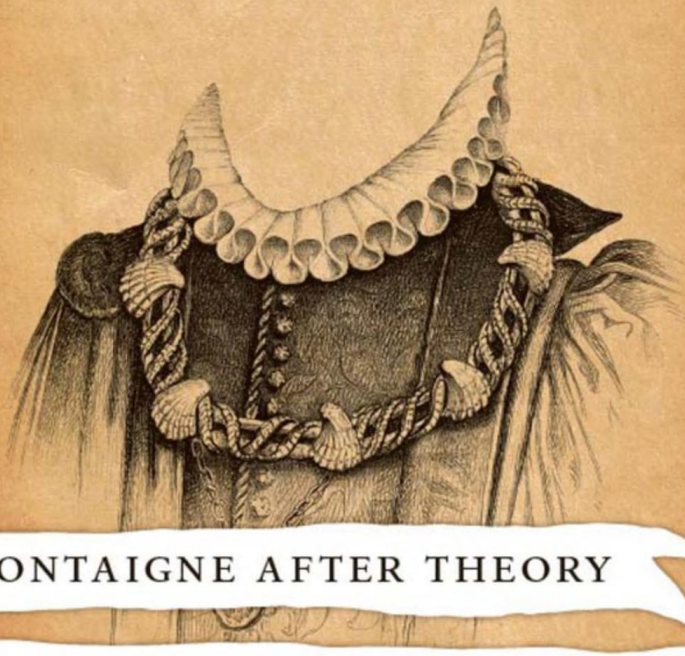

MONTAIGNE AFTER THEORY

THEORY AFTER MONTAIGNE

EDITED BY

Zahi Zalloua

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UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS *Seattle & London*

in association with

WHITMAN COLLEGE *Walla Walla, Washington*

Printed in the United States of America
Design by Thomas Eykemans
13 12 11 10 09 5 4 3 2 1

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS
PO Box 50096, Seattle, WA 98145 USA
www.washington.edu/uwpress

WHITMAN COLLEGE
345 Boyer Avenue, Walla Walla, WA 99362
www.whitman.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Montaigne after theory, theory after Montaigne / edited by Zahi Zalloua.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-295-98890-0 (hardback : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-295-98891-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Montaigne, Michel de, 1533–1592—Criticism and interpretation.
2. Montaigne, Michel de, 1533–1592. Essais. 3. Literature—History and criticism—Theory, etc. I. Zalloua, Zahi Anbra, 1971–
PQ1643.M5664 2009 844′.3—dc22 2008055942

The paper used in this publication is acid-free and 90 percent recycled from at least 50 percent post-consumer waste. It meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984.

Contents

Acknowledgments

MANY PEOPLE MADE this volume possible. I would like to thank in particular the Dean of Faculty's office at Whitman College for its generous financial support for what began as a conference organized by the College in Walla Walla, Washington, on February 23–24, 2007. The College displayed a great deal of faith in this project, and I am deeply grateful. I am especially indebted to the generous spirit of the participants, with the volume being, in no small part, a material manifestation of their intellectual commitment to the future of Montaigne studies. Special thanks go to my students and colleagues who helped make the conference a memorable event. Most of all, I thank Nicole Simek, my fellow theorist, for her tremendous encouragement and help on this project from its incipient phase to its current form.

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Introduction

WHAT IS THEORY?

Zahi Zalloua

AT THE TURN of the twenty-first century, the demise of "theory"—along with the alleged return of/to referentiality, the subject, history, and aesthetics—has become a commonplace in literary studies. But why should the death of theory be a pre-condition for a return to the proper study of literature? Is theory to blame for having interfered in the experience of the literary (or the beautiful)? Whose theory is at issue here? Most important, what is theory?

In ancient philosophy, *theoria* was associated with the abstract and thus distinguished from practice (*praxis*) and practical knowledge (*phronesis*). In Aristotle's thought, for example, theory is synonymous with pure philosophy, the life of contemplation. Practicing *theoria* leads to the highest state of happiness (*eudemonia*), since the philosopher cultivates what is most divine in him: his active intellect (*nous poetikos*). More recently, theory has been variously associated with the Enlightenment project of modernity (the search for autonomy and the cognitive mastery of the world), Marxist philosophy (with its aspirations to be a true science freed from

ideology), as well as poststructuralism (which understood critique as a critique of representation and its relation to the ideological structures of power) and postmodernism (which rejected metanarratives of emancipation, progress, and legitimation). The last two have come to be known more generally as "French" theory.[1]

Talk of theory's end typically relies, for better or worse, on this last understanding of the word, at least in the United States. This "resistance to theory," to borrow Paul de Man's apt formulation, is often couched in pedagogical terms.[2] At best, detractors argue, theory distracts from the study of literature: seduced by the jargon of the day, eager students neglect literature and the experience of the literary, and must be reminded to return to the text. At worst, theory is conceived as antithetical to literature's goals and values, as a coarse system of thought that suffocates "literary imagination" and disregards the readerly cultivation of what Robert Alter has called "a readiness to be surprised."[3] More than just an instrument subject to abuse, theory, in this view, displaces and destroys literature's aesthetic force, even hampering its moral mission. While debates over the function of literary criticism surely date back to the very inception of literature, Frank Kermode detects in today's generation of critics an unprecedented hostility to both the ethical value of criticism (which, in the past, "was extremely important; it could be taught; it was an influence for civilization and even for personal amendment")[4] and the aesthetic value of literature in its own right:

> Under the old dispensation, one might choose between several methodologies which had in common only the assumptions that it was permissible to speak of literary quality and that one could read with a degree of attention that warranted the issuing of judgments, even of declarations, that some works demanded to be read by all who claimed the right to expound and instruct. Under the newer metacritical dispensation, there were now many interesting ways of banning such activities and substituting for them methods of description and analysis which might derive their force from linguistics, politics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, or what were claimed to be brand-new, unillusioned, and exciting ways of writing history.[5]

Others, perhaps less subtle than Kermode and growing more impatient with this "metacritical dispensation" (attributed to the dissemination of French theory), have argued for Theory's impeachment and a return to a traditional discourse more amenable to the evaluation of "literary quality." Such is the call of Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral, the editors of *Theory's*

Empire: An Anthology of Dissent. While purporting to foster "a dialogue about theory,"[6] the volume unfortunately fails as an invitation to dialogue, parading a series of gross caricatures of theory and its defenders. In outlining the goals of their work, Patai and Corral propose three definitions of theory: "'a theory' as one approach among many, 'theory' as a system of concepts employed in the humanities, and Theory as an overarching 'practice' of our time."[7] It is of course the last—Theory in a personified, reified and homogenized form that collapses any qualitative distinctions between its practitioners—that the volume targets.[8] While contending that Theory's prestige is diminishing, as master theorists find themselves at a "dead end," Patai and Corral bemoan Theory's continued currency and tyrannical presence in literature departments, as evidenced by the ever-increasing number of Theory anthologies entering the market. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2001) provides a citation deemed exemplary of Theory's self-promoting claims of indispensability:

> There are very good reasons that . . . contemporary theory now frames the study of literature and culture in academic institutions. Theory raises and answers questions about a broad array of fundamental issues, some old and some new, pertaining to reading and interpretive strategies, literature and culture, tradition and nationalism, genre and gender, meaning and paraphrase, originality and intertextuality, authorial intention and the unconscious, literary education and social hegemony, standard language and heteroglossia, poetics and rhetoric, representation and truth, and so on.[9]

In this age of theoretical doxa, *Theory's Empire* presents itself as an antidote to the contamination of literature by one-sided arguments in favor of Theory; in other words, it is a sign of better things to come in the aftermath of Theory's uncontested reign.

Valentine Cunningham's *Reading after Theory* (2002), a selection of which is anthologized in *Theory's Empire*, emblematizes this joyful celebration of Theory's loss of cultural capital, indicting "Theory" as "the greatest intellectual colonizer of all time."[10] And though Cunningham does not envision a return to interpretive "innocence"—that is, to a mythical "prelapsarian" state of hermeneutical engagement[11]—he manifests, through calls to return to the text itself, a desire to return, as it were, to the traditional business of literary criticism: reading literature on its own terms. By "letting literary texts speak in their own voice,"[12] critics can once again claim the status of faithful (good) reader of literature, thus avoiding the

company of skeptical "theorists" who, we are told, "are, as a class, bad readers."[13]

To consider theory and the literary as necessarily distinct, and opposing, entities—as fundamentally conflicting "voices" competing for the reader's ear—is, however, to ignore or neglect theory's literary roots and literature's theoretical dimensions. Rather than unfruitfully seeing theory and literature as competing for the reader's ears—to whom will he or she listen: the subtle and surprising voice of the literary, or the dogmatic and predictable voice of theory?—we would be better served to scrutinize the depiction of theory as hegemonic and assimilative, as that which suffocates "literary imagination" and neglects the readerly cultivation of, in Robert Alter's words, "a readiness to be surprised." To be sure, some critics—who come to exemplify for theory's detractors how theorists work in general—do interpret literary texts as mere cultural artifacts, by-products of their ideological reality and socioeconomic context. On this model, literature is typically instrumentalized for the purpose of reinforcing already arrived at conclusions. But this view hardly captures the work of all, or even most, theorists in literary studies. J. Hillis Miller and Derek Attridge, two leading poststructuralist critics indebted to Derrida and de Man, make clear that a "readiness to be surprised" and a theoretically informed approach—an approach that takes the production of meaning as a question rather than a given—are by no means mutually exclusive; dialogically related, they constantly reinforce each other. In *Versions of Pygmalion* (2000), Miller underscores literature's own resistance (experienced as unpredictability) to theoretical dogma: "What is unpredictable about a genuine act of reading is to say that reading is always the disconfirmation or modification of presupposed literary theory rather than its confirmation."[14] In *Others* (2001), Miller formulates literature's unpredictability in terms of its irreducibility, arguing that appeals to contextual markers (cultural, historical, or authorial) might elucidate aspects of a literary work but could never exhaust its meaning: "If a given literary work were fully explicable in terms of its context, it would not be worth reading."[15] Likewise, Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (2004) frames the demands of reading in terms of a double bind: "To find oneself reading an inventive work is to find oneself subject to certain obligations—to respect its otherness, to respond to its singularity, to avoid reducing it to the familiar and the utilitarian even while attempting to comprehend by relating it to these."[16] Attridge's notion of the inventive work recalls Barthes's ideal of a writerly text: a literary work

whose goal is "to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of a text."[17] An inventive work clearly shares the writerly text's inexhaustibility, as well as its resistance to the reader's voracious appetite (or "comfortable practice of reading"), in a way that confounds readerly expectations.[18] But an inventive work does not simply privilege hermeneutical agency, which risks glorifying the reader as a producer of meaning. Nor does it indulge the reader's eroticized fantasies.[19] Unlike the writerly text, which pleases the reader by submitting to his or her desires, the inventive work elicits an ethical response. It calls upon the reader not only to produce and delight in potentially endless interpretations of the text, but also to respect its otherness, to sustain its singularity, and to resist the narcissistic assumption that it exists purely for the reader.

In *Practicing New Historicism* (2000), Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher similarly warn against systematizing French theory or deconstruction, comparing such a move to seventeenth-century attempts to rewrite humanist skeptic Michel de Montaigne "in order to make him sound like" an orthodox Thomas Aquinas.[20] What is at stake in both examples—reading theory and reading Montaigne—is the domestication of their "Pyrrhonian energy," the taming and compartmentalization of their skeptical thrust. Since deconstruction is not a philosophy (in the traditional sense of the term) but a perpetual questioning of hidden assumptions, a genealogical investigation of concepts and their function, its systematization and subsequent application to a literary text would be quite dubious. As Nietzsche puts it in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "only that which has no history is definable."[21] It is never the concepts themselves that are deconstructed, but the function that they serve within a given text. Attentiveness to the specificities and complexity of their deployment is what makes any deconstructive reading worthy of its name a close reading.

Montaigne's *Essais* offer fertile insight into the relationship between theory and form, into the "Pyrrhonian energy" that constitutes theory's—and literature's—force. Montaigne's views on Pyrrhonism have of course long provoked debate. As Cunningham reminds us, Montaigne expressed doubts about absolute skepticism, distancing himself from this philosophical current.[22] He quotes Montaigne:

> Pyrrhonist philosophers, I see, cannot express their general concepts in any known kind of speech; they would need a new language: ours is made up of affirmative propositions totally inimical to them—so much so that when they

> say "I doubt," you can jump down their throats and make them admit that they at least know one thing for certain, namely, that they doubt.[23]

On Cunningham's reading, Montaigne's language is the language of affirmative propositions, and is thus fundamentally different from that of the Pyrrhonists. The inference is clear: just as Montaigne recognizes the philosophical futility and self-contradictory character of absolute skepticism, so should today's literary critic recognize and reject these characteristics of Theory.

Cunningham's interpretation is by no means unreasonable; in fact, it relies on a well-established evolutionary reading of Montaigne's *Essais*. Pierre Villey first championed this reading in *Les sources et l'évolution des "Essais" de Montaigne* (1933), arguing that Montaigne's thought evolved through three stages: Stoicism, Skepticism, and Naturalism (Epicureanism). More recently, in his influential study *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy* (1999), David Quint has reiterated Villey's thesis, contending that "Montaigne got over his skeptical phase," that "he had something positive to say and something urgent."[24] Moreover, in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," Montaigne makes explicit his reservations about skepticism, considering its practice as a "dernier tour d'escrime" (558a) ("final fencer's trick" [418]) and intimating that this ancient philosophy must only be employed as a last resort and only by those aware of its devastating potential.

To conclude, however, that Montaigne simply overcame his skepticism (for ethical reasons) and opted for coherence and the language of affirmative propositions (for epistemological reasons) is to assume that skepticism and the essay form are conceptually separable, that the former can be discarded without altering the thrust—or "energy"—of latter. Here skepticism is understood merely in terms of a series of propositions that Montaigne ultimately rejects. Affirming Montaigne's resistance to the authority of any philosophical discourse is easy enough, since, after all, the essayist says as much: "He who follows another follows nothing" (I, 26, 111c).[25] Yet Montaigne incites his reader to consider the question of skepticism differently, not as an adherence to Pyrrhonism, but as a form of thought inseparable from language:

> I can see why the Pyrrhonian philosophers cannot express their general conception in any manner of speaking; for they would need a new language. (II, 12, 392a)[26]

While Pyrrhonist philosophers are unable to formulate their radical doubt, the reader is *obliquely* invited to turn to Montaigne's *Essais*, to his own practice of skepticism, a practice that sustains the open-endedness of the essayistic process and does not transform itself into dogmatism, or "a Pyrrhonism in an affirmative form" (376a).[27] In this light, we might think of the passing reference to this absent "new language" as describing the language of the essay.[28]

Almost four centuries later, Theodor Adorno and Michel Foucault offer complementary accounts of the essay's subversive potential. In "The Essay as Form," Adorno writes: "the essay remains what it always was, the critical force *par excellence*"; it "gently defies the ideals of *clara et distincta perceptio* and of absolute certainty."[29] Foucault, in *The Use of Pleasure*, also recognizes the essay's contestative impulse and its distrust of authoritative discourses. The essay—"the living substance of philosophy"[30]—does not endorse what is already known, but rather desires to know "to what extent it might be possible *to think differently*."[31] Philosophy as essay entails a kind of self-care, "an 'ascesis,' *askēsis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought."[32]

What, then, of *theory as essay*? If theory, with its systematic and totalizing potential, risks containing/explaining Montaigne, theory in its skeptical and essayistic mode serves to attest to and sustain the complexity and multiplicity of Montaigne's *Essais*. Once again, we can take our interpretive cue from Montaigne's own meta-reflections on his self-study. In a passage from the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (II, 12), Montaigne's self-gloss of the possibility of human knowledge, of knowledge about himself, seemingly transmutes into a consideration of his reception:

> *Having found by experience* that where one man had failed, another has succeeded, and that what was unknown to one century the following century has made clear, and that the sciences and arts are not cast in a mold, but are formed and shaped little by little, by repeated handling and polishing, as the bears lick their cubs into shape at leisure, I do not leave off *sounding and testing* what my powers cannot discover; and by handling again and kneading this *new material*, stirring it and heating it, I open up to whoever follows me some facility to enjoy it more at his ease, and make it more supple and manageable for him. (421a, emphasis added)[33]

As the product of "experience" and "essaying," Montaigne's "new material," which reminds us of his address to the reader ("I am the matter

of my book"), will then be passed on to his readers to come: "The second will do as much as the third" (421a).[34] Montaigne's readers, in turn, are invited to practice theory as essay rather than theory as system. Or, to put it differently, Montaigne hopes that his *Essais* will be read as an "inventive work," as a work that will elicit an ethical response from its readers, compelling them not only to respect the alterity of his text, to refuse to arrest its essayistic process by imposing an unequivocal meaning (what would amount to casting his *matiere* in a mold), but also, at the same time, to heed the author's call to be read and understood ("I am hungry to make myself known" [III, 5, 643b]),[35] to recognize his Pygmalion-like project to bring his work or textual body to life.

In a key passage from "Of Cripples" (III, 5), Montaigne ties the effects of self-study to astonishment rather than the expected sense of self-mastery, foregrounding the relation of essayistic writing to hermeneutic unruliness:

> I have seen no more evident monstrosity and miracle in the world than myself. We become habituated to anything strange by use and time; but the more I frequent myself and know myself, the more my deformity astonishes me, and the less I understand myself. (787b)[36]

Theory, with its "Pyrrhonian energy," is perhaps best suited to bearing witness to Montaigne's "semiotic monstrosity" as well as to preserving Montaigne as an object of curiosity that cannot be cognitively mastered, despite our desire to know the author and his work.[37] It is perhaps a philosophical, and institutional, truism that "we become habituated to anything strange by use and time" — *but the more we study Montaigne, the more he appears as other to us!*

To read Montaigne theoretically or essayistically, then, is hardly a belated activity forced on his *Essais*, or one that forbids it to "speak in [its] voice." In this sense, theory is never a mere addition to Montaigne's *Essais*, a supplement to a preexisting, authorized or legitimate reading. If it is to be conceived as a supplement, then it is a "dangerous supplement," a supplement that, in Derrida's words, productively alters its source, revealing that theory was never *after* reading.[38] This brings us, at last, to the title of our volume: *Montaigne after Theory / Theory after Montaigne*. "Montaigne after theory" might be rewritten as "reading Montaigne after the linguistic turn/after poststructuralism/after French theory." This formulation underscores the interpretive shift that took place in literary criticism in the second half of the twentieth century. Moving away from an author-based study, in which Mon-

taigne's text is conceived solely as the expression of the essayist's humanist concerns and beliefs, new readings highlighted the linguistic nature or textuality of Montaigne's identity. Montaigne after such readings was less a ready-made humanist thinker or philosopher in pursuit of truths than a literary writer engaged in a different kind of writing, a writing rhetorically fashioned *through* the essayistic process itself. Reconsidering the traditional importance attributed to Montaigne's biography (which gave primacy to the referential Montaigne, and was consistent with a certain cult of the Author), poststructuralist critics took more seriously the literariness of the *Essais*. Again, this sensibility to, or preoccupation with, form (vs. content), or manner (vs. matter), which highlights the complex rhetorical structures involved in the production of meaning, is not imposed on the text but emanates from Montaigne's own self-reflexive writing:

> (b) We are concerned with the *manner*, not the *matter*, of speaking. . . . (c) And every day I amuse myself reading authors without any *care* for their *learning*, looking for their *style*, not their *subject*. Just as I seek the company of some famous mind, not to have him teach me, but to come to know him. (708, emphasis added)[39]

> Let attention be paid not to the *matter*, but to the *shape* I give it. (II, 10, 296a, emphasis added)[40]

This new approach to Montaigne and the *Essais* was not, however, welcomed by all. Richard Regosin's monograph *The Matter of My Book* (1977), the first sustained deconstructive reading of Montaigne, is now recognized as groundbreaking, but initially provoked an array of responses. While many praised the book for its innovations in Montaigne studies, others criticized it as confused. Dilys Winegrad, for example, observed that Regosin's "emphasis on absence and negativity, even the 'blank page' and the 'flight from pleasure to *ennui*,' inevitably evokes Mallarmé or Baudelaire rather than Montaigne."[41] Regosin's meticulous reading, his attentiveness to the essayist's textual practice, brought to light the extent to which "resistance to theory," in de Manian terms, consists in "a resistance to the rhetorical or tropological dimension of language."[42] Winegrad opposed "separat[ing] the historical from the textual Montaigne,"[43] leveling against the study accusations of anachronism (a common objection among theory's detractors). As François Rigolot points out, however, the charge of anachronism should not give the accuser a false sense of hermeneutic security, since any critic must avoid not only anachronism (the

"aberrant projection of the present onto the past") but also catachronism (the "equally aberrant illusion that one can capture the past without regard for the present that is conditioning that capture").[44]

Montaigne was not unaware of these interpretive problems; he recognized that a text's meaning inevitably exceeds authorial intention and control: "An able reader often discovers in other men's writings perfections beyond those that the author put in or perceived, and lends them richer meanings and aspects" (I, 24, 93a).[45] For Montaigne, anachronism (along with one's awareness of it) was not an obstacle but a condition for creative interpretations, interpretations that would generously add to the semantic richness of the text rather than reifying it as a pure object of analysis devoid of readerly participation.

Montaigne the elusive essayist/able reader might serve as a model for the theorist (theory after/in imitation of Montaigne), since he performs "resistance to theory" in both its negative and positive aspects. On the one hand, as we saw above, attempts to read Montaigne's *Essais* differently, against received knowledge, and against the ideal of commonsensical, unbiased, and jargon-free commentary, are often met with hostility and dismissal.[46] On the other hand, "resistance to theory" also refers to Montaigne's own resistance to the dominance of any interpretive orthodoxy, to theory's domestication and systematization. To put it simply, to resist theory in this sense is to struggle to sustain its essayistic/skeptical force or energy. "Theory after Montaigne" can, then, be understood as any theory's critical self-assessment and recognition of the blind spots and hermeneutic limits that its encounter with the semiotic monstrosity of the *Essais* reveals. In this respect the title *Montaigne after Theory / Theory after Montaigne* affirms both that theory has altered our understanding of Montaigne and his *Essais*, and, conversely, that the essayist and his singular book have effectively challenged the authority of any interpretive doxa.

Most of the essays in this volume are the fruits of a conference organized at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, on February 23–24, 2007. What brought these Renaissance scholars together was not a strict adherence to a theoretical school, but a shared concern for conversing about the ways we engage with Montaigne, a desire to practice *conférence* (Montaigne's celebrated art of discussion), to rethink assumptions and to take this event as an opportunity to listen to other positions.[47] Toward that end, the volume welcomed an interdisciplinary approach to the *Essais*, one that conceives of theory not in its totalizing, fetishized form

(with a capital T) but, in the words of Jean-Michel Rabaté," as "a broad site upon which four main domains enmesh and interact: philosophy, history, sciences like linguistics and psychology, and literature."[48]

The volume opens with George Hoffmann's "From Amateur Gentleman to Gentleman Amateur," a discussion of the essay genre Montaigne's work inaugurated. Tying this genre to the common marketing practice of the "trial run," as well as to Montaigne's attempts to solidify, through his writings, his status as nobleman, Hoffmann resituates biography within—rather than prior to—a theoretical tradition that has rejected the assumptions associated with biography while failing to fully eradicate the biographical's attraction. Pursing the distinction Montaigne sets up between commoner and nobleman, moderns and ancients, and, ultimately, theory and practice, Eric MacPhail's "Theory and Practice in 'Du pedantisme'" examines how Montaigne reconsiders the opposition of theory and practice through his dialogue with ancient philosophy, reconciling the apparently opposed poles of the contemplative life and the active one. Modernism serves as the focal point for John O'Brien's article, "Fashion." Embodying the cultivation of the present, fashion, with its rapidly shifting norms, provides the essayist with a point of entry into a critique of modernist practices and the forms of discourse—the discourse of ethics, right government, and political responsibility—that modernism excludes or suppresses. In "Duty, Conciliation, and Ontology in the *Essais*," Jacob Vance approaches the question of critique, care, and governance in the *Essais* through the concept of duty, an ancient concept whose meaning the essayist borrows and alters in the formation of his humanist care of the self.

Turning more explicitly to the concern for the articulation of the Self shared by Michel Foucault and his Renaissance predecessor, Reinier Leushuis explores the application of Foucauldian interpretive theory to the *Essays* in "Montaigne *Parrhesiastes*: Foucault's Fearless Speech and Truth-telling in the *Essays*." Focusing on the problem of speaking truthfully about sexuality, Leushuis investigates the particular challenges involved in analyzing *parrhesia* in poetic or literary language. Marc Schachter explores similar concerns in "'Qu'est-ce que la critique?': La Boétie, Montaigne, Foucault." Bearing in mind the connection between the care of the self and strategies of resistance highlighted by Foucault, Schachter draws out points of intersection and divergence in Montaigne's and La Boétie's approaches to self-mastery and governance. Rounding out this exploration of the relationship between Foucault and Montaigne is Virginia Krause's "Confes-

sion or *Parrhesia*? Foucault after Montaigne." As her title suggests, Krause considers Foucault as an heir to Montaigne, viewing the essayist not as a "case" or example illustrating Foucault's later theories of the modern subject, but as a predecessor embarked on a similar critical enterprise: the construction of a critical history of confession.

In the following article, "Nasty, Brutish, and Long: The Life of Montaigne's *Essais* in Hobbes's Theory of Contract," David L. Sedley broaches the question of epistemology and experience. Examining first the various concepts of experience in Montaigne's work, and, more precisely, the irony with which Montaigne infuses the term, Sedley next traces the considerable efforts to "undo" this irony that Hobbes expends in his attempts to construct a political "science." Considering further the legacy of "De l'experience," Andrea Frisch's "Cannibalizing Experience in the *Essais*" seeks to rethink common understandings of the Montaignian concept by evaluating the instances in which experience is construed otherwise than the singular, subjective phenomenon it has come to imply in readings that focus exclusively on the final essay in Montaigne's work.

Edith Benkov turns to the topic of gender in "Rereading Montaigne's Memorable Stories: Sexuality and Gender in Vitry-le-François." Focusing on Montaigne's visit to Vitry-le-François and its incorporation into "De l'imagination," Benkov suggests that Montaigne's understanding of the distinction between sex and gender, as well as the instability of these categories, resonates with more recent theories of gender as performance. Todd Reeser's study, "Theorizing Sex and Gender in Montaigne," complements this article by posing the question of how to interpret the "moments of gendered ontology" in the *Essais* that enter into tension with these portrayals of sex and gender as fluid constructs. In "For a Theory of Forms in Montaigne," Philippe Desan further explores the tensions inherent in attempts to "theorize" or systematize the thought of a pre-Cartesian writer whose selected genre, the essay, precludes systematic philosophy. Distinguishing the essayist's attempts to develop a conception of form from Cartesian efforts to elaborate "philosophies of content," Desan suggests that Montaigne's originality lies in this effort to "think form as an organizing model of all knowledge." Next, Tom Conley's "*Fadaises & Dictons*" approaches the question of form from a different angle, examining Montaigne's use of the cliché in order to investigate "how the aesthetics of the *Essais* might bear on a politics of theory."

Finally, Richard Regosin's "'Mettre la theorique avant la practique':

Montaigne and the Practice of Theory" concludes *Montaigne after Theory / Theory after Montaigne* by reopening the questions implicitly structuring its title. Interrogating each of the terms that form the volume's topic, Regosin fittingly ends his inquiry with the question of beginnings, of where to begin reading and how—one of the most important questions Montaigne's complex and multifaceted work raises.

NOTES

1 Jean-François Lyotard, a chief representative of French theory and author of the influential *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), ironically saw himself as a critic of theory, calling for a destruction of theory's totalizing aspirations and epistemological authority: "Theory should become simply a genre among others and be dismissed from its position of mastery or domination which it has occupied at least since Plato. . . . The big issue for us now is to destroy theory" (Jean-François Lyotard, *Rudiments Païens: genre dissertatif* [Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1977], 9–10, 28). On the question of theory's ends, see Thomas Docherty, *After Theory: Postmodernism/Postmarxism* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Colin Davis, *After Poststructuralism: Reading, Stories and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2004); *Life.after.theory*, ed. Michael Payne and John Schad (London: Continuum, 2003); Valentine Cunningham, *Reading after Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); *Theory's Empire: An Anthology of Dissent*, ed. Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

2 See Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

3 Robert Alter, "The Recovery of Open-Mindedness and the Revival of the Literary Imagination," *Times Literary Supplement* (23 January 1998): 15–16.

4 Frank Kermode, "Literary Criticism: Old and New Styles," *Essays in Criticism* 51, 2 (2001), 191–207.

5 Frank Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.

6 Patai and Corral, *Theory's Empire*, 11.

7 Ibid., "Introduction," 1.

8 But, as Colin Davis observes: "The capitalization of Theory is an enabling gesture which confers false unity and totalizing pretensions on an otherwise bewildering diversity" (*After Poststructuralism*, 164).

9 *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001), 28.

10 Cunningham, *Reading after Theory*, 19.
11 Ibid., 35.
12 Ibid., 86.
13 Ibid., 59.
14 J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 20.
15 J. Hillis Miller, *Others* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 2. In de Manian terms, theory attends precisely to the irreducibility of the literary text, to its context or non-linguistic reality: "Literary theory can be said to come into being when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non-linguistic, that is to say historical and aesthetic, considerations, or to put it somewhat less crudely, when the object of discussion is no longer the meaning or the value but the modalities of production and of reception of meaning and of value prior to their establishment—the implication being that this establishment is problematic enough to require an autonomous discipline of critical investigation to consider its possibility and its status" (de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, 7).
16 Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 130.
17 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4.
18 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: The Noonday Press, 1975), 14.
19 "The text is a fetish object, and this fetish desires me," writes Barthes in a contrary move (*The Pleasure of the Text*, 27).
20 Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 4. For a highly informed discussion of the effects of New Historicism on the field of Renaissance studies, see John O'Brien, "Introduction: The Time of Theory," in *Distant Voices Still Heard: Contemporary Readings of French Renaissance Literature*, ed. John O'Brien and Malcolm Quainton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 1–52, especially 33–38.
21 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), II, 13, 80.
22 Cunningham, *Reading after Theory*, 59.
23 Quoted by Cunningham, page 59, from M. A. Screech's translation of Montaigne's *Essays*.
24 David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy: Ethical and Political Themes in the* Essais (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), xiv.
25 "Qui suit un autre, il ne suit rien" (151). References are from *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: PUF, 1965):

citations are by book, essay, and page. English translations are from *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957). Henceforth all references to this edition will be parenthetically stated in the text. The letters a, b, c, indicate the three major textual strata corresponding to the 1580, 1588, and 1595 editions. References to the book and chapter will be omitted whenever they can be clearly inferred from the context.

26 "Je voy les philosophes Pyrrhoniens qui ne peuvent exprimer leur generale conception en aucune maniere de parler: car il leur faudroit un nouveau langage" (527).

27 "un Pyrrhonisme soubs une forme resolutive" (507).

28 See André Tournon, *"Route par ailleurs": Le "nouveau langage" des Essais* (Paris: Champion, 2006).

29 Theodor Adorno, "The Essay as Form," trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 161.

30 Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 9.

31 Ibid., 9, emphasis added.

32 Ibid, 9.

33 "*Ayant essayé par experience* que ce à quoy l'un s'estoit failly, l'autre y est arrivé, et ce qui estoit incogneu à un siecle, le siecle suyvant l'a esclaircy, et que les sciences et les arts ne se jettent pas en moule, ains se forment et figurent peu à peu en les maniant et pollissant à plusieurs fois, comme les ours façonnent leurs petits en les lechant à loisir: ce que ma force ne peut descouvrir, je ne laisse pas de le *sonder et essayer*; et, en retastant et pétrissant cette *nouvelle matiere*, la remuant et l'eschaufant, j'ouvre à celuy qui me suit quelque facilité pour en jouir plus à son ayse, et le luy rends plus souple et plus maniable" (560, emphasis added).

34 "Je suis moy-mesme la matiere de mon livre" ("Au Lecteur"); "Autant en fera le second au tiers" (561).

35 "Je suis affamé de me faire connoistre" (847).

36 "Je n'ay veu monstre et miracle au monde plus expres que moy-mesme. On s'apprivoise à toute estrangeté par l'usage et le temps; mais plus je me hante et me connois, plus ma difformité m'estonne, moins je m'entens en moy" (1029).

37 In contrast to Montaigne's stress on his perpetual astonishment—which the essayistic process upholds rather than obliterates—Descartes emphasizes the importance of converting objects of wonder into that of knowledge, since failure to do so would result in the pathological state of astonishment: "Astonishment is an excess of wonder which can never be anything but bad" (René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Voss [Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1989], 58).

38 See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 141–64.

39 "(b) Nous sommes sur la *maniere*, non sur la *matiere* du dire. . . . (c) Et tous les jours m'amuse à lire en des autheurs sans *soing* de leur *science*, y cherchant leur *façon*, non leur *subject*. Tout ainsi que je poursuy la communication de quelque esprit fameux, non affin qu'il m'enseigne, mais affin que je le cognoisse" (928, emphasis added).

40 "Qu'on ne s'attende aux *matieres*, mais à la *façon* que j'y donne" (408, emphasis added).

41 Dilys V. Winegrad, Review of Richard L. Regosin's *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne's* Essais *as the Book of the Self, L'Esprit créateur* 20, 1 (1980): 87.

42 De Man, *Resistance to Theory*, 17.

43 Winegrad, Review, 86.

44 François Rigolot, "Interpréter Rabelais aujourd'hui: anachronies et catachronies," *Poétique* 103 (1995): 270.

45 "Un suffisant lecteur descouvre souvant és escrits d'autruy des perfections autres que celles que l'autheur y a mises et apperceuës, et y preste des sens et des visages plus riches" (127). Montaigne, as an "able reader" of Titus Livy, writes: "I have read in Livy a hundred things that another man has not read in him. Plutarch has read in him a hundred besides the ones I could read, and perhaps besides what the author had put in" (I, 26, 115c) ("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'autheur y avoit mis" [156]).

46 As Patrick ffrench points out, "'Common sense' in effect masks under the suggestion of a shared agreement the reification of meanings as historically frozen entities" ("The Fetishization of 'Theory' and the Prefixes 'Post' and 'After,' *Paragraph* 29, 3 [2006]: 110).

47 The volume hopes to help break through some of the stalemates in Montaigne studies described by Gérard Defaux: "If it isn't a dialogue of the deaf—each understands the other perfectly, I believe—it is at the very least a debate in which the same arguments, repeated over and over again, have absolutely no effect. A debate in which each side, convinced it is in the right, hunkers down into its position, and whose principle stake clearly remains the Subject's relation to language, or more precisely the capacity of this language to be *presence*, to elicit and represent being, to express essence and truth" ("Subjectivité, écriture et essai chez Montaigne: L'Exemple 'Des coches' [III, 6]," in *La problématique du sujet chez Montaigne*, ed. Eva Kushner [Paris: Champion, 1995], 121–48. 127).

48 Rabaté, *The Future of Theory*, 17.

1

From Amateur Gentleman to Gentleman Amateur

George Hoffmann

It is easy to enumerate the temptations of the biographical genre; harder to resist its enduring attraction. After theory, but no longer innocent from brushes with it, the biographer today distrusts nearly everything about biography: its pretension to "reveal" the intimate, its tendency to fill in gaps, its claim to speak to character.[1] Yet the narrative pulse beats none the less strongly for such suspicions. Far more fragmentary than Montaigne's *Essays*, a documentary record of dubious authenticity and irresolvable problems—where even the meaning of wills is fiercely contested—reminds one that interpretation always elicits fiction, just as fiction elicits interpretation. Biography after theory? Is there any other kind?

. . .

Élie Vinet shuffled into the seventh decade of his life trailing behind him a tattered gown and a patchwork career. Having begun teaching at the Collège de Guyenne while still a young man, the same year that Montaigne entered the school, he had spent the intervening years editing textbooks

and tending the unruly garden of students' declensions. Conspicuously absent from among the teachers of whom Montaigne later boasted in the *Essays*, Vinet published frequently but without distinction: basic mathematics manuals, pre-Copernican astronomy, editions of shorter Roman histories, and local antiquarian studies. This sort of editorial bottom feeding constituted all that a century of busy humanists had left for those untalented enough to undertake the brilliant revisions of a Turnèbe, an Estienne, or a Scaliger, or those indiligent enough to repackage materials into florilegia, compendia, miscellanies, and other Renaissance precursors to the encyclopedia.[2] The only surviving copy in Bordeaux's library of one of Vinet's school texts bears scribbling between the lines, marginal notes, and the eternal mark of the bored student, doodling. Weary from years of confronting pupils, Vinet had resigned himself: "If a child gets into his head, as often happens, to draw on his page a man, a dog, a horse, a tree, and so forth, one should not punish him, provided he has learned his lesson. Such can prepare him for art class."[3] Still in Bordeaux, still unmarried, he stewarded the Collège through its long decline, holding fast to the old curriculum, lobbying municipal leaders for subsidies, and lending to the ailing institution a rumpled venerability.

In the hands of its greatest practitioners such as Lipsius, antiquarianism could acquire a philosophical temper in how it encouraged one to adopt a distance toward the past and by extension the present; nowhere would this potential realize itself more fully than in Montaigne's reflection on historical instability in "Of coaches," a response to Lipsius's *De amphitheatro* which, itself, had borrowed Vinet's diagram of Bordeaux's amphitheater. But Vinet's own researches and eager inquiries after manuscripts bear the breathless tones of a boy bartering baseball cards. Capable of inspiring younger men to pursue a life of letters, his own achievements remained those of a run-of-the-mill humanist, the tired teacher and middling scholar of whom one so easily loses sight in the shadow cast by more accomplished figures. Lesser talent does not lessen pride, and mediocrity lightens little the sense of one's own importance. Vinet continued to labor away at his manuals even after editors politely began to decline them: he found no one to accept his revisions for a second edition of his Solinus or of his Priscian, nor could he incline any printer to reedit the *Antiquity of Bordeaux*, while Parisian publishers refused to touch his arithmetic handbook, *De Logistica*.[4] So, when printers in other cities began to reject his works, Vinet did what most people would have done: he blamed the publishers.

Although he had barely taken notice of Bordeaux's printers when he had his sights trained on prestigious houses in Paris and Lyon, Vinet now grew intensely preoccupied by the health of local publishing, complaining that "In this city, we have only the means to print pardons and decrees and even then, we do nothing worthwhile."[5] Having schooled the child Montaigne, he would set in motion, unawares, a sequence of events that led his late-blooming pupil to the kind of literary originality that Vinet could barely appreciate, let alone contemplate. Leveraging his vestigial reputation, he set out to convince the municipal officers that a more ambitious publishing infrastructure would afford Bordeaux's pupils a more reliable source of school texts.[6] His argument fell on receptive ears, for the Jesuits were in the process of setting up a rival school; the prospect of municipal education falling back into ecclesiastical hands dismayed even staunchly Catholic Aldermen, whose fathers had fought to establish the principle of lay schooling. In reality, the Jesuit undertaking was struggling with chronic understaffing and equally woeful underfunding, but Vinet managed to stir fears.[7] The municipality donated a building on the busy rue Saint-Jacques and helped raise 400 *livres* to purchase two fully outfitted presses in the summer of 1572.[8] For his part, Vinet proposed as the new shop's printer a former colleague who might be counted on for a more hospitable reception of Vinet's own submissions. Not surprisingly, one of Vinet's antiquarian studies appeared as the press's inaugural title a year later; a dozen more works would follow over the next ten years.

Given that the bulk of proofreading in smaller houses fell upon the master printer, Simon Millanges presented himself as an obvious candidate. Who better than a former teacher to reassure the city fathers that their children would learn from proper textbooks, who better than a grammarian to chart a moderate course through the storm of spelling-reform proposals buffeting the barely born ideal of a national French language, and who better than an accomplished Latinist and Hellenist to bring the right aura of credibility to Vinet's own scholarly editions? City officers named Millanges burgher the following year, exempted him from taxation, and relieved him of night watch and guard duties so that he might pursue "printing books with handsome and proper type."[9] He rewarded the city's businessmen for their support with the handsomely appointed *Privileges of the City's Burghers*, printed in the early summer of 1574 and boasting four sizes of roman and italic fonts.

But if Vinet thought he had found in Millanges an agent whom he could

ply to his wishes, he was mistaken. The change of career uncovered in the thirty-two year-old Limousin grammar teacher a keen sense for business.[10] Behind his commercial success, lies a key to understanding the literary ambitions rapidly spreading among Montaigne's peers. The publishing business, as Millanges sized up so astutely in the 1570s, presented an interlocking set of constraints and opportunities. He did devote himself, of course, to the school texts and manuals promised to the Aldermen, introducing a format that Thomas Brumen had successfully pioneered in Paris, oversized quartos with double-spacing and interfoliated blank leaves to provide students ample space for notes and interlinear translation exercises.[11] Rare surviving copies, mutilated by successive use and rendered nearly illegible by a series of different hands, suggest that they were passed down from one class to the next until virtually in tatters. Millanges could hardly have made his fortune simply through selling these slender volumes to proverbially impecunious students.

On 11 July 1576, Millanges became regius printer, thereby acquiring exclusive rights over royal decrees and administrative publications. Finally, missals and catechisms for the city's churches rounded out the bread-and-butter business of his operation. Replacement of these, in order to reflect the Council of Trent's recommendations, would prove a financial boon to printers all across France in the following decades.[12] But, for the moment, Church publications bore the same constraints suffered by all Millanges's official printing, whose sale was limited to a diocese, regional jurisdiction, or municipal district. Moreover, officials fixed a price in advance for such printing and profits could prove modest.[13] Thus, the opportunity to reach beyond the legal perimeter of the local administrative region made broader commercial work a more attractive—if speculative—investment.[14] The price of commercial publications could rise dramatically, as in the case of Laurent Joubert's assessment of folk medical practices, *Popular Errors*, "being in the beginning only ten or twelve *sous*, it has since sold for up to one *écu*, and even for four *francs*, just as in times of famine the price of grain will rise from day to day."[15]

Millanges's scholarly background would have suggested classical authors as the obvious choice for diversifying his catalogue. In fact, a new edition of Ausonius was supposed to have been the crowning achievement of Vinet's career—he had labored away on the notoriously difficult text since the 1540s and had prepared a copy that he sent, in 1567, to the Lyon printer, Antoine Gryphe. Following five years of silence, Vinet begged

Scaliger, his former star pupil, to look into the matter; still with no response from Lyon, Vinet probably approached Millanges with the project within the first months of his shop's opening. Unbeknownst to them, Scaliger and Gryphe published in 1574 the fruits of the copy Vinet had sent to Lyon seven years earlier.[16] Millanges rushed through his presses a partial edition lacking Vinet's commentary the following year, but it was too late to halt the damage. A fresh injection of funds from Bordeaux's Parlement could not alter the fact that by the time they completed the edition in 1580, its market had been compromised; reissues by Millanges in 1589, 1590, 1591, 1596, 1598, and 1604 attest to his protracted difficulty in liquidating the stock of copies.[17] By this point, scholarly publishers everywhere were feeling the pinch, as more and more of their activity came to consist in trading editions amongst themselves to diversify their stock, rather than in actual sales.[18] There were drawbacks, indeed, to indulging the vanity of an aging polymath.

After the Ausonius affair, Millanges never again attempted to publish a scholarly edition of a classical author. Instead, alongside the school manuals and governmental decrees, he launched an original literary publication in his first full year of activity, and thereafter a literary debut every two years.[19] Montaigne's book fit neatly into a cycle whereby Millanges invested capital, accumulated from his limited but steady business of official printing, into new works that, unlike those by classical authors, did not belong to the public domain and over which, consequently, he enjoyed a short-term monopoly.[20] This publishing policy, widely practiced by Parisian *nouveauté* booksellers, found legal consecration in a general privilege that Millanges acquired for "any book that is *nouveau*," thanks to which he printed the *Essays*.[21] As Montaigne himself avowed, against his ordinary distaste for novelty, "if strangeness and novelty, which customarily give value to things, do not save me, I shall never get out of this stupid enterprise with honor" (II, 8, 278a).[22]

De Brach and du Bartas both echoed Millanges's policy, calling their works first attempts, or *coups d'essai*, a familiar expression of ironic modesty; "as children set forth their essays," specified Montaigne, "to be instructed, not to instruct" (I, 56, 234c).[23] However tempting it is to read these as rhetorical gestures, such disclaimers reflected an established practice of floating first works in trial regional publication to sound the market before printing a larger edition. Millanges's partner in the capital, Abel L'Angelier, to whom graduated no less than nine of Millanges's first-time

authors, similarly fostered new works by Parisians.[24] One, also calling his work *The Essays*, promised "If these are well received, such will encourage me to continue and complete them."[25] An observer commented, "He is contemplating pursuing a translation of all of Petrarch, if what he has put forward be well received; thus has he entitled the book with only the term *Essays*" (emphasis here, and following, mine).[26] Another writer, soon to join L'Angelier's stable of top sellers, confirmed the practice: "Seeing how readers did not deem this first *essay* displeasing, I found the courage to risk again a new edition."[27] L'Angelier offered yet another's poems "as a sample and *essay* of the entire work that will soon follow, God willing, and this, in order to learn your kindly opinion of them especially in such a new undertaking."[28] Publications *à l'essai* did not so much constitute a genre as foster a provisional status for their writers; in short, whatever the writer's actual ambitions, he affected to be but a dabbler.[29] Rather than promote the sort of painstaking scholarship that toiled patiently toward the ever-receding horizon of the "definitive" commentary or edition, Millanges came to pursue very nearly the opposite sort of writing: the preliminary work, or experiment, that might stand as the premise of work to come, not as the conclusion to work accomplished.

Montaigne most likely first entertained "Discourses" as a title for his book. Its earliest commentator described it as "containing nothing other than a Discourse of [his] life and actions."[30] His first Italian translator, first Italian imitator, and even Italian owners of individual copies of the French work used *Discorsi*.[31] His closest French counterpart, François de La Noue, entitled his own book of short prose pieces *Political and Military Discourses*. Finally, Montaigne had long intended to place, as the anchor at its center, the work from which he had imitated so many devices, La Boétie's *Discourse on the Will to Serve*. But, seeking to exonerate his friend's inflammatory political treatise from charges of partisanship, Montaigne borrowed Millanges's preferred term for juvenilia in order to emphasize their youthful and speculative nature, "he wrote it by way of *essay* in his early youth" (I, 28, 135a).[32] Within a few years, Montaigne had taken the term as his own—a choice that would forever after assign to occasional prose writing the expectation of prospective open-endedness, the sense that it should trace an itinerary but leave the destination unfixed. As one early reader of the *Essays*—an author of L'Angelier's no less—explained, Montaigne's title meant "to *essay* in order to see if he would succeed in writing, to make a book as do apprentices; they essay at making works. It is a word that sig-

nals the modesty of the author who mocks grand makers of books."[33] One imitator, author of *Essays on the Essays*, explained fifty years later that "he names his book *Essays*, and not Discourses, that is to say, the trial and exhibition of all his thoughts."[34]

Millanges's sponsorship of literary "apprentices" intersected propitiously with Montaigne's own recent social ascension. Inducted in autumn into the militant Order of Saint Michael (the equivalent at the time of the English Order of the Garter), he was precariously poised far above his origins in the bourgeois officer class. Even after the Order's numbers inflated greatly, less than ten percent of old nobles ever received the distinction, and well over half of those ranked as marquis, counts, viscounts, or barons—no other member of Parlement appeared alongside Montaigne on the rolls as a candidate.[35] A measure of his promotion's incongruity can be taken by comparing one of his newly knighted fellows. At the opening of the 1570s, Guy de Lusignan de Saint-Gelais, Lord of Lansac was riding close to the crest of his career. Also a former student of the Collège de Guyenne, where he had boarded in Vinet's apartment, he possessed properties many times the size of Montaigne's lands. At twenty-three he became Bordeaux's mayor, although it took several months worth of pleading and two hundred ecus to entice him actually to enter the city.[36] The position that Montaigne would occupy some fourteen years later as the highest rung on his ladder served, for Lansac, merely as a way-station en route to what he hoped would be a high position at court, something that seemed nearly within grasp when the soon-to-be king Henri named him Chamberlin in 1572.

Upon learning he was to be knighted to the Order of Saint Michael, Lansac commissioned diamond, ruby, and sapphire rings, gold buttons, and crystal-encrusted knife and dagger, all matching an enameled gold chain, from which hung eighteen diamonds and eighteen rubies.[37] Within five years, shifting winds at court would reduce him to pirating merchant vessels off the Atlantic seaboard; when Montaigne, in turn, became mayor of Bordeaux and its port, Lansac would end up causing him considerable headache.[38] Lansac would work intermittently as an agent and informant for the Spanish crown, attempt in vain to entice the king's frustrated younger brother to initiate a naval war against the crown, be expelled from his home region for sedition, escape prison, and try to convince Philip II to place him at the head of an army to invade France, promising to outdo Columbus by winning for Spain a land far richer than the New World—the Spanish court prudently judged the project "more sonorous than solid."[39]

He attempted to have the duke of Épernon assassinated, argued that Henri IV ally himself with the Turks to invade Spain, and pillaged the "little gem" of the Loire valley chateaux, Azay-le-Rideau, in anger at his wife's request for a divorce—hardly unexpected in light of fourteen years of conjugal mishaps followed by sixteen more of frosty separation.[40] After feasting on her stores for nearly four months, Lansac abandoned the depleted castle in the middle of winter. He would end up dying destitute and alone in a Paris hotel in 1622, the sort of pitiless end that meets most large predators. But in 1571 the horizon still gleamed with dreams of grandeur that, however often shattered, he would never manage to relinquish. So, one wonders what he would have thought at finding the name of one of his father's minor clients, a some-time barrister from Bordeaux swimming far downstream of Foix family patronage, now figuring beside his on the rolls for promotion to the Order of Saint Michael.

The high pitch of his indignation still resonated, a half-century later, in the voice of a friend and first cousin with whom he had traveled on a paramilitary mission to relieve the knights in Malta in 1566, a bonsai-sized crusade that had ended up introducing him to piracy, before it degenerated into a gambling vacation. The captain of the Genoese garrison folded his hand once the Frenchmen began betting entire ships.[41] Lansac's later reckless politics and preposterous propositions constituted a natural extension of the stake-all risk taking he learned at these gaming tables. In 1578, he would sell his governorship of Brouage for the sum of 60,000l, equal to Montaigne's net worth, which he was supposed to have gambled away that same evening.[42] His companion on the Maltese escapade, Pierre de Bourdeille, later abbot of Brantôme, had retired his command over two companies of heavy cavalry after a fall from his horse in 1584 paralyzed him from the waist down. The accident probably saved Brantôme from a painful death in the following decade's civil wars, yet he clung stubbornly to military ideals well into his acerbic old age when, as he dedicated his pen to raising gossip to an art form, he singled out Montaigne as example of the declining standards of knighthood: "we have seen councilors leave Parlement, give up the gown and square bonnet, and start dragging around a sword, and immediately festoon themselves with this chain [of the Order of Saint-Michael], without any battlefield experience, as did the Lord Montaigne."[43] Carrying a sword could offend the sensibilities of Montaigne's old colleagues in Parlement as well. They still glowingly remembered Lansac's father, of well-established nobility even if not descended from the

legendary Lusignan line as he liked to claim, for having had the delicacy to take off his sword before entering their chambers.[44]

Now that Montaigne sported a sword of his own, hesitation appeared over how others regarded his promotion. His literary gambit faced a double risk; the book's aristocratic claims might alienate fellow members from the officer class, while its bookishness, however urbane, could draw attention to his professional origins in France's legal subculture. Embracing Millanges's term of "essays" allowed him to emphasize his scholarly informality and dissociate himself from the academic affectations of other titles of the time, such as the pharmaceutical guide, *Enchiridion or Manipulus of Pharmaticians' Miropoles and Tyroncles*.[45]

The family's purchased coat of arms, which he would paint on walls throughout his chateau and in hotels across France, Germany and Italy, featured a lion's paw on a blue ground scattered with gold clover-leaves. The motif reappears slyly at the end of one of his most troubled ruminations on identity, "Of Physiognomy," when he identifies himself as "only a jack of clubs" (III, 12, 814b).[46] The jack, or *écuyer*, represented the lowest chivalric rank — one that his father had held[47] — but an *écuyer de trèfles*, a jack with clover-leaves in the background, served as a wild card in the games of the day, one that could assume the face of any other. It was a card of which Lansac had seen far too little in his long life of failed bets and called bluffs, but which Montaigne would use to play his way into literary history.

Caught between a bankrupt humanism and a feral nobility, Montaigne's ostentatious informality toward Latin culture distanced him from the scholarly pretensions and erudite bias of other highly educated legal professionals. Conversely, his book's claim to enact an art of living, constituted of mental "deeds" rather than mere words, elaborated an ambiguous conception of nobility based neither in ancestry nor in the exercise of violence.[48] One exceptionally fine copy of the 1588 *Essays* preserves a note in early seventeenth-century hand observing that Montaigne used his book to pass as a "sword noble."[49] The ease with which the *Essays* lent itself to such readings appears in how casually Jean de Caumont borrowed its formulations to defend an essential, even visible, difference between old nobles and ambitious commoners.[50] Another reader considered him to have exemplified a "nobility which realizes and fulfills itself in the least of his essays."[51]

Rules for determining rank proved slipperier in Montaigne's age than

they would a century later. Passing as a noble ultimately depended on others' tacit acceptance: "nobility consisted in the recognition of another noble."[52] Montaigne had needed more than merely a new wardrobe and commissioned jewelry to step into his new role of knighted aristocrat. His titles and knighthood figured prominently on the title page of a book in which he nevertheless managed to omit any mention of his decade-long service in Parlement. Instead, he claimed to be descended "of a race famous for *preud'homie*" (II, 11, 311a)[53] a term derived from *preux*, the old chivalric value of prowess, but now indicating the more socially ambiguous value of prudence. Picking up a family register that had fallen into disuse, he paged to the notices of his father's birth and his own and crossed out with a double stroke each time the family patronymic; henceforth he would use the lord's title exclusively.[54] He introduced his father to readers with the somewhat exalted address of "Monseigneur."[55] Elsewhere, he implied his family had been living under the same roof for nearly two centuries, whereas they had owned the chateau for barely more than a hundred years and resided permanently in it for even less (II, 37, 579a/764a).

Once Montaigne won a luxurious quarto re-edition in 1588, he did not abandon the designation of *Essays* in order to fall back on a more familiar term such as *Discourses*. He did, however, mute the aristocratic overtones, "I was born of a family that from way back has flowed along without glamour and without tumult, a family ambitious above all for *preud'homie*": simple reference to his "family" had come to replace the more charged term of "race." Even the implied ancientness of his family became more realistic, "All her gifts [of fortune] that my house enjoys were there more than a hundred years before me" (III, 9, 764b).[56] By then, what some had caricatured as amateurish gentlemanliness had transformed itself into a fully philosophical bearing and, in transforming the term "essay," which had loosely invoked publishing practices into a designation for an entire genre of writing, he passed from amateur gentleman to gentleman amateur.

An unanswerable mystery nonetheless haunts the work: how much did his noble ambitions—however cleverly dissembled and imaginatively displaced—propel his literary accomplishment? Montaigne's use of a learned disdain of learning as a form of distinction explained the attacks by Scaliger, Vinet's pupil and plagiarist, who snidely recalled Montaigne's family background of herring merchants.[57] Scaliger was hardly above passing himself off as an old Italian noble, complacently allowing friends to refer to him as "de Lascalla" after a family fiction created by his father. But it was the

scholar in Scaliger who balked at the kind of self-assertion practiced in the *Essays*, a work that promoted throughout Europe the status of the non-professional man of learning.

More congenial to the modern age than either Vinet's lackluster laboriousness or Lansac's unlucky viciousness, Montaigne's lettered leisure took an early, decisive step toward the aestheticization of aristocracy.[58] The *Essays*' curious mix of offhanded learnedness and intellectual dignity owes much to the instability of Charles IX's court—and the erratic pattern of promotion it encouraged—as well as to the dilettante literary status supported by Millanges's policy of trial publication. The literary auditions sponsored through his presses, coupled with Montaigne's need to defend his recent social elevation, conspired to form a role capable of buttressing noble status, redefined in terms of cultural intervention rather than military prowess.[59] These distinct incentives together created the conditions that gave rise to a position that his work was to make so popular over the next two centuries, that of the "gentleman amateur" of letters.

NOTES

1 Jean Balsamo, "Biographie, philologie, bibliographie: Montaigne à l'essai d'une 'nouvelle histoire' littéraire," in *The New Biographical Criticism*, ed. George Hoffmann (Charlottesville, VA: Rookwood, 2004), 10–29.

2 For French editors, see Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 71–100; Jean Jehasse, *La renaissance de la critique: L'Essor de l'humanisme érudite de 1560–1614* (Saint-Étienne: Université de Saint-Étienne, 1976). For the move toward encyclopaedism, see Ann Blair, "Note Taking as an Art of Transmission," *Critical Inquiry* 31, 1 (2004): 85–107; "Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload, ca. 1550–1700," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, 1 (2003): 11–28; and *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). For the decline in humanist printing, see Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du livre* (Paris: A. Michel, 1958); *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800*, trans. David Gerard, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: N.L.B.; Atlantic Highlands [NJ]: Humanities Press, 1976); and Ian Maclean, "The Market for Scholarly Books and Conceptions of Genre in Northern Europe, 1570–1630," in *Die Renaissance im Blick der Nationen Europas*, ed. Georg Kauffmann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), 17–31.

3 *Eutropii Breviarium* (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1580); "S'il passe par la tête

d'un enfant, comme c'est l'ordinaire, de faire sur son papier un homme, un chien, un cheval, un arbre, etc. il ne faut pas le battre pour cela, pourvu qu'il n'ait pas négligé les préceptes du maitre. Car c'est là une préparation à l'art du dessin," *Schola Aquitanica*, ed. and trans. Louis Massebieau, *Mémoires et documents scolaires* I, 7 (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, Hachette, 1886), 8–9.

4 Louis Desgraves, *Élie Vinet, humaniste de Bordeaux (1509–1587): Vie, bibliographie, correspondance, bibliothèque* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), 20–1; letter to Pierre Daniel, 3 October 1571, Desgraves, *Élie Vinet*, 135.

5 Letter to Pierre Daniel, "Nous n'avons en cette ville moyen d'imprimer autre chose que pardons et edits, encores n'y faisons nous rien qui vaille," Desgraves, *Élie Vinet*, 135, and his *Bibliographie bordelaise: Bibliographie des ouvrages imprimés à Bordeaux au XVI^e siècle et par Simon Millanges (1572–1623)* (Baden-Baden: V. Koerner, 1971), and *Dictionnaire des imprimeurs, libraires et relieurs de Bordeaux et de la Gironde (XV^e–XVIII^e)* (Baden-Baden: V. Koerner, 1995).

6 *Narbonensium votum* (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1572), A2 recto, ed. Louis Desgraves, "'Avant-propos' et autres textes de l'imprimeur Simon Millanges," *Bulletin de la société des bibliophiles de Guyenne* 90 (1969): 165–66.

7 A. Lynn Martin, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva: Droz, 1973) and *The Jesuit Mind: The Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

8 Contract signed 17 June 1572, with Pierre Haultin, a Protestant preparing to move from Lyon to La Rochelle, specifying delivery in August, "deux presses d'imprimerie, garnies de leurs ustensiles," *Archives historiques du département de la Gironde* 25 (1887): 342–43; Louis Desgraves, *L'Imprimerie à La Rochelle: Les Haultin, 1571–1623* (Geneva: Droz, 1960), xvi–xvii.

9 "imprimer livres avec beaux et bons caractères," *Archives historiques du département de la Gironde* 1 (1869): 39–43. Millanges experienced growing pains, of course, complaining sourly that "if anyone should find [this book's illustrations] a bit rough in their cut, let him excuse the engraver who was learning as he did these, here at world's end where skilled labor is lacking," "si quelqu'un trouve [les figures dans ce livre] de taille un peu grossière, qu'il excuse le tailleur, qui a fait son aprentissage en celles-ci, au bout du Monde, où il y a faute de plusieurs bons ouvriers," Élie Vinet, *Arpanterie* (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1577), Z2 recto. The fact remains that Millanges was in effect training the next generation of printers for the entire southwest region of France. See Louis Desgraves, *Etudes sur l'imprimerie dans le Sud-Ouest de la France du XVe au XVIIe siècles* (Amsterdam: Erasmus editions, 1968), 9, and *Les Livres imprimés à Bordeaux au XVIIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1971), 8.

10 Not only did his fledgling venture survive the depredations of France's civil wars and the ensuing economic recession, but he retired an extremely wealthy

man. In fact, his income had grown to surpass the annual 6,000 *livres* that Montaigne could hope to collect from his entire domain, "more than two thousand *écus*," "deux milles escuz de rente" (I.14.63b; 44); Jean-Numa Dast Le Vacher de Boisville, "Simon Millanges, imprimeur à Bordeaux de 1572 à 1623," *Bulletin historique et philologique du comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques* 11 (1896): 803, 805–7, 809–10; George Hoffmann, *Montaigne's Career* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 68–69, 77.

11 The innovation greatly impressed city officers such as Jean de Gaufreteau, "These books contained everything that one read in school classes, in its order, whether it be taken from Cicero, Virgil, rhetoric, or any other author; and when the professors translated either into French or another Latin version, the pupils glossed between the printed lines; in the same manner, the annotations dictated by the professors were copied by the pupils on blank pages that had been inserted for this purpose between the printed ones, whereas before, the pupils had copied their own texts at a great inconvenience," "Ces livres contenoyent tout ce qu'on lisoyt en classes du college, selon leur ordre, soit qu'il fut tiré de Cicéron, de Virgile, de la Rethorique ou de quelque aultre autheur; et lorsque les regents interpretoyent le texte en françois ou en aultre latin, les escoliers gloissoyent dans les lignes imprimées; comme aussi, les annotations que les regents dictoyent estoyent escrites par les escoliers dans les feuillets de papier blanc, qu'on avoit pour cet effect entrelassé parmi les imprimés. Au lieu qu'auparavant, les escoliers escrivoyent leurs textes, ce qui leur estoit une grande peyne," *Chronique bordeloise*, ed. Jules Delpit (Bordeaux: G. Gounouilhou, 1876–8), 1: 209–10; Philippe Renouard, *Imprimeurs et libraires parisiens du XVI^e^ siècle: fascicule Brumen*, ed. Elisabeth Queval and Geneviève Guilleminot (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1984), 34. Compare, for example, Thomas Brumen's of Cicero's *Partitiones* in 1569.

12 Millanges abandoned his "*nouveauté*" strategy in the mid-1580s in order to take advantage of the heavily subsidized printing of post-tridentine liturgy and polemics, a sizeable part of which he seems to have sold through representatives in Spain (Desgraves, *Dictionnaire des imprimeurs*, 205), resembling in this the business strategy of Christopher Plantin in Antwerp.

13 On 18 August 1608, for example, he earned only eight *livres* for 300 copies of an ordinance, Dast Le Vacher de Boisville, "Simon Millanges," 811–12.

14 Millanges regularly distributed books in Toulouse, Rouen, Geneva, and Lyon, and was closely connected to the *nouveauté* shops in Paris's *Palais*. See Michel Simonin, "Le Périgourdin au Palais: Sur le voyage des *Essais* de Bordeaux à Paris," *Le Parcours des* Essais, *Montaigne 1588–1988*, ed. Marcel Tetel and G. Mallary Masters (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1989), 17–30; Dast le Vacher de Boisville, "Simon Millanges," 797–98, 806, 810–11; Desgraves, *Dictionnaire des imprimeurs*, 205.

15 After the 1577 fiscal reform, a franc was valued at one *livre*; "n'estant au commencement qu'à dix ou douze sols, il s'est depuis vendu jusques à un escu, voire à quatre francs: tout ainsi qu'en la cherté le prix de blé se hausse tous les jours," "Epistre apologetique," by the professor of anatomy at Montpelier, Berthemy Cabrol, in Laurent Joubert, *Seconde partie des erreurs populaires* (Paris: L. Breyer, 1580), B4 verso. Similarly, an English account affirms that Edmund Spenser's 1591 *Mother Hubberds Tale* jumped in price from sixpence to a crown, "Where itt was att the first sould for vi d. it is nowe of readie money a Crowne," document quoted by Richard S. Peterson, "Spurting Froth Upon Courtiers: New Light on the Risks Spenser Took in Publishing *Mother Hubberds Tale*," *Times Literary Supplement* (16 May 1997): 14.

16 Roger Green, "Scaliger, Vinet, and the Text of Ausonius," *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Torontonensis*, ed. Alexander Dalzell, Charles Fantazzi and Richard J. Schoeck (Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1991), 357–62; Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*, 128–29; Desgraves, *Élie Vinet*, 17–20.

17 *Archives historiques du département de la Gironde* 59 (1933): 51–52. To obtain the right to use this money for their edition, Vinet and Millanges argued that the edition of Ausonius contributed "à l'ornement et décoration dudict Collège." See Louis Desgraves, "Joseph Scaliger, Élie Vinet et l'édition des Œuvres d'Ausone," *Acta Scaligeriana: Actes du colloque international organisé pour le cinquième centenaire de la naissance de Jules César Scaliger, Agen, 14–16 septembre 1984* (Agen: Société académique d'Agen, 1986), 51–60. Nor was Millanges's plight an isolated incident; Gabriele Faerno and Marc-Antoine Muret both edited Cicero's *Philippics* in 1563, for example (Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*, 92). Rival Parisian editions of Seneca's works led the Parlement on 15 March 1586 to forbid the granting of exclusive rights over authors from antiquity. See Marie-Claude Dock, *Étude sur le droit d'auteur* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1963), 71, 78–79, and Augustin-Charles Renouard, *Traité des droits d'auteurs*, 2 vols. (Paris: J. Renouard, 1838), 1: 112–14.

18 Ian Maclean, "The Market for Scholarly Books" and "L'Économie du livre érudit: le cas Wechel (1572–1627)," *Le livre dans l'Europe de la renaissance*, ed. Pierre Aquilon and Henri-Jean Martin (Paris: Promodis, 1988), 230–39.

19 Du Bartas in 1574, Pierre de Brach in 1576, Gérard-Marie Imbert in 1578, Montaigne in 1580, and Jacques-Auguste de Thou in 1582.

20 This policy of speculating, at regular intervals, on new authors corresponded to a strategy developed by a group of booksellers catering to lawyer and fashionable clients under the arcades linking the Chancellory, courts, and legal offices of the *Palais* at the center of Paris, the densest concentration of book shops in the country. See Michel Simonin, "Peut-on parler de politique éditoriale au XVIe siècle? Le cas de Vincent Sertenas, libraire du Palais," *Le livre*

dans l'Europe de la Renaissance, ed. Pierre Aquilon and Henri-Jean Martin (Paris: Promodis, 1988), 268.

21 "il est permis a S. Millanges Imprimeur ordinaire du Roy d'imprimer tous livres nouveaux" (1580 edition of the *Essais*, ≠4 recto). For descriptions of the *Palais* shops, see Mark Girouard, *Cities and People: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 168–70; Orest A. Ranum, *Paris in the Age of Absolutism* (New York: Wiley, 1968), 12, 146–47; Annie (Parent-)Charon, "Le monde de l'imprimerie humaniste: Paris," *Histoire de l'édition française*, ed. Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin, 3 vols. (Paris: Promodis, 1982), 1: 237–53, and Henri-Jean Martin, "Renouvellements et concurrences," *Histoire de l'édition française*, ed. Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin, 3 vols. (Paris: Promodis, 1982), 1: 388–90.

22 "Si l'estrangeté ne me sauve, et la nouvelleté, qui ont accoustumé de donner pris aux choses, je ne sors jamais à mon honneur de cette sotte entreprise' (385); cf. "I am disgusted by novelty under any guise," "a wretched affectation for strangeness. . . . Provided they can strut gorgeously in their novelty, they care nothing about effectiveness," "je suis desgousté de la nouvelleté, quelque visage qu'elle porte," "une misérable affectation d'estrangeté. . . . Pourveu qu'ils se gorgiasent en la nouvelleté, il ne leur chaut de l'efficace" (I, 23, 86b/119; III, 5, 665b/873–74); see also II, 12, 418–19a/557–58; compare, however, II, 6, 273c/378; III, 6, 692–3b/907–8.

23 Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas, *La muse chretienne* (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1574), ed. Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr., John Coridan Lyons, and Robert White Linker, *The Works of Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas: A Critical Edition*, 3 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 2: 4; 3: 213; Pierre de Brach, *Poemes* (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1576), ã1 verso; André Tournon, "*Ce sont coups d'essai*: l'ironie poétique," *Clément Marot, "L'Adolescence clémentine," Cahiers Textuel* 16 (1997): 117–29; "comme les enfans proposent leurs essais: instruisables, non instruisants" (323).

24 Authors first published by Millanges migrated regularly to L'Angelier; Jean Balsamo and Michel Simonin, *Abel L'Angelier et Françoise de Louvain (1574–1620), Catalogue des ouvrages publiés par Abel L'Angelier (1574–1610) et la Veuve L'Angelier (1610–1620)* (Geneva: Droz, 2002), 57–59, 77. The authors include Joubert (156–57), Du Bartas (170–71), Brach (187–88, 203–4), Foix-Candale (223–24), Montaigne (239–43), De Thou (251–52), Monluc (258–59), Sponde (260–61, 270–71, 277), and Raemond (299–300). Peter Lindenbaum has shown in England how it often proves more productive to think of authors and publishers working in collaboration. See "Authors and Publishers in the Late Seventeenth Century: New Evidence on the Relations," and "Authors and Publishers in the Late Seventeenth Century, II: Brabazon Aylmer and the Mysteries of the Trade," *The Library: The Transactions of the*

Bibliographical Society 17: 3 (1995): 250–69, and new series, 3: 1 (2002): 32–57.

25 "Que s'ils sont bien receuz, cela m'invitera de continuer et parachever," Jérôme d'Avost de Laval, *Essais sur les sonnets du divin Pétrarque* (Paris: A. L'Angelier, 1584); Silvia D'Amico, "Les *Essais* de Jérôme d'Avost," *Les Poètes français de la renaissance et Pétrarque*, ed. Jean Balsamo (Geneva: Droz, 2004), 395–411.

26 "Il se délibère de continuer la traduction de tout le Pétrarque entier, s'il voit que ce qu'il a mis en avant soit bien reçu: aussi n'a-t-il intitulé ce livre que par ce nom d'Essais," François de La Croix du Maine, *Le premier volume de la bibliothèque* (Paris: A. L'Angelier, 1584; Paris: R. de Juvigny, 1772–3), 1: 372–73.

27 "Voyant que ce premier essay n'avoit point degousté ceux qui en avoient jugé, le courage m'est creu de hazarder encore cestui-cy," Guillaume Du Vair, *De la saincte Philosophie, traités de piété* (Paris: A. L'Angelier, 1588; Paris: A. L'Angelier, 1606), ed. Bruno Petey-Girard, *Premières Œuvres de piété* (Paris: Champion, 2002), 79.

28 "Pour un eschantillon et essay de l'oeuvre entière, qui suivra bient tost après, Dieu aidant: et ce pour en avoir vostre bon advis là desus, en une chose mesmement nouvelle," Blaise de Vignère, *Psaumes penitentiels de David tornez en prose mesuree* (Paris: A. L'Angelier, 1587), ed. Pascale Blum-Cuny, *Le Psautier de David torné en prose mesuree ou vers libres*, 2 vols. (Paris: Miroir Volant/Champion, 1992, 1996), 2: 323.

29 Michel Simonin, "Poétiques des éditions 'à l'essai' à la Renaissance," *Riflessioni teoriche e trattati di poetica tra Francia et Italia nel Cinquecento* (Fasano: Schena, 1999), 17–33.

30 "Il ne contient autre chose qu'un Discours de ma vie et de mes actions," La Croix du Maine, *Bibliothèque*, 1: 130. Originally meaning "itinerary," the term "discourse" applied broadly to shorter prose writing, often declamatory in style and frequently circumstantial in subject matter.

31 *Discorsi morali, politici et militari*, trans. Giorlamo Naselli (Ferrara: Mammarello & Baldini, 1590), Jean Balsamo, "*Il Turco vincibile*: Un 'corpus' turc à la fin du XVI^{e} siècle, La Noue, Naselli, Soranzo, Esprinchard," *Scrittura dell'impegno dal Rinascimento all'età barocca* (Fasano: Schena, 1997), 205–6; *Dictionnaire Montaigne*, 705–6; Flavio Querenghi, *Discorsi*, published 1643, but circulating in manuscript from 1607; 1602 edition, missing from Richard, A. Sayce and David Maskell, *A Descriptive Bibliography of Montaigne's* Essais, *1580–1700* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1983), with the hand-written title on the spine of "DISCORSI. DI. MICHIEL. DI. MONTAG[NA] IN. LINGUA. FRANCES[E.]," University of Rome "La Sapienza," Biblioteca Alessandrina D.e.47, Warren Boutcher, "Michel de Montaigne e 'Frederic Maria della

Rovere': La chiave nascosta della biblioteca dell'ultimo Duca di Urbino," *I Della Rovere nell'Italia delle Corti*, ed. Bonita Cleri, Sabine Eiche, John E. Law, and Feliciano Paoli, 4 vols. (Urbino: Quattroventi, 2002), 3: 93–114.

32 "Il l'escrivit par maniere d'essay, en sa premiere jeunesse" (183–84). E. V. Telle believes this was the first time Montaigne used "essay" to apply to writing, "À propos du mot 'essai' chez Montaigne," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et de renaissance* 30, 2 (1968): 225.

33 Antoine de Laval, "De ce mot je tire un Argument que Lipsius et ses semblables estrangers qui n'entendent point nostre langue ont mal rendu le tiltre de ce livre Essays par *Gustus* en latin qu'ilz usent pour ce mot de *pregustare* qui est l'essay que faict le gentilhomme devant le Roy cela s'appelle bien Essay. Mais les Essays de ce livre signifient autre chose que gouster. Il a entendu *conatus* comme dit le Poëte [Ovid, *Tristes*, 4.10.26] *quicquid conabam dicere versus erat*, tout ce que j'essayois à dire estoit vers, c'est à dire essayer pour voir s'il auroit reussi à escrire, a faire d'un livre comme font les apprentis, ils s'essayoient à faire ces ouvrages. C'est un mot icy qui marque la modestie de l'Autheur qui se moque des grands faiseurs de livres" (1595 edition, 261 [II.10.407]), Olivier Millet, *La première réception des* Essais *de Montaigne (1580–1640)* (Paris: Champion, 1995), 128–29.

34 Jonathan de Saint-Sernin, "il nomme son livre Essais, et non pas Discours, c'est à dire l'espreuve et la monstre de toutes ses conceptions," *Essais et observations sur les Essais du seigneur de Montaigne* (London: E. Allde, 1626), Millet, *La première réception*, 212.

35 Jean-Marie Constant, "Les barons français pendant les guerres de religion," *Avènement d'Henri IV, quatrième centenaire*, 4 vols. (Pau: Association Henri IV, 1989), 1: 49–62; "Je demandois à la fortune, autant qu'autre chose, l'ordre Sainct Michel, estant jeune" (II, 12, 577b/434); Balsamo, "Un gentilhomme et ses patrons: remarques sur la biographie politique de Montaigne," *Montaigne politique*, ed. Philippe Desan (Paris: Champion, 2006), 229, and *Les Essais*, ed. Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien, and Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 1523–24. Letter of Charles IX, 18 October 1571, received 25 October and acted on 28 October; Roger Trinquet, "Montaigne, Chevalier de l'ordre de Saint-Michel: Octobre 1571," *Bulletin de la société des Amis de Montaigne*, 4th ser., 27 (1971): 7–17; *Le livre de raison de Montaigne*, ed. Jean Marchand (Paris: Arts Graphiques, 1948), 296.

36 Gaufreteau, *Chronique bordeloise*, 1: 143, 149. Montaigne mentions Lansac's mayoralty (III, 10, 1005b/768); letter by Jean Gelida to Vinet, 28 August 1549, Desgraves, *Élie Vinet*, 105–6. His father Louis, a leading political player over the previous several decades, known for his "consummate prudence," and himself knighted since 1559, had facilitated his debut at court at age nineteen, Louis de Lansac, *Correspondance politique de M. Louis de Lansac*

(Louis de Saint-Gelais), 1548–1557, ed. C. Sauzé de Lhoumeau (Poitiers: Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1904); C. Sauzé de Lhoumeau, *Un fils naturel de François Ier, Louis de Saint-Gelais, baron de la Mothe-Saint-Héray*, *Mémoires de la société des antiquaires de l'ouest* 16 (Poitiers: Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1940), 53.

37 BN Ms PO 2751, 38, contract signed 12 October 1571, Nicolas Le Roux, "Guerre civile, entreprises maritimes et identité nobiliaire: Les imaginations de Guy de Lansac (1544–1622)," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 65, 3 (2003): 534; Sauzé de Lhoumeau, *Un fils naturel*, 109.

38 Letter to Matignon, 22 May 1585, ed. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 1392 (Frame, 1086).

39 Le Roux, "Guerre civile," 559.

40 Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III, roi shakespearien* (Paris: Fayard, 1985), 619; L'Estoile mentions seeing one of Lansac's invasion projects, circulated in manuscript, *Journal pour le règne de Henri IV*, ed. Louis-Raymond Lefèvre and André Martin, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1948–60), 2: 330, cited by Simonin, "Poétiques des éditions 'à l'essai,'" 32.

41 Brantôme, *Discours sur les colonels de l'infanterie de France*, ed. Étienne Vaucheret (Paris: Vrin, 1973), 116–18, 169, and *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Ludovic Lalanne, 11 vols (Paris: Société de l'histoire de France, 1864–82), 2: 45–47; Madeleine Lazard, *Pierre de Bourdeille, seigneur de Brantôme* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 97–106; Anne-Marie Cocula, *Brantôme, amour et gloire au temps des Valois* (Paris: A. Michel, 1986), 212–27.

42 Robert R. Harding, *Anatomy of a Power Elite: The Provincial Governors in Early Modern France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 156; Pierre de L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1992–2003), 2: 223.

43 "nous avons veu des conseillers sortir des courtz du parlement, quicter la robbe et le bonnet carré, et se mettre à traisner l'espée, et les charger de ce collier aussy tost, sans autre forme d'avoir faict guerre, comme fit le sieur de Montaigne," (1858–95) 6: 100, (1864–82), 5: 92–93; Donald Frame, *Montaigne, a Biography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), 118 (I have modified Frame's translation); Alphonse Grün, *La Vie publique de Michel Montaigne; étude biographique* (Paris, D'Amyot, 1855), 173.

44 Sauzé de Lhoumeau, *Un fils naturel*, 107; Charles-Bon-François Boscheron des Portes, *Histoire du parlement de Bordeaux depuis sa création jusqu'à sa suppression (1451–1790)*, 2 vols. (Bordeaux: Ch. Lefebvre, 1877), 1: 202.

45 Michel Dusseau, *Enchirid ou Manipul des Miropoles et Tyroncles Pharmacopoles* (Lyon: J. de Tournes, 1561); Telle, "À propos du mot 'essai,'" 228.

46 "A moy, qui ne suis qu'escuyer de trefles" (1063b); *Journal de voyage de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. François Rigolot (Paris: Presses Universitaires de

France, 1992), 12, 47, 274; Jacques de Feytaud, "Valet de trèfle ou l'honneur des armes," *Bulletin de la société des amis de Montaigne* 6, 5–6 (1981): 43–72; 7–8 (1981): 11–21; 9–10 (1982): 7–26.

47 31 August 1568, Bibliothèque municipale de Bordeaux 738, III: 106, Théophile Malvezin, *Michel de Montaigne, son origine, sa famille* (Bordeaux: Ch. Lefebvre, 1875), 259, 297; 12 December 1528, Archives de la Haute-Garonne, Paul Courteault, "La mère de Montaigne," *Revue de Bordeaux* 27, 1 (1934): 5–14; 27, 2 (1934): 49–60, reprinted in *Mélanges de littérature, d'histoire et de philologie offerts à Paul Laumonier*, ed. Jean Cousin and Ernst Hoepffner (Geneva: Droz, 1935; Geneva: Slatkine, 1972), 308.

48 Warren Boutcher, " 'A French Dexteritie, & an Italian Confidence': New Documents on John Florio, Learned Strangers and Protestant Humanist Study of Modern Languages in Renaissance England from *c.*1547 to *c.*1625," *Reformation* 2 (1997): 39–109, and "'Learning Mingled with Nobilitie': Directions for Reading Montaigne's *Essais* in Their Institutional Context," *The Changing Face of Montaigne*, ed. Laura Willett and Keith C. Cameron (Paris: Champion, 2002), 337–62.

49 Jean Balsamo, personal correspondence, October 2005. This is one of three known copies that bear Montaigne's hand-written correction to the date of his book's foreword.

50 For example, "O le vilain vice que mentir: Car c'est donner tesmoignage de mespriser Dieu, et quand et quand de craindre les hommes, et par maniere de dire c'est estre couard à l'endroit des hommes, et brave à l'endroit de Dieu," *De la vertu de noblesse* (Paris: Jean Charron, 1586), B1 verso, cf. "C'est un vilein vice que le mentir, et qu'un ancien peint bien honteusement quand il dict que c'est donner tesmoignage de mespriser Dieu, et quand et quand de craindre les hommes" (II, 18, 666a/505).

51 "vivant aux esprits de la Noblesse, qui s'achève et se parfaict au moindre de ses Essays" Alexandre de Pontaymeri, *Académie ou Institution de la noblesse françoise, ou toutes les vertus requises à un seigneur de marque sont déduites, avec une curieuse recerche des plus belles et riches matières qui se peuvent tirer des sciences divines et humaines* (Paris: J. Métayer, 1595), *Œuvres* (Paris: J. Richer, 1599), 53 verso; Millet, *La première réception*, 136; *Dictionnaire Montaigne*, 715.

52 "la noblesse consistait dans le regard de l'autre noble," Robert Descimon, "Chercher de nouvelles voies pour interpréter les phénomènes nobiliaires dans la France moderne: La noblesse, "essence" ou rapport sociale?" *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 46: 1 (1999): 17–18, and "Élites parisiennes entre XVe et XVIIe siècle," *Bibliothèque de l'École de chartes* 155, 2 (1997): 631; Balsamo, "Un gentilhomme et ses patrons," 223–42, and *Dictionnaire Montaigne*, 716–18.

53 "d'une race fameuse en preud'homie" (427); Ian Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 9, and personal conversation, March 2006.

54 *Le livre de raison*, 231–5, 291; Marchand dated these and a series of other corrections and additions to sometime before his father's death in 1568. However, a loose page of his father's journal discovered in Bordeaux seems to have been abandoned fairly quickly, as Montaigne confessed, "And I think I am a fool to have neglected it" (I, 35, 166c) ("Et me trouve un sot d'y avoir failly" [224c]), suggesting that maintaining family records was far from his mind at that time, "1568. Mémorial des affaires de feu messier Michel de Montaigne, après le décès de Monsieur son père, 225, cotté V," Bibliothèque municipale de Bordeaux, Ms. 738 (III), f. 107; Louis Desgraves, *Inventaire des fonds Montaigne conservés à Bordeaux* (Paris: Champion, 1995), 144. Rather the date falls between the announcement of his knighthood, 28 October 1571 (*Le livre de raison*, 295–97) and before Montaigne's spelling was provisionally influenced by the reformed rules advocated by Jacques Peletier du Mans, who came to Bordeaux in 1572.

55 *Œuvres complètes d'Estienne de La Boétie*, ed. Louis Desgraves, 2 vols. (Bordeaux: William Blake, 1991), 2: 167.

56 "Tout ce qu'il y a de ses dons chez nous, il y est plus de cent ans avant moy" (999). "Je suis nay d'une famille qui a coulé sans esclat et sans tumulte, et de longue memoire particulierement ambitieuse de preud'homie" (III, 10, 1021b/782); Arlette Jouanna, *L'Idee de race en France au XVIe siecle et au debut du XVIIe siecle, 1498–1614*, 2d ed. (Lille: Atelier reproduction des thèses, Université de Lille III / Paris: Champion, 1976; Montpellier: Université Paul Valery, 1981).

57 *Scaligerana secunda* (Cologne: G. Scagen, 1667), 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Cóvens and Mortier, 1740); Roger Trinquet, *La jeunesse de Montaigne: Ses origines familiales, son enfance et ses études* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), 45.

58 Virginia Krause, *Idle Pursuits: Literature and Oisiveté in the French Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003).

59 Jean Balsamo, "La critique des dispositions testamentaires: Un scepticisme peu philosophique," *L'Écriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne: Actes des journées d'études des 15–16 novembre 2001, Centre d'études supérieures de la Renaissance, Tours*, ed. Marie-Luce Demonet and Alain Legros (Geneva: Droz, 2004), 275–87; Warren Boutcher, "Montaigne's Legacy," *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, ed. Ullrich Langer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 27–52, and "'Le moyen de voir ce Senecque escrit à la main': Montaigne's *Journal de Voyage* and the Politics of *Science* and *Faveur* in the Vatican Library," *(Ré)interprétations: Études sur le seizième siècle*, ed. John O'Brien, *Michigan Romance Studies* 15 (1995): 177–214.

2

Theory and Practice in "Du pedantisme"

Eric MacPhail

In the essay "Du pedantisme," Montaigne asks the somewhat disingenuous question of why humanist pedagogues or "pedantes" have such a low reputation, a reputation that he seeks to confirm by every argument and example at his disposal. To disparage the modern pedants, who are incapable of public service, he contrasts them with the ancient philosophers, who were equally gifted at action and contemplation. Humanist education is impractical, he feels, because it does not teach us to appropriate our lessons, only to repeat them. By a series of antitheses, Montaigne seeks to expose the deficiencies of humanist pedagogy: humanists prefer memory to understanding, speech to action, knowledge to sense, and finally, theory to practice: "They know the theory of all things; *you* find someone who will put it in practice" (I, 25, 102).[1] Montaigne's apparent impatience with theory and with theorists masks a complex engagement in the quarrel over theory and practice.

Montaigne may profess a distrust of theory, but his own writing betrays a strange fascination with the notion of *theoria* developed by classical

philosophers.[2] It is in relation to this concept and its various counter-concepts that I want to situate Montaigne's essay "Du pedantisme," in part to see if there is anything in his essay that is *not* theory, or if in fact both terms of the opposition, theory and practice, don't collapse into the same term. To support my argument, I will invoke the ideas of a modern philosopher, Hans Blumenberg, who has written on the origins of theory in *The Laughter of the Thracian Girl*, which, interestingly enough, reviews many of the same anecdotes and doctrines from the classical tradition that reappear in Montaigne's essay on pedants.[3]

I want to start my genealogical reading of Montaigne's essay with the genre of the *protrepticus*, or the exhortation to philosophy, which traditionally exalted *theoria* as the goal or *telos* of human existence. The genre remains somewhat enigmatic, since it is represented primarily by lost works, but we do have several fragments of Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, which are conserved in the *Protrepticus* of the neo-Platonic philosopher Iamblichus.[4] There are also some passages in the dialogues of Plato that have been identified, or which identify themselves as protreptic, including a section of the *Theaetetus*, the same dialogue which forms an obsessive subtext to essay I, 25.[5] The tenth and final book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* fulfills a protreptic function by advocating the *bios theoretikos* or the contemplative life, as the means to achieve perfect happiness. I would also suggest that Seneca conceived of the preface to his *Naturales quaestiones* as a protreptic text, one to which Montaigne reacted quite vividly in the conclusion to the "Apologie de Raymond Sebond." One common motif of these texts is the self-representation of theory as a type of apotheosis. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates insists that the ultimate objective of philosophy is the assimilation to god, *homoiosis theoi* (176B), which the philosopher achieves through the cultivation of justice. Aristotle maintains that the theoretical life makes man like a god and that rather than be content with human knowledge, we should strive to be divine (NE 1177b26–34).[6] Seneca echoes this pretension in the notorious phrase which Montaigne introduces at the end of the "Apologie" as good and useful but absurd: "O what a vile and abject thing is man, he says, if he does not raise himself above humanity" (II, 12, 457).[7] In keeping with the protreptic tradition, Seneca attributes this elevation to theoretical philosophy. His preface concludes with the hortatory claim that to theorize is to rise above mortality: "haec inspicere, haec discere, his incubare nonne transilire est mortalitatem suam et in meliorem transcribi sortem?" (NQ I pref. 17; to contemplate these things, to learn them, to

dwell on them is that not to transcend one's mortality and to be assigned a better fate?). Here we can detect a clear echo of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where "transilire mortalitatem" renders *athanatizein* (1177b33), rather than any Stoic posturing. In relation to these texts, "Du pedantisme" presents itself as an *apotrepticus* or dissuasion from philosophy and from the values of theoretical inquiry and speculation.

At the outset of his essay, which insists at every turn on the antithesis of ancient and modern, Montaigne acknowledges a disconcerting parallel between the sixteenth-century pedant and the ancient philosopher: both are comic roles on the stage. In the very first sentence, the essayist declares: "I was often annoyed in my childhood to see a teacher always the butt in Italian comedies" (97),[8] while on the following page he admits, with some reluctance, "And as for the philosophers, who are remote from all public occupation, they have also in truth sometimes been mocked by the comic license of their times" (98).[9] As Hans Blumenberg reminds us, the archetypal scene of the comedy of theory involves the presocratic philosopher Thales of Miletus, who fell in a well while theorizing, literally while gazing on the heavens. Thales' fall was first recounted in Plato's *Theaetetus* (174A) and is repeated with curious variations in Montaigne's "Apologie de Raymond Sebond." First we can cite the version which Montaigne read in Marsilio Ficino's Latin translation of Plato's work:

> Quemadmodum Thaletem, dum coelum suspiceret intentus sideribus in foveam cadentem Thracensis quaedam eius ancilla concinna et lepida arguisse dicitur, quod quae in coelo sunt, pervidere contenderet: quae vero proxima et ad pedes non videret.[10]
>
> [Just as Thales, when he was looking up at the sky intent on the stars, fell into a pit, and a certain Thracian girl, his servant, clever and neat, is said to have mocked him because he was trying to scrutinize the heavens but he didn't see what was right in front of him.]

Next, we can compare Montaigne's version:

> I feel grateful to the Milesian wench who, seeing the philosopher Thales continually spending his time in contemplation of the heavenly vault and always keeping his eyes raised upward, put something in his way to make him stumble, to warn him that it would be time to amuse his thoughts with things in the clouds when he had seen to those at his feet. Indeed she gave him good counsel, to look rather to himself than to the sky. (II, 12, 402)[11]

In Montaigne's version of the story, the Thracian serving girl, now naturalized in Miletus, not only witnesses but also stages the scene, placing an obstacle in her master's path and then delivering a homily on self-knowledge, thus impersonating the Delphic Oracle, as Montaigne will do at the end of "De la vanité":

> It was a paradoxical command that was given us of old by that god at Delphi: "Look into yourself, know yourself, keep to yourself; bring back your mind and your will, which are spending themselves elsewhere, into themselves; you are running out, you are scattering yourself; concentrate on yourself, resist yourself; you are being betrayed, dispersed, and stolen away from yourself. Do you not see that this world keeps its sight all concentrated inward and its eyes open to contemplate itself? (III, 9, 766)[12]

The principle of "se contempler soi-même" suggests that the only legitimate theory for human society is ethical theory, rather than physical or metaphysical speculation.

To return to the "Apologie," Montaigne further modifies Plato's argument in the remarks which he adds in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*. For Socrates, Thales exemplifies the superiority of the philosopher, whose obliviousness to the mundane concerns of daily life exposes him to the ridicule of the masses: "[C] As Socrates says in Plato, whoever meddles with philosophy may have the same reproach made to him as that woman makes to Thales, that he sees nothing of what is in front of him" (II, 12, 402).[13] Yet Montaigne changes the emphasis of the story by making the ignorance of the philosopher reflexive: "[C] For every philosopher is ignorant of what his neighbor is doing, *yes, and of what he himself is doing*, and does not know what they *both* are, whether beasts or men" (402, emphasis added).[14] What he read in Ficino's version was, "for the philosopher not only ignores what his neighbor does but also whether he is a man or a beast."[15] Through the changes made to Plato's text, changes here italicized for purposes of comparison, the philosopher now occupies the same epistemological status as his neighbor: both are equally removed from the Delphic injunction to self-knowledge. In effect, for Montaigne, Thales, as the figure of the theorist, is no better than his neighbor. However, as we shall see, Montaigne is not content to limit Thales to the role of theorist.

Thales' fall is important for Montaigne because it inaugurates the tradition of the intellectual as a figure of ridicule, which is the point of departure for the vituperation of humanism in "Du pedantisme." Thales is in

effect a proto-humanist, at least for as long as he is stuck in the well. Unfortunately, Thales is also a model for Montaigne's hero, Socrates. Having witnessed Thales' fall any number of times in the reference works which he routinely ransacked in the composition of his early essays, Montaigne reencountered the same episode in Plato's *Theaetetus*, which he studied very attentively at the end of his life. Here, Socrates and his interlocutor attempt to define knowledge or *episteme*, and in the midst of their first definition of knowledge as sense perception, they digress to consider the life of the philosopher in opposition to the life of the practical man (172C–177C). It is here that Socrates adduces the case of Thales, rightly absorbed in contemplation of a higher reality, whose fall exposes the inferiority of its audience, not its protagonist (174A). It is this same passage, the so-called digression, that furnishes Montaigne with a long addition which he interpolates near the beginning of his essay right after the reference to the ancient philosophers, "mesprisez par la liberté Comique de leur temps." Of course the main, if not the only instance of such "mépris" is Aristophanes' caricature of Socrates in the *Clouds*, a portrayal with which Renaissance readers were familiar at least indirectly through Socrates' speech in the *Apology*. In the *Thaeatetus* Socrates seems to identify contemplation as the highest value of human life and to endorse the image of the philosopher as a recluse unsuited for public life. Having paraphrased this "peinture Platonique" (135) of the philosopher, Montaigne dismisses it in favor of an alternative tradition which is better suited to emphasize the superiority of the ancients to the moderns.

From the biographical tradition of Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius initiated by Dicaearchus of Messana, Montaigne retrieves the image of the wise man as a man of action who excels both in theory and practice.[16] First he considers the case of Archimedes, who used his knowledge of geometry to design siege engines for Syracuse when it was besieged by the Roman general Marcellus. Plutarch's life of Marcellus, which contains a life of Archimedes, makes very clear the hierarchical relation of theory to practice, and the stigma in Greek civilization against any kind of applied science. Plutarch even portrays Archimedes as a sort of martyr to theory, who, at the moment of his death at the hands of a Roman soldier, was completely absorbed in contemplation, or as he puts it, τῇ θεωρίᾳ δεδωκὼς ἅμα τήν διάνοιαν καὶ τὴν προσοψιν (Marcellus 19.8; "having given both his thought and his sight to theory"). Yet, for Montaigne, he exemplifies the thinker "put to the test of action [*mis à la preuve de l'action*]" (99/135). Next, after

reviewing some ancient sages who resigned the kingship, which ought rather to strengthen the image of the philosopher as unfit for public life, he turns to Thales, whose archetypal role as the impractical star gazer has to be neutralized. So, in "Du pedantisme," Thales is shown cornering the market in olive oil and getting rich quick through a sort of applied astrology. It is at this point in his argument that Montaigne interpolates, in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*, a reference to the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle reports the popular prejudice against Thales, Anaxagoras, and their like, who are wise but not prudent, *sophos* but not *phronimos*, because they neglect their own self-interest (1141b2–8 cited 136). Montaigne rejects this distinction, primarily because it threatens to interfere with another distinction which he wants to maintain. In the classical tradition, Thales and Anaxagoras personify the priority of theory over practice, as the Aristotelian passage makes clear, but this puts them in uncomfortable proximity with the modern pedants. Therefore, through his choice of anecdotes, Montaigne seeks to detheorize the ancients and to reserve the stigma of theory for the moderns.

To challenge Aristotle, Montaigne had to make use of Aristotle, since the anecdote of Thales' economic prowess ultimately derives from book one, chapter eleven of the *Politics*, where Aristotle, as the Renaissance commentators are at pains to make clear, passes from the theory to the practice of getting rich. In the edition of the *Politics* published by Eusebius Episcopius in Basel in 1582, the editor Petrus Victorius or Pietro Vettori has added to I,11 the chapter heading "The theory of acquisition having been explained, [this chapter] talks about those things which have to do with its practice" (Aristotle [1582] 78).[17] *Quaestuaria* is the Latin equivalent of chrematistic or the art of money making, and the familiar pair of *theoria* and *praxis* (here transliterated rather than translated into Latin) responds to the first sentence of the chapter where Aristotle announces that, having dealt in sufficient detail with things pertaining to knowledge ("quae faciunt ad cognitionem"), he will now pass to things pertaining to use ("quae ad usum pertinent"). For Aristotle, Thales' monopoly is an example of the usefulness of knowledge, and as such it is a useful counterexample to the pedants. For, one theme of Montaigne's essay is that the humanist pedagogue is of no use to his students: humanist training confers no benefit; it serves no purpose beyond itself. Montaigne considers such instruction to be a bad investment, commiserating "the care and expense of our fathers" (100),[18] and he likens the lessons learned in the classroom to a false coin

that can't be spent. In his view, humanist learning circulates "like chits that have no other value and use than to be counted and thrown away" (100).[19] This appeal to the criterion of utility, combined as it always is with money, represents in Montaigne's essay a pivotal, that is to say, an unstable or reversible argument.

In the protreptic tradition to which we alluded earlier, *theoria* is the highest goal or *telos* of human activity precisely because it is not necessary for anything else: it serves no purpose beyond itself.[20] In a passage from the *Protrepticus* conserved by Iamblichus, and imitated by Cicero in one of the extant fragments of his dialogue *Hortensius*, Aristotle demonstrates the preeminence of theory by the example of the Isles of the Blest, whose inhabitants by definition don't need anything and cannot profit from anything. In the absence of any conceivable hardship, the only virtue they need to exercise is thought and contemplation, which is called the free life:

> There is no need for anything, nor is there any profit to be gained from other things; the only remaining occupation is to think and to contemplate, which we now say is the free life.[21]

> If, he says, when we will have passed on from this life, we were allowed to dwell eternally in the isles of the blest, as the myth has it, what would be the use of eloquence . . . or indeed of the virtues themselves? Therefore we would be blessed uniquely in the knowledge of nature and wisdom, for which alone the life of the gods is to be praised. From which it follows that the other virtues are necessary, this alone is voluntary.[22]

Here *theoria* is shown to be the key to the aristocratic ideal of the wholly voluntary or self-sufficient life, the *eleutheros bios*. The choice of words in Aristotle apud Iamblichum echoes a very concise formula from the *Politics*, still book one, chapter eleven, which opposes theory to experience in terms that can be associated with a social hierarchy: "for all such things, the theory is free but the experience is necessary" (1258b10–11).[23] Renaissance translators, following Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, tend to render *eleuthera* as "libero homine digna" which we can in turn understand to mean noble or aristocratic.[24]

While Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* and Cicero's *Hortensius* were largely inaccessible to Renaissance readers, and the latter to modern readers as well, Aristotle rehearses the same ideas in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which was not only accessible but indeed ubiquitous in Renaissance culture. Here he advocates the *bios theoretikos* or contempla-

Index