, J. du Puy, 1567.

5 *Adversaria*, Paris, G. Buon, 1565; *De rerum natura*, Paris, G. Rouille, 1563.

its way so quickly into his hands. Lambin based his 1563 edition on three manuscripts: one consulted in Rome alongside Muret, another in Mesmes's library, and the last thanks to Turnèbe who had showed it to him when the two, along with Mesmes, had taught and studied together at Toulouse<sup>1</sup>. Turnèbe continued to work on the manuscript's textual cruxes in the intervening years, such that Lambin would mention him as co-editor<sup>2</sup>. The Lucretius edition constituted a fitting culmination of the group's various interests in textual criticism, physics, and scientific poetry.

Long after this circle of friends had disbanded and Mesmes had followed his celebrated mentor into disgrace, Montaigne would continue to visit Turnèbe's nephew, who remained one of his closest friends in the capital, Étienne Pasquier<sup>3</sup>. But most importantly, he took away a rather specific lesson from his overheard conversations and vicarious reading, something that hardly predominated among Buchanan's cohort, but would come to figure disproportionately in Montaigne's own thinking. Building upon his study of Aristotle's *Physics* with Grouchy in his second year of Arts school in 1547-8, Montaigne took from the eclectic scientific speculations on parade in Buchanan's circle an appreciation for the natural universe and the challenges it posed to efforts to explain it<sup>4</sup>. The tenor of what might be characterized as a humanistic, broadly "scientific" interest in the functioning of the natural world can be gleaned in Turnèbe's 1552 commentary on Plutarch's *On the Principle of Cold*, dedicated to Pierre de Montdoré<sup>5</sup>. Although Turnèbe, following various Stoics and Aristotelians, took his own stab at a solution to the problem of where heat and cold come from, he insisted that the point was primarily to show the limits to our understanding of even the most basic properties of the universe<sup>6</sup>.

1 Simone Fraisse, *L'Influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Nizet, 1962, p. 54-5; Lewis, *Adrien Turnèbe*, 1998, p. 40; "avons ordinaire avec nous Hadrianus Turnebus, Dionyus Lambinus", Mesmes, *Mémoires*, 1970, p. 139-42.

2 on the second edition's title-page in 1565.

3 Catherine Magnien, "Étienne Pasquier "familier" de Montaigne?", *La Familia de Montaigne*, éd. John P. O'Brien et Philippe Desan, *Montaigne Studies*, 13/1-2, 2001, p. 284-5; Michel Simonin, "Françoise (de La Chassaigne) et (son ?) Michel : du ménage chez Montaigne", *La Poétique des passions à la Renaissance, Mélanges Française Charpentier*, éd. François Lecercle et Simone Perrier, Paris, Champion, 2001, p. 155-70.

4 Trinquet, *Jeunesse*, 1972, p. 465, 480-7, 514-19, et 544-8.

5 *Commentarius de Primo Frigido*, Paris, A. Turnèbe, 1552; Lewis, *Adrien Turnèbe*, 1998, p. 178.

6 McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 1981; Petris, *La Plume et la tribune*, 2002, p. 545.

Although Montaigne advanced a withering appraisal of medicine's prognostic pretensions in "Of the resemblance of children to fathers," he not only regularly engaged with its diagnostic thinking, but he conducted such operations on his own, as witnessed in careful annotations in his travel journal regarding the progress of his kidney disease. Unlike today, Renaissance medicine appeared a career decidedly inferior to one in Law. Beyond marking his freedom from, or even resistance to, the legal vocation his family had charted for him, Montaigne acquired through his informal medical studies a lasting fascination for the human body<sup>1</sup>. Jacques Dubois practiced human dissections in his home (an activity that was, strictly speaking, illegal) and published "commentaries on Anatomy which we have gathered through the observation of many bodies which we have painstakingly dissected in public and in private<sup>2</sup>". These must have made a deep impression on Montaigne, who alludes frequently to dissection, as in the Roman custom of having criminals "cut up alive by the doctors, so that the might see our inner parts in the natural state and thereby establish more certainty in their art<sup>3</sup>". Most famously, he relates his literary project to an anatomy lesson: "I expose myself entire: my portrait is a cadaver on which the veins, the muscles, and the tendons appear at a glance, each part in its place<sup>4</sup>".

The extent of Montaigne's interest in medicine can be gauged from the *Essays*' surprisingly numerous references: there, he alludes knowingly to Jean Fernel as well as to Paracelsus; and he would likely have been familiar with the Bordeaux circles in which moved the scholar-doctors Antoine Valet, Étienne Maniald, and Pierre Pichot<sup>5</sup>.

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- 1 One of his teachers, Guillaume Guérente, moved from grammar to medical studies, Louis Desgraves, *Élie Vinet, humaniste de Bordeaux (1509-1587) : Vie, bibliographie, correspondance, bibliothèque*, Geneva, Droz, 1977, p. 112, note 1.
  - 2 Quoted by Jean Dupêbe, "Sylvius contre Vésale", *Prosateurs latins en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, éd. Stephen Bamforth et al., Paris, CNRS, 1987, p. 600; Jacques Dubois, *Introduction sur l'Anatomique Partie de la Physiologie d'Hippocras et Galien*, Paris, J. Hulpeau, 1555, f<sup>o</sup> 1r<sup>o</sup>.
  - 3 "déchirés tous vifs par les medecins, pour y voir au naturel noz parties intérieures et en establir plus de certitude en leur art", *Essais*, II, 23, p. 684a, p. 518.
  - 4 "Je m'estalle entier : c'est un Skelotos où, d'une veuë, les veines, les muscles, les tendons paroissent, chaque piece en son siege", *Essais*, II, 6, p. 379c, p. 274.
  - 5 *Essais*, III, 13, p. 1087b, p. 833; II, 12, p. 571a, p. 429; II, 37, p. 772a, p. 586, p. 765a, p. 580; Alain Legros, "La vie et l'œuvre d'un médecin contemporain de Montaigne, Pierre Pichot", *Revue française d'histoire du livre*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 92-3, 1996, p. 361-74. On Fernel's Galenism, see Laurence Brockliss and Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1997, p. 129-38.

He appears to have read the works of two Italian scholars of the medical avant-garde, Leonardo Fioravanti and Giovanni Argenterio, mentioned in the *Essays*. The former may well have inspired a number of the dietary observations in “Of experience<sup>1</sup>”. During his later trip to Switzerland and Italy, he would seek out the noted naturalist doctors, Theodor Zwinger, Girolamo Borro, and the Montpellier-trained anatomist, Felix Platter<sup>2</sup>.

Henri Estienne remembered Dubois as “having such a special gift for theoretical medicine that, had he the like in its practice, he would have become known as the second Galen<sup>3</sup>”. The qualification of Dubois deficiency in treating patients would hardly have left Montaigne indifferent, and it was perhaps to him that Montaigne alluded in denouncing those who “know Galen well, but the patient not at all [...] They know the theory of all things; *you* find someone who will put it in practice<sup>4</sup>”. Dubois’s mixed reputation reproduces itself in Montaigne’s own selective engagement with the medical arts, in his preference for its scientific inquiry over its therapeutic pretensions, its empirical emphasis over its bookishness, its descriptive function over its proscriptive practices.

He would thus take to heart Dubois’s admonitions when they ran to emphasizing direct observation, as in anatomy lessons:

I would have you look carefully and recognize by eye when you are attending dissection or when you see anyone else who may be better supplied with instruments than yourself. For my judgment is that is much better that you should learn the manner of cutting by eye and touch than by reading and listening. For reading alone never taught anyone how to sail a ship, to lead

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- 1 *Essais*, II, 37, p. 772a, p. 586, p. 765a, p. 580; Jean Céard, “Contributions italiennes aux mutations de la médecine selon Montaigne”, *Montaigne e L’Italia*, éd. Enea Balmas and Emanuele Kanceff, Geneva, Slatkine, 1991, p. 229-43; Anna Bettoni, “Cibo e rimedio : I meloni di Montaigne”, *Codici del Gusto*, éd. Maria Grazia Profeti, Verona, Francoangeli, 1992, p. 265-74.
  - 2 *Journal de Voyage*, éd. François Rigolot, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1992, p. 15, 192.
  - 3 “ce médecin avoit telles graces spéciales en la théorique, que s’il les eust eues pareilles en la pratique, on le pouvoit appeler un second Galien”, Estienne, *L’Introduction au traité de la conformité des merveilles anciennes avec les modernes, ou, Traité préparatif à l’Apologie pour Hérodote*, Geneva, H. Estienne, 1566, éd. Paul Ristelhuber, *Apologie pour Hérodote*, 2 vols., Paris, I. Liseux, 1879, t. 1, p. 309.
  - 4 “Ils cognoissent bien Galien, mais nullement le malade [...] Ils sçavent la theorique de toutes choses, cherchez qui la mette en pratique”, *Essais*, I, 25, p. 139a, p. 102.

an army, nor to compound a medicine, which is done rather by the use of one's own sight and the training of one's own hands<sup>1</sup>.

On the fruit that such investigations might bear Montaigne remained dubious: "In natural things, the effects only half reflect their causes." Ultimately, for Montaigne, what one learns from experience cannot lead to positive empirical knowledge for "The inference that we try to draw from the resemblance of events is uncertain, because they are always dissimilar<sup>2</sup>".

Once again, the medical influence upon Montaigne's thinking has been underestimated. He owes his critical assessment of empiricism to Galen's *Subfiguratio empirica*, an important, unidentified source for several key passages in the *Essais*<sup>3</sup>. His attendance of Dubois's lectures coincided with the period when Galen's works were replacing Avicenna's *Canon* in the medical curriculum throughout Europe. Galenism offered an attractive middle way between a theory-bound and stiffly institutional Aristotelianism on the one hand, and, on the other, the experimental practice of "low" sciences like alchemy, typically misdirected into qualitative rather than quantitative approaches to nature. For an unbounded and indeterminate field such as all of "nature," indexical methods (measures, coordinates, and statistical analysis) needed to supplant analogical reasoning; but until one enjoyed access to a mathematics of probability, Galenism offered as likely a structure as any within which to attempt to make sense of recurring instances of particular natural phenomena<sup>4</sup>.

An emphasis on circumstantial factors, typical in Montaigne's ethical analyses, "That is why, when we judge a particular action we must consider many circumstances and the whole man who performed it", derives almost entirely from medical practice. The doctor "must know this patient's constitution, his temperament, his humors, his inclinations,

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1 Quoted in *A Biographical History of Medicine*, éd. John H. Talbott, New York, Grune & Stratton, 1970, 49.

2 *Essais*, II.12, p. 531b, p. 396; III.13, p. 1065b, p. 815.

3 *Essais*, III, 12, p. 1037b, p. 793; II, 37, p. 782a, p. 594-5, where an anecdote about a serpent confirms Galen as provenance, *Subfiguratio*, 10.77-8.

4 Ian Maclean, *Logic, Signs, and Nature in the Renaissance: The Case of Learned Medicine*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2002, p. 172-6, 335-7; Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1995; Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study in the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1983.



his actions, his very thoughts and fancies. He must be responsible for the external circumstances, the nature of the place, the condition of the air and weather...<sup>1</sup> In this light, the *Essays* appears a natural history of the human animal, “investigated in particular through *essais*, or *experientia*, of Montaigne’s own particular humanity”; as Pliny said, each man is a good education to himself<sup>2</sup>. Or, as Montaigne put it at “Of Presumption”’s opening, “the study I am making, the subject of which is man<sup>3</sup>”. He presents the *Essays* themselves as a sort of medical journal, “I want to represent the course of my humors”; as Jean Starobinski has shown, empirical medical categories inform the self-diagnosis with which he concludes his work in “Of experience<sup>4</sup>”.

The fussy notes in Latin that Montaigne took in his first books and his assiduous purchases at Vascosan’s confirm that he left the Collège de Guyenne with pronounced scholarly pretensions, of which he would later repent: “In my youth I studied for ostentation; later, a little to gain wisdom; now, for recreation<sup>5</sup>”. One must read his later disdain of erudition against the backdrop of this youthful recondite ambition: “If I had wanted to speak from knowledge, I would have spoken earlier. I would have written at a time nearer to my studies, when I had more wit and memory.<sup>6</sup>” At the end of his work, he delivers a mature appeal

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- 1 “Voilà pourquoy, quand on juge d’une action particuliere, il faut considerer plusieurs circonstances et l’homme tout entiere qui l’a produicte”, *Essais*, II, 11, p. 427a, p. 311; “il faut qu’il connoisse la complexion du malade, sa temperature, ses humeurs, ses inclinations, ses actions, ses pensements mesmes et ses imaginations; il faut qu’il se responde des ciconstances externes, de la nature du lieu, condition de l’air et du temps [...]”, *Essais*, II, 37, p. 773a, p. 586.
  - 2 Warren Boucher (personal communication); “comme dict Pline, chacun est à soy mesmes une très-bonne discipline”, *Essais*, II, 6, p. 377a, p. 272.
  - 3 “en l’estude que je fay, duquel le subject c’est l’homme”, *Essais*, II, 17, p. 634a, p. 481, cf. “I imagine a man looking around at the infinite number of things: plants, animals, metals. I do not know where to have him begin his essay”, “J’imagine l’homme regardant au tour de luy le nombre infiny des choses, plantes, animaux, metaux. Je ne sçay par où luy faire commencer son essay”, *Essais*, II, 37, p. 782a, p. 594.
  - 4 *Essais*, II, 37, p. 768a, p. 574; “The Body’s Moment”, *Montaigne: Essays in Reading*, éd. Gérard Defaux, *Yale French Studies*, 64, 1983, p. 273-305, revised in *Montaigne en mouvement*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982, p. 169-222.
  - 5 “J’estudiay, jeune, pour l’ostentation; depuis, un peu, pour m’assagir; à cette heure, pour m’esbatre”, *Essais*, III, 3, p. 829b, p. 629.
  - 6 “Si j’eusse voulu parler par science, j’eusse parlé plus-tost : j’eusse escript du temps plus voisin de mes estudes, que j’avois d’esprit et de memoire”, *Essais*, III, 12, p. 1056-7b, p. 809.

to experience against over-reliance on books whose provenance proves far from coincidental, “is it not true that we seek rather the honor of quoting than the truth of the statement? As if it were greater to borrow our proofs from the shop of Vascosan or Plantin than from what may be seen in our own village<sup>1</sup>”.

These varied considerations and diverse speculations regarding Montaigne's activities in the 1550s inspire, then, the following hypotheses. He seems have begun his intellectual life with rather garden-variety aspirations of becoming a humanist scholar. But, thanks to the colorful company to whom Buchanan introduced him in Paris, he gravitated toward new thinking in naturalism—pursued, as it often was, from a medical standpoint. This interest in naturalism not only remained vigorous in his fascination with Lucretius' *De rerum natura* but well beyond. I have suggested elsewhere how such interests continued to inform the *Essays* themselves, and I can only briefly summarize these points here<sup>2</sup>.

Loathe to identify himself with any school of thought (he never called himself a skeptic), Montaigne nonetheless did name himself a “naturalist”: “We naturalists judge that the honor of invention is greatly and incomparably preferable to the honor of quotation<sup>3</sup>”. Used in a literary instead of a philosophic context, as well as somewhat off-handedly, the label would nevertheless have sent a specific signal to readers, summed in typical fashion by Louis le Roy, “these things proceed (after the opinion of the *Naturalists*) from the fatal law of the world; and have their natural causes<sup>4</sup>”. Now, the enthusiasms of the amateur Renaissance naturalist often came into play around a *Wunderkammer*, or curiosity cabinet<sup>5</sup>. Although usually not considered in this context, Montaigne's

1 “n'est-ce pas, que nous cherchons plus l'honneur de l'allegation que la verité du discours ? comme si c'estoit plus d'emprunter de la boutique de Vascosan ou de Plantin nos preuves, que de ce qui se voit en nostre village”, *Essais*, III, 13, p. 1081b, p. 828; Legros (2000), p. 37.

2 “The Investigation of Nature”, *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, éd. Ullrich Langer, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2005, p. 163-82.

3 “Nous autres naturalistes estimons qu'il y aie grande et incomparable preference de l'honneur de l'invention à l'honneur de l'allegation”, *Essais*, III, 12, p. 1056c, p. 809.

4 *De la vicissitude ou variete des choses en l'univers*, Paris, P. l'Huillier, 1575, éd. Philippe Desan, Paris, Fayard, 1988, p. 427, trans. Robert Ashley, *Of the Interchangeable Course, or Variety of Things in the Whole World*, London, C. Yetsweirt, 1594, fol. 126'.

5 Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux*, Paris, Gallimard, 1987, translated by Elizabeth Wiles-Portier, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, Cambridge,

tower library seems to have served such a function, housing a sizeable collection of objects, including family relics, historical tokens dating back to the English occupation of Aquitania, and artifacts from the New World<sup>1</sup>. Such *cabinets* extended the collecting and comparative impulses that underpinned humanist editorial enterprises to the great “book” of nature, and it was this extension, so much in evidence in Buchanan’s circle, that seems to have captured the younger Montaigne’s imagination.

Montaigne applied this naturalism not so much to nature as to humans’ nature, not so much to the physical world, then, as to the mental one. Here lies a key to understanding his adaptation of the materialist system laid out in Lucretius, whose appeal lay in the parsimony of its premises: atoms, movement, and a unpredictable swerve in the fall of those atoms<sup>2</sup>. True, Montaigne considers this swerve, or *clinamen*, as “very slight and ridiculous,” preferring to regard it as aesthetic invention “as had at least a pleasant a subtle appearance.” Elsewhere, he reproduces a criticism from Cicero (*De natura deorum*, 2.37) playing on the fact that *elementa* in Latin designates both atoms and the alphabet: “If the atoms have, by chance, formed so many sorts of figures, why have they never happened to meet to make a house, or a shoe? Why do we not believe likewise that an infinite number of Greek letters scattered about the place would be capable of forming the web of the *Iliad*?<sup>3</sup>”

But it seems that Montaigne adopted Epicurean physics only as a hypothetical model (as perhaps it had already functioned for Lucretius). What interested Montaigne in this explanatory scheme was its simplicity and the possibility of investigating humans with as few presuppositions as possible concerning a “human nature”—a phrase notably rare in the *Essays* despite hundreds of occurrences of the word “nature” and “natural”. Individuals possessed a “nature” in the sense that everyone exhibited a temperament, but Montaigne avoided implying a fixed definition of

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Polity, 1990, p. 45-9.

1 II, 18, p. 664c, p. 503; II, 12, p. 579a, p. 436; I, 31, p. 208a, p. 154.

2 Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 1966, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1973, trans. Robert M. Wallace, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1983, p. 170; on the swerve as a mathematical definition of the *minimum*, and Lucretian atomism as a sort of differential calculus, see Michel Serres, *La Naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce : fleuves et turbulences*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1977.

3 *Essais*, II, 12, p. 511, p. 379; Screech, [120] 259; II, 12, p. 544-5, p. 407.

what makes one human. Among the only times he did raise the problem, he denied that language distinguished humans from beasts since the only universal element of human communication concerned hand gestures, “this one must rather be judged the one proper to [defining characteristic of] human nature.”<sup>1</sup> And the term occurred precisely where Montaigne sought to blur the boundaries between humankind and the animal kingdom, “And there are half-breed and ambiguous forms between human and brutish nature,” or the divine realm, “There are... some midway between divine and human nature, mediators an go-between between us and God<sup>2</sup>”.

Epicurean physics offered Montaigne a model for how one might account meaningfully for the vagaries of behavior without ascribing an a priori character to humans. One traditional attack on Epicurean materialism targeted its inability to account for thought; Montaigne overturns this objection by explaining the operations of thought as a dynamic system operating after the fashion of Epicurean physics. Galen's theory of the humors had already implied a sort of psychological materialism, of course, but within a narrower, more causally deterministic framework aimed at specifying character. Montaigne found a system more congenial to his open-ended investigation of human nature in Epicurean physics.

The kinetic nature of “inclination” illustrated Montaigne's view that the mind was comprised not of states but of *movement*. Although he retained the categories of older faculty-based approaches to psychology, wisdom, for him, little resembled immobility and immutability; hence the premium he placed on traveling in one's education. Insofar as mental activity was identified with “reflexion”—a reflexive turning back on oneself—thinking presupposed a dynamism that recalls Lucretius' vision of the natural world<sup>3</sup>. Opinion becomes but the name that people commonly give to the *clinamen* of the mind, denoting its haphazard swings in predilection. On the subject of historians: “they give themselves the right to judge, and consequently, to slant [*incliner*] history to their fancy; for once judgment leans to one side, one cannot help turning and twisting the narrative to that bias.” Randomness can

1 *Essais*, II, 12, p. 454c, p. 332.

2 *Essais*, II, 12, p. 525b, p. 391; II, 12, p. 534c, p. 399.

3 *Essais*, III, 10, p. 1011b, p. 773.

explain the production of thoughts themselves: “A frivolous cause, you will tell me. What do you mean, a cause? None is needed to agitate our soul: a daydream without body or subject dominates and agitates it”.

In either case, whether in his mundane humanist aspirations, or in his more forward-looking naturalist interests gleaned through Buchanan’s circle, Montaigne seems bent on developing intellectual alternatives to jurisprudence. Montaigne’s later glibness toward learning lies atop very serious scholarly engagement, however much disavowed. Such disavowal has made it easy to overlook the intellectual connections he made during the 1550s and which would continue to underwrite and inform his intellectual trajectory throughout the rest of his life. One can perhaps best measure his debt to the interests entertained by Buchanan’s circle by the silence he so jealously kept regarding these formative years in Paris.

Of all the books Montaigne encountered thanks to Vascosan and Buchanan’s social largesse, the most enduring gift would prove a translation of Plutarch’s *Moralia* by one of Dubois’s friends, Jacques Amyot<sup>2</sup>. Once again, Turnèbe had pioneered the way with a Latin translation and annotation of Plutarch’s extended and difficult *Cessation of Oracles* in 1556, also through Vascosan. But Amyot, who in 1567 would succeed Montdoré as Royal librarian at Fontainebleau, did more than render the ideas of the remaining pieces accessible, he introduced into French the informal prose of Plutarch’s writing. Erasmus had already proven how felicitously Plutarch might provide both the matter and model for informal, conversational prose. Now Amyot furnished Montaigne with easy access to Erasmus’s original inspiration and demonstrated that the style could be applied to the vernacular with happy results. His 1572 translation of the *Moralia*, a miscellany of table-talk and sketches on pedagogical, ethical and religious matters, showed Montaigne the way toward the loose, open-ended essay form he was to inaugurate in French. Five of his essays borrow their title from sister-pieces in Plutarch, nearly a dozen more share a topic, and all draw heavily upon Amyot’s style. From the scholarly milieu

1 *Essais*, II, 10, p. 417a, p. 304; III, 4, p. 839b, p. 637.

2 Beginning with the *Parallel Lives* in 1559; for Dubois and Amyot, see *Prosateurs latins*, éd. Bamforth, 1987, p. 311.

that Montaigne had long admired, had arisen the work that would lead him past scholarship. Unlike many of his former classmates—and many legal professionals across the land—he had learned to read books rather than merely fondle them.

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