HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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EARLY MODERN LITERATURE: Resources
(Modern Western Mind in the Making: A Study Guide)

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Introduction

History as Unpeeling, Opening, or Advancing

Whether or not the events of history are pre shaped, built into the structure of being, or whether they are haphazard, and not under our control to shape or even to interpret, there is a sense in which the ongoing march of history is exclusive, closes off the past which preceded it, delineates what can never again be the object of discovery. (To discover something is to find that something just appearing over your horizon; it is to *un* as well as *dis* cover it.) The events of history, therefore, whether shaped or random, are unique and unrepeatable and deserve standing within us as interiorized monuments. Precisely that they are, and we can tick them off internally, becoming with each irreparably now like instant-event the more fixed-in-process. I take the liberty of calling this process of removing the layers of the past which leave increasingly exposed the pulsing fore antennae of the present, a process of peeling, or perhaps unpeeling. Or perhaps opening.

Human presents may be exclusivist and rarely slot into a neatly attendant continuum. That is, these presents, in which we know we are being-here, require evidentiary prompting, to discover their route to being first present then historical. We may, for example, come upon a text concerning the first recorded reference to living in the middle age; but we may ourselves not understand the words we are reading. We will be so far from living in the 'middle ages' that we cannot know the meaning of the statement we read .Parts of what the Middle Ages were can be unpeeled, unpackaged for us, but to know the true meaning of that 'time period' would involve having been at a site of unpeeling, across which what living is the middle ages is is just being disclosed. That would be an evidentiary site.

Ancient history it is from which we have, or have been, peeled off, in order to release from it the present history noted for being—in many parts of the world-- the twenty third century after the birth of Christ. The following book will try out being an explanatory anthology of the peel off taking place in the creative years that unfold between (what we now call) the end of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period (loosely calculating the 15th to 17th centuries, Pico de la Mirandola to John Dryden) for this transitional period during which the uniform dominance of the Church, the economies of agriculture, and the gradual coalescence of settled communities are giving way to more nearly industrialized societies, to the formation of organized states, and to increased individualism in art and music.) Our table of contents will give many names to the date range over which we hope to extend our unpeeling optic. We will be hoping for a certain inner vision, as we traverse in mind this robust but incorrigibly open sector of created time.

The time launch, for the present anthology in cultural history, is 1496, and involves a brief study of two works. (Startlingly meaningful, this launch date, for its proximity to Mr. Columbus, the 'opening' of a New World, and the linking of ancient cultures to a new life. arrival of We will pay attention to one work of Marsilio Ficino ,a great thought giant from the end of the fifteenth century. He will be echt old Europe, easily retraceable back into the mediaeval and even classical worlds. We will also look at a classic piece by Pico de la Mirandola the Italian philosopher and theologian.—and contemporary of Ficino. We will circle around the twenty-three year old's work, his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. In that way we will pay tribute to the waning energies of that Neoplatonism which was to close the door on the reigning Aristotelianism of the Scholastics, which from the twelth century on had so firmly marked the dominant thought-directions of neo-modern western man.

Our effort from that point on will be to track the unpeeling of significantly powerful thought-unfoldings from out of their matrices. This will be no matter of writing history from outside, as in a textbook purview, but rather of being the stages of consequential unfolding which you are part of (Being history will throughout be our passage to knowing history. It will therefore be incumbent on the writer to be what events wish to have said of him, as Western Europe achieves its intelligibility through him. That wil be the way the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of European construction and evolution will rewrite one another through the formulations of the author.

The concurrence of the late fifteenth century philosophers, over the Neoplatonic conviction, that knowledge is in the end the gift of salvation, augurs well for the growth readiness of that Renaissance and Early Modern discovery lens, through which the growing-modern of Europe will eventually add such precious fresh directions to the human experience. Plato was himself a precisionist, targeting issues like love, language, social organization or law, as discrete fragments of the noosphere. The Neoplatonists, widening the parameters of intelligibility, sympathized with the idea that a community of ideas was a gathering point of intensifying meaning—as it neared its origins. For Neoplatonists like Plotinus or Proclus it might be said that the cosmos was from the start and to the end intelligibility, and existed as a chain of interconnected meanings. The interlinking of the chains of being, within the order of the created world, was a gesture toward thought—aligned with what is, simply and globally.

It will be by establishing this expanding launchpad that we will make k place for unpeeling. And for what the textbooks tell us, far into our own time, about the bias and cutting edge of culture's meaning-pointers. We will pay particular attention to the transitions from one period to another. (For that reason we have arranged out 'contents' chronologically, maximizing the opportunity to observe the crunch of one period into another.)We will constantly build and dismantle these bridges as we scaffold out a descriptive structure for the Early Modern Period.

ENGLAND

Sir Thomas More (1478-1535)

Utopia 1516

As we continue tracking into the Renaissance, we come on figures who belong simultaneously to two worlds, the older and the newer. Thomas More is a harbinger of this complexity. He is best known for his *Utopia*, a vision world in which he tests out the alternatives social forms imaginable in his time, and potentials for enrichment of the given. In this he is as radical as his Florentine contemporaries, Ficino or Pico, working as a kind of poet-sociologist on the margins of change, but doing so without deranging the present as a standpoint for thought. He is also a friend of antiquity and its consistent, conservative values.

Book One

The setting

Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) describes an imagined culture. That culture is lengthily described to the author by a ship captain who had spent five years in this mysterious 'communist' land. More's work might be called an early novel, for it is in expository prose, awakens the imagination, and at the same time seizes the feeling of ordinary reality. The jagged edges of reality—the details of a distant way of life—remain vivid throughout the long central narration of the work, made by the ship captain Raphael to More himself, and inevitably forcing us to reflect on the realities of our own world. So compelling is the brew of historical reality—the reality of More's own life-- with fiction, that we have to slap ourselves to realize that the outside narrator of *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More, was one day to be the Lord Chancellor of England. The world Raphael introduces us to is, as just implied, a loosely speaking 'communist' state.

Titles

Among the various titles proposed for the present text, a reasonable starting point would be *On the Best State of a Republic and on the New Island of Utopia*. Basically the work concerns political philosophy in a wide sense. How should a government be constructed? What kind of society makes people happy? What does 'utopia' mean? The classically oriented readers, of More's England, would quickly have grasped the ambiguity buried in the word 'utopia,' with its Greek roots implying 'no place,' or, by another spelling of the Greek, 'the good place.' Much wiggle room for satire is in fact available here, in this question about 'utopia,' and indeed there is ample dispute over Sir Thomas More's intentions, in portraying the present mystery island with so many lessons to pass on to cotemporary England. (The foundation of Utopia dates from 1700 years prior to the present in which Raphael is narrating to More himself.) Does More

want us to admire the described island, and its distinctive ways? Or is this work satirical in the sense of 'looking askance or with humor' on the new terrain described by Raphael?

The Lord Chancellor

From the beginning we are led through the tale by the distanced, calm voice of the narrator, one day to be the Lord Chancellor of England, and one day to be beheaded for alleged treason to that same state of England. At the center of the present work More is reflecting on a gripping tale he has heard on one of his high level missions to the capitals of Europe. He recalls falling into a deep conversation with a wizened sea captain, who tells him about a culture far south of the Equator, where he lived for five years, absorbing the profound differences between his culture of the free living mariner and the gentle culture of the communist island of Utopia. We learn, in the course of the First Book—there are two—some of the salient differences between the two cultures, More's own and the communist.

Theft

One of the sharpest points of conflict, between the two cultures, occurs around the issue of theft, on which the future Lord Chamberlain, as might be expected, comes down hard, doing his best —as a law and order figure--to suppress the original evil of mankind, of whom—as Erasmus too had argued-- one should always expect the worst. The stakes around theft were indeed high in England. Capital punishment was a possible fate for thievery in the Britain of the day, and leniency was rare—especially in cases where private property had been threatened. The sea captain—we quickly become aware that he is more or less a spokesperson for the Utopians—speaks up for a more pragmatic response to such crimes as theft. On the whole, he has learned to value punishments that are constructive, both for the criminal—who must wear clearly marked clothing, and a ID criminal badge, and who must reflect on his crimes—and for the state, which can profit from the hard labor imposed on the criminal. The death penalty, as Raphael claims, has no constructive role to play in the resolution of a crime like theft. The entire Utopian perspective—pragmatic and melioristic—is implicit here.

Enclosures

The sea captain turns his scrutiny onto another contentious issue, pertaining to the British economy, in fact to the economic development of modern Britain, as he sees it. I mean the question of the enclosures of land, within village and towns, which are set aside for sheep grazing. This move leads toward the privatization of public property, and away from the older traditions of public grazing land. In this matter, as throughout the present text, the direction of utopia is toward communism, communal property, communal thinking, the common good. The sea captain condemns the woes of private property.

The dominant perspective of the book

The above is the bias of Raphael himself, and he retails it vigorously to his dignified British collocutor. (Whether in the end More's own satire strikes out against communism or not is a complex question, to which there are arguably conflicting responses. (The overall bias, of the present seventy-five page text, arouses much scholarly dispute, and not least because the whole text raises central questions about the perspective of the author. More seems to speak both through the distinguished and modest spokesperson of the British government, and through Raphael, the ship's captain and proponent of the world of Utopia.)

Satire?

Are we then reading a satire, in the depiction of Utopia, an overdrawn portrait of an unrealistically bland state, or are we reading the outline of a genuine eutopia—not a *no place* but a conceivable *good (eu) place,* with main paths of value for 'modern' societies like More's? Is the book a satire?

Adventure

An element in our answer will be that Raphael is satisfying that hunger, in More and his time, for adventure stories about the new world. (Montaigne's 'Of Cannibals' will exemplify the hunger for fresh discovery a century after More, when the extent of the New World, in the Americas, has begun to disclose Its thrilling and easily victimized new—old treasures. Charles Mann's book *1491* will convey the sense of global excitement, awakened by the succession of fifteenth and sixteenth century discoveries, which are in and on Thomas More's historical horizon.)

Book Two

The Setting

After lunch, Raphael settles down to provide More with the thoroughgoing account he had promised the dignitary, earlier in the day. Whereas the first encounter between More and Raphael had been recounted as an actual encounter, each man real in his setting, and the setting real, the second book recounts Raphael's account of Utopia, and locates itself inside no 'historical frame'—except for passing and casual references to the date of Utopos' founding of his city nation, 1700 years ago. (True enough, Raphael devotes his introductory to a description of the island of Utopia, which is about the size and shape of England; two hundred miles across and crescent shaped) Raphael barely appears as a figure in Book Two, and when he does it is hardly to establish any deconstructive relation between Books One and Two, but rather to lend, to Book Two, an unmistakable air of fictionality.

Communism

In the second book, Raphael will continue to satisfy More's curiosity about Utopia, and will leave no doubt that he, whatever the case may be for More, is deeply beguiled by the principles of utopian communism. These principles include the abolition of private property—which, along with private wealth, Raphael considers the chief encouragement to human vice—the sharing of all goods and services, and a life in which the solidarity of individuals is their guarantee of a happy life. These principles dominated the society of Utopia, were the dominating insights of the culture's founder, Utopos, and provide a complete blueprint for the organizing of men in society. It goes without saying, perhaps, that the narrator of this entire story furnishes a sotto voce back theme of critique, to all that Raphael praises, a counterpoint element which deplores the 'monotony' of Utopia, and guarantees a scratchy tension to the whole tale.

Open doors

Salient details mark the form of communism Raphael recounts. The citizens of Utopia live in houses with front and back doors—potentially gates to a closing in of the family unit (often fifteen to twenty members) and yet in practice, because these doors are never locked, there is no closure at all in Utopian cities. There are thirteen cities in Utopia, and as all resemble each other, and all houses are built on the same model, we can see that the lives of all the citizens flow into those of their neighbors, throughout the nation.

No jewelry

Aligned with this deflation of individualism, The Utopians, for example, do all they can to extirpate the social desire for jewelry, gold ornaments, and elegant clothing—to which they prefer a common and plain dress. They express their contempt for gold finery and its monetary worth by employing this precious metal in vulgar and degrading roles, as for instance in chamber pots, where the substance is regularly defiled; they express their contempt for foreign ambassadors who arrive on their shores bejeweled, elegant, and ready for the obeisance they do not receive.

Despite the plain style favored in Utopia, the attitude reigning there is not anti-cultural; in fact the citizens find their greatest pleasures in reading, conversing, and sharing ideas. In other words, jewels and gold are scorned—anti-communist appendages—but the fruits of mutual understanding and thought are abundantly appreciated. Every day, just at daybreak, public lectures are given throughout the nation, food for thought that day, and for learning paths into the future.

It seems obvious, in its turn that the tenor of Utopian communism will be happy. Pleasure is hardly sought for its own sake, but rather comes as a byproduct of virtue. Entertainment comes down to the communal labor—never too vigorous, as the well-organized system of society requires—in which one has the pleasure of doing good for others. No factitious amusement—gambling or hunting—is of interest to these island people.

Social Organization

The Farm World

Utopia is the product of planning, and clearly depends on the reliability of human nature to keep it running smoothly. The basic is this: there are thirty-four cities on the island. The controlling system, sited in a capital city, is maximally simple: once a year three old, experienced, and travelled men travel to the capital to discuss the needs of government and public policy. These elders represent the citizens, both rural and urban. The dominant character of the entire nation is agricultural, and much of the concern of the three elders and the Governor General is the condition of agriculture on the island. Around each island city there are twelve miles of farmland, on which the farm worker citizens of the nation work--as tenants rather than landlords—for a period of two or three years. The condition of these farms must be overseen, for the common good, which profits from good harvests and nutritious yields. Nor is the social organization of rural life so simple. No rural house has fewer than forty occupants, headed, in each case, by a mature master and mistress. One *phylarch*—note the regular presence of Greek in the Utopian language—rules over every three houses, with households and householders exchanging occupants every three years.

Urban and Domestic life

Whether on the farm or in the cities, the Utopians are gregarious. It is, for instance, very rare for citizens to eat alone, or to remain for any length of time alone. (It is the responsibility of the state to care for its citizens, seeing to it that the population continues its rotational patterns on a regular basis.) Life in the capital city, Amaurot, is exemplary for the whole nation. There are impressive walls, towers, and bastions, and twenty wide streets, each open onto a central thoroughfare. Once a year a new prince is elected, meeting every day with his advisors. (Noteworthily, the three agricultural inspectors, mentioned above, are different from the three advisors in question, at the present.) Nevertheless one can immediately see that bureaucracy is cut to the bare bone.

Food and drink

Within the urban dwellings of the capital, the food taken is simple—much garden produce ,wine and water, little meat—and the bulk of the food preparation, especially any preparation of meats, is carried out by slaves. Given the nutritious simplicity of the fare, the sharing mode of the economy, and the equitable mind of the ruling prince—replaced after a year—it is no wonder that there is little poverty, and that the island's highly developed medical skills are on the whole competent to deal with any diseases that break out.

War and other interpersonal actions

War is welcomed only as a means of saving the state, but never as a way of reaching out to grab land. (The Utopians have arranged their land as their needs and their desires require. They have few hidden appetites A massacre, for instance, is unthinkable, for it requires a longing to kill, which does not exist among the Utopians, people of reliably temperate emotions.) In general the attitude within an ongoing war is as little belligerent as possible; the culminating sign of victory being simply to kill the enemy's prince. Wiles are permissible within war, their purpose being to bring peace; for example, in prospect of a war piles of money are set aside for use in bribing the enemy. Since the chief consideration in war is the attempt to avoid bloodshed, it is easy to understand why mercenaries and slaves are regularly assigned to the toughest jobs, and suffer the greatest casualties.

Religion

It is taken as given, that nature and the world it brings us are benign and governed by divine purpose. The broad assumption, of life in society, is that to be good to others is part of aligning yourself with the purpose of your creator. Commonly, however, it is accepted that there are two different paths to that alignment, the simpler and more natural path, of following God's will in your daily activities, being 'a good person,' and the path of extraordinary charity, which involves living every moment to help others. Lives of the latter category are regularly taken to lead to a happy after life, as well as to insights—as into divine miracles—which no normally good life can fully understand. While the institution of the Christian Church is known, and priests are commonly found--no more than thirteen in any city—the presence of Christ is more to be felt in the articulation of nature rather than in any human institution. The reward of a quiet life is sufficient for those who question the ultimate value of religious behavior.

A Foonote on Satire

Both Desiderius Erasmus, a friend and admirer of More, and Sir Thomas More, were viewed as satirists, in the two works—*In Praise of Folly* and in *Utopia*—for which they were most popular. (On his first travel to England, Erasmus stayed with More and remained close to the creative sensibility of this equally prolific thought leader of his age.) What joins these two small masterpieces as satires?

In a satire, one narrative perspective adopts, toward another perspective, an attitude of mildly benevolent acceptance. In *In Praise of Folly* Erasmus has to look down, benignly but not belligerently, on the mindset of those mortals who are the raw materials of his portraiture of the pullulating human condition. (Folly opts out of any belligerence of perspective, by depicting herself as a bemused observer. In fact Folly devotes the first half of her *oratio* to the genuine pleasures of life, modest delights of the flesh, indulgence in which should lead no one to blush with shame.) More, the narrator of his framed tale, adopts an almost whimsical attitude toward the surprising account offered him by Raphael. Are the Utopians to be admired or thought stiff and artificial?

Both More and Folly look down on their created worlds with a mixture of fascination and scorn. The looking down, in *Utopia,* can be tracked from the direction of Raphael, whose attitude toward the Utopian life ranges from tolerant to fascinatedly approving. In either instance, whether the 'satirical' attitude is tracked from More or Raphael, onto the subject of *Utopia,* the projected attitude is gentle enough to qualify as satire, and not, for example, as diatribe, like Swift's, or excoriation as we might excavate it today from the rhetoric of politics.

Our two early Modern texts, More's and Erasmus', have in common a point from which to mock. Folly and Raphael interweave mockery with patches of admiration. How does their mockery, for example, square off against that of Rabelais, who boldly and not subtly, mocks everything from contemporary fiction, through the machinations of church politics through contemporary medicine through heroic sea voyages in quest of the god of wine. Neither Raphael nor Folly throws punches at the object of their mockery, but Rabelais permits himself a boxing stance stand off, clobbers without leaving a compensatory compliment.

Study guide

What is Thomas More's attitude toward the world of his Utopia? Does he value the agrarian communism he (through Raphael) discovers there? What values are peculiar to this world, in the view of the future Lord Chancellor of England? Would those values be common purpose, appreciation of peace, or the public distribution of the news, every morning at daybreak? If you incline to accept these values as indicators of More's view of utopia, would you also incline to consider this work as a satire—of an unrealistically simplified version of gentle life? Can a satire be both a critique of and a salute to the main traits of another culture? Is Erasmus' satire*, In Praise of Folly,* both a devastating critique of man the fallen, and a salute—right at the onset—to the beauties of taking it easy, the wisdom of the maxim that one should never complain, never marry.

Does the creation of a utopia suggest a modernity-seeking mindset? Is More's very making of this imagined land a step in the construction of the 'modern mind?' (Does 'imagining a lateral possibility,' as More does, forecast a readiness to 'think outside the box in Renaissance fashion,' or to assess one's own time and place with the needed freedom from the shackles of the present? Is this kind of experimental freedom kin to the freedom of the scientist of More's time, who begins to value experimental thought as a kind of search for future constituting algorithms? Can you enrich this question by looking ahead to other examples of utopias—in Francis Bacon, Samuel Butler, or George Orwell?

Erasmus and Sir Thomas More were close friends, and spent quality time together on the former's momentous trip to England. Imagine two sets of conversations—one between More and Erasmus, one between Ficino and Pico—and review the skills they would bring to effective state building. Which pair would show the more pertinent skills of administration and social organization?

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1585)

The Defence of Poetry (1580)

An Apology for Poetry was created in blank and poetic prose by one of the greatest English poets of the sixteenth century, Sir Philip Sidney. (His sonnet sequence, *Astrophel end Stella,* was composed in the 1580's, and is considered surpassed, as pure poetry, only by Shakespeare's sonnets (1593-1609). *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia,* ca. 1590, was Sidney's most ambitious single work, an idealization of the shepherd's life as reimagined in high poetic transformation. This was a work able enough to attract Shakespeare's own attention, as in the construction of one of the sub plots of King Lear. One has to wonder what kind of oeuvre Sidney might have completed had he not been killed in a sword fight at the age of thirty two). His *Apology for Poetr*y, written around 1580, was thus a young man's work, and clamors for our astonishment at the width of knowledge, consistency of perspective, and faultless eloquence of the text.

Philip Sidney was born in Kent of a family aristocratic on all sides, lived his brief life in the ambience of the nobility—he was educated at Christ Church, Oxford,--was elected to Parliament at the age of eighteen, served in his twenties various sophisticated diplomatic circles on the mainland of Europe. In the mid l580's Sidney returned to England, wrote the major texts described above, and married. (His ongoing hyperactive life was to see him engaged, during the years in question, in any number of diplomatic dramas, such as a secret visit in Prague, to the exiled Jesuit priest, Edmund Campion, or a visit to Oxford as host to Giordano Bruno. At the same time he continued his engagement with affairs of state, and in particularly with affairs supporting the Protestant cause in the ceaseless Protestant-Catholic conflicts which were eating up Western Europe, and which reverberate so intensely to us, from just this moment, in the writing of Montaigne. Tragically, Sidney himself was by this time close to his own death which would strike him down by a blow of the sword, fighting in the Netherlands, dying heroically (and with class) as he had lived in his own culture. Mustn't he remind us, as we sketch the portrait of this 'Renaissance' man, the figure whom, in many ways, Castiglione might have modelled, in creating his brilliant and virtually omnicompetent *Cortegiano*, his courtier.

The Apology for Poetry

Out of Sidney's privileged and highly educated background emerged texts which complemented, in elegance and erudition, his life as a diplomat courtier. The apology for poetry picks up on both a local quarrel—Elizabethan society contained its share of poetry scorners, mockers of an art which seemed locked in traditional styles and locutions, and deeply out of touch with the new realities of Elizabethan commerce, business, and internationalism. Sidney threw himself into this fray with a strong defense of poetry, picking up many of the themes of the Roman poet Horace, who in his *Ars Poetica* (19 BC), both exemplifies and argues for the supreme felicity of the poetic art, and anticipating a nineteenth century essay, Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (1821) which extracts from poetry the recognition that it is the supreme human expression, and from the poet, that he is the 'unacknowledged legislator of the world.'

Greco-Roman Tales

For the contemporary reader, Sidney may seem to present a daunting barrage of classical literary history interwoven with anecdotes about the ancient Greek poets. Such references, among the literary cultured in Renaissance Europe, were on the whole an available new language, sets of meaning points available to bring up large literary contexts—like the tales of Odysseus or of Aeneas, or the intertwined strands of tragic action that joined Oedipus to Creon to Antigone to Eteocles. Sidney's apology for poetry is in part an apology for this inbred language of poetic discourse, and in part an aggressive plea for attention to the unique and enduring values of the Greek poetic genius..

Poetry and History

The notion of poetry, for Sidney, is of the highest expression of awareness and articulateness. By making ancient Greek and Roman his field of reference, he separates poetry from any effort to describe or account for his own daily, and raises poetry to a consistent effort to see deep meanings in texts and traditions.

Aristotle Poetics

To make this claim Sidney must pick up the challenges addressed to this issue by Aristotle's *Poetics*, that critical theory reference point which hung over all Renaissance efforts to formulate the place of the literary arts in culture. Poetry, Aristotle had argued, was more philosophical than history, because poetry deals with what might have been, the possible, while history deals with what actually happened. (Poetry is an act within possibility, while history is an account of what happened. The validity of this distinction, and the account it gives of history, are both debatable, we would probably intervene here, yet for Sidney, and his time, elite opinion would have been largely behind Aristotle's position. (Historiography was still on a shaky and anecdotal basis, whereas philosophy, to which Sidney preferred poetry, for its opening of being, was still back -held in the traces of medievalism, from which the universities had not yet released it. The true open spirit of poetry, for Sidney, was evident in the great musical poetry of the Hebrew singer, David, and the high risk musical drama of Homer.

Poetry and virtue

The poet particularly deserves our praise, for in fact he not only surpasses the historian and the philosopher, in range and social usefulness, but he leads his fellow citizens in the teaching of virtue. The poet—*vates* (*prophet)* in Rome, *poietes (maker*) in Greece—does not affirm or proclaim opinions, but expresses the truth in exaltation. Thanks t that high flowering of mind, that approaches truth directly, the poet is not misled by the desire to please. Pleasure, in the vulgar sense, is in fact that distraction from virtue which poetry most carefully avoids. At which point, as suggested above, Sidney is carefully distancing himself from those, even in his own intellectual culture, who associate poetry with nursery room metrics, childish plays for the ears, just as he is avoiding direct conflict with another contingent of 'poet lovers,' those for whom poetry should be admired as pure provision of amusement. In these counterattacks against the vulgar in poetry, those who want street wise pleasures from the Lady, Sidney includes the vulgar, an increasingly taste-shaping element in Elizabethan society, for whom such gross pleasures as are met with on the stage seem a justification of art in general.

Platonism

Throughout Sidney's discourse run both an admiration for Platonism, and a fear of that perspective. On the one hand Sidney deeply inherits the broad idealism of Plato, his devotion to the beauty which 'never was, on land or sea,' and which was to become the durable on-lurer of western poetry, until in the Romantic movement, with such as Shelley and Keats, that beauty found itself coming aground on mysticism, despair, the kind of loose exaltation the Romantics vanished into in Germany and England—in Novalis, Shelley, or d'Annunzio. A. N. Whitehead's thought that 'Western philosophy is simply a series of footnotes to Plato,' would appear equally applicable to 'Western poetry,' for wherever poetry exalted itself

into high vision, from Homer to the present, voices were head proclaiming the poetry a byproduct of Platonic aspiration.

Sidney's Platonism

Sir Philip Sidney himself, refined and deepened the Platonic strain in English poetry, and did so from a keen sensitivity to the work of contemporaries like Edmund Spenser, or William Shakespeare. He was himself an aetherial but disciplined writer of sonnets. His attention was, as the form required, on dilemmas and resolutions, love called in to save the day. We should close with a sample from Sidney's work as a sonnet writer: the first poem in the 108 poem sequence*, Astrophil and Stella,* and a proving ground for what Platonism means in Sidney's work.

Astrophil and Stella 1: Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show

Sonnet 1

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,—
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,—
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe;
Studying inventions fine her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburn'd brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting invention's stay;
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows;
And others' feet still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus great with child to speak and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,
"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart, and write."

From the outset, the poet's dilemma is how to express his love his beloved. His 'sunburned brain' requires moisture from others!', 'fresh and fruitful flowers.' Ultimately he grows pregnant with the message he wants to convey to his love, his love for her. He does that by discovering that the message he wants to send is in him all the time. He needed only to free it from himself. The mind's true love could find its way into expression only by being freed from its ideal condition, into a direct statement of itself to his beloved.

Study guide

Sidney was a sonnet writer, and had in common with Ronsard that each was a clever and ingenious craftsman.(Even Ronsard's sassy epitaph for Rabelais is immaculately formal.) What did Sidney gain by extending his sonnets to the number of 108? One could have posed a similar question to Shakespeare! Was the answer that one wanted to give the reader a choice among many ways of viewing choice and loss in love?

What did Sidney defend, in his illustrious *Apology for Poetry*? Was he particularly eager to defend the Platonic tradition—remember the Platonism of his contemporaries, Ficino and Pico?—or was he shocked by what he considered the corroded English of his time, which lacked the sense of the classical tongues and the background of the classical experience? Also to mention, Sidney took out considerable critical venom, in attacking the commerce and industry that was corroding the language of his time in England. He did not think that language should serve the interests of pleasure, but of meaning and beauty.

Aristotle, as you see played a formative role in Sidney's view of poetry This meant that for Sidney, like Aristotle, beauty and virtue were partners. The good poem, like the good tragedy, should demand a morally congruent reaction. Does this seem to you an appropriate expectation to make of a poem? Can a poem exercise respect for virtue?

Sir Francis Bacon

The New Atlantis (1626)

Science, Common Sense, and the Novel

The *New Atlantis* is a fictional novel published posthumously In 1626, and written by Sir Francis Bacon, whose essays have appeared at another point in this encyclopedia. It will be recalled that the trademark of his thinking, was, like that of Montaigne, 'common sense,' a sensible man's reason addressed to everyday problems. Yet Montaigne's pursuit is different. He explores hidden corners of human behavior (and misbehavior) bordering on issues of what we would call psychology or sociology. In addition to the systematic application of common sense, which he shared with Montaigne, Bacon tends to fully exercise the new understandings of physical science, boldly advancing into empirical thought and, say, in the direction of the work of Descartes, laying out mathematical coordinates against which to track the complex expressions of nature, and God its maker.

The New World

Like Montaigne (and Sir Thomas More, and Thomas Campanella) Bacon was fascinated with the new world of undiscovered places and people, and with the invigoration available from reviewing those reported or imaginable extensions of the human setting. It had been almost one hundred fifty years, at the time of publication of *The New Atlantis*, since the Americas had been opened to western travelers, and the complex and splendid worlds of Aztec and Maya culture had seduced western explorers and gold rushers into horizons never imagined even in the boisterous Renaissance societies from which cultural missionaries were rapidly scattering out. To this commercial and expropriative drive, which was turning the Renaissance into the playing field of 'early modern man,' Bacon brought an imagination of a *new scientific society*, which his mind was able to extrapolate from the data of prior travelers and explorers.

Plato

Tracing from the ancient Platonic legend, of a lost continent of Atlantis, Bacon imagined out an ancient culture, far older by several thousand years than his own, to which a fictive voyage could bring yields of new understanding for the modern man of his own time. This utopian novel—for the brief, incomplete work takes its place in Western literary history too—was virtually contemporary with such soon to be runaway popular texts as *Clarissa* and *Pamela,* sharers in the early sentimental naivete of the romantic adventure. A tale gets spun, in these proto novels,in which the new world meets the archaic world, and is astonished to find itself anticipated and more, elaborated from the far side. That is, the archaic turned inside out into the contemporary, of Bacon s own age, takes first place in the story told here.

The New Atlantis tale itself

The tale that Bacon spins is hardly a 'tale,' rather an 'account,' for it consists largely in straight narration, during the course of which a band of inquisitive searchers recount their encounter with an archaic but ever so interestingly modern kingdom of ocean dwellers. The novel commences with the discovery of a mythical island, Bensalem, discovered by a shipwrecked crew west of Peru. The minimal plot advances through encounters with dominant Figures of Bensalem, then with the striking feature of the island culture, with its state sponsored research projects, which revolved around the fertile margins of Salomon's House, the knowledge and planning headquarters of Bensalem. After arrangements have been made, for a generous period of time on the island, The Dean of the College continues to expound, to the western travelers, the degrees and kinds of knowledge that accumulate around the research facilities of Bensalem. The reader will hardly need reminding that the text of this narration barely transforms its material with imagination, and hews to 'the facts.' Hence, perhaps, the description of this work as an 'account.'

The Dean's Discourse

The Dean advances a voluble description of the origins of Christianity on Bensalem, and an account of the miracles that accompanied the advent of the New Religion, accompanied as It was by miraculous appearances, vertical columns of water over the surface of the ocean, other signs of the unique power of St. Bartholomew, Bensalem's patron saint. The perfect chastity of the Bensalem community is the finest testimony to this powerful Christian stamp on the people of the community.

Breadth of Science

In the last third of *The New Atlantis* Bacon provides his ocean Dean with the perspective of that scientific organization by which, in the study of nature, the scientists of Salomon's house coordinate their classifications of the nature which God has so bountifully offered us. (We might seem to be looking at a Linnaean classification, passed under the lens of God's examination.) One gradually realizes, in the course of this direct lesson in research structure and policy, that the research aims of our own present social policy, are being creatively anticipated by Renaissance social analysts. As these principles of inquiry are effectively put into practice, among the directors of the Solomon's house project, we see that an overall view of the purposes and aims of scientific research is an omnipresent element of the Bensalem analysis of society. 'The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things, and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.'

Merchants of Light

The tale reminds us of our own day, when a great culture is thirsty for knowledge of how to develop with powerful and hard wrung skills, wrung from the experience of another great culture—I think of the tens of thousands of Chinese students in the United States-, annually returning home, after graduation, with new 'data' and 'info systems' picked up out of the brain trusts of American State University classrooms. In a similar light, and presciently anticipant, Bacon sees to it that the professionals of Solomon's House go out on knowledge collecting missions to other civilized zones of their known archaic culture world. From there they return with the fruits of others' learnings, bought cheap. For the benefit of their guests hey carefully characterize the kinds of missionaries they send out from their island kingdom.

Depredators, Mystery Men, Pioneers, Compilers, Dowry Men

Three men go out on mission annually, from the House of Solomon, to gather records (anonymously) of experiments, which are found in all manner of imported books and texts. These men are called *depredators.*

Three men go out annually to gather the experiments that have taken place elsewhere in the liberal arts and the mechanical arts, respectively. These are called *mystery men.*

Certain men go out to try out new experiments that they think of value. These men are called *pioneers* because they free wheel on the margins of science, and invent freely--using the materials of the natural world.

Three men go out every year—they are call*ed compilers*—to collect previous data extractions, in order to render them ready to process, analyze, and graph the knowledge already deposited in the vaults of the island kingdom. Pre computer, essentially, the society of Bacon has gone far toward understanding the drives for computation in the formation of a modern society.

Dowry men are sent out in trios, annually, to canvas the potential benefits, for their society, of the medicinal discoveries made possible by earlier expeditions. They are guardians of the welfare of their own native land, and we can under-hear Bacon calling out for the attentions of his own essentially still mediaeval version of agricultural society.

Discovery Fiction, and the Organic

One will have observed that the major figures of this narration—the Dean of the House of Solomon, the circulating figures and explainers from within the system of the House of Solomon; or among the quite anonymous crew of sailors from the archaic Atlantic world who first establish rowboat level contact with westerners, that these archaic but admirable figures are pretty much cardboard copies of the ideas they express. The visitors are in a constant state of awed pause, curious for everything they hear, and of course properly respectful. The genre of the novel has here the foundation of its developmental history, as does the genre of testifying to the surprising breadth and surprising customs of people In hitherto unfamiliar lands.

Literary history

The New Atlantis is a harbinger of many soon to be created fictional hits like *Pamela* (1740) or *Clarissa* (1748), both by Samuel Richardson, which stress the social underpinnings of recognizable emotional lives, or, even earlier in the eighteenth century, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) or *Moll Flanders* (1722), both of which still display something of the artificial jointedness we note in *The New Atlantis* and in its portrayal of organic characters. The textual passage needed, to slip from the mindset of Bacon over into that of Defoe, is like any major cultural shift in sensibilities, not to be stormed, but to be released. One is reminded of an old discussion of Homer's capacity, or lack of same, to present his major characters as full bodied, rather than as assemblages of parts which need to be recreated or rejoined from inside them. Bacon is arguably starting from that same kind of literary historical challenge; how to make whole characters out of words.

Bacon the Moralist

For the most part, as we know, Bacon was not on the path to fictions. His world as a moralist dominated his common sense understanding of what works in life, and on that course, the path of the scholar of society, seeking for improved human adjustments to life as it is, Bacon carved out a unique place as a social visionary, which is where we find him in *The New Atlantis* as well as in his *Essays.* His model of a self-conscious polity, planning out its step by step development, is great contribution to the growing science of social policy, which expressed the same point in the American sixties, as the author looked out on the greening of America?) It is a mere and miserable solitude to want true friends, without which the world is but a wilderness. The intimacy of true friends to one another, in a society, provides a kind of civil shrift, by which we can confess one another, and relieve one another of those pains imposed by daily existence; 'sharers of cares,' as the Romans put it.

<u># 38. *Of Nature in Men*</u>

Human nature, thinks Bacon, is hard to counteract, and requires great attention, lest it recur powerfully, and declare itself just when least appropriate. For Bacon, the key to dealing with our human nature—our particular and forceful propensities, like drinking, or gossiping, or ignoring our prayers—is to 'bend nature like a wand,' handling it subtly with no expectation of finally subduing it. Good sense, in dealing with one's nature, depends on the individual's willingness not to expect too much of himself, not to be easily discouraged, and above all to plan 'intermissions,' when he is able to indulge himself in that 'glass of wine' or 'tidbit of gossip' which placates nature without turning over the power to it.

<u># 42 *Of youth and age*</u>

With characteristic finesse, Bacon both contrasts the stages of age and youth, and plants surprises where the discussion of the two life stages might seem to grow hackneyed. Staple and indisputable notions of the two conditions are laid out with, invariably, the salt of difference which makes for the life of Bacon's insights. The expectations are met: 'young men are fitter to invent than to judge…fitter for execution than for counsel…the errors of young men are the ruin of business…' Then comes that not too expected twist of insight: Bacon speaks of 'that which doubleth all errors; 'young men' will not acknowledge and retract

their errors, like an unready horse that will neither stop nor turn. Men of age,' on the contrary, 'object too much, consult too long, and seldom drive business home to the full period.'

 # 58. The vicissitude of things

This selection of landmarks, from Bacon's essays, underplays the large issue of Fortuna, which in both Montaigne and Bacon—as well as in late mediaeval music, art, and philosophy—is a recurrent concern. We are talking. in Bacon's time, of a period of cultural history in which various threats to human existence are making themselves felt. No doubt this atmosphere of threat—which coincided with much news of the newly discovered worlds to west and east, storms and shipwrecks, and hitherto rarely noted natural disasters in Western Europe. Vicissitudes were obvious by products of the world that was dis-closing itself to science and adventure in the Renaissance.

The Renaissance was a period in which historical and cultural prospects were emerging from the wraps of mediaeval myth-historia, as were the first serious scientific theories, such as those of Roger Bacon (1220-1292). With a scientific optic came the realization that the by and large closed world of the Mediaeval Mind was in part a smokescreen emitted by religious ignorance. While Bacon's astute and cunning observations of mind and morals grew from a uniquely probing mind. It can be said that change and chance and openness, the first fruits of analytical thought, were among the world conditions that the Early Modern mind needed first to cope with.

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The themes of Bacon's thought

Style

Bacon writes with style, and admires style. He thinks clearly, he admires clarity of distinctions; and he sees to it that every sentence has a specific job to do, and must complete it until the following sentence has been initiated. Like Montaigne Bacon believes in taking rich topics as they come, clarifying them and exemplifying all issues, and carrying them through to a resolution. Though he can hardly have known it, soaked as he is in Latin training, his own verbal style reverberates with the eloquence and discipline of Silver Age Latin.

Boldness of Inquiry

When Bacom addresses a theme, like youth and age or love and friendship he pursues it fully. He chooses examples which press his point into its finest implications. He writes to startle, to convince, and to force the reader into investigation. Is this a theme or a practice by which Bacon reinforces all his themes?

Common Sense

Bacon makes clear, throughout his essays,that he will weigh in on the side of common sense rather than of fancy. By common sense he does not mean 'straightforward' statement, for he is notoriously paratactical in his greatest meaning-conveying sentences, but it means content available to general interpretation.

Belief in Meaning

For Bacon, it is unbelievable that the living world in which we find ourselves should not be the product of meaning. Behind that meaning must lie an intelligent and all powerful creator. The very premise of style in writing is coherence in actuality.

Chance

Nature, historical transitions, the hunger of time to gobble up the past, the shortness of memory: all these elements of our setting in life conspire to render our present moment in time a tissue of possibilities, of potential existence situations which might have been ours. The fact is that each of us is the byproduct of just the existential elements that define us. We are products of chance, though not products of chaos or lack of meaning, for meaning (and the Creator's pressure in it) is what makes us so much aware of what accident really is.

Study guide

Among the traits of the modern consciousness in its early Renaissance form, is the inclination to investigate, inquire, and soon to experiment. The Middle Ages were not without their experience of all these traits—cf. Lynn Thorndike on the development of science in the Middle Ages, or the life in science of Roger Bacon—and Sir Francis Bacon leads the anglophone awakening to the newly discovered wonders of the natural world.

Like Montaigne, Bacon finds his voice in the essay. That fresh form opens the way to supple and bold investigation. In his own essays Bacon does not explore unique scientific alleys of discovery, but he proclaims readiness for concrete scientific action. He is a ground breaker. But for which actual pathways within what we now call science, does Bacon especially lead the way? Would it be for hard science, or for the science of social structure? (The latter, perhaps, when it comes to the speculations that fill *The New Atlantis*?).

The essays of Bacon and Montaigne are fitting zones for the study of the 'making of the modern mind.' Have we forerunners to the essay in Roman and Greek culture? The Greeks moved naturally into display literature—dramas, epics, lyrics, even philosophy—but not reflective writings in which, so to speak, a mind investigates a topic, turns it over and looks at it from different angles, and draws conclusions from the investigation. In Rome one might think of the letters or Pliny and Cicero, or on moralistic-discursive pieces like Cicero's 'essays *De Senectute,* On Old Age, or 'On Friendship' It is true that we speak of Cicero's *Essays*, but do we mean 'essay,' here, in the same sense as in Bacon or Montaigne*? This would be a practical form of an essay you, dear student, should write*. You will find, as you explore this topic, that you are onto a key inquiry into what characterizes the modern mind at work—its self-reflective investigations.

Christopher *Marlowe (1564-1593)*

Tamburlaine (1587)

Elizabethan Poetry

The genius of poetic creation in Elizabethan culture assumes multiple forms: the epic of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Spenser dazzles us with original stanzaic strategies; the Platonic romanticism of Sir Philip Sidney, who in *Astrophil and Stella* and in his *Defense of Poetry* gives heart and soul to the expressions of love; the sonnets of Shakespeare, unparalleled for their blend of passion with perfect subtlety. (The theatrical legacy of Shakespeare is of course the world summit of the British gift to culture.) The British tradition of poetic eminence is fully launched well before the advent of what we later called the Metaphysicals, in the early Jacobean Age.

The Young Marlowe

Christopher Marlowe was one of the generative forces in Elizabethan literature. He was not of the high born. He was born to John Marlowe and Elizabeth Archer, in Canterbury, in 1564. His father was a shoemaker, and an aggressive one, who had a volatile temper like his son, and early became familiar with street fighting. In 1589, when he was twenty five, the younger Marlowe was involved In a violent confrontation, in which a man was killed. Marlowe was briefly imprisoned, but not dissuaded from

engaging not only in further fights but in behaviors that had his downfall inscribed upon them. Whether through calumny or his own recklessness, Marlowe managed to create around him a sturdy reputation for blasphemy and atheism—particularly for scorn for Islam-- and for including a furious burning of the *Koran* in the play *Tamburlaine*-- for homo-eroticism, for street brawling, and above all for espionage, of which he was accused by his enemies, whose constant charge was that Marlowe was a crypto-Catholic, in league with Elizabeth's sturdy army of Protestant agents, who were scattered throughout Western Europe.

Marlowe no street ruffian

All of which is not to say, however, that Marlowe entered his culture at a ruffian point, a sensibility of the streets, for in fact he was indebted to Cambridge University for a much needed scholarship, for which he had made use, in order to position himself for a broad education in Greek and Latin. One thinks, in the Marlowe case, of Francois Villon, and the wonderful if gross ballads he wrote straight off the streets of Paris, a century earlier; another scholar-lyricist, who was far from the elegance of literary salons.

Tamburlaine and the other plays

Our topic, *Tamburlaine,* joins other Marlowe plays—*The Jew of Malta, Dido, Queen of Carthage, Doctor Faustus, Edward II*—in refusing banality, shocking artfully, and daring the waters of brilliant lyrical-dramatic language. It can be no surprise, in addition, that Marlowe's dramatic work reflects the impulsive life of the young man behind it. The Tamburlaine play is set in an exotic Hellenistic and Central Asian past in which intense theatrical emotions—sadism, brutality, scorn—play a rarely so exercised role. A robust language, befitting the energy and freedom of the period, is generously allotted to this 'modern drama, which by the mid seventeenth century was to be viewed more as bombastic than powerful, having suffered critical rebuffs from such opinion establishers as Ben Jonson, for the often overblown language of the play seemed vulgar. Ben Jonson condemned 'the Taburlaines and Tambur-chams of the late age, which had nothing in them but the scenical strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers.'

The Language

It is no surprise that the iambic pentameters of Marlowe should have struck such finer critics as Ben Jonson as heavy handed. We miss, in this language, much of the finesse of Shakespeare, for instance, and yet Marlowe slams himself strongly into his expressions and themes, and gives his language little opportunity to relax. Listen to the peroration of Tamburlaine to his arch enemy, and now defeated foe, the Persian Bajazet:

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A sample of dialogue

Tamburlaine

The chiefest god, first mover of the sphere
Enchas'd with thousands everlasting shining lamps,
Will sooner burn the glorious frame of heaven
Than it should so conspire my overthrow.
But, villain, thou that wishest this to me,
Fall prostrate on the low disdainful earth,
And be the footstool of great Tamburlaine.
That I may rise unto my royal throne.

Bajazet (Emperor of the Turks)

First shalt thou rip my bowels with thy sword,
And sacrifice my heart to death and hell,

Before I yield to such a slavery.

Tamburlaine

Base villain, vassal, slave to Tamburlaine
Unworthy to embrace or touch the ground
That bears the honor of my royal weight;
Stoop! Villain, Stoop! Stoop! for so he bids
That may command thee piecemeal to be torn,
Or scattered like the lofty cedar-trees
Struck with the voice of thundering Jupiter.

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Inside this language

The iambic hexameter line of Marlowe drives a heavy cargo of emotions-- hate, scorn, fury, debasement, terror—which, given the restlessness of the entire play, is never able to come to a pause. (Shakespeare wins first prize for his skill at changing scenes and tones, miming the diversities of the 'wide world.' Marlowe appals and shocks with occasional outbursts of stunning beauty.)

Plotting around the language

Built through richness and intensity of language, M*arlowe's plot rivets our attention to the single figure of Tamburlaine*, himself barely developed, except as a line of coherence within the ebbs and flows of emotive language. Formulated abstractly, the plot of *Tamburlaine* simply tracks the name of this figure who was a shibboleth for mysterious eastern power in the world of those Hellenistic and central Asian silk roads which even our time inherits, as a trace memory of jugular power groups, moving over the rocky turf. The course of Tamburlaine's rise to power, and ultimately toward ruling the world, is his readiness to move with the flow of history—to woo and win the daughter of the King of Egypt, Zenocrate, to win over and employ the soldiers of his enemy Mycetes, and finally—but in quick succession—to conquer and then humiliate the Turkish Emperor, Bajazet, eventually caging him, feeding him on table scraps, and only occasionally releasing him, though then only by allowing him to serve as footstool fo Tamburlaine. (No wonder that Bajazet kills himself soon against the bars of his cage while his wife Zabrina soon follows suit. That humiliating demise does not, in the flow of the text, do more than punctuate the slowly soaring grandiosity of Tamburlaine.)

The place of language in the creation of character.

Marlowe's Tamburlaine is of course made of language, and is thus a measure of the place of language development in the creating of the modern mind. This is to say, of course, that Tamburlaine is only what he says, coupled to what the playwright says Tamburlaine says. What people can simulate in language, whatever we call them, is their acting themselves out as character. And Tamburlaine will for sure, on his path to the end, need to act himself out of the future entirely. His final wish is for his children to rule the world, having stamped out all his enemies. We should be ready to believe, in this connection, that Marlowe—whose personal life boils with elements of self-will and reckless domination—found in Tamburlaine a ready made creation image for his own aspirations.

Tamburlaine as a mirror of the Renaissance man

Early modern man, as we feel it out in these entries, differs sharply from mediaeval man or woman, who have in their time not yet acquired those aspirations, for controlling nature, for travelling and conquering vast spaces, for constructing weapons and traversing earth and mountains—or, to wrap it up in a sentence—for taking charge of the universe. That latter aspiration, which in our time we have seen as a kind of driver in the vision -worlds of such as Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, Elon Musk or Eminences of global perspective like Pope Francis, Winston Churchill, or Karl Marx—was barely imaginable in the early modern period, but was implicit in the thinking of a Marlowe, of those utopian-city visionaries (More,

Campanella, Bacon; The New Atlantis), or of Pascal, Milton, or Bunyan, who followed their creator's mind tracks into places where spirituality seemed to crack open unexpected places for the global human imagination to grow. The thinking of Descartes and Montaigne, similarly, touched base with thick earth, with pragmatic problems, which could be addressed with down to earth thinking. From the pragmatic thinking of these two persistent and realistic Frenchmen rose the thought scaffoldings on which the imaginative visions of our own age would grow.

Tamburlaine again

The swashbuckling overreach of Tamburlaine, who as it were comes out of nowhere in order to overwhelm the world with his visions of world conquest, is a fitting example of the power of imagination. Marlowe's text itself exemplifies the power of transformation, here of a Spanish original—Pedro Mexia's *Silva de varia leccion,* turned first into French and then into English—from which texts Marlowe drew the main lines of his story; while the minor characters of the play were largely drawn from Marlowe's imagination.

Historians

Historians of Marlowe's time provided the requisite details concerning the stupendous power of the actual Mongol Empire ruled by Timur (Timur the Lame, Tamburlaine) and dominant, throughout the fourteenth century, throughout Central Asia—Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan. From the rude power of this Mongol dynasty, credited with having killed five percent of the globe's population at its time, to the brawling and tempestuous imagination of Christopher Marlowe at the University of Cambridge, two centuries later , is the distance between the raw materials of power and the extravagant imagination that transforms that power into culture.

Study guide

What relation do you see between Marlowe's *Tamburlain*e and Pico de la Mirandola's *Oration on Human Dignity*? This question may seem outrageous, given the contrast between the viciousness of Tamburlaine the ruler and Pico's ambitious character model for the power of the human. What could there be in common? The key is to recognize the superhuman potential of Pico's model, a human figure to be sure but at the same time a transcending figure, a model of the supreme powers inherent to man. (Pico's model might perhaps best be compared with Nietzsche's superman, or the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus, images of a supreme model of fidelity to man, and resistance to Zeus.) By seeing Pico's 'man' in that setting, we may note that he is a figure of great power, capable of protecting as well as harming us. Has Tamburlaine any benign traits? Is he a mere ruffian? Or is he man at the apex of power?

Edmund Spenser

The Faerie Queene (1590)

The poet and his time

Edmund Spenser was born into the prime of the Elizabethan Renaissance in England, and, along with writers like Shakespeare, Sidney, and Marlowe captured the energies of a golden moment, when British commerce, naval power, and cultural synergy were at their peak. Queen Elizabeth I was the awe-inspiring sovereign whose presence surmounted the independent and sea-savvy Britons, whose sense of historical centrality coincided with their growing self-consciousness as a world culture.

Elizabeth and her cultural moment

Around the Queen gathered a large number of courtiers—men of wit and intelligence, and in many cases (Sidney, Spenser, Sir Walter Raleigh) true scholars, familiar with the oldest traditions of English literature and history. In the case of Elizabeth herself, who plunged into the study of Greek, and like the youngsters educated throughout the realm, the classics played a daily role in the formation of the Elizabethan mind.

So did the 'mediaeval,' that component of British culture which was increasingly awakening nostalgia, romance, and a sense of popular-regional histories among ordinary English people .Spenser is deeply influenced by the ethos of this milieu around the Queen, and by his sense, during wide travels in England and Ireland, of the rapidly developing national character that was apparent on all side of him.

The Faerie Queene in its time

The Faerie Queene—i.e. Queen Elizabeth !—is a long epic poem composed by Edmund Spenser The first three books of the poem were published in 1590; they were then republished in 1596, with Books IV-Vl. The poem is more than 36,000 lines in length, and contains more than 4000 stanzas, making it one of the longest poems in English. In six books the poet follows the adventures of several knights, each of them devoted to one virtue in particular—chastity, honor, justice—and committed, in each instance, to making the world more available to the virtue he represents.

The text of the poem

The Faerie Queene—courtly, linguistically archaic (early modern English), and knightly—presents a lather of styles and attitudes, from courtly adulation, through robust defense of the virtues, to delight in epic language and the splendors of the Greco-Roman tradition which underlies the present text at every point. (The lengthy peroration to the Muses, at the opening of Book One, is a vivid Homeric reminder. Spenser's Muse is invoked to sing of the poet's adventures, this time in quest of true virtue, and of course to aid the humble poet in his effort to consecrate the most important tribute possible, to the Queen.) Spenser himself, like his contemporary, Philip Sidney, and like such Europeans as Castiglione, Macchiavelli, Campanella, Montaigne, was deeply educated into Classical languages and cultures, and brought that foundation of reference to the front of his texts, elevating pagan perspectives into a consistent chivalric Christianity.

The management of The Faerie Queene

The conduct of this enormous, ultimately unfinished work is turned over to the world of *faerie* (especially of the Arthurian legends which thrived throughout the late mediaeval period in England.) *Faerie* was an imaginative zone found by Spenser in his reading of Chaucer, and especially of the Italian epic poets Tasso (1544-1595) and Ariosto (1474-1533), whose visions of Christianized chivalry were dominant for the Renaissance mind in sixteenth century Britain. Lords, ladies, warriors and evil dwarves abound in this imagined zone of culture, which so perfectly represented the fancy and dreams of the Elizabethan mind. While this pagan romanticism provided a soft landing from the mediaeval into the early modern, it coincided with the tumultuous Protestant redirection of Elizabethan England, which was to provide temporary dominance to the Anti-Papal themes of sixteenth century Europe, and which in England, as in Montaigne's France, was to bathe in the long bloody stretch of Religious Wars, which were to usher in so many of the truly modern conditions of seventeenth century Europe.

The Beginning of Stanza One of Canto One of The Faerie Queene Dissected: The uptake of Stanza One into Stanza Two

Given the complexity of Spenser's poem, as a whole, with its innumerable characters, plot and sub plot, Canto One of *The Faerie Queene* should serve as our model and example, before we make any effort to summarize the entire remaining epic. Canto One deserves our close attention.

The first Canto of the poem opens thus:

'Lo I the man,' whose Muse whilome did maske,
As time her taught, in lowly Shephearde's weeds,
Am now enforsd a far unfitter taske,
For trumpets stern to change my Oaten reeds,
And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds;
Whose praises having kept in Silence long,

Me, all too meane, the sacred Muse areads
To blazon broad amongst her learned throng.
Fierce wars and faithful loves shall moralize my song.

Meaning and metrics

Although Spenser rarely sacrifices meaning to metrical consistency, he does contrive to bring that consistency to the reinforcement of meaning. Let us say that the meaning of this initial stanza, a major upgrade to the poet's artistic assignment, is sharply and even alarmingly uptoned by the Muses'command to 'moralize his song.' The protracted hexameter, which furnishes the final line of the stanza, jacks up the command to memorialize lords and ladies. Now the poet's mandate is to fight the world's battles on behalf of virtue. The hexameter in question draws out the full dignity of the poet's charge, which has been nobly modested by reference to the 'lowly Shephearde's weeds' in which he used to dress himself, in the old days, when he was a pastoral poet, and had not yet been called on to 'blazon broad' the 'wars and loves' in which the issues of morality are central.

Classical presences in Spenser

The opening stanza of the *Faerie Queene* picks up the proem to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* both, to that poet's Achllles and Odysseus, but does so with a gorgeous self-reference to the overwhelmed guy, 'I myself,' who is left with the burden of rising to deal with the moral issues generated by the great of this world. Spencer, quite in the diction of major poetry in his own time, is preoccupied with his own unworthiness to perform the high task demanded of him by his Muse. Not infrequently, as in this first stanza of the First Canto, he completes the work of his already tasking eight-line opening, only to leave the stanza at a dignified point of rest, before the taking up of a new proposal and response.

Flow and transition in Spenser

For the sake of showing Spenser at his typical best, master of flow, transition, and over-vision, we should look also at the beginning of the second stanza of the poem, which follows immediately on the iambic hexameter with which Canto One concluded, burdening the poet wit the obligation to treat the highest moral issues:

Help, then, O holy Virgin chiefe of mine,
Thy weaker novice to performe thy will;
Lay forth out of thine everlasting scryne
The antique rolls, which there lie hidden still,
Of Fairie knights and fairest Tanaquil,
Whom that most noble Briton Prince so lo
Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,
That I must rue his undeserved wrong.
O help thou my weak wit, and sharpen my dull tong.

One Stanza to the next

A perfectly hewn second stanza rounds off the closure of poetic humility, by which Spenser acknowledges his modesty, and his unreadiness to carry out his high calling. The narrator imprints the challenge of that calling by reaching into a dark zone of memory and magic, the Arthurian Age in which there was still vivid memory of Tanaquil, the archetypal good mother of the original Roman state, and in which archaic English—*scryne* for *shrine* or *bookcase—could be employed* in daily speech. Spenser unhesitatingly deploys such references, in constructing his land of *Faerie*. One has to imagine a sophisticated audience—it was the same people, beyond doubt, who were making of Shakespeare's plays a national entertainment—for whom even more than a suspension of disbelief, indeed an onset of willed enchantment, was the foundation stone of literary commitment.

The shape of the whole poem

We have opened the magic box of the first canto of The *Faerie Queene,* and made several observations: of the diction, the dominant stanzaic form, the realm of Faerie, from which the highly 'poetic' moralizing of the whole creation is drawn, and the skill with which complex prosody is woven into the adroit sketches of personhood, that first will of the modest poet. What we need in addition, in order to take the measure of the *Faerie Queene*, is some access to the larger unity of the poem.

Fairyland

Gloriana, the Queen of Fairyland, holds court for a broad selection of knights and ladies, drawn straight from the traditional imagination of the Arthurian Middle Ages; Arthur himself is the central figure in this wide cast of *faerie* characters, and is endlessly attracted to Gloriana herself. He is one with the whole project that drives Gloriana to further the mission of the knights who are awaiting their mission assignments.

The assignments

The first of those assignments, as we have seen, is that given to the Red Cross Knight (who 'represents' *holiness),* the second is given to the Knight of Temperance, the allegorical banner for Lord Guyon, the third mission is for the Briton Queen of Chastity, Britomart, the fourth for the *Knights of Friendship, the* fifth assignment *is* that given to Sir Artegall, the Knight of Justice, while the final remaining assignment is devoted to Sir Caledore, the Knight of Courtesy. It is each Knight's mission to procure the appropriate honors and freedom for all victims who find themselves in need of his or her unique protection. The protections in question are conferred by the virtue in whose charge the individual knights find themselves. Allegory links each knight to his deeper meaning.

Allegory

The function of allegory, in Spenser's England, where all major literature was assumed to clothe itself in moral significance, is to say more than just what it says, while implying even more than that. The Red Cross personifies holiness, the Reformation Church of England free of Papism, St. George and the true cultural spirit of Britain. By parallel, Una, the lovely lady who rides through the forest beside the Red Cross Knight, personifies truth and the true religion. In the second stanza Prince Arthur incarnates magnificence and private virtue as well as Protestantism, while Gloriana, whom Arthur loves, and who activates the whole fleet of missions, represents spiritual glory and her supreme other, Queen Elizabeth. The sequence of allegorical relationships plays out through the ongoing explosion of characters who find themselves implicated in the virtue-missions central to all six books.

Characters

What kind of characters are constructed by an allegorical literature of Spenser's kind? It is often remarked that Shakespeare—say in creating Falstaff or Prince Hal or Prospero—finds his way to the center of a character, out from which he lets an organic creation deploy itself. Anywhere you touch such a character it is fully alive. The greatest advocates of Spenser's work will not claim such organic power for him, yet they have other insights to offer, into the variety of ways available to the poetic characterologist. Spencer's greatness as a maker of figures springs from the 'modest-deep' portrait he makes of himself, as the poet charged with a mission, a moral missionary. In each of his character portraitures he retains the aspirations of moral evaluator, and struggles through shadow into light with an ennobling but subtle music.

Study guide

Spencer's language is archaic, early modern English, but is his tale archaic? What is the main point of his tale? Is it that virtue and beauty are man's chief goals? If so, does that suggest in Spencer some affinity to the Neoplatonism of Ficino and Pico, and perhaps of a poet like Michelangelo? Queen Elizabeth is the model of both beauty and virtue, for the poem—the long poem, 36,000 lines—and the support throughout

to the idealism of the poem, but does the archaic tone of the work detract from the immediacy of respect for the monarch?

Spencer's work is replete with classical learning, both Greco-Roman and archaic British lore. What does the use of such a backdrop do for the poet? Does it enable him to make points which would otherwise require too blunt and unshaded a formulation? How do you explain the persistence of learning models drawn from two ancient cultures, a millenium and a half distant from the Renaissance? Why has British lore—which of course plays its role in Spencer's work—not prevailed into 'our time'? Has any myth still a living presence in our moment? Have myths been largely replaced by gusts and currents of language, which establish algorithms instead of 'tales'?

Study guide

Does this poem belong to our theme of 'the making of the modern mind'? Have we pinned down the traits of the modern mind, in such a way that we could address this question? After all we could ask the same question of the work of Marlowe, Michelangelo, Sir Philip Sidney, or Marguerite de Navarre. The modern mind—in a blunt sense the empirical, questioning, self-reflective, aesthetic mind that began to assert itself with the Renaissance, and that has begun to deposit its skills in formerly unimaginable feats of technology, social engineering, and revolutions in communications---the modern mind has many salient features, but growth in the skills of art, such as Spenser's masterpiece, must be counted as part of the self-mastery which is an unquestionable element in the coming to shape of a fine consciousness of human ability. To overcome the challenges Spencer successfully faced, in breathing rich life into the challenge of interweaving beauty with virtue is a clear 'becoming modern.' Do you agree? Argue out this point!

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

Pilgrim's Progress (1678)

Bunyan's background

Bunyan was born in Bedfordshire, the son of a tinsmith, received a minimum education, joined the army and spent three years in it, in his teens, returned from war to marry in his hometown, and settled down to raise his several children, and to follow his father in the tinsmith trade—keeping local pots and pans in useable condition. Troubled inwardly by religious scruples, and sensitive to certain remarks about his over fondness for bellringing, and for young man games played on the village green, he found himself drifting into religious circles, talking and even preaching among members of the Bedfordshire Free Church, a local expression of dissent against the Anglican Church.

Restoration of the Monarchy

With the Restoration of the British monarchy, in l660, John Bunyan found himself on the wrong side of laws of assembly designed to reserve exclusive rights, to public worship, for the Anglican Church of England. Refusing to accept these laws, Bunyan continued to preach as a dissenter. The result was imprisonment. At first his imprisonment was assigned for three months, but Bunyan's absolute refusal to abjure future preaching led to an increased prison term of what Bunyan in the end became twelve years—with occasional permissions for release, and even for the pleasure of rejoining and preaching at his Bedfordshire Free Church. In l672 Bunyan was released from prison, having written in jail a good part of his masterpiece, *Pilgrim's Progress*—and other texts, as well, like *Grace Abounding.* The final publication of *Pilgrim's Progress* occurred after Bunyan's release, and was an immediate success.

Bunyan and Milton

Pilgrim's Progress was completed in the 1670's, and rapidly became a best seller. (It is said to have been the next best seller to the Bible, in British literary history.) We note with fascination that John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1667, written by a child of privilege and high education, and probing the mysteries of

Christian theology, was created out of the same milieu, and virtually at the same time, as *Pilgrim's Progress.* One could hardly imagine a clearer double case study, for grasping the Christian imagination in the seventeenth century, still embroiled in versions of those Christian anti-papal wars which preoccupied the cultural environment of Michel de Montaigne, a century earlier.

The Christian imagination

Like Bunyan, Milton had composed a Christian allegory, devoted to other-worldly themes of fall, sinful mind, grace, and paths to redemption within the Christian repertoire. Unlike Milton, Bunyan had projected his theological tale onto a rustic dream, and spread its actions, directed as they were toward the search for salvation, over the course of purportedly naïve narratives of one man's journey onto the path to salvation. Christian, as the man was called, was to be the journeyer who made an exemplary ascent into salvation

The Christian narrative

In a dream, Bunyan's narrator recounts a striking scene, which he observes in a field. A weary and ragged man is walking there, obviously in pain and exhausted, crying out that he longs to escape the City of Destruction, in which he was trapped. He declares an immediate catastrophe—the City of Destruction is to be burned to the ground—and he begs his family and friends to flee with him, escaping the disaster. At first they deride him for exaggeration, then they simply attempt to keep him quiet, to leave them in peace.

The Encounter

The distraught burden bearer, Christian, who is continually crying for help, eventually encounters a much needed ally, Evangelist, who directs him to a wicket-gate, on the other side of a wide field, 'Do you aee yonder shining light'? Christian can barely discern the light, but expresses his readiness to go toward it, and to knock for entry. As he charges across the field, toward the gate, his family spots him, and runs out of the house, begging for Christian to stop. In one of the high dramatic moments, of the entire narrative, Christian ignores his family, and races ahead purposefully, crying 'Life, Life! Eternal Life!'

Ascending together

For a short distance his friend Pliant walks by his side, but when the pair of them reach the Slough of Despond, a viscous and muddy pond, Pliant begins to feel himself being sucked in , and abandons the journey as not for him. Pilgrim soldiers ahead, though, finally getting a fresh push from a fellow named Help, who emerges encouragingly from the Slough, but just as quickly disappears. So much for the protestations of Help. The Slough, as it turns out, is one of the allegorical passages which continually recurs, as an image of the Inherent obstacles on Pilgrim's journey.

Biblical References

To note, about the text Bunyan is laying before us: it is permeated by Biblical references, which are allowed to accumulate around every passage with a Biblical reference behind it. (Bunyan, a devout church goer with an infallible memory for the Bible, had had only two books with him during his twelve months in prison; one was the Bible—the other Fox's *Book of Martyrs.* He found himself able to draw on his dense knowledge, of biblical passages, to enrich his own narrative argument, and to keep the presence of the holy near the weave of his tale.)

Capitalizations

The omnipresence of capitalized names with abstract meanings. The capitalization of names, in itself no peculiarity in seventeenth century British spelling of English, distances the persons of the narration—no one goes unnamed—transporting them in an eye to an abstract meaning zone. That is the zone in which they coincide with their presences as Biblical support passages.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman

After Help has vanished from the Slough of Despond, characteristically indifferent to the true dilemma facing Christian, Mr. Worldly Wiseman materializes—as out of thin air; thus interchange places In seamless continuum the many characters with whom Christian and his occasional friends, allies, or foes meet in the forthcoming journey to eternal rest. Mr. Worldly Wiseman is above all prudent, and urges Christian not to undertake a perilous journey of uncertain outcome. Instead it would be better, he argues, to take a detour to the pleasant and well run village of Morality. There Christian can live with his wife and children in security and comfort, abandoning the arduous struggle of ascent. Christian is tempted, yet as he is walking toward Morality he sees an austere figure approaching him.

Evangelist

It is Evangelist, there to reprove Pilgrim sharply for his initial gesture of leaving the path of righteousness. Pilgrim blushes with shame, realizing that he had been on the verge of yielding to the familiar comforts of his own home. Evangelist urges Pilgrim to head straightway for that wicket-gate which will be the true entry to the path of ascent. As the wicket-gate swims into sight again, we realize how craftily Bunyan has brought us to the present point in the narration, the entrance to the ascent.

Literary strategy

The characters around which Bunyan is starting to spread his tale are both characterless—when it comes to fine points of appearance, dress, manner—and vivid, sharply representative of the distinctive attitudes they 'represent.' At the same time, the pace of Bunyan's journey is quick, forceful, goal oriented but fascinatingly doomed to twists and turns, struggles inherent and incremental triumphs, as Pilgrim rises to ever more exalted heights.

The development of the tale

The Cross

An inventive series of obstacles awaits the reader who has entered the wicket-gate with Christian. That reader will, of course, surmise that the journey upward, to the Celestial City, will eventually reach its goal. Bunyan does not win attention by raising doubts, about eventual success, but rather by establishing a fascinating set of obstacles to ascent, and of ingenious paths for circumventing disaster. Christian is met, at the far side of the wicket gate, by benign and helpful figures like Good Will, and then Interpreter, who begins to explain to him the sacred Christian symbols which will landmark his journey upward. Christian comes upon the Cross itself, whereupon his burden falls from his back, and in a twinkling he is greeted by Celestial angels, The Shining Ones. (Bunyan shows masterful control of his stage properties, introducing each new phenomenon before the traces of the previous event have left the mind.)

Apollyon and Hell

A bleak darkening of Fortune strikes, at just this point, to throw Christian into furious battle with the brutal beast Apollyon, who tries to block the path, and to trick Pilgrim by a dangerous orifice, that leads abruptly downward into the Gates of Hell. Circumventing these nearly fatal obstacles, Christian takes advantage of the much needed presence of Faithful and Hopeful, who give him the courage to take the final bitter strides to the Celestial City. The small band of pilgrims enters joyfully into the golden streets of the City.

Christiana's journey

After the journey upward of her husband, Pilgrim, his wife Christiana receives an invitation from Jesus Christ to attempt the salvational journey to the Celestial City. On a long and arduous journey, marked by obstacles and beasts, as well as by life-saving acts of mercy, Christiana and her retinue, which has swollen in number by this time, make their ways to the Holy City, where Christiana is reunited with

Pilgrim, while the the couple's immediate offspring remain behind, to people the thriving Church of Christ on earth.

Bunyan's genius

The success of C.S .Lewis as an allegorist, say in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrob*e, 1950, still fascinates both children and adults, proving that the Romantic sense of imagination is not the only literary organ in town. Lewis charms, astonishes, and even scares modern readers of all ages, with his *Narnia* series. Christian magic replaces the transformative magic of which Romantic poetry was so rich a source. Bunyan knew how to experience the world allegorically, in terms of jagged intermissions between moments of peril and moments of grace, experienced by simplified figures from Christianized theology. By tapping into universal concerns with grace, life after death, and holy terror, Bunyan indestructible center of the human experience.

Study guide

We are surprised to learn that in Bunyan's and Milton's moment, the former was far more popular, widely read and widely sold, than Milton. Why might be surprised? Milton writes in the great literary epic tradition of the West. His language is rich, ornate and Latinate, and his theology is complex and coherent. Unlike Milton, Bunyan is telling a simple tale about simple pilgrims. And yet, Bunyan is telling a tale archetypal search for heaven, on the level of archetypal believers wandering through archetypal landscapes—landscapes plotted out with every kind of obstacle and encounter, as Dante might have stage managed it. We sympathize with Pilgrim and his wife—at the same time we view them as cardboard characters. (Are there characters to sympathize with in Paradise Lost? Adam, or Raphael, or even Satan? Or do we sympathize in Milton with our own fall?) Perhaps we get out of Bunyan what we put into the experience of Pilgrim, the tireless quester in ourselves. That might be why Pilgrim's Progress is second only to the Bible in English-reader popularity.

What do you make of the use of abstract, capitalized names in Pilgrim's Progress? Does this practice detract from the 'reality' of the narrative, or does it enhance the narrative by stressing the global argument nestling inside Bunyan's tale? Is Bunyan interested in the reality if his characters? Would his text find a readership in literate circles today, say in a contemporary University course? What would be the chief obstacles to his success?

With Bunyan and Milton before us, are we still on the track of the growing modernity of Early Modern literature? Can we 'think back' to Pico or Erasmus or Sir Thomas More, and feel that we have 'come to some place' won from time, unpeeled to from a core of emergent significance? Are we still convinced of the actuality of this temporal tapestry, and of the, even if stuttering, continuities that are built into it? Surely we did not expect a linear movement into modernity, originating from some ground level point? Surely we were not so enwrapped by what would become the doctrine of 'progress,' which reached gospel status in the nineteenth century? Address this question closely and you will be approaching a critique of the entire project of this book.

John Milton (1631-1700)

Areopagitica (1644)

The tradition of free speech

In an age when such platforms as Elon Musk's Twitter declare themselves for absolute freedom of expression, it cannot escape notice that such freedoms are never easily secured, in communities where social timidity and commonplace insecurity easily repress free discourse. The development of the modern voice, and of independence of thought, in short of conscious modern man, has been evident in the thought of many of the makers of the western conscience—Bacon, More, Montaigne, Macchiavelli-- and we can track that western tradition, of free expression, to us from the Greeks, not to mention from the boldness of the author of *Gilgamesh*, who dares to question the goodness of the gods, or from the

makers of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, who dared to map the geography of the dead man's journey to homelands in the sky. The affairs of the Areopagus, *Areopagitica,* is Milton's title for the present pamphlet, and stand for the Greek tradition of a region for free speech, one of the holiest spots in the ancient city, an area (like Hyde Park in London) where anyone can freely proclaim his opinions.

Milton and Free Speech

Seventeen centuries after the Christ asserted that 'the truth will set us free,' John Milton took his place in the center of the call for true human freedom of expression, and in so doing he picked up not only the special promise of the early modern tradition but the weight of the Hellene and Pauline traditions, which so vigorously pronounced the vigor of free speech from the Areopagus, through the oratory of such as Isocrates (4th century B.C.), and Saint Paul. (The Areopagus was a hill to the northwest of the Parthenon in Athens, and long served as the site of Athenian tribunals. Both Isocrates, in the fourth century B.C. and Saint Paul spoke from that bald eminence, in defense of freedom of spirit, so that it was natural that Milton, more than twenty centuries after Isocrates, should baptize his own lasting verbal monument to freedom under the banner of a lofty reference to ancient Hellenic freedom of speech. *Areopagitica*, the affairs related to the Areopagus, was to be Milton's testimony to the lasting tradition of free speech, which was initially sanctified by the Greeks.)

The Ordinance on Freedom of Speech

Milton's special insistence on free speech was provoked by actions of the British parliament—of which he was not a member—which were passed as the Licensing Order of 1643 and bore the official title, *Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing.* The essence of the law stipulated that an official government license needed to be presented, by the author of any book written and published in England. Power was thus given, to government censorship, to determine what deserved to be printed.

Background to the Ordinance

There was a long precedent behind Parliament's legislation—it went back to the regulations laid down by Henry VIII in the sixteenth century—and in fact the Catholic pressure of the Inquisition is the modern provocation the anti-papal Milton is most happy to confirm--though the enforcement of the law came now in the midst of the mid-seventeenth century struggle among different factors of the largely Presbyterian British Parliament. (Milton had himself suffered at the hands of the Parliament, for earlier tracts he had written in defense of divorce, for which the reigning authorities had little patience, and he was personally sensitized to the issue of free speech and liberty of personal behavior.) It was above all in Milton's broad human interest to contend on behalf of the large traditions of human expression and openness. (One might think of the perspective pf Montaigne, in this regard. Such innately 'humanist' thinkers proceeded from an innate trust in humanity, though they were the fsrst to spot the innate follies of mankind.)

The argument of Milton's Areopagitica

Milton opens by paying tribute to all those who care Intelligently about the commonwealths in which they live, and who take the trouble to enlighten it with valuable opinions. He puts it thus: 'When complaints are freely heard, deeply considered and speedily reformed, then is the utmost bound of civil liberty attained, that wise men look for.' The 'old and elegant humanity of Greece,' Milton continues, set the example for its posterity, by embodying honest and thoughtful critique in their arts of government and in their tragedies, in which such figures as Ajax, Neoptolemos or Oedipus reinforce our respect for the pursuit of honesty, truth, and frank critique. To which Milton adds that the suppression of scandalous or libelous opinions was never of value in actually suppressing those toxic attitudes. Books are not dead things whose vitality can simply be snuffed out by ordinance. Rather they are living organisms, says Milton, as he launches into the most illustrious, and brilliantly formulated, argument of this pamphlet.

Books as Life Blood

Startling thought! 'As good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kills a reasonable person made in God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, kills the image of God… a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit.'(The renown of this formulation has carved it into the lintels of the New York City Public Library and the Library of the University of Indiana, to the knowledge of the present writer.) Aware of the nature of the book, though of course still ignorant of the skills, culture or economy of printing, the ancient Greeks of course made no moves toward banning books, a useless and self-defeating exercise, making exceptions only for works such as those of Protagoras, which argued against the existence of the Gods, a blasphemy under no conditions tolerated. When it came to high spirited literature, like that of Aristophanes, even a highly critical mind like Plato's could kick back and laugh, knowing that he was in the hands of an irreproachable master.

En route to repression

Milton tracks the mediaeval background of Papal text- suppression, inquisitorial book-scrutiny, and the increasingly available—and repressible—out flowering of printed texts after the invention of printing had turned the book and manuscript world into an industry. Milton's whole body of work, especially in *Paradise Lost* (1667) turns around a mythography of loss, a narrative of the fall of man, our original sin:

'of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree/ whose mortal taste brought sin into the world, and all our woe…Sing heavenly muse…'

The human condition, vulnerable from the start, as we ourselves are, Is not to be nursed and coddled, but, given the values of robust challenge, exposed to the tough grit of social opinions and attitude; other reasons, thus, for avoiding the kind of society-overseeing that a patronizing government may incorrectly indulge. Milton explains how healthful it is for citizens to exercise their intelligence on material that is 'bad for them.' 'I can not praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue,' he says, 'one that never sallies out and sees her adversary…but slinks out of the race…that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary….' Even the Bible can be dangerous, thinks Milton, unless we read it with world-seasoned minds. In view of which, Milton recognizes, the enterprise of sealing off and locking away the dross that comes with any communication is completely impossible.

The elusive truth

The truth, asserts Milton, is in the end pure quicksilver, and cannot be pinned down. Plato shows the absurdity of any effort to codify truth, and preserve it for future generations. He tries to declare, in the *Laws*, that if poets continue to write their poems those very poems should, prior to distribution, be vetted by the guardians of the laws. But of course that is, to Milton, philosophical mumbo jumbo, and will never result in inoculating the people against falsehood. (Not until the return of our savior, says Milton, will the truth be amply before us. It is enough, adds Milton, that we are freed from the scourge of the Papal, without demanding that the truth entire be known.) For all that, however, and the case it supports against Big Brother's domination of thought, we must admit that the State has an ongoing Interest in promoting both healthy and innovative thought. Intrusion into that thought and expression is counterproductive, and the licensing of printing seemed to Milton a perfect example of such intrusion. Sadly, though, the original evil Milton fought is still very much with us, and the talent to evaluate it rarely aligned with the subtleties generated in serpentine propaganda.

John Milton (1631-1700)

Samson Agonistes (1671)

Historical setting

Milton was long involved with the kinds of issue that dominate his finest work: issues of power and faith, the role of the female in god's plan, social claims on the individual, man's strength in relation to the feminine principle, the laws of God and the penalty for ignoring them. All these sets of concerns challenge this multi-faceted writer, for whom the crucible of the English Civil Wars added intense personal focus. (In some ways he joins Montaigne, in fighting out his personal struggles against the canvas of Civil Wars which were tearing up the very ground on which he was writing. Exactly here we glimpse the battleground across which the modern consciousness was being forged.) The England of the mid- seventeenth century was a dramatic place in which to confess out one's deepest feelings, on all the central human topics. A man of high government position, a beneficiary of the finest education available both from St. Paul's stringent preschool and from Oxford University, Milton was staged for dramatic encounters with himself. Among the most potent texts Milton left, as vestiges of his from the beginning ambitious anthropology of man and God, is the *Samson Agonistes (Samson the Struggler*) before us.

Latin and Milton

What does the figure of Samson, that towering block of resistance from the *Book of Judges—Chapters 13-23*—offer Milton as a vehicle for dealing with himself? (The he himself, enshrouded in formal language, *Samson*, is himself Milton. He explodes into a version of himself as both power and weakness, but before reaching to us with such verbal ferocity he establishes himself in that same passionate, Latinate, erudite but wry, language that seems never not to have been Milton's trademark. (Reading Milton without Latin, for instance, is to lose the high noble register he sustains almost everywhere in his poetic work. The synthesis of classical English iambic pentameter with its innumerable plays against its sister language, Latin, empowers a game of great mind power, an engine which, in Milton's poetry, rarely runs down.)

The strategy of *Samson Agonistes*

Like the greatest of writers, Milton writes both a down to earth tale, and an allegory of that tale, in which his work is embedded, and which the universal stamp to the entire conception is visible. That universal message, which we can address in discussing 'themes,' below, is that great power of person and body can become proud and dangerous powder kegs for tragic developments. In Samson's case, in his condition as a redoubtable community leader, man of arms, the slayer of uncountable Philistines, the great enemy to hs own tribe, the worst of personal reductions has take its vengeance; he has been reduced to the Dungeon 'of himself.' Samson's soul is Imprisoned now in real darkness of the body, where it dwells, 'shut up from outward light to incorporate with gloomy night.' For 'inward light alas puts forth no visual beam.' With an interiority packed into historically embossed language, Milton flies outward to the point where, in the present passage, he reminds us of no less a wounded congener of the modern human condition than Hamlet, Shakespeare's brilliant exemplar of a young modern philosopher, who found himself beset by a need for actions which his situation couldn't adequately explain to him.

Modern dilemmas, modern resolutions

'Sicklied over with the pale cast of resolution,' Hamlet deeply felt the obligation to act and 'clean up the stables,' but the fuzziness of the modern mandate clipped his intentions and he went out as a wounded 'sweet prince'. Faced with a similar incumbency, the lover of Israel, *Samson agonistes,* concludes that he has been humiliated by events, betrayed by his beautiful Dalila, forgotten by his own sense of honor, and that only one recourse remains to him, first to embrace his enslavedness, then to own it entirely and to become, inside his imprisoned condition, the over thrower of his fate. This Samson, crouching potently within Samson, the character, will attract the full attention of what Milton designs as a modern tragedy, a source of that pity and fear which were for Aristotle, as we see in the introduction to this play, the deep triggers of the tragic experience, and pathways (through pity and fear) toward resolution and even peace.

The display technique

Milton's putting on of this moving psychodrama—a drama in the mind if you like, a play in which we meet Milton at every turn of feeling or sentence structure—places directly across from each other a wounded

giant, the shell of what had been the most powerful of Israel's leaders, and a redoubted warrior. We are to know Samson as a tissue of layers, prominent among which is a susceptibility to women and their dangerous charms. It is in fact this demanning, by the seductive Dalila that has reduced Samson to the crushed condition of a wounded warrior. The backstory to this display is brisk, but sharp angled: lover of a fabled Philistine beauty, Samson is lured by her into giving up his strength—locks of his hair—so that he falls into the hands of her clan of Philistines. It is in that dudgeon that we have first met Samson, 'eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves,' and pitied him as a mighty giant torn from his tribe, and up for humiliation as a public prisoner.

The succession of visitors

The playout of the drama transpires as a succession of visitor-specters who pass through the dramatic space of Samson, commenting on his condition—blinded, bound-- mocking him, bewailing the bad steps he has taken, that have led him to this destiny. Central to all these passing figures of the drama is the *chorus,* a well-intentioned crew of supportive community members who were close to Samson before his imprisonment, and who interact with his present worries and worrisome appearing plans. (Interestingly enough, the technique of a commenting visitor parade, adopted here, resembles that of the Greek tragedian Aeschylus, who employs it *in Prometheus Bound*, as he makes the bound hero the centerpiece of conversations with numerous passing spirits; Milton was living his classics to powerful effect here.) Samson's elderly dad visits his son, to say that he has collected ransom money which he is ready to offer for Samson' release—though before Manoa realizes it, Samson will have been led off to public trial, and will have brought down the temple on his own head and that of the Philistines. Dalila, Samson's wife, visits, with her seductive manners, but can no longer waken Samson' attention.

Samson and the end game

We realize at this point how deeply Samson's mind is elsewhere, and how apocalyptic his thoughts. Harapha, a cowardly giant, visits to mock Samson in prison, but is chased away, scorned by Samson as a big mouthed coward. The final turn of events is at hand. The succession of visitors, through whose reaction we have taken the pulse of Samson's character—which is both volatile and powerful—has given us an open window onto Samson's depression, humiliation, undefined fury, and anguish. To put all this in contemporary terms we might want to say that Samson is brewing the ingredients of mass murder, and that an explosion is about to rock him and his world.

The recounting of the end game

As it happens, a messenger is on his way to Samson's prison, to announce the calamitous finale of Samson's Fury. Taken as a display piece to the Philistine National Festival, where the whole community is engaged in festivities, Samson is called forth to perform feats of strength, to the awe and amusement of the assembled crowd. Assembling his fabled strength he raises the sacred temple of the regional god, smashing it to the ground, crushing the people of the bity, and killing himself. It is in this last action that Samson becomes *agonistes*, the Greek term Milton chooses to describe his protagonist. Samson is a *struggler*, a *battler*, as would be a fighter in classical Athens, all sweat, intention, and bulk, as he throws himself against the common enemy. A sinle man prizefighting is not an agonist, but a fighter; an antagonist fights from within a wider and deeper human commitment.

Themes in Samson Agonistes

Women

One of Samson's greatest weaknesses is beautiful women, and his wife Dalila is notoriously attractive. Certain strands of hair, on Samson's head, are the sources of his strength, of his power to resist her, and Dalila comes to realize that if she can snip his hairs gradually, until his strength to define himself and escape her fades, she will be able to exercise power over him. Nothing, of course, is simply what it seems to mean here.

Violence

Violence (or huge summonable strength) is important to Samson, in the present closet drama. He worships a god of power, is notoriously combative, and yet, because his power is sulky-moody as well as potent, he must be treated as all times as vital danger. (Character types pass through the contemporary eye, as it considers the blend of personal insecurity with need for dominance, on the political sight scape brought us by television today.)

Religion and Humiliation

The emasculation of Samson, by the wily Dalila and her co-plotting tribesmen, is the most devastating attack on Samson by his enemies. He is gradually deprived of his strength, which has for him a double religious meaning. He is more than ever forced to recognize the presence of others—which he does, appropriately, in facing the parade of visitors to his prison. He is also driven inward, with his strength, until it becomes some kind of nuclear engine of his behavior. It is this outreach of faith in which he brings his existence into the very face of God.

Aesthetic morality

Milton designs his one act tragic closet drama to accomplish the aesthetic ends Aristotle desired, for the full scale of a Greek tragedy, like Sophcles' *Oedipus the King.* In Sophocles's play (as in Milton's) the audience gives its sympathy to a great man, who through his own error falls, raising in us the feelings of pity and fear, a catharsis which cleans and purifies us.

Study guide

The two set pieces under discussion, as the heat of Milton's work, join in their celebration of the spirit of liberty, a constant concern of Milton (For a larger instance, Paradise Lost, arguably Milton's greatest work, builds constantly on the theme of liberty, dreadful as that condition is, when devoted to inner freedom and the power to dp gpod. As well, of course, as the power to choose evil, and to join Satan in Hell. In Samson Agonistes we encounter the ultimate figure of humanity, and realize how strenuously he struggles to reject the temptations of humiliation-submission. The same striving figure dominates *Areopagitica,* which is the culminating masterpiece of the passion for freedom. Does freedom emerge as a goal to strive for, or as an ultimately unmaintainable condition?

Milton's Samson is a figure of great power, ultimately strong enough to pul down the great temple and destroy his enemies. (The spirit of liberty, of that power which insists on freedom in *Areopagitica*, which unbinds the shackles of the mind.) Does Milton's powerful freedom loving man resemble the archetypal Man of Pico de la Mirandola's *Oration*? Do the two writers conceive an ideal man of power or of freedom alone?

Do you find love in Milton's essays? Is freedom, as Milton presents it, related to any of the gentler emotions? The answer seems to be no. In fact, perhaps because we have largely =sidestepped the lyric in our anthology, we have barely touched the topic of love, certainly romantic love, in this anthology.

John Dryden (1631-1700)

Essay of Dramatic Poesie 1666

The Ars Poetica in British Literature

English literature (especially poetry) has long grown alongside a rich self-awareness, a sense of what a work of literature can or should be. A stimulating precedent for this self-awareness was established by the Roman poet, Horace (19 B.C). who in his *Art of Poetry* laid down a pastiche of errors common to the inexperience of poetry, and of tricks of the trade familiar to the greatest in poetic persuasion. In the larger sense, Horace taught the good writer how to become the very good, if not great, writer. (*Poeta nascitur, non fit,* says this critic—*the poet is born not made,* that is he is either is by nature a poet—who like Horace himself was born bawling in hexameters, the classic line—or will never become one.)

Early English Poetry

English poetry—with its roots in such great culture-poetry as Chaucer's, and such eery archaic brilliance as *Beowulf*—has long battened on the power of significant poetic analysis. Sir Philip Sidney took arms, in his *Defense of Poetry* (1595) against downright opponents of the art against whom he arrayed the most powerful argument for disciplined beauty, the Platonic tradition; he showed us, in his sonnet-sequence *Astrophil and Stell*a, how skillfully he was able to turn passion up a notch with imaginative planning. Ben Jonson (*Every Man in his Humour*, 1598) ushers in the full power of Jacobean retrospect, bringing the experience of the classical literary heritage to bear as a high standard criterion by which to cut down literary pretensions.

Nineteenth century

A line of high poetic talents follows Jonson into the style and taste worlds of diverse centuries. Paying ardent attention to the social values of the poet's work. George Meredith *(An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*, 1877) and Percy Bysshe Shelley in his *Defense of Poetry (1821)* assume different postures in their defenses of poetry. Shelley carries us back into the Platonic zones we travelled (with Sir Philip Sidney, in the Elizabethan period while Meredith introduces us to a celebration of the role of comic drama in the refinement of social culture, and particularly features the socializing role played by women as actors, participants, and delighters In drama. Meredith's study is an original treatise on the essential role of the imaginative arts in seasoning simple social co-existence.

Dryden's role in establishing the English ars poetica

Dryden, like Sidney, undertakes a broad survey of the place of literature in ancient and modern cultures, reviewing many of the themes –ancients versus moderns, Aristotelian 'rules' versus more naturalistic treatments in English drama, the nature and value of blank verse and rhymed verse In drama. The introduction to the discussion is itself a piece of drama, for it introduces four friends engaged in heated conversation, concerning the broad issue of whether ancient or modern cultures are the finer.

On the barge

The conversation of the present essay transpires in a barge on the Thames, at the moment when the cannons of the British fleet are just announcing their victory at sea, over a contingent of the Dutch navy. The participants in the discussion—Crites, Eugenius, Lisideius, and Dryden himself, self-named Neander (*new man*) for his more modest social status than that of the other three aristocrats—are deep in debate. (Each of the gentlemen is a well known figure in British cultural circles.) The topics the four persons lay before themselves, as they bask in a moment of special British culture pride, are of three sorts: the relative values of ancient and modern drama—a branch of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, a hot topic of the time; as it coincided with the effort to create a colloquial new style in English; whether French or English drama is the better—the position of Neander, a staunch supporter of Shakespeare's work; the issue of whether blank verse or rhymed verse is more suitable for drama.

The conflicting opinions

Dryden masters the flow of discourse. Crites sets a leading tone by supporting the case for the superiority of ancient drama, and thus of course of the principles of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which were opinion setting in

Dryden's time. With this bolus of presumptions Crites establishes himself as a defender of principles and crisp thinking. (He witticizes that his only regret, at the British victory in the field, is that it would open the floodgates of 'bad celebratory poetry' 'ill poets should be as well silenced as seditious preachers.' To Crites Lisideus retorts that the poetry he most hates is that current and trendy kind of Clevelandism—a reference of the moment, to a Royalist fop poetaster. Banter of this sort launches counterattacks of wit which bring together the four barge passengers, as they leave the fading noise of the battle behind them. It is in such interplays of known personalities, with currently topical literary issues, that the four worldly friends make their ways upstream. The direction of the four person discourse is sharpened, when Lisideus asks Crites to explain in which aspect of poetry he thinks the ancients superior to the moderns: Crites' response, that dramatic poetry best shows the superiority of the ancients, immediately channels the discussion into matters of the theater.

Change in the meaning of nature

The meat of the dispute, that develops around Crites' support for ancient theater, turns on the validity of the Aristotelean position, that great theater presents what Crites calls a 'just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.' The mainline of response, to this 'ancient' perspective, is the provocative view of Eugenius, that a new nature has been created, by the progress of 'modern science' – in optics, medicine, anatomy, astronomy—so that the old adages, about drawing wisdom for art, from nature, need to be reconfigured. A lively debate ensues, In the course of which the whole issue of the useful and morally enriching in art is raised for reexplanation. Dryden the author adroitly navigates the discussion into issues of cultural self imaging, and in his remarks on a 'new nature' gives the ball to Eugenius, for a number of his most brilliant points in literary theory.

French theater and the unities

With some shifting of position, among the four of them, the barge riders permit the topic of ancient values to morph into the issues of the contemporary French theater—Corneille, Racine, Moliere - on which yet another kind of obeisance to the ancients is being played out. The classical French playwrights are seen to dwell on the details of dramatic unity, exceeding Aristotle by the attention they devote to the three unities of *time, place, action*; regulatory unities (units)in the working out of which they are able to gain perfectly perspicuous control of the art-form taking shape before them. The contemporary variations of Spanish or Italian theater, all in their ways subtle variants on the ancient pattern of *The Poetics*, provide various additional lenses onto the possibilities offered by new form to the arguments of what were the artful works of contemporary western European dramatic art.

The tragic moment

The final topic of discussion involves a searching dispute over what Aristotle means, when he asks literature to provide a vivid image of life, selecting from that diversity a moment—one might say the *tragic moment*-- when the intense moral implications of life declare themselves. It is, as we have seen in the opinion of several speakers, that Aristotle's view of tragedy is unsurpassed, although voices have been raised to support the increased diversity of tones in modern drama, in the 'dramatic poesie' Dryden values in his own time, with its relative freedom from verbal and rhythmic rules. A particular case, of this 'new critical perspective' is raised by Neander, the essay's author, who undertakes a fresh look at Ben Jonson's play, *The Silent Woman*, 1609, and finds in it those elements of irony, comic vice, and antique reference which add up to a new form of theater. The other participants in the dialogue pitch in here, each sensitive to the virtues made available to 'modern drama' by the opening into it of the classical arguments dear to Aristotle and his contemporaries.

The uniqueness of Dryden's Essay

The genius of Dryden's essay lies in its blend of narrative with insight. The narrative flows seamlessly along with the Thames, on which we are slipping quietly away from the site of a thunderous naval battle, in which British victory over the Dutch fleet heralds a sense of British cultural achievement, which is

echoed consistently on the essay's theoretical level, (There is much interchange of opinion, say between Crites and Eugenius, but in the end each has proven open to both the ancient and modern perspectives, while Neander, Dryden himself, has both shepherded in the overall views of the text, and given hearty subscription to the aesthetics pf the new Renaissance world.) 'In the end,' for Dryden's self-reflective text is about itself, about the kind of ancient or modern perspective it itself offers, while offering them, Dryden is too much the artist to intrude on his own work of art with the adoption of a 'position'.

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I will later turn, for example, to two late fifteenth century instances from Northern Italy, then, segue into a profile of Erasmus, who worked the same geography as Ficino and Pico, but who was a theological centrist, good sense incarnate, as distinct from the two Italians who worked issues which still savored of Platonism and the mediaeval spirit. In other words I will make clear, throughout, that no simple linear development is going to prevail over the many individual minds that went into forming the mind of modern Europe, the West. But I stress the word *simple*.

Study quide

Dryden's setting for the Essay is particularly felicitously blended into his theme. Four men in a barge, floating downstream away from the cannonades that mark, for the British, the victorious end of a war with the Netherlands. The four interlocutors, who are in fact four well known men around London, drift as though naturally into culture topics like the stage of the theater in London, and, from there, into broader issues of the nature of literary arts. Each of the men adopts a distinctive position, the views of Aristotle occupying a steady position among the gentleman critics, one on the side of the Stagirite, another at another point on the spectrum, countering the Aristotelian by claiming that the old fashioned view of nature, the proper object of mimesis, is out of date, and must give way to new views of the issue. Does the setting and management of this argument seem to you lively for today's criticism of theater? Is the old Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns still alive?

Does the incremental birth and growth of the modern makes itself known by the reading of Dryden's Essay? Do we feel we are getting there?—though of course we have no idea where we are 'going'—inwardly advancing toward the point where, as perhaps we intuited in this author's childhood—the word 'modern' glistened and shone, and only gradually loosened its grip on the 'world as an experience of language and feeling? What tt might mean to observe that we feel we are 'getting there,' as we arrive at Dryden, could be suggested by casting our eyes around at three age mates of Dryden himself. Pascal, Milton, Angelus Silesius, and John Bunyan were all born within a decade of Dryden--a prolific writer from whom we have selected just one choice work. Extrapolating from the very limited sample we have of these four writers we might too hastily conclude that Dryden was nearest of the group to feeling a whole history behind and before him, and to intuiting, in a startling speech by Eugenius, that Aristotelianism was no longer a sufficient critical stand point. Would we be right to conclude with that speech, in our effort to measure degrees of approach to the modern. Does Eugenius not reach nearly to touching distance, to the nature we live today in our modern or postmodern world? Eugenius expands the understanding of nature to exceed the portrayal of significant human behaviors, and to rely on catharsis as a moral end for the theater. A variety of experimental sciences—optics, mathematics, astronomy, physics—are all mentioned as discoverers of the nature which now it is fitting for us to consider, when we say that art is an imitation of nature. Has any of the contemporaries of Dryden, mentioned above, taken so bold and concrete a step toward putting on the modern imagination?

Write at any extent you think appropriate, on the nature of modernity, the steps toward it taken by the creators interviewed in this study book, and the major trends in self-awareness prominent if western thought from the eighteenth century to our day.

FRANCE

Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549)

Heptameron. (1558; posthumously published)

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No less a writer than Francois Rabelais (1494-1553) dedicates the third book of his *Gargantua* to the Spirit of the Queen of Navarre, Marguerite, and he may as well have the first word here. Who better than he could have valued the saucy spirituality that marks Marguerite's work, and that instructs us by a cunning blend of spirituality with pornography? His dedicatory poem is as follows.

Abstracted spirit, rapt in ecstasy
Who while you haunt the skies, your origin,
Have left your servant host as you roam free,
Your well-matched body—quick to discipline,
Heeding you for this pilgrim's life we're in
Sans sentiment, and to emotions slow;
Wouldn't you care for just a while to go
Out of the heavenly manor where you dwell
To see in their third section here below
The joyous deeds of good Pantagruel?

Older sister of King Francis 1 of France, Marguerite is invited to earth, the home from which she has departed for the heavens, true, as Rabelais sees it, to her mystical temperament, her salvational drive which led her, throughout her royal life, to act as a patron of the persecuted, of young writers, and of freedom of thought? Yet had we only the *Heptameron* to guide us, in interpreting this jolly poem of Rabelais', we might wonder whether the poem writer had correctly spotted the figure of Marguerite in the heavenly skies. Marguerite was a crafty writer, with many apparitions onto the literary scene, and a wink in her eye, which reminds us of the free spiritedness of religious sensibilities even in the fifteenth century.

Of a mystical turn, all her life devoted to Church Reform and to the lives of the Saints, Marguerite was known as a protector of young writers, of all who are persecuted. She left behind a body of work which included deep religious poems, secular dramas dealing with religious and moral issues, and the tales composing the *Heptameron*, verbal pastimes for ten stranded friends, who contributed seventy two tales to a pastiche of stories roughly inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron* . (While Boccaccio left us one hundred stories covering ten days, Marguerite completed, by the time of her death, only the second story of the eighth day.) We will look closely at the way Marguerite's creative mindset develops as it plays out into the first three tales. Then we will move to a summary survey of the remaining Tales themselves.

The Prologue to the Heptameron

The prologue to the present collection is as old and tried as the literary text that follows it, and has everything to do with our confidence that we are in a trustworthy setting. (Should the prologue be deceptive or self-contradictory, we know that we must be watching our step. Such attention to 'our step' is essentially 'modern,' depends on our having called our perceptions into question, and yet Marguerite is privy to the tricks of the literary trade. Marguerite has no desire to go postmodern, and yet she does open to us a religious vision, in the person of Osile, from which she herself can be imagined, later in the tale, looking down on a number of the accounts that pretend to fill the entertainment needs of the younger visitors to the Abbey.)

Tale-telling plans

The narrative material of the present prologue has one job, to transport a group of pilgrims, who have gone to take the baths, to an ultimate shrine destination, at which they can cleanse their souls; and do so against the challenge of a raging river which has made it impossible for them to access their shrine. This narrative challenge is overcome by eventual arrival, at the spot where the bridge will be built, and the crossing will be made possible. Thanks to a sheltering abbey, and its wise old sister, Osile, plans are laid for ten days of story telling, which will carry the pilgrims to the completion of the bridge. The pilgrims—ten men, ten women-- settle down as though he or she were to be the creators and auditors of a vast epic sequence. At the same time that Marguerite de Navarre lays out before us the rich interwoven tales which

the pilgrims recount in the next ten days, she also includes the pilgrim-tale tellers as part of her own narrative. The result is that we hear from Marguerite not only the tales of the *Heptameron*, which follow below, but also the commentary of the pilgrims on the tales they create and hear.

The frame story thus created includes Marguerite the author, who hovers over the entire text, but also the ten pilgrims she has aligned to tell her tales, and thus, ultimately, also the many topical ideas that emerge from the pilgrims themselves, as they discuss issues of the time—theological, military, moral, sexual (especially), and social as they are generated by the tales of the *Heptameron.* What follows will indicate the nature of the pilgrims' sequence of tales, the core of Marguerite's narrative. We can indicate here the themes that pervade the tales, but must leave it to our reader to recreate personally the larger perspective which boils through the seventy two tales completed by Marguerite before her death.

Themes

The themes of Marguerite's Heptameron are such as would speak to the audience of midlife pilgrims of the fifteenth century. We have to presume a middle class background here—after all, we are talking about people with leisure for pilgrimage—and we have to imagine an appetite for attention grabbing tales; after all the tale tellers are forming opinions and discussing issues throughout the afternoons of narration. Perhaps their readiness for the nitty gritty of life will have been enhanced by the mornings the group has spent, in prayer and reflection on Scripture.

Erotica

The mishaps of eros, sex drive fall outs, provide the most coherent group of sub themes. It is as though the world-ruling libido that Lucretius puts at the center of D*e Rerum Natura*, or the congenital imbecility of humans, as Erasmus nails it in *In Praise of Folly*, were to have become free of their reins, and to have started committing havoc throughout the universe.

Marriage, one central symbol of the ordering of our eros lives, is subject to constant abuse in the *Heptameron*. *Adultery* abounds, leaving us amazed in the two or three instances when fidelity, good spirits, or good housekeeping save a marriage and crown it with a refreshed love. For the most part it seems habitual, even the norm, for a dignitary or sometimes a fine lady simply to take a fancy to the opposite sex, and without concern leave its own foundations in tatters. (Roughly half of the tales turn around this kind of impulse 'falling in love.' 'Days of our Lives' or 'The Women of Beverley Hills' would have to stretch to rival this level of promiscuity.)

The ambience in which this adulterous infection thrives is one in which increasingly impulsive sexual disorder expresses itself. Rape, sequestration, sodomy (within the setting of monastic life), assault, sexual jealousy, indecent handling: all these uncontrolled libidinous movements make for that engaged titillation which keeps audiences like Marguerite's together.

Impiety

Marguerite's milieu, like that of Rabelais, her near contemporary, was deeply imbued with the presence of the Church, its priests, canons, nuns, and monastic friars While it is said that Marguerite de Navarre was herself a thinker of high spirituality and more than usual generosity, her pictures of ecclesiastical life are rarely inspiring. Friars regularly grope women, make lustful advances in the confessional, collude with men of power to arrange rendez-vous with women. Nor are monks portrayed as variably nobler than in these impious actions. Monastic environments are portrayed as filthy and their residents as disreputable.

Trickery

Trickery abounds among the episodes of erotic adventure, for the name of the game, in the courtly and religious milieu, from which Marguerite draws her examples, is dissimulation in order to satisfy some private appetite: to insert yourself into so and so's bed, while she thinks it is somebody else, to fool one's mate into thinking you are reading, when you are making out with the servant girl, to drive your masters

out of the house by pretending it is infested with ghosts. There is no standard of reliable behavior. A mom, in conjunction with her serving maid, will contrive to deceive her own son into sleeping with her, thereby impregnating her with his own child. A pursued woman, eager to get rid of a suitor, lures him onto the stairs leading to her bedroom, then screams THIEF so loudly that the entire neighborhood can hear.

Cruelty

A country gentleman, married to a gorgeous court lady, catches her in bed with another man. He takes cruel revenge. He murders the lady's lover, then locks her up in a small room with the skeleton of her former lover. He keeps her there for years. Then the intervention of a well-intentioned friend softens the country gentleman's heart, and he relents. The lady is once again the lady of the house, and the marriage continues successfully. A brute bursts into a house where his friend lives, when the man is away, and rapes, strips, and shears his wife. His abduction is ultimately thwarted, but she is humiliated for life.

Gentleness

A subtheme of gentleness filters through certain of Marguerite's tales. A courtier and a high born lady are unable to marry—too deep a discrepancy in class-- though he is in love with her. He begs for a solution. The lady agrees that she will give into him in ten years, if in the meantime he remains distant from her and out of communication. After ten years, during which she has remained true to her contract, she receives a long poem from her lover, and a letter saying that he will never be able to see her again. In another, and characteristic, example we read about a couple poignantly in love at court, but separated by class level and wealth disparity. The man, though relatively impoverished and from a simple family, remains true to his love, even while he dwindles away, from frustration and sadness. She is destined by history for a high nobleman, but to the end remains painfully faithful to her losing lover, who only through death can be separated from her.

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The tales of the Heptameron

DAY ONE

Tale 1

Simontould is chosen to tell the first tale—the pilgrims will at every tale-change appoint one of their own to deal with the following day--which he does with gusto, blending violence, hatred, lust, Biblical undertones, and voodoo in a breakneck torrent of narrative details. Having been assigned the lead position. In what is to be a ten day marathon the teller pulls out all the stops in his effort to assure audience attention. The enrichment of our own overall argument, concerning the Renaissance discovery of the human, should be enhanced by a starting point like the present tale, in which we are confronted with, as it were, initial raw materials of early modern man in search of a personal self-account.

Sin and gender conflict

The characters destined to make Simontould's point, about the ills done to one another by both men and women, are boldly carved, like figures in a mediaeval morality play—or in a particularly sordid version of *Dateline*, in which a decent husband or wife, victimized by a partner's adultery, ends up slaying the other woman (or man) and burning the body in a trashcan. We are on our way to Tale #3, where structural finesse trumps foul morals, but in the first tale we have not yet pushed Marguerite's talent to that kind of limit. She will instead be contenting herself with a frame plot, in which easily seduced characters hightail it to one another' beds, and then do what they can to bring higher powers. to forgive them.

Sex, Marriage, and Sin

Lady X, to make Tale one short, marries the Proctor (an ecclesiastical administrator) at St. Aignan, a nearby larger community. Not long after the marriage, the Bishop of Sees meets and takes a strong fancy to the lady. The lady' husband, for a long time unaware of the affair taking place behind his back, is just finding his anger when the lady, who is insatiable, casts her eyes on a lusty young village lad, and for some time has things as she wants them: the Bishop was there for her profit, the young village boy for her pleasure. Inevitably the crowd of juggled balls begins to tumble. One day the village youth goes to his lady's house, but is told to leave, by the milkmaid. The reason, according to the milkmaid, is that the lady is upstairs in bed with the Bishop. The infuriated young man breaks into the bedroom where he finds the Bishop, but discovers that he the youngster has a further obstacle to his lust—the ingenuity of the young lady, who, caught between a rock and a hard place, invents the explanation that she has been assaulted by the young man, and needs protection from him. Barely slipping away from her fate, the young lady returns quickly to her husband, with whom she moves to another province.

The tenacity of evil

Marguerite de Navarre uses her almost endless ingenuity to keep regenerating her plot from its own ashes. Just as the not very virtuous young lady begins to catch her breath, she realizes that Dumesnil, who has been following her to another town, is the individual kneeling beside her in church. It is clearly time to be rid of him, certain as he is to regenerate the nest of misadventures in which the girl has so recently been trapped. Action oriented as always, the lady lures the young man to her house, where she sees to it that her husband has the young man murdered, and his body burned. Enough has been made clear, by this point, to prove woman's genius at wreaking havoc; the proof of man's viciousness is amply proven by the subsequent efforts to dispose of the young man's body, The miserable husband is condemned to death, fails in several efforts to buy a pardon, and eventually turns to sorcery, to attempt clearing the world of his enemies. In the end even the effort with sorcery fails, though the episode with Gallery, the sorcerer, leaves us with a curious insight into Marguerite de Navarre. She is no foreigner to the dark arts.

The 'spiritualty' of Marguerite de Navarre

Can we back off from conventional senses of spirituality, and return to the words of Rabelais, with which he dedicated the third book of *Gargantua*? 'Abstracted spirit, wrapped in ecstasy' arguably aligns with the person Marguerite puts before us here, playing with the deadly frivolity proposed by a terrified husband, who is playing every card in an effort to trick the gallows. And is not the humor, which restrains the endless perversity of the 'lady,' an element in the exaggeration which builds defenses for honor, against imminent loss.

Tale 2

Violence, lust, sadism all play roles in Marguerite's piety, drawing to themselves the stout Christian belief that exquisite pain is after all the pathway to our salvation. The messages of the first two tales align around the themes of our suffering and of God's tolerance, even joy at the resourcefulness suffering extracts from good women. Marguerite clearly derives that joy from her recounting of instances of female endurance and Osile is a fine tempered spokesperson for the perspective.

Attack

The second tale opens with innocence oppressed, then savagely ground away. A muleteer's wife has given birth and is recuperating while the muleteer himself has gone off, to collect his pay some distance away at the castle. While he is away, the new mother must deal with the adoration of a suitor who has long ago 'sought' her favors, and whom she, in the outrage of her virtue, savagely rejected, threatening to have him beaten and dismissed. The rejected suitor buries his longing quietly, awaiting some more tangible way to express his desire. He feels he has found the way, when he learns of the muleteer's absence, and he contrives to assault her, when she is dropping off to sleep. Although she counter

attacks him and makes every possible effort to flee, she becomes a deathly victim, in the end, to the intruder's fury, superior strength, and violence. After he has given up hope of winning her, and she has been stabbed into submission, she turns her loving face to god, and praises the goodness of the Creator. The tale ends with a broad aura of praise for the creation, and for the lowly in it, especially those loved by God. The humility of our Savior, carved out of pain, gives the muleteer's wife the joy sadly missing to all the other characters in the first three tales.

Marguerite's theology of original sinfulness

Osile, the senior abbess shepherding the storytellers, speaking for Marguerite, and sharing the challenge of amusing a younger audience, leads to an exaggerated interplay of lust with compassion for the lowly. Like the disaster prone lady of Tale one, the muleteer's wife appears doomed to succumb to the vicious downfall implanted in us by our forefathers' original sinfulness. It is not until the third tale that we see the range of artistry Marguerite is capable of bringing to bear, on the anatomizing of human evil at work. The women in the pilgrim audience find themselves, at this point, overcome by weeping for their dishonored sister, and loudly determined to preserve their own purity intact.

Tale 3

Having apologized for the second tale, in which she has generated weeping instead of the laughter which makes us happy, Osile requests Saffredent to undertake the third tale. This speaker, who has given us Tale one, reluctantly agrees, after conceding that he had 'probably better just get it over.' The fact is, though, that he steps up to the bat and performs he finest entertainment to date. He steals the show and sets a new standard for it.

King Alfonso V, monarch of Spain, pays a visit to one of his most distinguished subjects, and while visiting finds himself attracted to the gentleman's lovely wife. Having some indication, from her part, that she reciprocates his feelings, he proposes to arrange some quality time with her. He sends the lady's husband on a three week mission to the Holy See, and takes advantage of the man's absence to visit and sleep with the man's wife. This goes on. It becomes a pattern. Before long the victimized husband catches on, and finds himself deliberating on the best move to make. This is the moment of key interest in the tale, for if the husband had acted out in anger, he would simply have played his role in the vicious battle of the sexes, which grinds to painful halts in the first two tales.

Queen implicated

Instead of taking the path of power, the husband pays a visit to the Queen, wins her loving attention over the course of a few visits, and sets up an arrangement with Alfonso's consort, whereby he will in future visit her on the occasions when the King chooses to visit his subject's wife. A kind of erotic perpetual motion is thereby established, to which the expected emotions provide constant fuel. The queen's jealousy grows into desire, so that she too is put into desire's perpetual motion machine, like her husband. The story closes on the inevitability of a narrative unravelling, but with a sense of the perfection of deceit, in the revelation of which the promises of evil are swallowed up temporarily into the ideals of geometry.

The artistic range of Marguerite de Navarre

The author is reaching out into the undefined wide world of narrative, in order to entertainment pathways, for mollifying ten junior pilgrims, who are awaiting the construction of a bridge. That Marguerite de Navarre is uncommonly liberal can be felt in all her work, but especially in the seventy-two remaining tales of the *Heptameron*, whose concern for lust, sadism, jealousy, nd vengeance displays both her openness to the human experience, and her readiness to recognize its dark side. She is at her finest when, as in the third Tale, she eschews action and lets the space of thought fill her page. In the third Tale she allows such thought, and its consequences, to create her story for her, rather than explicating or evaluating the events.

Tale 4

Reciprocities of cuckolding

The husband who becomes the Queen's lover is a picture of care, as he allows the Queen to absorb the news that the King's infidelity (with that she was familiar) was settling onto the wife of the courtier who was standing before her. This took absorbing, as did the fact that the Queen was juggling perspectives, in responding to her situation. We can feel that she felt she should foremost be angry with her husband, yet that on palpable second thought she felt that she should play out a slow vengeance, by permitting her husband to embed himself in ever deepening discomfort. The courtier before her carefully arouses the Queen's desire for vengeance, knowing that that is the most effective path to his own satisfaction, which he soon begins to harvest—in her bed. A narrative panel further on, we observe the King, in the bedroom of the husband's wife—the husband is visiting the Queen—eyeing the stag-horns' ornamented plaque hanging over the bedstead he temporarily shares with his courtier's wife. Chuckling to himself—but here especially we must sub-auscult his unwritten words—the King thinks, 'this man I replace, in this bed, has aptly defined himself, by displaying over his bedstead the horns that describe his situation.' Omitted from the chuckle is the unrealized observation that the King himself is the cuckolded one, at just the moment when he is cuckolding.

Lust, shame, and dishonor intersect regularly in Marguerite's imagination. In Tale three, as we have seen, a kind of sexual humiliation is ritualized, seeming to satisfy maximally, but in fact shaming all parties. In Tale four humiliation and shame are the only victors. The same anonymous courtier type, which was of high prominence in the courts of Europe, is only too conscious of his charms, and lets his wandering eye fall on a widow, the sister of his court superior. He makes no secret of his affection, and is for some time encouraged by the lady. The situation gets out of hand, however, when the young man one night takes advantage of a structural anomaly, in the architecture of the palace, to crawl into the lady's bed just as she is dropping off to sleep. She, who has previously made it clear that she no longer welcomes the affections of the young man, fights back like a tiger, not only driving the young man away from her bed, but scratching him viciously over face and body. His dilemma is simple: he escapes unidentified, but as soon as he returns to his own room, he realizes he is walking visual evidence of his crime. He conceals his wounds as well as he crime, but in the end he suffers the most painful wound. His victim, and her lady in waiting, have decided to 'press no charges' but simply to let the young man fall deeply out of attention, be ignored, and disappear from the figures that count, at court.

Tale 5

While some of Marguerite's tales are brief, others, like Tale ten (ahead), come on as brief novels, fifteen written pages, many hours of narration. The fifth tale is brief and semi comical. A boatwoman is used to ferrying passengers back and forth across a considerable river. One day she is approached by a couple of Grey Friars, who attack her in mid-course, demanding sexual favors. She assures them she will comply, then proposes a plan, which will enable her to deal out her favors to one man at a time—no voyeurism. She leaves one monk to wait on a small island, while she services the first one. In the course of readying herself for monk number one she pushes that monk into the water, then rows off, leaving the second monk stranded on his Island.

Tale 6

A trick. A one eyed married man distrusts his wife. He follows her to another town, to check on her activities. He pounds of the door, of the house where she is visiting. No response. He pounds again. Smartly, she cries out that she is being assaulted, and that she needs her husband to help her. She thus buys time to get her lover out the back door, before cumbrously letting her husband in the front.

Tale 7

A young lady falls for a handsome merchant, whom she follows to another town, rather than staying with her mother. The mother discovers the treachery, and threatens the merchant. He solves the problem by

returning with the girl, to the house where her mother lives, and passionately embracing Mom, who is overwhelmed and abandons her complaints against the man. He drags the woman away, and with his brutality, and the fuss he makes, he quiets her complaints.

Tale 8

A man makes an arrangement with his friend. The friend agrees to set the man up with his maidservant, whom he loves. However the friend is in love with the first man's wife, with whom the friend in fact sets the first man up. Both the first man and his friend have the pleasure of sleeping with the first man's wife.

Tale 9

A sad tale, lacking the Rabelaisian boisterousness of so many of Marguerite's stories of entertainment. A suitor is poor, but otherwise has all the virtues. He falls in love with a lovely lady from a distinguished family, but is unable to share the lifestyle of the family, which gradually determines to see the last of the suitor, and to accede to their daughter's resignation to another man. So it happens, and yet the daughter is beset both by love and pity for her first suitor, who is in the meantime dwindling away from inanition and depression. The closure is inevitable. The young lady visits the first suitor on his deathbed, and shares a lasting embrace with him.

Tale 10

The longest, most convoluted and complex, of the first day's tales, Tale ten presses to the max the theme of thwarted but therefore all the more exquisite love. (There is much love, much frustration, much suffering, but precious little longing in these tales, which do their story telling work and dissolve, like good entertainment.) Amadou falls hopelessly in love with Florida, the daughter of his old friend, the King. Florida reciprocates the love, but hesitates to mention it to her parents, instead speaking of Amadou only to her best friend, Amadou.

DAY TWO

Tale 11

Marguerite gives free rein, now and then, to her mediaeval scorn for the monastic life. While that life was fertile and spiritual, at its finest, it appears to have been, at its worst, a seedbed of many vices, ranging richly from lust to sodomy and filthiness.

Tale 12

Be it remarked, as we survey the tales of the Heptameron, that among the tales are interspersed jocular, vivid, saucy comments from the audience, Marguerite's creation, as part of the tales' narratives. We restrict ourselves to the tales, but without forgetting that the whole creation, of the Heptameron, is a unique kind of comic opera, which cuts deep into its culture.

Tale 12 is a brutal story, as have been many of Marguerite's inventions. A distinguished Duke has married a young girl, then shortly after fallen in love with the sister of his best friend. The Duke threatens to kill his best friend, unless the friend makes it possible for the Duke to sleep with the sister. The best friend, who owes everything he has to the Duke, is in a bitter quandary, and decides on a trick. He says yes to the Duke, sets up a rendez vous between Duke and Sister, but arrives at rendez vous armed to kill. Just that he does. Fleeing the country, with his sister, he heads to Turkey and freedom. Is he a good man?

Tale 13

An old man and a young woman, married, live in perfect harmony, as she has built her life around serving him. Their dream goal is to make a trip to the Hotly Land, and fortuitously a sea captain enters their lives,

who plies the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean, and guarantees he will be able to take them to Jerusalem. By a series of mishaps, the Captain, who has fallen deeply in love with the young wife, dies on the high seas, leaving behind a love message, and a precious diamond, to be sent to his young beloved. As it transpires, however, the packet in question is sent to the Captain's wife, who reads everything between the lines, and sends the packet to the young woman with whom the story opens. Taking the diamond as a gift from her husband, her love for the senior is reinflamed, and the couple flourish into an even richer symbiosis.

Tale 14

Tale l4 introduces us to a French rascal lover, who competes with an Italian knave for the bed of a gorgeous lady. While she had been awaiting the Italian, the Frenchman introduces himself into her bed, in which she is awaiting the Italian. He gives her top pleasure, and when the Italian arrives, later in the evening, he finds the lady indifferent, ill, and unable to take interest in further sex.

Tale 15

A poor man, endowed with great charms and looks, and favored by the King, falls in love with a beautiful young lady of the court. Unfortunately, though, he pays little attention to her, cares little for her. Quite naturally, she frets over this abandon, and in time, seeking revenge, turns to a new lover, who reciprocates the feeling, but is informed by the King that he should stay away from the abandoned woman—it all goes back to the King's fidelity to the poor man initially in question. At this point nature turns things around: the husband's jealousy, at the intervention of a princely lover, the one told to back off, is too much for him, and he begins to shower her with the attention she has long lacked.

Tale 16

A lovely Milanese lady, widowed, vows to have nothing more to do with marriage. However she is swept off her feet by a handsome courtier, who follows her high and low, after three years gathering the courage to declare his love to her—even as she is taking communion. She turns viciously on him, but with great tenacity he follows her soon after to her very house. She lets him in, but puts him to a test—pretending that her angry brothers are coming to the door, to dispatch the suitor. Rather than take her advice, to hide under her bed, the lover stands firm, flings open the door, and finds two servant maids holding swords. The testing lady is impressed by her lover's courage, and throws herself in his arms.

Tale 17

The handsome German Count William was taken graciously into the household of King Francis. Shortly after he had joined the household, letters were received at court, which indicated that William had been sent with funds which would enable him to effect King Francis' death. The King tested William, encountering him man to man in the forest, and giving him ample opportunity to express enmity. William expressed none, but evidently he felt it, for the next day, in all courtesy, he departed.

Tale 18

A student of noble birth fell heavily in love, but with a stringent woman, who was in no hurry to find a partner.

Tale 19

Pauline and her lover were poor, though rich in love for another; unfortunately neither of them received any encouragement from friends or family. They decided that both of them should join monastic houses. They did, amidst ample weeping, of the sort outpoured in earlier tales.

Tale 20

Tragic mutual deaths of Lord Riant and the widow he loves. She is the kind to set severe conditions, and he vows to meet any demands she makes, before she will yield to him. Many temptations rise up, to block his path to her. She slowly accedes to his suit, but not without torturing him all the way. She tries to tempt him with a servant girl of exquisite beauty, splayed out naked on his bed. He resists. He is true. Nothing will break his resolve.

DAY THREE

Tale 21

A court lady of modest beauty and modest mind, and a court gentleman of the same traits share a common problem—though not the usual one—that they cannot find interested mates. Equally frustrated, but not knowing one another well, the two feel mutually attracted, and in the slow course of disclosures, they discover one another and fall in love. Since the master figures of the court are opposed to the couple's romantic relation, they naturally do all they can to discourage the growing attention of our lovers to one another. Love, however, finds a way, and that is precisely the case in the present story, for the loving couple find, come hell or high water, that they can find ways to communicate with one another, and to develop a fond relationship. Although the queen becomes privy to the couple's marriage plans, and staunchly opposes them, having it all out in powerful arguments with her subject, she fails to prevail. Love maintains itself, the bride to be rejects even the intercessions of the King, and true love stands firm.

Tale 22

A certain monk, in Paris, remains a model of trim and chaste until around his fiftieth year, when he starts abandoning his disciplined lifestyle. He becomes fat and heavy, eyes the ladies, and chooses one special favorite, Marie Heroet, for confessions. As it happens this ugly religious hits up on Mme. Heroet, touching her breasts and feeling her up under her habit. In the end the sister has the better of him, remaining true to her virtue, and justifying herself fully after the monk has tried pretending, that he had felt her up only in an effort to cure her of a dreadful disease.

Tale 23

A certain friar—ah yes, this is becoming a refrain, no?—counsels a lay friend, saying that it is permissible to make love to your wife shortly after she has given birth. He has a hidden desire of his own, to sleep with the lady, and on the evening appointed for his friend, to sleep with his own wife, the friar slips into her bed and makes out with her, silently vanishing before her husband arrives. This clever strategy goes on for some time, until the lady becomes aware of the trick being played, and is horrified by the humiliation. In the aftershock of this discovery she hangs herself.

Tale 24

A charming and handsome courtier is known at court for his coldness toward all women. When asked by the Queen whether he loved some secret woman, he replies that he can not tell her, but that he can show her, if she will accompany him on a ride into the forest. The Queen rides into the forest with Elsor, and at a proper moment asks him to clarify his love. Elsor pulls out a mirror, shows it silently to the queen, and assumes that she understands what his lifelong passion is. Once again home in the court, the Queen elicits from Elsor the exact meaning of his visual, and he inquires whether his love stands a chance. The Queen replies in the affirmative, but declares that he must accept one condition. He agrees. He is to remain in a remote place, far from her and the court, unknown to all his friends—for seven years; at which time, she implies, he will have won her love. They break a ring in half, sharing it, and for seven years they wait. One days an ancient hermit brings her a message, bearing a long and passionate love song from Elsor, and his half of the ring. Never, declares Elsor, never will we meet again.

Tale 25.

A wealthy advocate is unable to have a child, by a first wife, so he tries another, younger. A young prince falls in love with this second wife, and woos her away from the advocate. A secret tryst joins the two adulterous lovers. But the prince is not happy with his badly won union. The prince expresses his love in prayer, and through that love opens his heart to the advocate, to whom he effectually returns the girl. Happiness is restored through the love that threatened happiness.

Tale 26

A certain distinguished Lord shelters a handsome young man, whom the gentleman finds charming and attractive, adopting him into his family. The young man falls in love with the gentleman's wife, and without acknowledging this love the young man requests the leisure to go on pilgrimage. The gentleman of the house accords this freedom, and during his absence the young man takes the opportunity to sleep secretly with his master's wife. However the secret comes out, the woman is humiliated, and takes the only possible recourse, killing herself.

Tale 27

The servant in a large household allows a very ugly servant friend to lodge with him briefly. The ugly friend falls for the master's wife. She tricks him. She tries luring him up the stairs Into an attic, but she makes him go first, and then, from below on the ladder, shouts so all an hear, 'Is it alright if I tell my husband where I am?' The secret is out. Ugly man is driven away.

Tale 28

A trick identity tale, in which a merchant of Bayonne palms off a hard wooden shoe, packaging it up so that it resembles the famed Bayonne ham. The party recipients, who have been lured on succulent promises, take nothing home from their hunger except sore teeth.

Tale 29

The tale of a woman who cannot give birth with her husband. Naturally enough—in this tale world—the woman goes to the church and is impregnated by the pastor.

Tale 30

Many tales in this third Book reduce to riddle, aphorism, or folk tale level. The present word object lies in the midst of the discomfort humans are so skilled at creating for themselves. A widow has a young son, who, upon getting into his early teen years, begins to look around at the girls. He makes bold to ask his mother for help, in arranging a trick which will enable him to sleep with the serving maid. The mother takes advantage of the trick to position herself instead of the serving maid, in the appointed bed at the appointed time. The result, the mother's impregnation by her own son, leads to an investment in a happy and unaware family.

Tale 31

Unredeemed violence and brutality lurk in the corners of Marguerite's entertainment universe.

A helpful man cared for a Prior Confessor in the next door Greyfriars monastery, but while the Confessor was visiting the helper man he fell in love with the man's wife. (How routine and undisciplined is this falling in love, throughout the tales, and how casually it is introduced into what affect to be pious settings). In order to have his way with this woman, stripped to her petticoat, hair shorn, horse-bound, the Confessor awaits the two day absence of the husband, manages to murder two serving girls in the master's house, then rides away with the bound girl, into the blue. At just the moment of the Confessor's departure, the master of the house returns, and with the help of committed friends saves his wife, and rids the world of the Confessor.

Can we say that Marguerite, whom Rabelais commends for her spirituality, and who calls God to her aid throughout her tales, insists on uplifting finales to her tales? Is the present tale self-justifying, in the sense that evil eventually destroys itself?

Tale 32

King Charles sends a high ranking aid on a mission. His trip is difficult. When he arrives at the house of his host to be, he sees a gorgeous woman, seated at a table in the middle of the room. She soon leaves the room, without having said a word. Later the host explains. The woman has been unfaithful, and the host has imposed a harsh penalty on her. Instead of killing her he has locked her in the room where she had been found with her lover. She lives in that room surrounded by her lover's bones and skull---from which she eats. A living hell. Release from this hell opens when the narrator within the tale, the official, begs his host to reconsider his punishment of his wife. He does so. The host and his wife fall in love again and have beautiful children.

DAY FOUR

Tale 33

In a small village, a young woman is about to give birth. She insists that she has never 'known a man,' and yet the village believes she is an offshoot of the Virgin Mary. In the end it turns out that the woman has been lying, while the progenitor of her child is the priest. Upon discovery of the lie the child is burned to death.

Tale 34

A grotesque snapshot. Two Greyfriars monks are on a mission, and lodge with a farm couple. The friars--one of them exceedingly fat—sleep in a bedroom adjoining the bedroom of the couple, and wake to hear their hosts' conversation, through the wall. Their talk is of 'slaughtering the fat one in the morning,' which seems to the obese friar to be aimed at him. In terror, both friars flee the house at first day break, but only the obese friar is impeded—due to his weight—and manages to flee no farther than the pigsty, where the master of the house discovers him. All is explained and peace restored.

Tale 35

A lovely lady goes regularly to mass, where gradually she falls in love with the handsome priest, who has no idea of her feelings. She proceeds to write voluminously to the priest, about her passion, and the letters get into the wrong hands. Her husband develops a heavy suspicion of her. He tricks her into confession. They rediscover one another.

Tale 36

A youngish woman, finding that her husband is growing old, falls in love with a robust young man. Following the guidance of his servant, the husband discovers the wife in bed with the young gent. The husband feigns forgiveness, but shortly after prepares a poisoned salad for his wife, and she dies.

Tale 37

A wife discovers that her husband is losing interest in her. One day she finds him asleep in a corner of their house, snoring in the dirt beside a filthy servant woman. She decides on a positive solution to her problem, straightens and beautifies their marital home, and before long realizes that it is her own foul housekeeping that has driven her husband away. All is made well.

Tale 38

As in Tale 37 we go upbeat, and look at versions of marriage-improvement,

There is a certain great feast, until the wife begins to suspect that the husband is no longer interested In her. He is hanging out elsewhere. The wife discovers the wretched hovel where her husband is sleeping around, and pities him. She lures him home by a thorough housecleaning and sprucing up. The feast is a success.

He returns home.

Tale 39

After many years abroad, a man returns to his country estate, to find that his wife has moved out, to a nearby house; in fear she has fled the ghosts that are invading the marital home. The man of the house totally disbelieves the story about the ghosts. He notes that the purported ghost is calling out his own grandmother's name, which adds to his suspicion. Suddenly the man grasps a hand, and finds it is that of his serving maid, who, he proceeds to discover, is trying to burn down the entire building for herself and her lover. He bans the seditious couple, cleanses his house, and is reunited with his wife.

Tale 40

A pious countess calls on her Greyfriars monk to confess her. He gives her a strange penance, that she should wear his robe chord around her naked body to keep her in mind of our Savior's sacrifice. (A variant on the hairshirt of the time). Then he adds a detail. He himself must affix the cord to her body.) She is upset by the oddity of his request. She reports to her husband, and the friar is beaten.

DAY FIVE

Tale 41

A brother and sister, who love one another, live at home together. One day, inevitably, a friend manages to spent the night in bed with the brother's sister. The brother is enraged and murders his sister's friend. The brother and master of the castle lock the girl up in a tower, and pursue looking for a husband for her.

Tale 42

A handsome, well born count attends church to watch the ladies, and is struck by one exceptional beauty. She considers herself of too low birth even to discourse with the count, and only by the help of his butler can he bring her to exchange a word with him. She makes it clear that she can not live in his company; her birth is too humble. In the end, the passionate gentleman gives up, defeated.

Tale 43

A high born lady- in- waiting dominates the palace. She is haughty and arrogant, and has no tolerance for men or passion, although she is beautiful. There is, however, one young man in the court whom she falls for, although she is careful not to enter into a relation with him. She spots him in the palace garden, covers herself with veils, and has her servant invite the lad onto the palace terrace. He is himself covered head to neck, in a traditional page's outfit, while she is undiscoverable under her cloths. A silent love affair, with a daily set rendez vous, is established between the two, until one day they actually meet in the garden, and upon the lad's pronouncement of his love of the lady, she angrily drives him from the palace. for good. Their love could only flourish under uniquely romantic circumstances.

Tale 44

The honesty of a Greyfriars monk-confessor wins out, and holds the court together. Into the bargain, the friar is given two pigs, instead of just one, by the Lord of Sedan.

Tale 45

On the day of the Holy Innocents, men have extreme license over their wives and children—and girlfriends. This is a time when the male can make the female dance in the rain, play silly games in the snow, generally free herself from the reign of decorum—and all without being scorned for it, just as the male is at the same time being absolved of criticism. It was a godsent break time for young guys, and, if all works, for their lovers.

Tale 46

Another demeaning tale about monastic life. A friar falls for the wife of his friend. He follows her upstairs, but she kicks him downstairs. He follows the trail of pussy into the quarters of another lord's daughter. He screws her and flees. Where is Rabelais, to put the stamp of gross on this melancholy tale?

Tale 47

Two young courtiers had a perfect relationship. From youth on they had shared everything together, and now that they were older it seemed fitting that the one who married should share his bed with his friend, as well as with as with hIs wife. So this happens. At a certain point, however, the married friend, even though he slept in the middle of the bed, began to feel suspicious of his friend. He soon accuses him of messing with his wife. Jealousy tears them all apart from one another.

Tale 48

Greyfriars monks stop by at Inn where a marriage is taking place. By a trick one of the friars hops into the marital bed while the groom is still absorbed by the wedding dances. The friar has his fill, and escapes before punishment catches up with him.

Tale 49

A certain lady at the court of King Charles entertained successive courtiers in her chambers, though she was able to keep the chain of secret assignations private; no one of the men knew about the others. At a male get together, later, the courtiers who had been involved in this sequential fun gradually realized with a trick had been played on them. They were not amused.

Tale 50

A courtier for a long time wooed the same lady, but always in vain. So despondent was he that his life begins to slip away .He tried going away on a vacation, but this only made things worse. At this point the lady decides to accord him the one favor, the absence of which is taking his life away. But the granting of this favor only hastened the man's death. Upon learning that the poor man had died, the lady in the tale hanged herself.

DAY SIX

Tale 51

The Duke of Urbino was exceptionally eager to secure a good marriage for his son, and was very upset by the news he received, concerning his son's plan to take his marriage into his own hands. That plan involved passing on notes to his true love—not, in fact, his father's favorite—and doing so with the assistance of a serving maid who was acquainted with the lad's beloved. Unfortunately the Duke got wind of these secret notes, and was so furious that he had the intermediary, the message-carrying servant girl, put to death. The Duchess, who befriended the servant girl, was horrified, and condemned the behavior of her husband.

Tale 52

Margaret's tolerance for the gross is at its clearest here. It is a cold day. A man in need asks for breakfast at an apothecary shop, and in the course of discussion falls out with the varlet who works for the apothecary. Ugly words are exchanged. The varlet finds a frozen turd on the road, wraps it attractively, and serves it to the man for breakfast. When the 'breakfast roll' begins to thaw, and the sun to shed its rays, the pungent odor of the turd sickens the needy man, whose fury leads him to further revenge antics with the same turd.

Tale 53.

A prince was blessed with a great wife, but, as often in these tales, falls in love with a high born beauty, who was sought by all the men at court. The ensuing closet drama—which reminds us of a great succession of French domestic studies—*La Princesse de Cleves*, the interplay texts of Choderlos de Laclos—studies the ins and outs of jealousy, intrigue, and faithlessness in the upper class scenario of French society.

Tale 54.

A very rich man has intense pain around the roots of his hair, and is advised that the remedy may be to cease sleeping with his wife. He agrees to the solution, and he and his wife come to an agreement. They will sleep in separate beds, and at oblique angles to one another, so that they cannot see one another. Their new custom will be this: a handmaid will stand beside the bed of each partner, and will hold a candle over the partner, who will thus be able to read in quiet. As it happens, the shadow cast by the husband, and which the wife can read in the shadow movements of her spouse, indicates that the husband is making out with the candle-holding maid. She calls him on it. The shadow movements disappear.

Tale 55

Near death, and eager to reconcile himself with God, a husband leaves his wife final instructions. Upon his death, he wants her to sell a fine horse, which he has recently purchased, and to share the money with the poor. The clever wife sells the horse, and at sufficient profit to beef up the needy mouths of her growing family.

Tale 56

A woman seeks a confessor to advise her husband on how to arrange a good marriage for her daughter. A Greyfriars Brother takes the matter under advisement, then manipulates the social setting so that his fellow friar can inherit the role of mate for the woman's daughter.

Tale 57

The charming and adroit Lord Montmorency—refer Castiglione *The Courtier*, for such a profile —has had the pleasure of pressing a beautiful lady's hand to his lips. For the remainder of his stay in England, he is unwilling to remove her glove from his hand.

Tale 58

A lady of wit is an appreciator of men in general, but at last her eye falls on a singular favorite. However, a bitter quarrel breaks out between the two of them, and she decides to take revenge on him. She ascends toward her upstairs sleeping room, and bids him to follow her, but when he has gotten half way up the stairs she cries THIEF so loudly that she arouses the attention of the whole household, in fact the whole neighborhood.

Tale 59

A husband tires of his wife's spending, and retires far into the countryside. She plans for a serving girl to lure her husband to a remote cottage, then tracks her husband to the assignation, and 'discovers' him there, giving him the expected tongue-lashing. The man sees the whole fabric of his marriage, in a flash, accepts the pain he is causing his wife, and forgives her.

Tale 60

A woman falls in love with a court singer, and abandons her husband. Her sisters embrace her, submit her to a fake conversion, so that In new guise she is returned to her husband and her marriage is freshly restored.

DAY SEVEN

Tale 61

A lovely husband and wife enjoy a marriage as attractive as themselves. The canon of a nearby church falls in love with the lady. The woman longs to be with the canon, but her husband conceals her from him. The canon gains control of her, and keeps her sequestered for a year. The wife is relieved when her husband agrees to take her back. However she cannot forget the canon, and once again she returns to him, with whom she lives for another fifteen years.

Tale 62

A lady is a wit and a storyteller.
Here's a story.
It is about her.
A lover comes to take her in her bed.
He is in a hurry.
He is in boots and spurs.
When he rises from the bed,
Satisfied, he is still wearing boots and spurs.
His spurs catch on her bedsheet, And tear it open, so that she is exposed, naked.

Tale 63

Four girls are together in Paris. A distinguished provost in Paris brings them together. A handsome young man longs to join the group. He asks his wife's permission. Then the King himself plunges into the group, a buddy to the 'handsome young man.' In the end the effective duo is the handsome young man and the king.

Tale 64

A man and his woman were much in love. They wanted to get married. However he was deeply disappointed, because her family rejected him as a marriage partner for their daughter. He went into isolation. The lady continued loving the man, and wrote him an extensive love poem, indicating that her love is eternal.

In a return message he declares to the lady that his love is dead. He has retired to a monastery. She visits him there, but immediately gives up her hope of union with him. He is hopeless, and renders her hopeless.

Tale 65

In the Church of Saint John there was a very dark chapel, into which a soldier had wandered to pray, and had fallen asleep. Just then a lady entered the chapel With her own intention to pray. But as she started to kneel she saw a flickering candle pass across her view as the wakened soldier rose and left the

chapel. Miracle! Cried the worshipping lady, assured that she had seen a long awaited apparition from on high. A candle held by no one, risen from the tombs!

Tale 66

After their wedding, a just married couple falls asleep. A cleaning woman finds them and berates them harshly for their cavalier behavior as just marrieds—they are, after all, dead asleep and exhausted from dancing. Others come to observe them, and die laughing. The Duke arrives asking severely why the cleaning woman berated the newly married couple.

Tale 67

A moral tale, reflecting the new merchant Explorer-theme of the times.

A certain captain sailed to the Canadas, on a mission to populate and settle the area. Unfortunately there was, along on the mission, An evil man of contemptible morals. He ate the fruit of his miserable life, And was abandoned alone On the island With his wife.

Tale 68

An apothecary married a beautiful wife. Other women came to him Inquiring what they could do to arouse their husbands to greater affection. Was it not a dog that poisoned the apothecary's wife?

Tale 69

A married lady discovers her husband dressed in the garb of a cleaning lady, disguised and hiding out waiting for an assignation with his girl friend. Fou rire, crazy laughter breaks out from madame, as she ridicules her husband's garb and deflates his libido.

Tale 70

The Duke of Burgundy had a beautiful wife, with an evil interior, which he was reluctant to recognize. This wife fell in love with the Duke's best friend. She made unsuccessful efforts to seduce the Duke's friend. Then the woman decided to tell the Duke's friend of her powerful love for him. The Duke's friend declared that he had not nor would ever have intimacy at court except with his friend the Duke. He rejects the come-on of the Duke's wife. The wanton woman spreads slanderous gossip about the Duke's friend.

DAY EIGHT

Tale 71

The saddler to the Queen of Navarre is a bit of a drunkard. Tragically, his fastidious wife grows ill and is on the point of death. The saddler takes advantage of this tragedy, to attempt to make out with the servant maid of his wife. His wife, though on her death bed, observes this damnable liaison, and damns her contemptible husband.

Tale 72

We are in a hospital administered by nuns. A man has died, and only one nun and a prior are left to bury the body. The wicked monk-prior takes advantage of the situation, to put the make on the nun. The nun is shocked when she realizes she has lost her virginity, and is already again being put to the test. After a *second instance of intercourse with the monk, the nun feels profound shame. She flees, to* seek the Pope's blessing, but on the way she is comforted and consoled by a loving sister, who frees her from guilt, and sends her home to the hospital from which she came.

***

What is the *Heptameron*?

We are all brought up on stories, and absorb them as parts of life; neural pathways that absorb us, and along which we ease into pictures of what the world has been and may be like. At an early age we may be enchanted by these stories, and feel as though we are there first truly ourselves. Once a particular story pattern is lodged with us, we are uncomfortable to listen to a revised version of it: of a new way to retail Snow White or From the Tables Down at Morey's, the Yale poem for the cosmos. The Heptameron is a text carved out of need and boredom, and inserted where ten young pilgrims await the subsiding of a raging river, on the far side of which is the Virgin shrine to which they are heading.

The tales on which the patience of these youngsters is fed is story, tales from the imagination of Marguerite de Navarre. Although individual tales share something of the narrative of early fiction, even the novel, they are of diverse ancestry and present fixed worlds that are already of a long lived mediaeval past. They are little developed, except in the mind that reads them. But these proto novels are just one of the entertainment panels blocked out by Marguerite's pilgrims. There are chunks of folklore, small closet dramas, aphorisms and even haiku-ish bits. (To see how these diverse genres could provide sufficient entertainment for the waiting pilgrims we must go back to the dialogues among those pilgrims—evidence of the topicality of the specific offerings. Not only can the tales of the Heptameron be parceled out into groups, but so can the themes, which are as varied as their genres.

The themes of the *Heptameron*, as noted in the beginning, are as much the talk of their moment as the themes of our daily conversation today, in an age when the digital has rendered everyone an instant news consumer. Marguerite's pilgrims debate crime, ultimate moral values, issues of sexual and social morality, and true love. We could not hope for a more vivid picture of ordinary and extraordinary life at the brink of the modern era.

Study guide

Born in the year of Columbus' journey to the West, Marguerite de Navarre was destined to be a complex figure, known for her genuine piety, her care for striving younger people and especially those with a desire to write, plus a gift for tales—as well as for their displays of erotic interactions and acts of voluptuous holiness. Give some thought, please, to the character of this woman, think her back into her position as a queen, and see if she coheres with other unexpected female images from the early modern period in Western civilization. She is, after all, the only woman in the small anthology we collect in this book. Does she remind you of any similarly multiple women in world literature? Has she anything in common with Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, with Cressida in Troilus and Cressida, or with Gertrude Stein, in 'real life. '(It's a hard question, no?) Is there, by the way, any good explanation for the paucity of well sketched women in Early Modern Literature? Should we attribute this lack to social prejudice and lack of money in female pocket books?

Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585)

'To be on the skids'; 'Epitaph for Francois Rabelais'

The western mind in the making. Our theme in this critical anthology. Do we feel new bruises of self-awareness, as we jolt, say, from the mystical transports of Ficino's Neoplatonic world view, with its blend of earthy medical lore and transcendent, indeed astral, life of the spirit, to the raw meat of (certain of) Ronsard's poems. (Raw meat? This Ronsard we now chew off a couple of bites of, is at times supremely lyrical—deep in the natural wonder of the County of Vendome—at others, musical and innovative, with his bringing to perfection of the 12 syllable Alexandrine line—all these resources he can bring to the chemistry of roughness, which meets him, as in the past they met the sensibilities of Francois Villon, 1431-1463, who brought a strange beauty to rest on the raw texture of fifteenth century French poetry.

The passage of centuries, ultimately drowned in the slippage of temporal eras, highlights here the gear grinding as well as the oil slick passage of one century into another.

As a visage encountering the new of the first modern century, Ronsard brings with him the kind of traditional education and high-level social entry that would mark Montaigne's career, a decade later. Like Montaigne, Ronsard was born into the provincial nobility, thoroughly trained in both. He was swept up young into royal service, first as a court page, then as a member of the diplomatic corps, accompanying Princess Margaret on a royal wedding journey to Scotland, then, upon return to France, and in the course of travel to a conference in Alsace, Ronsard fell victim to a serious deafness, which was to color the rest of his life and to redirect his energies—he now appeared headed toward a significant post at court—*toward humane study and literature*. It will have been at this point that his blend of erudition and experience kicked in to firm up his appropriate career. He joined with a few fellow poets, who represented the cutting edge of French language in this early modern moment. The members of this eventually illustrious group—*La Pleiade*, honoring a group of six poets from ancient Alexandria, and signaling a desire to write in the stylistic wake of antiquity. It is no surprise that in Ronsard's first published volume, *Odes* (1550), Horace shone as the master star of the work. Carefully hewn, intricately earthy language was to be part of Ronsard's path in language.

The following twenty eight liner, 'To be on the skids' —two sonnets back to back-- works the traditional effects of the sonnet, interlacing rhymed with unrhymed line endings, fine tuning the inner distances established by rhyming pairs and rhyming quatrains, opening and then closing one prominent pathway of meaning after another. The dexterity of thought aligns with the trim music, though of course we must recognize that we are reading this poem in a (splendid) English translation, which is employed to make the discussion available to an English language reader.

ESTRE INDIGENT. ('To be on the skids')

To be undaunted and dissolve in fear,
To wish to die, and dance upon a string,
And, all being ventured, to have nothing clear;
To bow in servile homage, with the brand
Upon one's face, the heavy loss in hand
To plot unceasingly some trick or dodge
Whereby one's brave designs shall not endure,
Are the effects which in my spirit lodge
Hope that is doubtful, torment that is sure.
To be in want and one's last pittance wring,
To laugh by feigning and suppress the tear,
To hate the true, to love the fictive thing,
To possess all and find in nothing cheer;
To be set free and to one's shackles cling,

(*Author note*: the heady intercrossing of fictive hope with willed delight in bondage, of 'hating the true,' while 'loving the fictive,' spins the lines with the deft energy of a poet miming the utter down and outness of a brilliant sensibility—who is invented by the author.) The persona generated by this antic (or is it crazed?) persona, the author's emissary within the poem, predates, but anticipates the paradoxical personae of John Berryman's *Love Songs* (1969) or of the narrator of Hart Crane's *Bridge* (1930) or perhaps even of William Blake's presence to the daily in his *Songs of Experience (1794),* all of these works sites at which the creator's mind interacts unpredictably with the self-aware languages of hysteria, sharp perception, sudden insight. We we can imagine parts of the poetic sensibility; we can imagine this sensibility increasingly visible by the time, say, of the era of John Donne (1572-1631) and the metaphysical poets, not to mention the work inside the Romantic movement, when the whole soul of the poet (as in Wordsworth's *Prelude*) is invested in its identity with the natural scene (with which it interacts copiously and instructively.)

These sonnets in the Pierian solitude

I made, when Frenchmen under armour sweat,
And the whole people rushed infuriate,
Being guided by Bellona, dripping blood;
When vice instead of Law, when murder, crude
Impudence, the low skill to imitate
Glaucus and Proteus to control the State
Were marks of pride: the Theban tale renewed.
In such a vicious time, to cheat my thought,
I put these quite unuseful plaints together:
Mars, even as Love, is happy for our tears.
One war is cruel, mine is nobly fought;
Mine could be ended by two skirmishers,
A hundred thousand could not end the other.

(Author note: the stamp of the classical glistens on most serious poetry of the early modern period. We recall that Ronsard began early to write a *Franciade*, a France-centered epic, modelled on Virgil's *Aeneid*, and celebrating the triumphs of his native land, replete with references to ancient literary texts. The sense of self, in all its openness to the kaleidoscope of dicta the poetry-rich past exudes—the team of the Muses, the death struggles in ancient myth—grows rich, complex, and compelling, like the dexterous self of Ronsard's brilliant play on indigence.)

Ronsard is rarely so pungent with wit as in the poem on indigence, where he is working out the hypersubtle intricacies of his search for identity, for the comfort of something to call himself. In the following poem he comes at us with one foot in the Middle Ages, realistic and thick, the other in the world of wit he occupies in his indigence poem. Yet, for all its seeming readiness, for the conflict with his fantasy-foe, Rabelais, for the hardy combat with his brilliant but rough tongued predecessor, there is a basic play and bitter high humor, in this epitaph, which derives from an age intimate with death, and willing to figure-skate over the surface of dark fact.

Epitaph for Francois Rabelais

If anything can sprout
From a dead man rotted out.
And if further generation
Arises from stagnation,
A grapevine will surely take birth
From the belly and the girth
Of good Rabelais, who contrived
Always to drink while alive.
In one suck down the hatch
His gullet could dispatch,
With two shakes and a burp,
More milk than a pig can slurp,
More rivers than Iris can nuzzle,
More waves than a beach can guzzle.
Not even the dawn sun, blinking,
Has seen him when he's not drinking,
And night, however late,
Has seen him in no other state
Because 24/7, no break.
François had a thirst to slake.
But when the summer came on.
Sweltering, dusk to dawn,
He'd roll up his sleeves until,
His arms half-bare, he would spill
Flat on the floor in the dirt

With the rushes and jugs, inert.
Supine in the grease, he would hollow
A hole in the ground, where he'd wallow
In wine like a frog in mud,
Then drunkenly warble a flood
Of praise to good Bacchus - a story of
triumph and glory:
How he'd put down a Theban plot;
How his father was much too hot
For his mother, and grabbed her ass
But burned her alive, alas
He sang the club and steed
Of Gargantua, and the seed
Of Panurge; the quondam reign
Of the gullible Papimane
And his customs, codes and lore;
Of Jean des Entommeures
And all Epistemon's battles.
But Death does not drink, he rattles,
And he hauled François from here
To the underground frontier,
Where he's forced by Death to drink
From rivers that run like ink
All you who pass his grave,
Be you nobleman or knave,
Hang cups on this, his shrine
To vessels and sparkling wine;
Hang sausages and ham:
For if he still has sensation,
His soul prefers potation
To lilies as a gift,
And wine gives a better lift.

Like the poem on indigence, this early modern poetry flirts with being tongue in cheek. (Scholars debate the character of the poem: is Ronsard expressing his admiration or his contempt toward Rabelais?) Do we feel, in either of the two poems in question, here, that the poet is reaching ahead of himself, into a self-awareness not characteristic of the pre-modern literary figure? Do we feel we are dealing, here, with a lack of some presence to self which will mark what later, even already in Donne, we will identify. The answer is, of course, that we are counterposing shadows, inventing a pre modern and a modern perspective, in the interests of our overall exploration. There are few registers of literary modernity for which we cannot find parallels in western European literature as old as Chaucer, Boccaccio, or Petrarch. (Whether we can step carefully and lightly even from late antiquity, up the modernizing ladder, to the Renaissance and farther, is substance for the broadest perspectives we can undertake; though this long climb might well prove fruitful and make us rethink the kind of lip we find dividing the Middle Ages from early modernity.)

Study guide

Ronsard was raised into an aristocratic home, given the best of educations, and passed formative years of his youth in the diplomatic corps. But it was not until after he had lost his hearing, as a consequence of an infection, that he began to bring his world-experience back into writing, heading, as he did, the poetry circle that called themslves *La Pléiade.* Within that framework Ronsard became a full time poet. Becoming aware of himself as a writer was his stance toward becoming ‘aware of his self,’ surely one version of ‘writerly self-awareness,’ a trait conspicuous among many of the leaders of artistic movements, in the modern period. Do you think there were self-aware groups of poets in western culture prior to the Renaissance? How about the poets of the Carmina Burana?

Ronsard's poem, 'To be indigent,' 'To be on the skids,' as I put it, is the max in the adroit nimbleness of a search for identity. The dance of words mirrors the dance of mind as it defines and then unravels itself. Are we en route here to the role of the poem, in 'modern literature,' as the foremost carrier of the weight of literary self-awareness? Are we on the cusp of the discovery of the poet as working through his multiple identities, and giving words full freedom to direct their user's thought? Is Ronsard, looking like a 'modern poet'?

What kind of confraternity does Ronsard pretend to establish with Rabelais? Does the jocular humane tone of this poem take us back in spirit to the long premodern tradition of the drinking song or the Villonesque joking tone. Are you reminded of the teasing boisterous tone of the Carmina Burana? Do you identify such a tone in 'modern poetry?' Edward Lear? G.K.Chesterton?

Ronsard created many deeply human, full throated poems, celebrating love and women's beauty. One of the most celebrated is his Sonnet pour Helene, which opens:

Quand vous serez bien vieille
Le soir, a la chandelle…

One day when you ere old,
In the evening, by the candlelight…

And carries on to remind the lady that she will remember Ronsard, and that they were intimates, and he was renowned…and time had eaten them up. Take a long look at the treatment of Beatrice and Francesco in Dante's *Divine Comed*y. How did Dante handle a tender love affair—of his own creation? Was he torn by compassion? No way.

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)

The Essays. (1580)

Essay 1 That men by various means arrive at the same end

Introductory

Montaigne chooses to open on a loose topic—what kinds of resolution are there, for a situation in which you deal with a person (or foe) who is angry with you or has been offended by you? Or in which you are an aggressor determined to get rid of your enemy, and seemingly have no pity for him? By and large the author chooses to consider different kinds of resolutions to such situations: passive resistance that turns the mood of the aggressor; violent strike-back from the aggressed that shocks or startles the aggressor

into reexamining his attitude; unexpected attacks of compassion or forgiveness on the part of the figure of power.

Examples that illustrate Montaigne's way into his theme.

Compassion 1 Edward the Black Prince furiously assaults a French city, determined to obliterate the inhabitants. As he enters the city, however, he sees three brave and defiant French Cavaliers, walking the streets, and obviously refusing to surrender. The Prince is so touched and impressed, by the defiance of these three men, that he spares the city.

Compassion 2 The Emperor Conrad III of Germany sacks an enemy city, and in his fury proposes to wipe it out. So comprehensive is his fury that he orders even the women and children to leave the city, taking with them all they can carry on their backs. To the Emperor's amazement, the women leave the city gates taking their husbands with them on their backs. The Emperor's fury disappears, and he spares the city.

Conclusion

Sometimes a shocked response to oppression will dispel it, while at other times the oppressed can effectively win the compassion of an aggressor. Montaigne observes that there are various ways to peace and resolution. From the instances of surprising behavior, which Montaigne finds in his examples of the various means by which people arrive at the same end-- peace, resolution, or quiet—Montaigne concludes that 'man is 'a marvelous, vain, fickle, and unstable subject'—and from that conclusion follows directly onto his reflection about himself, his autobiographical reflection: 'I have a marvelous propensity to mercy and mildness, and to such a degree that I fancy that of the two I should sooner surrender my anger to compassion than to esteem…"

Essay 2. On Sorrow

Introductory

Montaigne opened his first essay with a discussion of the various ways in which conflict situations can be resolved. He is especially concerned with the unpredictable elements in human character,that lead us at one time to be inexplicably compassionate, at other times to be brutal. This discussion of the uncertain focus of our emotions flows into the discussion of Essay Two, in which Montaigne turns to the emotion of sorrow, and to the unpredictable and fickle ways in which it manifests itself.

A bevy of examples support Montaigne's scorn for the 'foolish and base' emotion of sorrow, which seems to him another playground for the unstable and unreliable nature of mankind. 'No one is more free from this passion than I.' says Montaigne, as he goes on to add that to the ancient Stoics—he is referring to his favored ancient wisdom sources in Zeno (5th cent. B.C.) , Seneca (1-65 A.D.), Epictetus (d. 135 A.D.)—sorrow was a particularly objectionable emotion.

Examples

Father's sorrow The fifth century Greek historian, Herodotus, includes in his *History* many instances of perplexing, and irrational behavior. In one instance a father, caught up in the mind numbing sandblast of war, notes the deaths (corpses) of his son and daughter, but in some way processes away the sight. He endures it without undue emotion. Not much later, however, the father passes the corpse of a 'familiar friend,' also a battlefield victim but of no special intimacy to him, and breaks down with grief. The cumulative power of exposure to death is too much for Father; it overweighs whatever is plain common sense about the unparalleled shock of seeing one's own children dead. The emotion of sorrow is a poor judge.

Father's sorrow Sorrow can change its character like a chameleon, rendering it a fickle guide to the true nature of whatever has provoked it. A man sorrows for a slain soldier on the battlefield, then, on

looking closer, discovers it is his son. His emotion is still sorrow, but it is sorrow intensified to a high and nuanced power of itself. Montaigne tirelessly dwells on the imprecision of sorrow as an emotion.

Harmful sorrow Sorrow can lead us to torture ourselves needlessly. Diodorus was humiliated by being bested in a contest of dialectic. His sorrow was inexpugnable. He could not be consoled. He was a passive victim of his sorrow. He was helpless, and to no good end.

Excessive grief Contrast two ancient models. There is Niobe, whose nine children were slain by Leto, the goddess, for her excessive hybris. Driven to an excess of sorrow, Niobe went nine days without eating. Finally, transformed by extremes of sorrow, she was turned to stone. Her sorrow overcame her. On the other hand—and this is a personal example, given by Montaigne—there is the case of being so overburdened by sorrow that the increment irrationally dispels the stockpiled emotion, and one feels freed. Niobe was freed by petrification, while Montaigne was freed by excess, the trespass on the limits of endurance. An emotion (sorrow) which can lead to such paradoxical results—two antithetical kinds of freeing—is of little value to the human animal, which must rely on emotions as guides on the path toward reality.

Conclusion

Montaigne seizes on this last example to characterize himself (though not by boasting) as a person not subject to sorrowing after such loss. 'I am for my part of a stubborn apprehension, which also, by reasoning, I every day harden and fortify.'

Montaigne, as we are seeing, constructs an incremental autobiography, through the inserting of his own opinions into the relatively new essay form. (Par excellence, the early modern temper of Montaigne's time was just positioning itself for the kinds of self-awareness which were eventually to facilitate the novels of such as Proust, Kafka, or Mann, for whom the self was to become the most direct theme of one's work.) Montaigne tends to work around a broad philosophical humanism, grounded in the reading of the ancient classics. (He was raised speaking Latin, tr ained by the best classical tutors of his time, and carried out his studies at the Université de Bordeaux, where he was taught by outstanding Renaissance Humanists).

Montaigne is a skeptical thinker, a lover of life but of reason in life, and a shrewd analyst of human behavior and emotions. It is from the latter stockpile that he draws the fine distinctions that build out most of his essays. The very finesse with which he distinguishes sorrow from compassion, committing himself to the latter but distancing from the former, indicates his inclination to make fine distinctions in language, which mirror the intricate modifications to which the fickle animal man is prey.

Essay 3. That our affections carry us beyond us

Introductory

The autobiography. We let Montaigne construct his autobiography incrementally. He does so with great care, and example-filled adjustments, and though he may seem chiefly to be pursuing philosophical arguments—say the broad critique of mankind as faulty, fickle, and unreliable—the deeper intention of the author is to 'record some traits of my character and of my humors.' At this point, we should have to say that there is fragile unity emerging from the 'traits' of Montaigne's character. Compassionate, suspicious of sorrow, a friend of living in the present: the traits accumulate slowly, and enrich themselves as a complex self-portrait. Looking ahead—there will be three books of essays, 107 chapters, by the completion (*1592*) of the whole project, by which time Montaigne will live before us as a full, and often self-contradictory, 'modern man.' History was bringing to birth, almost simultaneously, two unprecedentedly prescient personalities: Shakespeare and Montaigne. Shakespeare gave back to the world what he learned, while Montaigne kept endlessly fingering the newly discovered world.

Reminder. It will be remembered that— in the first two essays-- attention was drawn to the unstable, unreliable, even vile condition of human being. This dark view of human nature ran parallel to the various modes by which we resolve serious conflicts, to the indication of what sorrow is, and of what value there

is to man. In the course of exploring these specific instances, Montaigne let us in to his own inclinations, to compassion (rather than assets) and to emotional control, rather than sorrow. This, we begin to see, is the way Montaigne constructs his autobiography, by increments embedded in a discussion of largely ancient examples. The broad tenor of the discussion is humanist skeptical, the work of a creative observer of life too smart to be taken in by appearances. The third essay addresses peculiarities of thought and behavior as they pertain to our thoughts about death, our preparations for death, and, more generally, the mindset which leads us to reach in fear toward the future, rather than dealing with the present which is up close and pertinent.

Platonic perspective. Montaigne contrasts the distractive human value system, with the mindset Plato recommends. Plato puts it concisely: 'do thine own work, and know thyself.' (For Plato, as the author explains, each part of his adage implies the other: in doing your work you will know yourself, while in knowing yourself you will do your own work.) The operative practice, for most of us, is never to be 'present with, but always beyond, ourselves; fear, desire, hope, push us toward the future.' We lack the gift of what today, in the West, we praise as *mindfulness*. For Montaigne, this gift was precious; he saw its roots in examples from ancient classical spirituality rather than (like us) from eastern Buddhism.

The text of the third essay. Once again, Montaigne's text abounds in germane examples, largely drawn from Greek and Roman sources. What have the examples in common? They all deal with our thoughts, plans, and arrangements concerning death, a condition in the wake of which we will no longer be here. In what ways does Montaigne show us projecting out from the present so as to deal with death? How does he Illustrate thereby the ways in which our affections get out ahead of us?

Montaigne urges us to live in the present, and to follow Plato's prescription that we should know ourselves and do our work well, without being distracted by thoughts of the future. Naturally one consequence of the Platonic position is that we free ourselves from anxiety about death, which is a useless preoccupation.

Examples

Live the present. Epictetus, the fifth century Athenian skeptic, established an academy of sages. But he dispensed his highly disciplined students from any obligation to think about the future—which has no existence.

Shame The Emperor Maximilian, ashamed (like Montaigne himself, who regularly exposes his 'male problems'), could not endure to be seen urinating, so when the need was on him he slipped away to do it in private. Particularly eager not to be seen naked in death, the Emperor ordered that he should be entombed in his shorts.

Death Count no man happy til you see him dead. This dark-light view of death was vigorously expressed both by the lawgiver Solon, and by the bitter fifth century B. C. lyric poet, Theognis. It gives paradoxical expression to the idea that happiness and death can coincide. Like the Epictetus example, this one illustrates an effective thinking-about-death strategy, which allows the thinker to live in the present.

Death Contrary to Epictetus' principle—example one-- was the practice of the ancient Lacedemonians, as reported by Herodotus. Upon death, the Lacedaemonian hero was the object of elaborate ceremonies, rending of garments, wailing. Death is not a condition here but a tragedy. It is an absolute instance of living in the anxieties caused by worry about death.

Death Edward I, king of Scotland, ordered that upon his death his flesh should be boiled, and his bones collected by his son, as a talisman to be used in future battles. The man's presence was devoted to the ongoing furies of the next life.

Death Socrates is not surprisingly the most inventive of those Montaigne cites, as thinkers thinking their own death, but without living for what is not. Take your time to spend yourself creatively in death,

says Socrates. ‘Happy,’ he says, ‘are those who can gratify their senses by insensibility, and live by their death.’ This imaginative prospect of living your own death, is Montaigne’s suggestion of a response to the Platonic advice, about living in the present. By making the present your living point, you are always in it; when dead you are in the present, and can live joyfully there, as—a modern instance—do the Irish and the Nigerians, who live joy (dance, drink, babble) in festive funerals.

Essay 4. That the soul expends its passions upon false objects, where the true are wanting

Introductory

For Montaigne, the thinking that goes into the study of universal propositions—his essay titles—is also the thinking that generates his growing sense of who and what he is—his character and humours. As writerly consciences, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Montaigne turned, in the Renaissance, to the distinctive new and contemporary form of the essay, with its informal inquisitiveness They simultaneously freed from within themselves a new and conversational presence to their intimate thoughts. These intimate thoughts differed from the more formal thinking of a Descartes, or even of Pascal, as well as from the ‘literary,’ imaginative thinking of a Shakespeare or Moliere. With the essay a new kind of thinking, as well as a new kind of autobiography, was being created.

Self-revelations—as a compassionate man, of disciplined emotions—say, when it comes to sorrow—and as a believer in living carefully in the present, rather than in fantasies of a future—these self-revelations emerge in tandem with a highly skeptical view of human nature, which Montaigne views as false, fickle, and easily carried away. By and large the traits and humors Montaigne finds in himself are the negatives of the traits he finds dominant on the street. In the fourth essay he proliferates extensive exempla showing that ‘the soul expends its passions on false objects, where the true are wanting,’ exempla which, in demystifying, Montaigne finds fascinating avenues for a self presentation which, though never boastful, broadens his emergent autobiographical portrait.

Passions We have a super abundance of passions. The same pets we adulate, on occasion, are not always bundles of love. When wounded by a natural object, like a root or stone, they are likely enough to take out their fury on the offending object—which has no awareness. False objects are attacked, when true objects are not available.

The soul is a cauldron of passions, which want expending on the objects that attract its attention. We have in our souls, for instance, an abundance of affection, more than we can properly expend on other humans. Therefore, we turn to pets, to absorb our excess of passions. Our contemporary pet industry or the scene at any major pet cemetery take us straight to Montaigne’s thinking.

Examples

Irrationality 1 Plutarch provides an example from the philosopher Bion. Bion observes a man who is extremely upset, and who is, as we say, tearing his hair out. Bion says: I didn’t know that baldness was a cure for griel.

Irrationality 2 Gamesters grow furious when they lose their money at dice, and sometimes express their fury by chewing up their losing cards or swallowing their losing dice, as though the cards and dice had stolen their money.

Irrationality 3 The Emperor Augustus, after losing a great battle, smashed his head against the walls of his palace.

Irrationality. 4 Caligula, the brutal and often half mad Roman Emperor, had a great palace destroyed, because of the pleasures that his mother had had there.

Irrationality 5 The wild Thracians, when enraged with the Gods after a serious military loss, shot vengeful arrows into the sky.

Irrationality 6 To a bereft maiden: 'It is not your lovely tresses you should attack, but the bullet that shot your brother.'

Conclusion

Montaigne. Montaigne himself is an astute and persistent observer of human nature and its weaknesses. Does the weakness targeted in the present essay—the need to strike out when wounded, even if the cause of your wounding is not to be found, even if you must accept an inappropriate object for your wrath—does that weakness enter the account of mankind as basically vile and unstable? Yes. Montaigne is consistent in his mistrust of human nature—very far, let us say, from the thinking of such a Romantic poet as Wordsworth, for whom 'nature hath ample power to chasten and subdue." Our need to find a cause or explanation for what wounds us prevents us from discovering our own responsibility for our failings. …'we can never enough decry the disorderly sallies of our minds.'

Montaigne's larger point is accurate and arguably of universal application. Sulking is a universal name for this vengeful response to events which seem provided by fate to thwart us. It rains on my party and I curse the gods. The world bypasses my dream of inscribing world history with the name of my greatness. My teen ager is beaten up just as he is about to take his SAT exams. How can I not feel that the universe is against me? How can I not bang my head against the wall?

Essay 5. Whether the governor of a place besieged ought himself to go out to parley.

Introductory.

Montaigne frequently opens his essays with an open question to be discussed: how conflicts get resolved; how we can live in the present, how we can direct our passions to valid objects, how best we can deal with sorrow. The essay is a form in which the author, while speaking with frankness from his own voice, can address broad human issues. In this fifth essay Montaigne turns his attention to a matter which at first seems closely tied to military issues—whether the governor of a besieged fortress should himself descend to negotiate with the enemy, or whether he should remain in his fortress. Ultimately, though, the essay is about human behavior and human choice.

Examples

Strategy Quintus Marcus, in fighting king Perseus, asked his opponent for extra time, to fix the battle for an appropriate moment and place. He was thereby deceiving his foe, buying time to build up his army. Montaigne apparently shares what was at the time the preferred strategy, to avoid any guile in military affairs—to leave that kind of deceptive strategy to those like the wily Greeks. We take a look ahead, in this discussion, to the virtue-based conclusion of Montaigne himself.

Honor Montaigne—and this follows from the point in the first example—clearly admires those military strategists of old, for whom a battle was a pre-arranged contest of valor, who staged the upcoming battle with clearly defined ground rules, and who fought openly, like those heroes of Homer's Iliad, who engaged in pitched two person battles which spring up and occupy the entire narrative screen. Montaigne's heart is with the man who, besieged and called on to exit and give up, replies that so long as he has his sword he is neither besieged nor ready to take orders.

Prudence Montaigne is as always on the side of good sense, and urges on the governor inclined to emerge: discuss terms, stick close to your fort, and stay under shelter until firm protective conditions are in place for you.

Conclusion

Montaigne Montaigne raises a question for debate, and yet we know that he will slyly insinuate his own take at the end. We know how self-aware he is constructing his autobiographical portrait, of which

we have already seen diverse traits: that he is critical, a severe judge of such human foibles as severity, thoughtless commiseration, preoccupation with the future, vengefulness toward the empty air, false objects which stand in for obstacles to the greedy human.

Montaigne, noted for skepticism, and for raising the question of his own identity—who am I really? What do I know, really, for sure?—Montaigne has shared with us a few instances of spontaneous virtue—unexpected compassion or unexpected sorrow at the random death of a man on the street, with his firm belief in the present and joy (Platonic or Socratic style). Skeptic Montaigne remains, but not a dark pessimist in the fashion of a Schopenhauer, who feels the universe has been created counter to the human. Or in the fashion of Joseph Wood Krutch, who in *The Modern Temper* (1929) sees us irremediably lost to the spirit of belief.

The issue of the current essay, whether the governor of a besieged city should go down for parley—that is in order to discuss terms and conditions with the enemy—seems at first not to provoke a discussion of what kind of person Montaigne is, or of Montaigne's moral values—but in fact we will get to that 'what kind of person,' at the very end, when Montaigne tells us how he would answer the guiding question of the essay. He raises the question of how he would behave, as governor of a besieged city, in the case where the enemy has informed him that they have sapped the foundations of the besieged castle, so that it will collapse momentarily. (In other words, so that the governor. believing his foe's claim and warning, should get out fast, before the structure collapses).

Montaigne's response to the situation is characteristically subtle. He thinks of the consequences for his honor, if he were to be thought to be running like a rat, to save his life. "I could, and do, with great facility, rely upon the faith of another; but I should very unwillingly do it in such a case, as it should thereby be judged that it was rather an effect of my despair and want of courage than voluntarily and out of confidence and security in the faith of him with whom I had to do."

In other words Montaigne would prioritize the question of honor, and put even the appearance of this honor before the possibility of being blown up. I might do the same thing.

Montaigne will follow the dictates of common sense, but not at the expense of his honor.

Essay 6. That the hour of parley is dangerous

Introductory

It will strike us that many of Montaigne's themes and examples are drawn from the experience of warfare. The fifth and sixth essays center on military behaviors carried out during siege warfare, especially as it involved parleys, negotiations, and agreements between armed camps or between a besieging army and the civilian population it is overcoming. (Even in the first two essays, the examples were regularly drawn from the battlefield, while in the third essay\ he develops such war-pertinent examples as those touching Caligula or Augustus, in which we see evidence of the collusion of power and madness.) War and power moves were of course at the forefront of social experience in Montaigne's moment, which saw a flurry of religious conflict struggles, efforts of the old landholding society to retain what remained of the mediaeval life of formalized intra-nobility land grabs, and the actual growth of the first urban power centers, in North Italy and France. Among these centers of influence and power, it is not surprising that issues of peace treaties, conditions of surrender, and underlying questions of trust would underly many influential situations.

Examples

Treachery 1 Montaigne's first example draws on an event from ancient Roman society, and involves a dilemma facing the Roman general Lucius Regillus. Lucius was determined to establish a justifiable treaty pact with the citizens of a city which he had just conquered. His proposal was accepted by the former foe, but then, while Lucius' attention was elsewhere, his people—the mobs attending his army—cut loose and ransacked the defeated city, treacherously undermining Lucius' intentions.

Treachery 2 The Greek general Cleomenes settled on a peace treaty with a defeated enemy. Little did that enemy know that the Greek general believed integrity irrelevant to the rigors of war. The two sides established a peace treaty applicable for five days, but on the third night the forces of Cleomenes attacked and massacred the enemy, on the pretext that the peace agreement was for five days, but not for five nights.

Treachery 3 From Montaigne's own time he draws the instance of M. d'Aubigny, who was besieging Capua. In the midst of drafting peace resolutions, the citizens of Capua realized they were being assaulted by the forces of M. d'Aubigny. One thinks back to Essay Five, and what seem necessary precautions for any defeated foe to take, and for any negotiating potentate to hold in mind. We are not far from the moment of Machiavelli's *The Prince* which has taught the world lessons in the sophisticated art of trickery and confusion in warfare.

Moderation 1 The Greek philosopher Chrysippus carved out advice, on the relation to others in competition, which bears on the military issues discussed above. When you run a race against your opponent, says Chrysippus, give it your all, from start to finish, but do not resort to tricks like tripping or pushing your opponent in the course of the race. The ancients from whom Montaigne usually takes his examples, tend to blame the Greeks for unscrupulous morals in competition.

Magnanimity Alexander the Great was ready to besiege the Persian Emperor Darius. One of his adjutants urged him to attack just at nightfall, when the enemy would be least prepared to counter the attack. Alexander refused indignantly: 'By no means; 'it is not for such a man as I am to steal a victory.' We are taken back to essay four, in which Montaigne refers to the good old times of Roman military propriety, when wars were fought at appointed times, by professional warriors (*knights*) and followed expected rules of propriety. *(We* note this at a time of serious international conflict in our own world, in which the moralities of war time behaviors are as hotly debated as they can have been in Montaigne's day.)

Conclusion

Montaigne's take on his examples.

When we consider the historical distance between our time and the sixteenth century western Renaissance, we can assume that there will be noteworthy differences in value systems. Montaigne himself stresses the importance of honor, and especially trustworthiness, as he assesses the qualities of a military leader—although he (like Machiavelli) fully understands the reigning guilefulness which marks the new, and already far from chivalrous, contemporary world.

His stress on trustworthiness has a flavor to it, for Montaigne, as we know, was a privileged noble, a gentleman brought up on largely noble classical models—the very models from which he draws the examples for many of his essays. Montaigne expects behavior, on the battlefield, which will mirror the gentlemanly standards accepted in his own background. The military elite of our Western moment, today, scope out enemy protestations, weigh carefully whatever is proposed to them, and make sure they have the weapons they need. On television, however, they are careful to display chestsful of medals of honor.

Montaigne is between two worlds, as a military moralist. One side of him is rooted in the knightly chivalric world of honor, professionalism, and especially trust, while the other side, increasingly 'modern,' though prior even to the concept of 'modern,' is raising the question about what the human being is, what we can know, and what kind of values are appropriate to a newly acquisitive society. One thinks of Montaigne's regard for Platonic values, in Essay Three. How does he see those values playing out in contract negotiations on the battlefield?

Essay 7*. 'That death discharges us of all our obligations.'*

Introductory.

Montaigne has a fine eye for moral variations. He can isolate the volatile ethos of a military man who decides to spare his enemy because he admires three defiant enemy cavaliers, or the startled sorrow of a man breaking down before the corpse of a slain unknown soldier, while not long before the same man had gazed on the slain corpse of his son with a certain equanimity. He can measure the complex difference between a general who stalls for time, in order to reconfigure his army, and a military man who would refuse to save his life by escaping dishonorably from his sapped fortress foundation. We speak of situational ethics today, meaning that ethical values can be perceived as they appear in living interactional situations. Montaigne goes even farther than that, in parsing the moral choices we make as we pass from life into death.

Examples

Postmortem. 1 King Henry VII hates the Duke of Savoy, and wants ultimate vengeance on him. He asks his son, Philip, to capture this enemy and to bring him into court. Philip agrees, but on condition that no harm will befall the Duke of Savoy. The recusant Duke is brought into court, without harm, but at the moment of his capture, when he is under the power of Philip, the King dies. The King's last testament is opened to reveal that he commands Philip to execute the Duke of Savoy. The intention proves to be the 'judge of our actions.' Our intentions can prove operative up to and beyond our deaths.

Postmortem 2. At Brussels in the war between Spain and the Netherlands, the Duke of Alva demanded the surrender of Counts Egmont and Horn; Egmont having accordingly promised Horn that he could safely comply with the order to surrender. Having surrendered, and facing execution, Egmont asked to be the first to be executed, so that he could be freed of his obligation (the obligation of the living to the living) to the living Horn, to whom Egmont had promised security upon surrender. Both men were executed in 1568, the intention of Egmont, to satisfy his obligation to Horn, having been thwarted by the executioner's sword. Egmont was not able to go beyond his will. The human experience is all about will and intention. 'We are masters only of our will.' 'We cannot be bound to what we are unable to perform.'

Postmortem 3 Montaigne adduces the example of the mason in Herodotus, who during his lifetime kept to himself the secret of the treasure of the King of Egypt. At the mason's death, he revealed this treasure to the children of the Pharoah. Doth death discharge us of our obligations, or did the mason carry with him, into the next world, the obligation to have disclosed the treasure?

Postmortem. 4 Montaigne excoriates those who put off paying their bills until the time comes to make our their wills, and then in allocating this and that to various debtors crimp and cut the true debt until they have greatly reduced it. Equally objectionable are those who maintain their personal hatreds beyond the grave, taking out their ire in the provisions of their will.

Conclusion

Montaigne longs for a scrubbed conscience, which will enable him to pass on equal with the world he lived in: 'I shall take care, if I can, that my death discover nothing that my life has not first and openly disclosed.' (Socrates, on his death bed, remembers that 'I owe a cock to Aesculapius,' the ultimate in fighting to keep one's conscience clear.) In addition, though, Montaigne introduces philosophical riffs, into his discussion of dying well. He divagates onto the power of the will, which, even though it cannot always be fulfilled, is the ultimate judge of our actions. We cannot guarantee the ultimate fate of what we will, but we are free to will what we like, and in so doing we reveal a great deal about ourselves.

Essay 8 *Of Idleness*

Introductory

Montaigne is consistently interested in the way the mind works. He decided at the age of thirty eight to retire from active public life, and to devote himself to 'tranquil study and reading.' He supposed, at that point, that his mind would exfoliate out into ordered and self-enriching new ideas, but what he found was quite different, that his mind went wild with monsters and phantasms, every matter of wild and disordered fantasies. This experience played into the themes of his essays, in which, as we have already seen, there is regular emphasis on mind control, on what in Buddhism is called mindfulness. Indiscriminate sorrow, as Montaigne has argued, is a harmful emotion; for happiness' sake one should try to live in the moment, knowing your own self; the passions should be carefully aligned with significant objects of emotion; one should negotiate with others in a state of close attention to details and to one's own safety; one should freely exercise one's will, without deluding oneself into the belief that what you will will necessarily come into effect.

Examples

Disorder in nature When an abandoned field, full of grasses and soil, is seeded properly, it grows florid, springs up into vibrant plant forms, and produces seeds which can be turned into the profitable seeding of a new field.

Order in nature and mind The right seeds, whether in a planted field, in human genetics, or in the ordering and instructing of young minds are the indispensable means to profitable growth. Plants require cultivation, so do children's minds.

Direction is essential 'The soul that has no established aim loses itself.' The mind, left alone, tramples in all directions, like a wild horse.

Conclusion

Montaigne has little confidence in 'the state of nature.' He believes in discipline, whether that of disciplined studies or disciplined behaviors, and is himself the product of a highly disciplinary upbringing, by a father who insisted that Montaigne (along with all the servants in the household) speak Latin for ordinary discourse, that studies should be systematically inculcated from early youth, and that education should be offered on the highest level, as at the distinguished Bordeaux University, where Montaigne mastered the classical languages from which he selects in detail for his 'examples.' On the other hand--and remember that Montaigne is a Renaissance Humanist, sometimes considered 'the first modern man'--Montaigne is a lover of humanity, a benign observer of our follies but also of our unexpected graces—as in our willingness to spare a city out of sympathy for the inhabitants, whose women carry the men to safety, on their backs.

Essay 9. Of Liars

Introductory

A review of the earlier essays will leave us in no doubt that Montaigne is a friend of honesty. Through what other lens could he be promoting the necessity of trustworthiness in the formulation of military peace deals, the life-saving importance of aligning your passions to true objects or your attention to the texture of everyday present life, as it is, or the discipline of mind against the careless thinking and ready self-entrapment of lying. Distinguishing between speaking 'untruth,' good faith error in assertion, and 'lying,' Montaigne blesses himself that he has a poor memory, risks no fabrications, and has learned to deal, by honest explanation, with the complaints of his friends, that he has forgotten them or the promises he has made to them. Montaigne goes so far as to claim that a good memory 'goes with infirm judgment.' For one thing, a weak memory reduces any ambition Montaigne might have—you need a good memory to be a ruler—while for another Montaigne's own bad memory spares him from holding grudges. He believes

one of his best qualities is his true instinct for friendship. In relations with others he can never remember what it is he was angry about.

Examples

Lying 1 Francis I needed information from the Duke Sforza of Milan, and to that end sent a spy, fitted out with a false identity, to ferret out the details from the Duke in Milan. Sforza became suspicious of the unconvincing spy, Merveille, who was caught by the agents of the suspicious Duke, and executed at once during the night. When asked by Francis to explain why the execution was carried out at night, Francesco Taverna, Francis' Ambassador to Sforza, invented a false explanation that the Duke would never wish to have such an execution take place during the day. It was a palpable self-serving lie, of which the keen sniffing Francis 1 was instantly aware. Disastrous results followed, for the lying Ambassador.

Lying 2. Pope Julius sent an Ambassador to the King of England, to urge him to take arms against the King of France. The king of England responded that there were many difficulties facing an assault against France, to which the Pope's Ambassador replied that he too was worried about that issue, and had discussed it with the Pope. The King of England suspected that the Ambassador was secretly on the side of France, and was not on a good faith mission. The Ambassador, in short, was lying, betraying his true attitude, when he urged the King of England to assault France. When the Ambassador returned to Italy, he found himself without a house, lucky to have his life spared.

Conclusion.

In two examples drawn from contemporary history, Montaigne illustrates the serious error of lying in the political climate of the pre modern Western European cultural climate. We will remember that Macchiavelli—*The Prince,* 1532—is lenient, when it comes to self-serving political subterfuges, but also that the same judge is extremely scrupulous when it comes to choosing your occasions, and calculating your risks. Neither the Pope's Ambassador nor Francesco Taverna, in the examples above, was careful to construct or cover their lies.

Montaigne himself, of course, carries the weight of Catholic moral disapprobation into his critique of lying. Though he first of all rejects lying as doomed self-deception, he sustains the basic Christian (and broadly religious) principles which infuse Renaissance European thought. Respect for the other person is essential to the Mosaic religions and (for example Buddhism) and is in Montaigne potently fused with a secular analysis of the 'problems of the lie.'

Essay 10. Of Quick or Slow Speech

Introductory

In his third and fourth essays, Montaigne attends to the housekeeping of the mind. He urges us to control our passions, and to see that they do not vent themselves against , say, harmless objects like the hair we pull out in our anger or the arrows we shoot at the heavens after they have dealt us a military loss. He is equally alert to the care of language, to its effects and to his own skills and limitations.

Montaigne reviews his own verbal gifts in the present essay, and does so by reflecting on two kinds of gifts given to mankind: slow, deliberate, and thoughtful speech, peculiarly needed in the pulpit, and more informal, quick, and flexible speech, such as that required of a good trial lawyer, who must be able to go with the flow, in language and thought. He concludes with a look at his own weaknesses and strengths, both in speaking and writing.

Examples

Lawyers and Preachers While the preacher can meditate over his sermon for the following Sunday, the trial lawyer must be ready to meet the changing ploys and diverse pieces of evidence, brought against

him by the opposing side. The lawyer must be ready to change direction, while the preacher will normally want to pursue a consistent theme without distractions.,

Lawyers. 1 A distinguished trial lawyer, M. Puyet, is commissioned to plead a case before the Pope, though at the last moment the format and nature of his presentation are sharply changed. The lawyer is flummoxed, and cannot say a word. You can only be so agile witted.

Lawyers. 2 The Roman lawyer, Servus Cassius, was an exemplary trial lawyer when he was under pressure from circumstances or from a masterful opponent. The situation brought out the most flexible of his arguments; he does not insist on a severe logic which would, so to speak, break the neck of the bottle of language.

Montaigne himself. 1 Montaigne is at his worst—in writing or speaking—when he is 'in his own possession'—that is, knows just what he is doing. 'Accident has more to do with anything that comes from me, than I…' Even the varying tones and ranges of his own voice can spur him on to creative speech or writing…he can be auto-inspired. Accordingly, the 'things I say are better than those I write…'

Montaigne himself. 2. 'When it comes to speech, I am already so lost that I know not what I was about to say…' 'a stranger often finds it out before me…' Even good improvisatory lawyers, Montaigns implies, build less discovery room into their briefs than does a good conversationalist.

Conclusion

Montaigne is an astute observer of diverse kinds of speech and writing, including his own. He comes down strongly onto the god given gift of improvisation and discovery. (His shrewdest observations pertain to the collaborative work of a good conversation, in which an initial speaker can strive to formulate thoughts which his interlocutor completes for him, or insinuates out of him—a maieutic of language to which we owe many of the best conversations.)

The essay form itself, which was under creation by the mid sixteenth century in Europe, was itself the product of a conversational version of writing. The essayist, we have seen, was at his best speaking his I, and permitting his reader to enrich and unfold his half-completed thoughts.

Essay. 11. Of Prognostications

Introductory.

Citing Cicero, Montaigne assures us that divinations and prognostications, which played large roles in personal and state decisions, in ancient Greece and earlier, had by the time of Jesus virtually faded away. (Was the Christian Revelation the broom that swept away pagan superstition? Montaigne remains on the fence, a propos that revelation). Animal sacrifices and divinations, organ auscultation, the interpretation of dreams, astrology, and spirit-read apparitions: all these means for interpreting the unknown were falling out of currency. That they were not totally outdated, however, could be amply substantiated by instances of prognostication in Montaigne's own time.

Examples

Superstitious belief 1 Francesco, Marquess of Saluzzo, Lieutenant to King Francis, owed his prosperous lifestyle and Dukedom to the munificence of King Francis, and had every apparent reason to

remain loyal to the King. However he fell under the spell of Tuscan divinatory practices, and was persuaded to join the forces of the Emperor Charles V. Pure superstition led him to this fatal disloyalty.

Superstitious belief 2 Casually Montaigne makes a brief foray into the anthropology of the practice of prognostication, and in doing so reveals his own mindset, mediaeval plus early modern. He reports, from Cicero's authority, that an Italian laborer, cutting into the soil, came upon the ascending figure of the god Tages—infantile but profound with wisdoms—whose oracular value would continue to attract knowledge-needy humans for many years. This encounter with Tages will bear on the living potential of prognostication, to which even in the present essay Montaigne will conclude with a half-believing reference. Montaigne walks a fine edge between true skepticism and openness to superstition.

Superstitious belief 3 Montaigne assures us he would rather build his future on the throw of the dice than on a superstitious prediction. We might think a few decades ahead, here, to the French philosopher Pascal, who believes that, in the throw of the dice we might make, to wager on the existence of God, it was worth betting on the presence of this divine creator.

Divine supervision On a dangerous coast, known for its shipwrecks, stand memorials to those spared shipwreck by divine intervention. Why then, intervenes the critic, not rather count the number of those who perished in the waters, and were not saved? This is Montaigne's default critical position, when it comes to evaluating claims for the divine and its presence is shaping our lives. He tends to believe that the burden of proof is on the 'divine,' to establish its plausibility.

Socrates' daimon Montaigne's skepticism leads him to what proves a difficult test. Socrates claimed that he was guided by a *daimon*, a 'personal god' that oversaw his life. Can Montaigne accept that notion? He closes down the brief discussion with a doff of the hat to Plato's teacher, who was a hard genius to undermine.

Conclusion

Among Montaigne's disparate takes on the realms of divination, spirit presences, or star reading, he opens from within himself a vein promising for its richness of application to the present (and previous) essay. Socrates' *daimon* is a prompt from within that resembles Montaigne's own gift, in conversation, of discovering by leaving it to his interlocutor to complete his 'meaning.' Isn't it that creative openness, in Montaigne himself that readies him to appreciate the spontaneously unfolding tableau of new meanings with which the Socratic *daimon* beckoned Plato's pupil?

Essay 12. Of Constancy

Introductory

In his third essay, Montaigne deals with the appropriate behavior of a fortress commander, when faced with the decision whether to descend and negotiate for the fate of his citadel, or to remain steadfast in his defensive position. A particular case is brought up, that involved the threat by the besieging foe, to have sapped the foundations of the fortress, so that the commander will face certain death if he refuses to yield. Montaigne expresses his preference for remaining in place, lest the impression be given, that he as commander is saving his skin by yielding the fort, rather than remaining honorably within the doomed self-structure. That question, honor versus reasonable self-protection, dominates the present essay.

Montaigne maintains that a decent level of self-preservation is permissible to all mankind. Just as is an initial feeling of fear and trembling, in the face of battle. While not of heroic temper, Montaigne takes his favored examples from ancients like the Stoics, who in battle feel—like us all—an initial fear at the shock of battle, but recover quickly, and persevere with constancy.

Examples

Flight and pursuit One way of open battle strategy is to combine retreat with assault. In fighting the Persians, at the battle of Plataea, the Spartans found themselves boxed in by a larger and tightly packed enemy line. Their recourse was to disassemble their own line and to flee, 'more dangerous from the back than from the front.' Once scattered and in mock retreat, the Spartans found the enemy, dispersed, following them in hot but confused pursuit. The Spartans then turned and slaughtered the unbalanced foe.

Direct confrontation Montaigne ponders the pros and cons of constancy as it involves the relation between a fixed line of cannoneers and an opposing squadron of field artillery, directly facing them. His advice is to remain staunch, beside your potent weapons—though nature will see to it instantly, if and when the time to duck or budge announces itself. At that point Montaigne leaves no room for heroics. Duck, for Christ's sake! This unequivocal Montaigne is the same person for whom the claims of honor were strong, upon the fortress commander who was invited to flee his sapped structure.

Up close and personal. Like most eminent men of his time, in Western Europe, Montaigne was familiar with battlefield fighting, and with the shocking sounds and sights of direct combat. Hearing rifle (*arquebus*) fire nearby, but not where he expects it, he (like any of us) feels an initial disorientation-terror. However, taking his clue from the prescriptions of the ancient Stoics, who 'yield their consent to their fright and discomposure,' rapidly take control of their responses. 'The Peripatetic sage does not exempt himself from perturbations of mind, but he moderates them.'

Conclusions

Pre-nuclear, pre-drone, Montaigne lives at a time when there is prolific warfare—especially among the numerous city-states, imperial forces, and inter-urban conflicts—but when the mediaeval traditions of personal valor, formal courage, and above all knightly behavior still make their presence felt. It is thus that the broader senses of constancy—consistency, honor, steadfastness—are central warfare issues for Montaigne. That these constancy issues apply in an age of advanced military hardware, like ours, is less clear: the Army lieutenant sending a drone from New Jersey to Aleppo may indeed hone in on an ISIS commander, but what if he hits the family next door?

Essay 13. The Ceremony of the Interview of Princes

Introductory

Montaigne himself was born into sufficient wealth, and nobility, that the topic of this essay, protocols for meetings among the social, political, or royal of this world, was not unfamiliar to our writer. In dealing with such protocols, however, he retains that good sense, and basic awareness of the human condition, which throughout his Essays forever calls us back to modesty and humility. We will remember, in that regard, that Montaigne's father sent him to spend the first three years of his life with a local peasant family, deeply familiarizing the young human with the universal basics of the human condition. Throughout his essays, Montaigne—like, say, Jean Jacques Rousseau-- will retain the ability to remain at ease in all types and kinds of social milieu.

Examples

Social rule 1 It is an embedded assumption, of the social world in which Michel de Montaigne grew up, that if someone your equal or superior announces their intention to visit you, you must be at home and awaiting them when they arrive. One should not go out in advance to meet the visitor—you might miss them—but you are free to meet them at your door.

Social rule infraction 1 Montaigne is naturally refractory—though far from rebellious-- in following the social playbook. (Thanks to his stubborn nature, and perhaps also to his infant years, Montaigne carries with him at all times great ease, finding himself himself at home in any human environment. He wants to keep his house to himself, and not to be slave to the intrusive expectations of others. While following the spirit of protocol, he reserves a priority for human values.

Interview protocol. Royal level 1 In 1533 there was a high level, consequence- rich, interview meeting between Pope Clement and King Francis of France. The King made all necessary preparations, then left the meeting venue for several days, so that the Pope could get the feel of the place. In this, an unwritten premise of interview practice was vivid. The Pope was 'spiritually' the loftier of the two rulers.

Interview protocol. Royal level 2. In 1532 there was a significant meeting between the Pope and the Emperor Charles V. The Pope was the first to arrive, in accordance with the practice mentioned above. In addition, another factor played into the special accommodation provided for the Pope. The venue chosen, for the interview, was on land owned by the Emperor, which fact make it especially incumbent on Charles to host munificently.

Conclusions

Montaigne opens the present essay with the sardonic comment—fully in his vein—that no topic is too banal to be made the subject of one of his essays. With classic grace, however, he builds the topic into a case study in morals and manners. (With the growing urbanization of pre-modern societies in Europe, the protocols of social living, down to the levels of dress and table manners, were demanding new kinds of attention, from writers, artists, and even theologians, interested as they all were in the finer relations among god's creations.)

Montaigne shows, in the present essay, that he too is part of this growing movement of social finesse, and yet he also takes his stand for comfort. What was his retreat from the busy social world, in mid life, except a determination to lead life in his own way? That way was broadly independent, though Montaigne never doubted that manners were an enriching element in the development of society. He adds, though, a characteristically subtle, and patrician, caveat: that when one lapses from protocol it should be seen as a gesture of choice, not as a sign of poor breeding.

Essay 14 *That men are justly punished for being obstinate in the defense of a fort that is not in reason to be defended.*

Introductory

Montaigne frequently deals with the issue of defending, protecting, or making large decisions, with particular reference to the valor, recklessness, honor or prudence evinced by one's behavior under circumstances of siege intensity. Among his early essays are two which consider, respectively, the dangers of peace negotiations between commanders, and the challenge, to the commander of a fortified structure, of how to proceed. In negotiations with the other side one should be perspicacious, and attend to it that one's own rabble should not inappropriately enter the enemy city, and prejudice the negotiations. One should also take one's own time in deciding whether or not to resist the enemy, or to accept offers of safe passage. At stake in these various instances is the exercise of one's valor, normally considered a virtuous disposition, but one susceptible to abuse—passing over into temerity, and folly-- as in the instance where, for example, a commander insists on an imprudent, no-win defense of his fort. We might take Montaigne's discussion, here, both a tactical message to commanders in the field, and a brief advisory to the imprudently macho in man, the valorous that can quite properly inspire the punishment of death.

Examples

Punishment 1. Constable Montmorenci, at the siege of Pavia, found his advance blocked by the defenders of a small tower perched on a bridge of entry into the city. He had every one of the few defenders hanged. Fools!

Punishment 2. The Dauphin of France, on a military expedition beyond the Alps, trussed the military governor, and the few defendants, of a small and inconsequential palace blocking a mountain pass.

Punishment 3. Captain Martin du Bellay strung up Governor Buono, who was in charge of a resistant but undermanned enemy fort, 'all his people having been cut to pieces.'

Punishment 4. Attackers and the attacked.

Some ad hoc rules of behavior deserve the attention of both attackers and attacked. The attacker must make sure he has not underestimated the strength of the fort resisting him. The attacker must calculate the power of his reputation, as a factor in forcing the foolishly valorous to surrender. Those vaunting their power to resist, should remember that some attacking commanders, drunk with almost Oriental power, will slaughter their adversaries down to the last breath.

Conclusion

This brief essay provides a good opportunity for tracking the curve of Montaigne's mindset in the making of an essay.

Reason is stressed from the start. One should not undertake a fort that is not in reason defensible. This is the voice of the prudent and skeptical Montaigne. (We can remember that he intensely reproved the fault of obstinacy in children, and believed that it should be beaten out of them.) Valor, Montaigne sees, is a virtue up to a certain point, when it crosses over into the vices of temerity and folly. Crossing over into those vices the commander makes himself a legitimate sitting duck for destiny. He crosses the line from protecting his honor, and enters the grey zone of disastrous bad judgment.

Essay 15. Of the punishment of cowardice

Introductory

Montaigne introduces us to a scene taking place, in which a Prince is listening to a narration of M. Vervin's surrender of Boulogne to the English (1444, to Henry VIII). As the case develops, we see that the person being tried is accused of having surrendered Boulogne but cannot be put to death, for though cowardice does seem to be in question, the motives behind cowardice are complex, the actual details of cowardice are hard to pin down, and the legal judgment of cowardice is difficult to pass. The surrender of a city can result from cowardice, sure, but that cowardice can also result from treachery or infirmity. We are, therefore, into a classic Montaigne issue concerning moral distinctions, and opening up fresh perspectives onto moral judgment. Montaigne immediately opens a wide perspective by observing that, in some moralists' eyes, we can only be found guilty of what we assert or perform against our conscience. Cowardice doesn't seem to fit that definition.

Examples

Punishment 1. It was the belief of the Greek philosopher Charmides that the best punishment for cowardice is ignominy. The guilty individual should either be ignored or humiliated.

Punishment 2. The earliest Greek philosophers had a specific punishment tailored to cowardice. Those who fled battle were for three days displayed attired in women's clothing. Montaigne clearly respects the thinking behind this punishment. There was none of the waste of manpower which would follow on sentencing the coward to death. There was an opportunity for the coward to review his behavior, and to recover his courage.

Punishment 3. By classical Roman law, however, it was quite customary to enact the death penalty for what was by their law viewed as cowardice. The Emperor Julian put to death ten soldiers who turned their backs on the Parthian enemy, during an infantry confrontation.

Punishment 4. The Romans did not normally invoke the death penalty on deserters*, but* felt that the resultant humiliation was sufficient punishment. Evidence suggests, says Montaigne that in antiquity the desperation of ignominy was so powerful that it drove many deserters mad. Once again Montaigne leans toward the legal pathway which provides most leeway for repentance and reformation, thinking of ways to redeem vice, but recognizing the great power of humiliation.

Punishment 5. In 1523 Seigneur de Franget surrendered the fort of Fontarabia to the Spaniards. (We are back to the issue of surrendering a city or fort, with which we began, and in discussing which we noted Montaigne's refusal to settle for strict punitive guidelines.) For this dereliction he, and Montaigne supplies several other contemporary instances, was stripped of all his medals, privileges, and special rights of nobility--like Prince Andrew in our own time. It was a stiff punishment.

Conclusions.

There is no single thunderous conclusion. We begin to know Montaigne, complex and modern for his time. Does he believe that fallen man—fickle, vain, ready to lie, often ready to run and flee—is also redeemable, gracious, willing to learn, sociable? The present essay offers us several ways to view this question. A man may seem to be a coward, may be unreliable in battle, may turn his back on the enemy, yet may be redeemable after humiliation, and may also, in fact, be displaying what we take as treachery or cowardice which is actually rooted in infirmity. Roman field commanders may have been tough as nails, ready to shoot deserters, but Montaigne wastes no words of praise or analysis on them. We can guess that Montaigne, like yours truly, would have had General Patton censored for slapping his subaltern.

Essay 16 *Proceeding of some ambassadors*

Introductory

Montaigne travelled often, in France and Italy, and made it a point, he says, to inquire of people he met, and to learn from them. His preference, he says, is to learn from people about their specific area of knowledge—engineering, agriculture, construction—rather than about matters they are incidentally interested in. This is an important point, it seems, for most people want to talk about something that is not their special skill, but, perhaps, a fancy of theirs, a skill they would like to acquire, and which fascinates them. So common is this inclination that the querying traveler may simply find out what a person wants to talk about, not what they are in a position to talk about.

Examples

Criticism 1. Archidamas, an ancient Greek critic, used to say of Pertander, that 'he quitted the glory of being an excellent physician, to gain the repute of a very bad poet.'

Criticism 2. Julius Caesar, in his writings about his battles in Europe, forever drifts away from his one magisterial skill—his military tactical brilliance and his gift for leading men—to discuss what he truly wants to talk about, his competent but not exceptional skills as an engineer and bridge builder.

Criticism 3. Dionysius was a great military captain, but wanted to be known as a great poet—like Archidamas, in Example 1. The gods were not that generous.

Distraction 1 Montaigne himself digresses, here, to present a barrister who is easily distracted, but has a vast collection of books; a near kin, as it turns out, to the expert who wants to wander off into fields where he would like to be an expert. The barrister goes to visit the collection of a fellow bibliophile—he is eager to study the man's collection-- but becomes distracted by the barricade placed at the top of the stairs, leading into his friend's study door. Montaigne chooses an extreme example, to illustrate the distracted and fixated condition of certain would-be specialists.

Concentrations. 1 Montaigne segues into the issues of concentration and distraction, as they bear on the matter of following instructions.

The same people who are likely to digress, when asked about what they know best, are likely to have problems with the following of instructions. There are some cases, in which a judicious craftsperson, say, can choose to follow his own bent, in complying with specific instructions. In such cases, as those of the specialists working for the king of Persia, so much free rein is given to the individual craftsperson, that he must continually resort to his master for more explicit instructions., But generally it is desirable that the craftsperson should stick to the subject and follow instructions. The Roman triumvir Crassus ordered twin masts made for one of his sailing vessels. He was demanding, but at the same time seemed to be seeking advice. Instruction giving should be clear and direct, without undertones, just as requests, for information about one's special skill, should be to the point.

Conclusions

Montaigne's thought follows a sinuous and subtle course. The instance of the present essay is typical. We pass from the question of travel, curiosity, and learning from strangers, to the question of following instructions. While the two parts of the essay seem separate, a bridge joins them. Both the specialist interrogated for his special skill, and the craftsperson faced with explicit instructions from his boss, should make an effort to follow just what is requested, while leaving some room for individual judgment.

Essay 17 Of Fear

Introductory

For Montaigne, fear is the least understandable, and arguably the most powerful, emotion, 'more importunate than death itself.' Terrible astonishment and confusion descend on us during the fit of fear, and for people of less developed analytic skills fear evokes hallucinations, rumors of ancestral sufferings, senses of apocalypse. None of us, even the most hardened man of arms, acquires immunity to the emotion of fear.

Examples

Fear 1 When M. de Bourbon took Rome, in 1527, an ensign on guard ran the wrong direction, out of fear, and headed directly for the enemy lines. By luck of the confusion into which he threw the astonished enemy, he reversed course immediately and made it back to his lines unscathed. Not so lucky was a certain Captain Julio's ensign, who in terror jumped out of his ship's porthole, and found himself in the midst of a surprised enemy, who slaughtered him.

Fear 2 In the same siege, a gentleman of Captain Julio's force went stone immobile with fear. He was dead, without an injury. Fear had killed him.

Fear 3 Tacitus recounts a fixed battle between the Roman general Germanicus and the German tribes on the northern border of the Empire. In terror of one another, the two sides both fled, but both ended up in the tactical position from which the other had fled. Fear had simply transposed the two lines.

Fear 4 The Emperor Theophilus was so terrified by losing an important battle that he found himself unable to move. One of his ensigns, hoping to save him from a shameful reaction, shook the Emperor into consciousness, and threatened to kill him—for the sake of his own honor-- unless he came to.

Fear 5 In a battle against the Carthaginians, 11,000 Roman foot soldiers panicked, and in this state of delirium threw themselves on the enemy and slaughtered every man jack of them.

Fear 6 Pompey's friends, noting a terrible murder transpiring within his ship, were nonetheless so terrified, by the sight of an Egyptian ship coming close to board them, that they could not pay attention to the murder in question.

Fear 7 Those who have received a serious fright, in face to face battle, may forever after be anxious about conflict; while those who are victims of conflict—enslaved or imprisoned people—can often as not live on quite merrily.

Conclusions

Montaigne himself says that he fears nothing so much as fear. As his examples indicate, fear generally produces terror, total confusion, irrational risk taking, inaccurate observations, or shameful behavior. (On rare occasions, as he notes, panic may lead to a sudden burst of energy or military ferocity, but the Stoic tradition, from which he largely inherits, precludes Montaigne from any enjoyment in extreme emotions.) Fear at its worst can paralyze us naked in the universe. Panic terrors, with no determinable cause, were known to strike the Carthaginians in the desert, leaving them helpless.

Essay 18 That men are not to judge of our happiness til after death…

Introductory

Montaigne's concern with basic moral issues leads him frequently to return to the question of death. What role does death play in life? Is death part of the drama of life, which we should be prepared for? Does a good life lead to a happy death, or is death both distant and far at any given moment, so that the conclusion of one's life may be reversed in a moment? Montaigne follows the thinking of classical Greece, on much of this matter and especially the thinking of the Stoics and Epicureans.

Examples

Death 1 Croesus, king of Lydia, was taken prisoner by Cyrus, ruler of Persia. He was sentenced to death, and as he was approaching his final moments he cried out, 'O Solon! O Solon!' His reference was to the adage, of the classic Athenian lawgiver, that 'you should count no man happy til you see him dead.' Croesus, famed for wealth, but short on wisdom as he aged, fell victim at last to false expectations of death. His was not a lucky death.

Death 2 Agesilaus remarked on the 'lucky' king of Persia, but added that Priam too was once happy.

Death and Fall 1 Montaigne reflects on the powerful kings of Macedon, the followers of Alexander whose hegemony they distributed throughout the Near Eastern world. Not so long after Alexander's death these epigoni had become scriveners and joiners in the city of Rome, nothing more than handymen. Their own deaths, be it noted in the spirit of Montaigne, may or may not have been happy, but in the larger picture, of a few generations, their fall had been quick and dramatic. Their master, Alexander, had been ruler of 'one half of the world,' but had been reduced to a 'suppliant of the rascally officers of the King of Egypt.'

Death and Fall 2 Ludovico Sforza, the Tenth Duke of Milan, coming from the heights of nobility and power, died a miserable death after ten years in captivity, imprisoned for much of the time in an iron cage.

Adage Seneca: 'my last day must be the judge of all my life.'

Conclusion

Montaigne's best friend was a brilliant young writer of his own age, Etienne de la Boétie, who died in 1563, having shared seven years of profound friendship with Montaigne. The death of this 'other I' affected Montaigne deeply. So did the dramatic intensity of death, surrounding which, as our notes on this Essay suggest, widely various interpretations swirl. What we know of the death of Montaigne, himself, will only add to the complex richness of the death event, which for Montaigne was an instant of judgement on a life. Montaigne's own final affliction crippled his vocal powers, grounding a man famous for brilliant loquacity. Unable to speak, he made it evident to his chamberlain that he wanted his friends, fellow nobles of the neighborhood, to join him at mass on Sunday a few days hence. While the priest was saying the mass, for the small assembly, the moment came for the elevation of the host ;at that moment Montaigne collapsed and passed away, a true but, as we have to understand, immensely complex Roman Catholic.

Essay 19 *That to study philosophy is to learn to die*

Introductory

Montaigne opens on a line of Cicero, observing that 'to study philosophy is nothing but to prepare oneself to die.' Such study, Montaigne believes, is a process of detaching one's soul from one's body, thus readying the earthly self for being left behind, a 'semblance of death.' While this perception, of the process of study, might seem gloomy, it is in fact quite the opposite, for all reasoning, as Montaigne puts it, teaches us not to fear death, but rather to 'live at our ease,' as Holy Scripture urges us to do. The element of pleasure emerges, from these insights, as the highest good for humans—when high pleasure is correctly understood. (A firm distinction is established here, between high pleasure, pleasure deeply virtuous yet sensuous, gay, sinewy, and robust, and vulgar pleasure, which gives passing gratification to the senses, but nothing more. Vulgar pleasure is fragile and passing; true pleasure, what Montaigne calls divine pleasure, is deeply contenting and maintained by the kind of study described above, which separates us from the earthly.

In the spirit of his age, classical but Catholic, Montaigne devotes the bulk of the present essay to reflections on how to live a good and happy life on the edge of death. He works the territory of the *ars bene moriendi*, *the art of dying well*, which was a spiritual theme as well as a literary genre, well into the early modern period in Europe.

Examples

Scorn for death Xenophilus, a noted Greek musician, lived happily and healthily to the age of 106. He belongs to a 'type' of model longevity, familiar in the West from classical as well as Biblical texts. Aeschylus, killed in his nineties by a tortoise falling on his bare pate, is another of Montaigne's favored

examples of robust longevity and scorn of death. Montaigne is always aware of his own death, which is intertwined with his life, but since he was 'born for action' he does not brood over mortality. He takes what he has received from fate, and lives it, in the spirit of that return into the world of the mind, which had drawn him to withdraw in midlife from active involvement with his busy life.

Readiness for death Death is right around the corner, when least we expect it; we should always be 'booted and spurred and ready to go'; in evidence of which Montaigne provides numerous examples of the 'imminence of death: after high feasts the Egyptians would drag a dried skeleton through the banquet hall, as a memento mori for the guests; none knows the time of his death—King Henry I was killed in a sporting tournament, just when he was most vigorous; a Roman Emperor was killed by an infection caused by combing his hair and cutting his scalp; a brother of Montaigne was killed by the concussion caused by a tennis ball's blow to his temple; Aristotle, speaking of 'little beasts that die within a day,' alerts us to the brevity of life.

Dealing with death. 'Let us disarm death by talking constantly of it,' says Montaigne, suggesting we keep death closely in mind, even in the midst of our revels. Let us remember the exact time of our birth and death—Montaigne reports he was born between 11—12 AM on Feb. 1, 1553 A.D—and that nothing guarantees he will not slip back to the other side of that birth, at any time; we should accordingly be ever alert. We should keep in mind that death, when it comes, will be our greatest liberation; 'wherever your life ends, it is all there.'

Conclusions

Montaigne thinks a rich brew of thoughts, pertaining to our existential condition. We might say he inherits the best of classical-Christian wisdom, concerning our prospects after death, and blends it with that mature skepticism which is his trademark, and which makes him distinctively 'modern.'

Essay 20 Of the Force of Imagination

Introductory.

Montaigne inherits the largely Roman notion of imagination, which has its roots in the notion of the *imago*, the visual image. As Montaigne develops that notion, he gives it increasing depth by adding in the senses *of intuition or insight*. That is, he moves from the bare visual image toward the supersensible, even toward the mysterious in awareness. In that gradual enrichment, of the idea of *imagination,* Montaigne does reach out to the culture shaping dimensions imagination later acquired in modern European thinking, where, for example in Coleridge or Wordsworth, the concept of imagination characterizes the entire higher life of the mind, as it gives all of us access to the riches of nature and the arts. The supersensible or intuitive, Montaigne's implications for the term imagination, fall short of the world-valuing claims the Romantics attributed to the term *imagination*. Montaigne thinks as both a late mediaeval and early modern interpreter of mind.

Examples.

Power of imagination 1 Montaigne fears the power of imagination, especially because it renders him painfully sensitive to the sufferings of others. (Another's slightest cough tickles Montaigne's lungs, The more beloved the cougher, the greater Montaigne's pain. Here we see imagination in the form of emotional outreach.)

Power of imagination 2 MontaIgne is hypersensitive to the feelings people have to other people. A psychiatrist goes mad from investigating others' madness. 'Boiling youth' satisfies amorous desires in the course of sleep. Antiochus fell into a fever from the sight of his beautiful beloved. A supersensitive man hears voices on all sides, at all times, in the air. At the same time his body can remain immune to

feelings. A twenty year old girl turned into a male, as through excess fascination with the masculine she extends herself into a wide reaching leap, releasing male genitals from her crotch. First modern man? That's putting it mildly.

Power of imagination in sexuality 1 Montaigne devotes much attention to the woes of the imaginative, in sexual relations, and particularly to the ravages of impotence. He is wary of the fetishes and ligatures whose proper tying can promote benign marital rites. He cautions the marrying male, who finds himself susceptible to the sorcery imposed by the jealous or rivals, to ready his mind—especially the anxiety producing center of his imagination—against the pitfalls awaiting the marital act. One move within this psychodrama is to warn your partner, in advance, that you have difficulties with intercourse—then to surprise her with your performance. Another move is prayer. Amasis, King of Egypt, could not get it up with his wife, so followed advice and prayed to Venus, who restored his power. Of value, among these precautions in the game of sex, is remembering that the penis, key player, is ever whimsical, reluctant to obey, then out of control.

Imagination as infection 1. Montaigne recounts the tale of a bird in the top of a tree and a fox, at the foot of the tree staring up at the bird. Their eyes are locked. Eventually the bird falls straight down into the fox's maul. Imagination has infected them to one another. Another tale recounts the birth- giving of a hairy female baby; the mom had been infected by a depiction of John the Baptist, on the walls of her hospital room. Hares and partridges turn white in the winter, from exposure to the snow. A festive dinner party in heralded by the voice of the major domo announcing that the main dish, at that moment being served, was baked cat. The guests scattered, missing a splendid *ragout de veau*.

Conclusions

Montaigne concludes his essay on imagination with some subtle remarks on his own beliefs and observations. He may speak as the first modern man, but as a rich byproduct of the still pre- scientific Middle Ages. His message: he is conscientious in reporting what he has heard from others and observed about the human brain; he is ignorant of much and many of those from whom he has learned are ignorant. In the end it is 'not too important whether an old story be thus or so.'

Essay 21 *That the profit of one man is the damage of another.*

Introductory

Montaigne has his way of wrestling a theme to the ground, then chewing all the meaning he can out of it. The dominant theme, in the very brief Essay 21, is that of the inherent selfishness of human actions, and the barriers we find within us, to wishing the best for others. Montaigne draws our attention to the inner motivations of a wide range of citizens, from funeral directors through lawyers to divines, in each of which professions the professional has ample interest to see others fail where he has succeeded. And to see his success promoted by others' 'failures.'The funeral director, still alive, is grateful to the dead for having given him business, The barrister thinks less of his client's fate than of the oratorical skill by which he has put to shame his seething rivals. Divines, who should by all rights be most ready to praise the Creator's works, and to forgive those who stray, may in their finest sermons be praising their own fine oratory, and reflecting on the verbal clumsiness of his rivals.

Examples.

Funeral Director The funeral director can only do a thriving business if there is an ample supply of corpses to bury. The director fills his pockets with gold, as the dead enter his mortuary, one by one. Is Montaigne correct to interpret this selfish transaction as indifference to those who have died? Or could the director's view include the position that he too is a part of the social web, and will in his turn be serviced by the living?

Barrister The barrister owes thanks to his clients for committing the crimes for which he has to defend them. Their loss is his gain. Is it, though, quite that simple? Is the barrister purely a profiteer? Or does his

oratorical skill, on behalf of the losers, open the social world to new horizons, which will eventually breed higher levels of social behavior, and diminish the cases of malfeasance.

Preachers Great preachers would seem to batten on the fallen behaviors of mankind. What else, after all, is Bossuet to thunder at than the latest adultery at court? It bears reflection, though, whether Montaigne is, in such examples, pointing to a general truth about the way the world works. Is he convincingly showing us that our virtues are tightly locked into our failings?

Conclusion.

Montaigne is skeptical about human nature. He finds many faults in us: disloyalty, mindlessness, cowardice, fear, dishonesty, vengefulness, dishonesty. He ventures the argument that because of our weaknesses we are prompted to glow in the achievement of our virtues. We thrive on the failures of our fellows.

Essay 22 *Of custom, and that we should not easily change a law received*

Introductory

Montaigne opens the brilliant discussion on an ancient tale, about a countrywoman who is accustomed from childhood to lifting a baby calf in her arms, and who continues to do so, on a regular and daily basis, until in middle age she finds herself lifting a full grown ox. This tale is all about getting used to challenges, or stages of social achievement and development, on a gradual basis. The wide ranging essay expresses Montaigne's cosmic view of the rightness of natural process, whether in the heavens, in civil society, or in morality. It is easy to see how this 'gradualism' aligns with the skeptical view of mankind, which Montaigne so brusquely formulates in the brief essay which precedes the present one. Gradualism is the best counter to the wilfulness of nature.

The ramifications of our embeddedness in custom are wide. Custom is rooted in experience and trial and error and reflects our innate capacity to adapt intelligently to new situations. Each trade gets used to the noises it makes, each culture to the foods available to it—no end to the outlandishness of the comestible (snake, insect, or bark—and Montaigne himself has easily grown insensible to the church bells which every morning loudly proclaim the Angelus outside nis window. The routine and benign, in this accustoming process, are easily appreciated, and can be understood as the healthy fabric that holds together effective laws and practices in a society. Custom can, however, prove to be a tyrant, welding us to the habits, sensations, and attitudes we have become 'accustomed to' and making it hard for us to see other ways of doing things—though on the whole Montaigne finds innovation harmful and dangerous. On the negative side of custom, not the dominant theme here, Montaigne stresses the danger of bad habits in childhood, which can progressively root, until they become the vicious habits of maturity.

Examples

Objectionable customs Despite Montaigne's resounding final stress on custom, as man's path toward harvesting valuable experience and even wisdom, he is profuse with examples of customary harm. As a close critic of child-raising practices, Montaigne is especially eager to prevent childhood viciousness—he stresses cruelty, here, toward animals, pets, other children, as well as the importance of total freedom from lying or deception. (Montaigne speaks here of his own 'extreme aversion from deceit.') Montaigne notes with equal aversion those deeply 'foreign' practices, which local custom makes part of daily life in remote parts of the world. (The author of these perspectives is in this discussion of custom and value infinitely complex: a widely learned pre-anthropologist, steeped in both lore and travel reports; a strict classical disciplinarian in the Western European pre modern vein). He veers toward scatological instances of foreign custom: courts at which the King's shit will be collected, in cloth containers, by his respectful retinue, or in which, when the king spits, his spittle is eagerly grabbed by his retainers, before it hits the ground; in which virgins display their pudenda, while wives hide theirs; in which women make water standing, while men squat; dead bodies are boiled, or dirty fingers at table are wiped on their owners' genitals.

Valuable customs The most brilliant imaginings of Montaigne revolve around his formulations of 'custom as ruler of the world.' For though he sees the tyranny of custom, as a possible path into perversity or stagnation, he sees that healthy innervations preserve valuable social experiences, sustain the harmony of the spheres, and the very music of the cosmos, and protect us against that most hateful development, the *innovation*. Novelty, whether in clothing, personal tastes, or governance is Montaigne's abhorrence. The Christian religion, he insists, above all mandates respect for order—the saving sacrifice instituted by the Christ—and requires obedience to civil magistrates. Such as Socrates were surely right, though the judgment of him was created by fools, in that he refused to abjure the laws of his state, even though it cost him his life.

Conclusions

This essay is wide ranging, touching many topics and perspectives. Montaigne is an anthropologist *avant la lettre*, erudite in ancient classical literature, and widely read in the travel literatures of his time, which were drawing widespread attention, at that stage of Renaissance exploration and growing popular culture. Montaigne, though, is also a philosophical sociologist, deeply perceptive of the ligatures that hold together the social fabric, their gradual accumulation of learning and experience, and their value as intersections between human and cosmic harmony. We know that Montaigne's dad lodged his son for the first three years, with a local peasant family. Montaigne acquired a face to face training in honesty, clear thinking, and an awareness of how the social fabric is created.

Essay 23. Various events from the same counsel

Introductory

In the preceding essay, Montaigne expatiated on the multiplicity of customs that go to make up a world of diverse humans. As an exploratory Renaissance mind, Montaigne found these customs both fascinating and foreign/bizarre, but consistently argued for the value of different practices in general, as experience-based elements in whatever is stable about humans. He hated innovations. In the present essay he explores the elements of common sense in the behavior of princes, and the wealth of good judgment available there. He is looking for keys to personal security, dignity, and calm, trademarks of the kind of selfhood he set for himself when in midlife he retired from the busy world.

Examples

Dealing with the enemy 1

A man of note at court learns that a hired killer is out to get him. Should he be proactive, and wipe out the man? After reflection the nobleman invites the prospective killer to an interview, in which he brings out the bad conscience and humiliation of the would be killer. From that time on the would be killer is tame as a cat.

Dealing with the enemy 2

The Emperor learns that young Cinna plans to try to assassinate him. He calls the promising youth to him, and lays out, before the young man, his reflections over whether he should or should not punish him.

He considers his, the Emperor's, wife's pleas for leniency. Finally the Emperor Augustus relents, wins the lasting friendship of Cinna, and inherits Cinna's fortune when Cinna dies.

Dealing with the enemy 3

Physicians, artists, painters, and in fact skilled citizens must in general rely on fortune to support their efforts and achievements. That is one way of putting what Montaigne calls 'working with nature,' a concept he considers, like 'working with fortune,' to indicate a fruitful way of dealing with the life-hand you have been dealt. Presenting oneself as a spokesperson for good fortune is a good way to ward off jealousies—no one can envy you. Montaigne is a regular proponent of doing everything in the shortest and most direct way; his is the very life blood of a person whose willingness to flow with what he has been given is the best protection.

Dealing with the enemy 4

Montaigne tells the story of a military man who is being hunted down by enemy forces, but who manages to escape them for a long time, by hiding out in the bush. After a long time of hiding and being ion the run, the military man gives himself up to be killed. He can't endure the anxiety and indignity of his situation. We know when we have had enough. For Montaigne, courage and living with nature—as well as prudence – are essential for the happy life, and regularly promote the greatest success.

Dealing with the enemy 5

Montaigne praises an ancient power-gaining trick, by which a ruler can subdue his opponents. The ruler colludes with a tricky ally, to advertise that the ally has asked for a talent (26 kilograms) of pure silver in return for a strong power-giving secret. The 'talent' having exchanged hands, the ruler then lets it be known, with the support of the 'ally,' that he is in control of a great secret, the 'nuclear option; and had better not be messed with. He is left alone.

Conclusions

Montaigne's own values become clear, once again, in his cautionary advice. He is for dignity, self-control, courage, insight—into human behavior, and going with the flow. Because he is preternaturally astute, over the range of human behaviors and reactions, he qualifies himself for that 'first modern man' tag, which marks him off as savvy and self-reliant.

Essay 24 Of Pedantry

Introductory

There was an atmosphere of scorn for pedantry, both in Roman antiquity—which attributed the vice to the Greeks--and in Montaigne's own time, when the pedant was the joke of stage and countryside. Montaigne himself is much concerned with the distinction between what we might call informed intelligence and the brain-stuffed condition of pedantry, which furthers nothing. It will be observed that Montaigne himself is characteristically modest, and takes care to remind us that, because as we know he has 'no memory,' he is not a victim of pedantry, the disease in which what has been remembered is all there is.

Examples

The stuffing of the brain Montaigne describes pedantry as a condition in which the brain is too full, and the contents compressed so tightly that no currents—intelligence—can pass through it. (He compares the brain of the pedant to an overwatered and water logged plant into which more and more fluid keeps being poured; eventually it drowns in its own squishiness.) This imagery, however, leads Montaigne to question the borderline between the overfull and the intelligently functioning brain. Why are certain people gifted with the ability to translate their learning into the simple raw material of intelligence, and to digest wider learning in a practical and efficient manner?

The procedure of the brain Montaigne observes the way the pedant's brain puts together scraps of knowledge, a bit from here, a bit from there, without experiencing them together as a whole. He references the case of a wealthy Roman gentleman who surrounded himself with experts in each major department of knowledge—the arts, warfare, carpentry, worship—and when involved in conversation, concerning such real world skills, simply turned to the appropriate expert, and asked him to speak. (The same rich man might, in our time, simply conduct rapid Google searches). Montaigne carefully relates this weakness of brain muscle to the thinking of the easily distracted man. In an earlier essay Montaigne describes a librarian who, visiting a fine library, finds himself distracted by the portal through which one enters the library. In the present instance the distractable person has been sent to a nearby house, to bring back fire for kitchen cooking in his own house. However when he arrives in the kitchen of the neighbor, whose fire he is about to borrow, he finds a cozy oven blaze and sits down to warm his hands. He stays there; he has forgotten why he went to the neighbor's house.

Usefulness and knowing Montaigne concedes that there are highly intellectual and effective people—his examples range from military distinction to civil government—who are learned in an effective way, and do not step into the trap of pedantry, which is at the antipodes of wisdom. Wisdom, in fact, is a proper goal of learning, though not the only proper use of the development of mind. Montaigne joins many ancient sources in praising the education of youth among the Lacedaemonians, who taught virtue and goodness to their children, in preference to those skills of oratory, persuasion, and logic, which formed the backbone of Athenian culture.

The case of philosophy Montaigne devotes especial attention to the kind of knowing characteristic of philosophy, which was always spotlighted as a key ancient achievement of mind, by which the individual acquires maturity through inquiring, asking what the meanings of life are. The pedant is far from the philosopher, for while the former is mired in detail, the latter is before all an opener of prospects; however the philosopher is rarely, in the end, effectual in shaping 'real life.' He is rarely a more formative influence than the pedant.

Conclusions

Montaigne allows himself wide range in discussing the notions of pedantry, learning, and the differences between superficial knowledge and the true ability to achieve things through the work of mind. In the end Montaigne is, as he says, interested in better learning, rather than more knowledge, and finds himself—we sense—most in harmony with men of the world whose intelligence is well constructed, under continuing instruction, and who can use that intelligence to earn, do, and improve.

Essay 25 Of the Education of Children

Introductory

Though Montaigne writes this lengthy and ambitious pedagogy, for a distinguished lady of his acquaintance, who is on the verge of childbirth, he takes the opportunity to reveal his own personal educational story, and to lay out broad views of the whole learning process. We will note that Montaigne regularly derides the scholastic educational theories—*trivium* and *quadrivium*, intricacies of Aristotelian or later Thomistic logic—and remarks his collegial kinship with thinkers like Hobbes and Bacon. To some degree the following is simply an application of Montaigne's distinctively humane Renaissance perspective, while at the same time it is a provocative and forward looking attempt to conceive the education of the whole person, a goal in which we are actively interested today, and which is part of our understanding of the dangers of that limited pedantry Montaigne ridiculed in the previous essay.

Examples

Montaigne's own education Montaigne opens by explaining the most unusual upbringing he himself experienced, one which tinctures all he will say about education in general. He was, as we know, from a distinguished and independent family, and from a father who had distinctive pedagogical ideas. For his

first three years Montaigne was lodged with a local peasant family, where he learned the equality of all to all. The sense of the universality of the human condition is potent throughout Montaigne's work. At six he transferred to a high-standard private tutor, then upon graduation from that home-based education, in his teens, he completed his formal education at the University of Bordeaux, one of the preeminent Renaissance faculties, for instruction in Greek, Latin, and classical literature. It can be no surprise, that Montaigne's educational advising includes a strong emphasis on individualized instruction. However, his fierce emphasis on the classics is seriously moderated in the advice provided to Mme. de Foix, for the education of her soon to be newborn son.

Humane education: getting started

Montaigne's pedagogical advice is built around the training offered a young gentleman, by a resident tutor—preferably one of foreign language and culture. A close supervisory relation is imagined, between the youth and his tutor. (The tutorial relation is close to that described by Tolstoy, in his *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*; essentially an investigation into the process of growing up. The tutor constantly observes the development of his pupil, so calibrating the sequence of his learning experiences, that he—the pupil—is given increasing liberty to choose his path. As we can imagine, the pupil's first learning period will involve physical training, the fine art of relating to others of all sorts, and of all social conditions. (Montaigne also places great stress on the honesty and obedience of the learning youth—'abominate impertinence' Montaigne says—and on his ability to digest, rather than simply consider, the life lessons he is running into along the way.)

Making the whole learner

Once in the proper relation to his tutor—compliant, but curious, freedom-seeking, ready for anything—the young man is urged to take on the world: to meet others, of all classes and gifts, to converse confidently, to observe the human scene—to take that kind of astute pleasure Pythagoras describes, among the spectators at the Olympic Games, those that simply attend to watch. It will be only after these preliminaries that the young man will turn to studies in the stricter sense. These will commence with good use of language—which for Montaigne means the robust use of common everyday French—even market place French—becoming used to the natural in language, the reflection there of a person at ease with people and their world. It will be at this stage—one might guess late in the second five years of one's first decade—that the youngster turns from language to philosophy—the gayest and liveliest science, nothing but 'feasting and jollity'—and from there, accustomed to dealing with arguments, into his choice among the more disciplinarian sciences, geometry, history—of particular interest, for its exposure to the lives of great men, military and leaderly—and languages. Rethinking his own example, Montaigne stresses the learning of foreign languages, with special stress on the foundation-building of Greek and Latin, but also with emphasis on the 'foreign' element, for after all education, as Montaigne conceives it, is about urbane, tough, flexible, and deeply grounded ways of responding to the world. Ten to fifteen years of education should suffice, leaving the young man ready for his true mission, action in the world.

Conclusions

Montaigne thinks in terms of a deeply private and individualistic course of education, in which the presence of one or more full time tutors is indispensable. The bias is entirely toward the formation of a strong and intelligent young man, who will enter life at a level of military or political influence, and who will, as we might say, reproduce the system over again. This is patrician male education, not unknown in the industrialized west today, and yet preserving within it echoes of a brilliant Renaissance which—as in the thinking of Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo—exemplified a sense of the wholeness and possibility of the human individual.

Essay 26. *That it is folly to measure truth and error by our own capacity.*

Introductory

Montaigne opens with a bow to the superficial rationalism of his day—which was not the hard nosed disciplinary perspective that would make its way into Enlightenment thought two centuries later in France, but rather the debunking kind of rationalism, which considers itself above all forms of superstition. It is that kind of presumed superiority, of the 'thinking person,' that Montaigne attacks here, while admitting that he too, for a long time, shared that perspective, the first to criticize 'superstition.' Ultimately, though, it struck Montaigne that to maintain that superior attitude was to limit what was possible to God—namely, any and everything--perhaps within the bounds needed by God to continue being God. Nature seemed a much more open field to the mature Montaigne, than it had to the youth, eager to share the values of his clique. Montaigne invites us to imagine possibility.

Examples

Enlarging purview The man who has never seen the ocean assumes that the first river he comes on is itself the ocean. As our purview grows more complex, and the range of our experiences grows, the more we admit into the possible.

Novelty There is a provocation to us, in rare things or parts of nature with which we are not familiar. This provocation is the cause of our ongoing curiosity about our world, and of our growing openness to what can occur in that world. Our own limits, as we surmise from the title of this essay, are not sufficiently broad to entitle us to judge reality.

The seeming incredible. Montaigne distributes examples of events that seem miraculous or, in other cases, pushing the limits of belief, like events said to have been reported almost at the moment they occurred. A Roman Emperor loses a significant battle in the Alps, but the report of it is announced simultaneously in Rome. Churchmen of great repute—Montaigne puts it just this way, and includes such as Saint Augustine-- have reported many miraculous healings, curing of blindness, teaching of the lame to walk. Neither pagan nor Christian examples seem to raise special doubt in Montaigne, who has absorbed his own maxim, that we should not measure the possibilities of the world by our limited understanding.

The 'scourges of the soul.' 'Glory and curiosity are the scourges of the soul. The latter prompts us to thrust our noses into everything, the other forbids us to leave anything doubtful and undecided.' This brilliant analysis, of the restless human mind, foretells our difficulty in negotiating life as a path between infinite search—the quest that 'science' represents in cultural history—and resignation to the belief doctrines (Glory) that appear to wrap experience in certitude.

Conclusions

Early modern, caught between mediaeval superstitions—which were by the sixteenth century being identified as such—and the first cumulative efforts of modern science—Montaigne keenly intuits the dangers of a hasty rejection of the past. He is, furthermore and as we know, a sharp analyst of the human mind, so sees clearly that a harsh rejection of the past will never succeed in formulating a keen scientific perspective.

Essay 27 Of Friendship

Introductory

Montaigne sidles into the deep and subtle question of friendship, that male bonding—for his instances are men—that meant so much to classical cultures--Achilles and Patroklos, David and Jonathan. In such examples of friendship Renaissance Humanism found support for the idea of the splendor of mankind. We soon learn that Montaigne references throughout his dear friend Etienne de la Boétie, with whom he had enjoyed, over a period of four years, unparalleled friendship-identity, and who had coined the priceless expression 'voluntary servitude,' to describe the intimacy of the male-friendship bond. So intense is Montaigne's devotion to the memory of Boétie, that he establishes that bond as the prime

example of friendship as a whole, far surpassing the friendship of man for woman, yet fiercely avoiding the abomination of 'Greek love,' homosexuality.

Examples

Limits on friendship

Friendship is not to be assumed among siblings or relatives. Plutarch, in conflict with his brother over testament details, says 'I make never the more of him for coming out of the same hole' as me. Similarly grumpy ancient commentators remark that while fathers, through their generative power, make sons, they also produce spit from their bodies. As for the love of women, Montaigne joins the (male) opinion of his time, in believing that love or friendship toward women is limited, for women are by nature fickle, unfocused, and unsteady; the marriage relation not qualifying as the basis for durable affection.

True friendship True friendship, for Montaigne, involves an identity between the two friend-selves, an identity so complete that what Mr. X does for Mr. Y, is precisely what X would do for himself. The friend's needs, behaviors, reactions all assume identity with the friend who has become his very identity. Of his relation with Boétie, Montaigne observes that there was no 'seam between the two of them,' and that 'we sought each other long before we met.' The identity of this friendship situation enables the situation of the ancient philosopher Dionysius, who, when he needed money, 'redemanded it of his friend,' who, as his other, shares totally with him. In the same vein Montaigne tells the tale of the man who, upon his death, bequeaths to his two closest friends, the obligation to care for his aged mother and his marriageable daughter. The friends are delighted with this expression of their friend's identity with their own intentions.

Conclusions

Montaigne gives intense expression to his feelings for his friend, Etienne de la Boétie, with whom he shared four years of intense mutual pleasure and understanding. It seems Montaigne's final conclusion, after reflecting on the loss of his friend, is that in true friendship the benefit of the other far outweighs any benefit to oneself.

Essay 28 Nine and twenty sonnets of Etienne de la Boétie

This essay (or chapter) contained thirty nine sonnets written by Montaigne's friend, Etienne de La Boétie. The amorous material included here is of inferior quality, and customarily omitted from collections of Montaigne's essays.

Essay 29 Of Moderation

Introductory

Montaigne is a precise observer of human nature. He astutely anatomizes our inclination to excess, and finds it manifest both in what we do and what we fail to do. ('Both in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,' run the Abrahamic religions' 'confessionals,' in their effort to suggest the complexity of individual sinfulness.) In everyday language, Montaigne claims that 'the archer that overshoots misses as much as he that falls short.' Moderation is the point at which the precise target is identified. One need only plunge ahead to another French visionary, the nineteenth-century poet Arthur Rimbaud, to find an instructive opposite to Montaigne, an argument for the 'dérégulation complete de tous les sens,' a 'disordering of all the senses,' as a pathway to the discovery of truth.

Examples

I love temperate natures If we review the essays of Montaigne, to the point we have reached, we will note that they tend to strive for moderation. Military commanders exercise control—neither using subterfuge on an enemy nor conceding justly won territory. Temperate men manage their sorrow justly, neither giving in immoderately to it, nor fighting against it with a protective shield. The education of the young man should prepare him to be both headstrong—in the right time and place—and obedient when it is appropriate. The temperate nature is flexible, but only in order to avoid the extremes, excesses. 'Be soberly wise,' says Montaigne.

The excess of love is not love Montaigne's moderation is clear in his view of marriage, which he sees not as a passionate binding, but solely as a means of providing for children. (Only one of his own six children survived infancy.) A man may learn erotic tricks of the trade, in growing up through his culture—the odd playgirl, the odd whore—but he is not to bring these tricks into the connubial bedroom. Marriage should be a 'discrete and conscientious pleasure,' in which no indulgences of passion are fitting. Moderation is the keynote of a good marriage.

'Our pleasures are not legitimate guides.' Montaigne recounts a number of tales—of Homeric gods and Persian monarchs, with a taste for debauch—in which the excess of lust is gross and counterproductive. We are aware that Montaigne himself is no prude—he speaks vigorously of choosing beauty when it comes to the bed—and he takes his pleasure in a cultural milieu where male dominance has everywhere its sway. But his whole body of writing is about reason and common sense, and with no trace of actual sensual concentration.

Conclusions

Montaigne hews to the classical precepts of moderation, which advocate for great care in dealing with others. The Greeks enshrined this behavioral maxim in their discussions of *hamartia*, the action of missing the target, of a consequential error in judgment, which can lead to errors of excess—too much, too little—that impact badly on relationships, financial outcomes, or military undertakings.

Essay 30 Of Cannibals

Introductory

By the sixteenth century, Western Europe had in full force begun its discovery of the wider world of the Americas, both North and South, and was paying intense economic interest to the mines and raw materials of these areas, as well as 'cultural and philosophical' interest to the peoples found there. As an early anthropologist, deeply interested in the way cultures are formed, and create their values, Montaigne grasped at the opportunity, taken by European intellectuals from the Renaissance on, to anatomize their own culture by placing it side by side with a real or fictive foreign culture. We will see that this is what Montaigne does, with the alleged 'plain story' passed on to him by a seafaring man of his acquaintance, who had wide acquaintance with a certain fascinating people little known outside their island land.

Examples

Ancient Lore Montaigne sets the stage, for his seminal encounter with the mariner—one might think of Coleridge's introducing of the 'ancient mariner' into his own tale of the distant south seas. He discourses about Plato's Atlantis, and of more recent island domains rising from the sea, laden with meaning for a

west just beginning to think about its own culture critically. He speaks of cataclysmic natural events which reshape lands and oceans, as well as the minds of men.

The New Land The narrating mariner tells Montaigne that in the world he has visited the general view is that the rest of settled reality—whatever that could be—is barbarous. (Montaigne of course begins here with his self-mockery, of a France which is parochial and meaninglessly 'superior.') The new world, in this tale, is close to natural rhythms, healthy, happy, well adjusted. The environment is lush and beautiful, abounds in rich fruits unknown in Europe. The narration treats us to abundant details of the fine environment, down to the wonder of complexity, with elegantly woven birds' nests and spider webs, themselves testimonies to the Inherent brilliance of uncontaminated nature. (Which, as Montaigne takes care to stress, far exceeds art in skill of workmanship.)

Life in the New Land Life in the new land shares beatific traits with the land of the Lotos Eaters in the *Odyssey*, or with Samuel Butler's *Erewhon.* People live collectively, in long houses accommodating several hundred people each, sleep in hammocks—men and women separately—eat one meal a day, a large one at daybreak—and throughout the day dance and drink the universal beverage of the people, a root based claret- like beverage to which Montaigne nods approvingly, having been invited to share with his mariner narrator. Lest the New Land scene appear self-indulgent, there is a steady procession of supervisory priests, circulating in and around the citizen dancers, guardians of decorum and productive behavior.

The warlike in the New Land The men of the new land are as warlike as they need to be, to protect their vulnerable culture. They go to war naked except for their fierce lances, take enemy heads as trophies—which they attach to their door lintels—eat the enemy dead—to take on their power—and make a veritable communion meal out of their enemies. (Montaigne contrasts this open anthropophagy with the duplicity darkening his own society of lying, treachery, betrayal, tyranny, and disloyalty, while taking special care to reflect on the relation between the new land's taste for body, and the symbology of communion in the Catholic Church.)

Discrepancies Montaigne winds down with certain observations by recent visitors to France from the new land. The wife-husband relation surprised their French hosts. In the New Land, men have several wives, who encourage their mates to take on as many new conquests as possible—a sign of prowess which redounds well on the wife. Montaigne's final arch comment—'the men wear no breeches'—seems to belong to this fascinating new-world praise of the natural.

Conclusions

Montaigne takes the opportunity, as it presents itself, to criticize the inequality of wealth in his own culture—one fact especially noted by visitors to France from the New Land—French women's jealousy, cultural shibboleths like 'holy communion' in Europe, even perhaps the preoccupation with illness, which contrasts with the natural healthiness of those whom the French would be happy to call 'barbarians.'

Essay 31 That a man is soberly to judge of the divine ordinances

Introductory

Montaigne strikes out, here, against those believers who think that 'god is on their side,' and that their worldly successes—say in battles—are to be taken at face value, as signs of god's approval. For Montaigne it is foolish for us to think that we can interpret god's will into its details, and even more foolish, to assume that our strongest reason to believe is that god does good things for us. Once again, in this argument, Montaigne makes simple but subtle points, clearly and effectively. He reminds us of the true foundations of faith, that it is audacious to assume god has his eye on our little corner.

Examples.

Cautionary thinking 'Nothing is so firmly believed but what we least know,' says Montaigne, striking out both against our dangerous ignorance and against the bitter partisan religious forces, which are tearing France apart with 'religious wars' at just the time this essay is written. God's will is a particularly easy tool for the ignorant, in the construction of religious arguments. Though the lives of the ignorant may be tossed and turned by turbulent developments, they often persist in seeing within themselves a manifest set of 'divine ordinances.' They think, foolishly, that the deity is speaking directly to them.

Unfolding of divine ordinances One should take what comes from the wisdom of the gods. In the Indies all fortune, good or bad, is ascribed to the gods. No questions asked. The Christian should likewise accept what comes. Montaigne rejects any inclination to affirm and support 'our' Christian religion by the prosperity of our enterprises. To do so is to offer ourselves up to the criticism that we have no better proof than success to justify our belief, whereas—Montaigne implies—we have convincing proof of the basic truths of the Christian religion. As we see in the Book of Job, our suffering can also be part of our creator's interest in us.

Conclusion

Montaigne has urged us to judge 'soberly' of divine ordinances. He lived in a period of ferocious religious wars, in which Protestants and Catholics, in France, were bitterly opposed to each other—for a parallel one might think of the hostilities which for so long separated Northern and Southern Ireland. To tie religion to prosperity seemed at the time to be an easy way to brag that god was on your side, but the thought strategy was feeble, for by this way of thinking, as soon as you lose a battle you have to concede that god is no longer your leading force.

Essay 32. That we are to avoid pleasures, even at the expense of life

Introductory

Montaigne concurs with the ancient belief, as well as with common sense, that it is better to die than to live badly, mired perhaps in vice, the worst, or in steep decline, to such a point that the body is primarily a source of pain. In the brief course of Montaigne's discussion, we catch glimpses of him as the Christian of the late Middle Ages, and as the early modern man of temperate reason.

Examples

Flee vice Montaigne opens this example by citing the ancient Roman Stoic, Seneca, who is part of the classical wisdom-trove that our author relies on. Seneca addresses a distinguished noble friend, who is aging and caught up in the trammels of a life vitiated by immorality. It is Seneca's opinion that the man should fade away into death, rather than hold on to life. We remember earlier essays of Montaigne in which he considered the end of life, and the high importance the writer put on the final condition in which we leave life. It is partly a question of the legacy we leave, and partly one of presenting ourselves befittingly in the next world. Montaigne concurs with Seneca, on the importance of taking a timely step out of vice into a death without spot.

Embrace death Montaigne expatiates on the case of Hilary, the eminent Bishop of Poitiers and one of the greatest 'doctors of the church,' according to Augustine. Montaigne is fascinated by the bishop's complex input into the question of death and virtue. Hilary's daughter is a beautiful, charming, and virtuous candidate for marriage, who catches the attention of a prominent nobleman, who seeks her hand in marriage—all this reported to Hilary by his loving wife. The prospect of this elite upscale marriage, into a sensually rich world, bound up with matters of politics and power, is revolting to Hilary, who decides it would be far better for his daughter to die, than to take this potentially degenerate marital step. Hilary urges his wife to intervene with their daughter, but to no avail. The Bishop devotes himself to praying for his daughter's death, and rejoices when at last she dies, and is in heaven. In the end his wife shares his opinion, and herself dies—in joy, as is Hilary, now that she is freed from the filth of the world.

Conclusions

Early modern does not mean modern, and Montaigne regularly startles us 'truly moderns' with the firmness to which he is committed to the 'next world' of the Christian Middle Ages. In the two examples above, Montaigne's mindset seems cautionary. He is eager for the soul to avoid desecration by the world, though he is also well adjusted to the human condition, and knows how to appreciate the given world. In his essay on Cannibals he knows how to portray an earthly paradise, that of a humanity not yet touched by the viciousness of the New Land.

Essay 33 That fortune is often-times observed to act by the rule of reason

Introductory

Just as Montaigne hovers between Christian assuredness-- survival after death-- and a darker skepticism, so he hovers between a mediaeval world-set in which chance is taken to represent mystery and luck, and one in which chance speaks with a reasonable voice of its own, and 'makes sense.'

In the following instances, the coincidence that constitutes chance is for the most part beneficial, part of an often surprising way events have, of working themselves out. Montaigne leaves us to wonder, in the end, whether some of his instances are 'tongue in cheek,' for the overall cast of his mind is far from 'superstitious,' and yet, viewed as a whole, Montaigne seems to be moving toward a potent idea of order.

Examples

Malign coincidence Montaigne opens with his only truly malign instance of chance. A well-known duke is invited to dine with his son, his enemy, and the Pope. Presuming that his arch enemy will be the first to arrive, the duke provides the butler with a special bottle of (poisoned) wine, which can be opened and served to the Duke's enemy. Unfortunately the Pope is the first to arrive, asks for a glass of wine, and of course has no idea that the special brand has been set aside for the presumed first arrival, the duke's foe. The pope drinks the poisoned portion, and dies in slow agony.

Complex coincidence A certain gentleman wins the hand in marriage of a lovely lady, whom he had sought, in keen rivalry with a second nobleman. Rejoicing at his success, the first gentleman decides to celebrate what will be his marriage night, by heading out on a merry joust. He falls into lance thrusting with a second knight, who turns out to be his love-rival; and being defeated in the contest, on his marriage night itself, he is taken to prison, where he remains incarcerated for two years, while his wife to be pleads for his release. He is ultimately released. The coincidence? Choosing precisely his deadly rival to joust with triggers a painful reversal of fortune, only later re-reversed.

Random coincidence The Eastern Roman Empire falls to Constantine and his bride Helena. The Fall of the Eastern Roman Empire—to the Ottoman Turks—occurs under the reign of the Emperor Constantine and his wife Helena. The rule of reason, in these first two instances, comes down to very different faces of chance: savage miscalculation, word-play: so broad, we see already, are the homophonies and contrarieties that can be generated by fate.

Benign coincidence The ancient Greek painter, Protagoras, was painting a picture of a dog, when he came to some final touches that were evading him. He was trying to depict the slavering muzzle of the animal, but with each stroke he further unbalanced his depiction. Finally, exasperated, he picked up a sponge and threw it at the canvas. The moist sponge so re shadowed and smudged the image that it assumed a perfect likeness of the painting as Protagoras originally conceived it.

Benign coincidence. The Emperor Clovis besieges a city until its walls fall down. It so happens, though, that a mine has been sprung beneath the city, and in exploding shocks the fallen walls into the air from where they fall once more, perfectly in place as they had been before.

Benign coincidence A certain illustrious Jason of antiquity suffered from a tumor in the chest. In great pain from the festering growth, he decides to throw himself into battle, as a final act. In the heat of man on

man conflict his opponent's lance pierces his chest, and dissipates the malign growth, freeing Jason from pain and illness.

Conclusions

Montaigne observes the world around him, and sees homologies, coincidences, creative accidents which all suggest some meaning-convergence in the given world. In the title of the essay Montaigne calls this convergence the 'rule of reason,' and though some of the examples of this rule seem implausible, even imaginative, the thinking behind the collection is that of a rationalist on his way to the French Enlightenment. Montaigne is spying on order and reason, which to eighteenth century thinkers like Diderot might cumulatively emerge as evidences of order.

Essay 34 Of one defect in our government

Introductory

Montaigne, born into wealth and raised, in childhood, both for three years in a peasant's family, and otherwise in a noble castle, among servants who addressed him in Latin, was surrounded by a large library of classical volumes, and by an abundance of youthful peers—at least until he went off to school in Bordeaux, at the age of six. While the theme of his work is the equality of all people, and his own bent was toward simple life and simple values, he can have had little contact with the pulse of the small market villages which were the lifeblood of communal existence. Bookish, brilliant, destined for high political interactions, and sophisticated tourist travel in midlife he nonetheless remained attached to earlier perceptions derived from the regional thinking of his father, whom he admired—for though the man was not lettered, he was practical and managed a large and multiform estate. We can understand Montaigne better by understanding a couple of details about his father that struck the young man.

Examples

A social idea Montaigne is attracted to an idea dear to his father. There should be, in the center of every town, a chapman (trader, journeyman,) who would be stationed in a single place, ready to answer questions, give advice, consult and refer. (The visitor's center, in the Iowa Town where I live, is stationed centrally, right under the town's water tower, and is staffed on most days by a volunteer who can provide a town tour, advice on neighboring communities, or of course pointers to where this or that can be purchased. By this moment, Google is doubtless intruding on the would be role of the chapman.)

A use for the chapman Montaigne's ever forward-thinking mind leads him to think of the network of economic implications that might follow if, say, one went into the village to ask the chapman to buy you pearls. The chapman himself might head for Paris, to negotiate, which would bring into existence an economic nexus, established by the purchaser and chapman, and various merchants, money lenders, pearl traders, and aesthetic appraisers might eventually be caught up in the aftershock of the citizen's initial pearl request to the chapman. Montaigne the early modern economist is already far into the analysis of social economy.

A benign societal perspective. A rich notion angles off from these comments on the chapman. The remarks lead Montaigne to reflect on large-world people of quality—he references two distinguished scholars who have fallen into urgent poverty—and who would be candidates for a kind of generosity his father, a friend of learning and humanity, would happily have hosted on his estate, ornaments of learning and a joy for conversation. Dad's goal: 'to service rare and remarkable persons of any kind.'

A practical device. Montaigne noted, about his admirable father, that the man carried two notebooks: one for accounts, one for recording daily events—marriages, deaths, visits, absences, sales, events. He kept business separate from daily life.

Conclusions

This essay is an eloge to Dad. Montaigne greatly admires his father, and seemingly owes him his own sense of the unity of mankind, and of the basic importance of simple and useful human behavior.

Essay 35 Of the Custom of wearing clothes

Introductory Montaigne's day was full of travelers' reports from distant and newly discovered parts of the world, like the Americas, India, or North Africa. It was observed by all westerners, both from human specimens and from prints and drawings, that many of the inhabitants of these regions wore few or no clothes, and if not to that extreme wore no shoes or head covering. Montaigne characteristically turned back to consider his own culture, and to consider why they were so addicted to clothing. We are carried back to Montaigne's earlier essay on customs, in which he seemed up for a radical relativism, in which he attributed a wide variety of habits to the natural variation among peoples. There follow here a few examples of Montaigne's response to the reports of unfamiliar social practices.

Examples.

Clothes are not a god-sent necessity. Montaigne wants it clear that many people, in other cultures than his, with much less clothing or none, tolerate harsher weather than that of France. The French, Montaigne says, have unnaturally imposed clothes on themselves. 'Our petticoats and breeches are to a large degree unneeded.' Had God wanted us covered, Montaigne continues, he would have given us thicker finger tips and shoe soles.

Naked is natural Turks go naked for devotion, Montaigne learns. He cites the response of a naked Turkish worshipper, when asked why he refuses to wear clothes: 'You go with your face bare. I am all face.'

Toughness Ancient writers confirm that the Persians, who fought the Egyptians with their heads elaborately swathed, died in battle from oversensitive skulls, while the Egyptian soldiers presented tough and resistant naked scalps to the elements, and toughed it through effectively.

Military strength Julius Caesar was used to lead his men on military campaigns, in all weathers, with his bare skull gleaming for all his men to follow.

A good practice Plato urges men to go barefoot and bareheaded in all weather. Montaigne doubles down, in so many of the present examples, on the unnecessity of the elaborate clothing his fellow citizens are fond of. The subtext, of all these instances, is scorn for the parochial habits of Montaigne's elite social formation. (When he speaks of laborers working for him he notes that they wear the same clothes in all weather, and are inured to inclement weather.)

The author's confession Montaigne admits to needing his own personal warmth. He cannot endure being 'unbuttoned or untied,' or exposed to the cold.

Conclusions.

Montaigne admits to being fond of his own national comforts, while opening his mind and eyes to much different clothing and covering practices in several other cultures. This is his style: ensconced in his own world, but open to the largeness of the creation and to the multiplicity of the ways of nature.

Essay 36 *Of Cato the Younger*

Introductory

Though we know Montaigne for his hatred of lies, his scorn of youthful impertinence, his insistence on masculine uprightness (in the Long Letter on the Education of Children), and though we know that he is suspicious of overblown imagination, we may be surprised by the full fledged and unshaded assault, of the present essay, against the moral

collapse of his own time. He carefully avoids couching this critique in the language of moral superiority—he tells us outright that he views himself as no measurement standard for appropriate behavior, and that he frankly criticizes only to aid others in their effort to prove their superiority to him. Wherever he can find value, whether or not the bearer of it shares his perspective, Montaigne is delighted. 'I apprehend a thousand ways of living.' There follow instances of Montaigne's views on the issue of higher virtue in society.

Examples

Self-appraisal Montaigne walks a fine line, in this essay, between contempt for the folly of his age —the people around him are stupid and without standards—and exhortation to his fellow citizens to strive for ever higher plateaus of moral achievement. Montaigne puts himself down, but particularly elevates the memory of Cato the Younger, who expressed the highest ideals of the Roman Republic, and its opposition to Julius Caesar and his powerful pull toward autocracy. (Though Montaigne has much of value and praise to say of Caesar, too.)

Self-abasement. Montaigne describes himself as 'crawling upon the slime of the earth,' but reminds his reader that he looks up to heaven, scoping out the supreme values, and meditating on the essential character of virtue, that is intention or will directed to actions which are their own reward, and for which there is no tangible payback. This is where the nobility of Cato the Younger enters, a lifetime opponent of Julius Caesar, an opponent who refused to cooperate with the partisan politics which was dragging Republican Rome into imperial autocracy. Cato remained aloof from the political elite, though he was born into its networks, and he left behind a model for such as Montaigne. Cato's suicide was his final statement of defiance, a pure act of protest that kept him in the annals of Roman virtue straight through the Empire, and into the model mills of mediaeval Christianity.

Greek virtue The Spartans were widely admired for the purity of the virtue in which they raised their children. They were not easily satisfied with even the finest youthful discipline. The example is given of a certain extremely virtuous man named Aristodemus, who was deeply valued in his defense of his homeland against the Athenians. Until the last moment, the Spartan assembly had decided upon awarding Aristodemus a large national prize for virtue. Just at that moment, however, a Spartan legislator objected, reminding his fellow citizens that Aristodemus had in his past been stained by one moment of poor judgment in a military encounter, therefore that the virtue of his present heroism was not blameless, as he had an interest in cleaning up his record. His heroism could not be viewed as an *acte pur.*

Conclusions

Montaigne will at times appear as a hedonist, up for enjoying good food—on his midlife journey to Italy he records his appetites, and fussiness about removal from his home diet—no crayfish—while his pleasure in the day, in beauty, in sex—'I am not continent,' 'beauty first in bed' is oft announced—but in the end he is careful about behavior, a great appreciator of others, and a modest brilliant man who willingly admits to admiring people of strength and virtue, whether monks or generals, providing they remain pure devotees of their ideals.

Essay 37 That we laugh and cry for the same thing

Introductory

From his first essay, you will recall, Montaigne is sensitive to the mood changes of the human being; one thinks of the invading general, who is about to wipe out the enemy city, but is so impressed by the

bravado of three ‘enemy’ officers walking defiantly toward him, that he decides to ‘save the city.’ In his essay Of Sorrow, similarly, Montaigne speaks of a military man surveying the enemy dead: he observes two of his grown children lying there dead, then passes on, but is assaulted by great sorrow, not much later, by the sight of an anonymous corpse, whose pathos brings forth deep and heartfelt sorrow. The source of this unpredictability of human response, Montaigne believes, in line with the medical thinking of his time, derives from the complex congeries of humors in the human body. What examples does Montaigne favor, to illustrate this argument for unpredictability?

Examples.

Mood unpredictability Montaigne opens with three examples of military brass, who find themselves saddened (confused, perplexed) by their sorrow over the loss of their principle enemy on the battleground. (Antigonus was angry with his son for showing him the head of the enemy commander; Rene, Duke of Lorrain, mourned the death of his opposite general, and went to his funeral; the commanding general at the Battle of d’Avray was very moved to see the dead body of the enemy commander.

Mood concealment ‘The heir’s tears behind the mask are smiles.’ In his first example Montaigne stresses the unpredictability of mood, while in the present instance, he insists on the difficulty of reading another’s mood, which is often intended as a disguise.

Unity of laughing and crying Children often laugh and cry at the same thing; departure from loved ones, to a no matter how greatly longed for journey, inevitably produces a mixture of sadness and joy, Schadenfreude.

Attitude change Many times we lament a person who has died, but for whom we would otherwise have had no special feeling.

Mood complexity I may curse my servant at one moment, but at the next forgive and even praise him. I was never defined as ‘one who can’t stand his servant.’ Long term appreciation of the man simply blended with a patch of anger.

Seeming changeability Xerxes was criticized for a deep shift in countenance. The fact was, though, that he was first of all meditating proudly on the vast fleet he was about to lead against the Athenians, but while he was meditating his mind digressed onto the thought of the number of brave souls who would perish in the engagement, and his face clouded over.

Conclusions.

Montaigne opens a rich theme, when he aligns laughter and crying around the same cause. He shares some of the Shakespearean attitude, that all of life is a stage, and all the players are actors. Human personality is volatile, pain and pleasure—as we learn from recent psycho--historical research, or from the work of the Marquis de Sade—are two sides of the same coin.

Essay 38. Of Solitude

Introductory

Montaigne continues here to take his inspiration from the ancient Roman Stoics, who, like their contemporary Epicureans, were studious observers of human behavior, and shared ,the conviction that a calm, steady, and disciplined private life was the best path through human existence, especially as it approached its later years. In the present essay Montaigne offers abundant advice for such a personal aging, and in doing so draws both on his own experience and on his wisdom acquired from the ancients, of whom his knowledge, especially of Roman literature and culture, is astonishing and invariably pertinent.

Examples

The end is all one, to live at more leisure and at one's ease.' One hears again the unmistakably patrician voice, of a man who was able to retire into his study in midlife, and who was used, throughout his life, to studying and conversing with upscale peers. Nonetheless, Montaigne comes over as speaking for humanity as a whole, for practices which commend themselves to rich and poor, educated and simple, alike. Looking unsentimentally into the aging of the human condition, he urges us all to choose pursuits and pleasures suitable to an endgame finally freed from the exposure and exhaustion of the public sphere.

The quest for peace Whether we are King or modest householder, peace will be hard to find or sustain, because you always have your own turbulent self to contend with. No hair shirt or sequence of prayers can fully guard you against the troubles the self brings with it. Socrates, when told that a friend had had a very disagreeable trip, remarked 'I very well believe it, for he took himself along with him.'

Solitude as 'backshop' Each of us should carry, inside him, a backshop in which he can store provisions, that he can draw on when the pressure of the public world gets too heavy. It is important to stay disentangled from the pressures and complexities of people and things, when puttering around in one's inner space. Montaigne speaks firmly about the avoidance of too much entanglement with wife, children, or other intimates; sources of distraction against which he has warned fleetingly throughout his essays, in which he has consistently spoken of marriage as a valuable shelter for children, but not as romantic nest. In fact, as will surprise no student of upper echelon Renaissance culture, Montaigne's social zone included his male offspring—actually he had none—his male peers and women of interest in the culture at large.

'Ambition is the most contrary to solitude.' In your solitude be content, at ease, and cheerful, and make no effort to compete with rivals. The beggar at your door, Montaign characteristically remarks, is likely to be the happiest person you meet, and you should emulate him by holding on to the small but real pleasures life holds out for the aged.

Conclusions

Montaigne's essays are ripe with the sense of intelligent, disciplined joy in life. Being 'at your ease,' whether young or old, is for him a prime virtue; a virtue nourished, of course, in an elite and privileged milieu, but promoted, by Montaigne, with a broad sense of the human situation, and of (what he takes to be) the wisest way to deal with it.

Essay 39 A consideration upon Cicero

Introductory

Montaigne opens this marvelous essay, upon the life of writing, with a consideration of two great Roman letter writers, Cicero and Pliny, who were even more gifted when it came to affairs of state. Both of them were distinguished Roman consuls under the Empire, and were guaranteed a 'place in history,' for which they were equally and intensely ambitious. Each of them furthermore, was jealous to immortalize his thoughts and feelings in personal letters through which they recounted their travels and encounters throughout a hyper active public life. This observation, in which Montaigne notes that letters were not necessary, to prop up the lasting fame of these two men, also leads Montaigne into the dominant query of the essay, whether one should be known for one unique skill—say that of ruling a nation, or being a great orator—or for one single gift. We will see, from the examples, that Montaigne quite gladly identifies his own gift as essay writer, having noted that he particularly enjoys the writing of letters, but can develop himself more fully in the essay. (Might it have been the blog today?) We turn to a few examples of the way Montaigne develops his thought, in the present essay on the essay.

Examples

Ambition Cicero and Pliny were both great statesmen, but their ambition drove them, and they wrote copious letters to their friends, in order to assure a legacy of awareness of their own great deeds. In their cases, for they wrote excellent epistles, the enrichment of the men's deeds was valuable. But in most instances, as Montaigne sees it, a person of gifts or power should stick to the special power granted him, a king to being king, a wise man to being instructive, a whore to preserving the marital bedroom. A consul is a consul, a letter writer a letter writer.

What people think of Montaigne's essays. Readers of his essays, Montaigne thinks, often fail to penetrate their substance, or for that matter the 'delicate sound they make.' Montaigne would like to be honored not only as an essayist, but as an essayist of fine tones. And not only that. He wants his readers to know him as bluff, non ceremonial, to the point. He is paring down the distinctions among the ways his readers can be left free to mistake his unique tone.

Regrets Montaigne regrets, briefly, that he has not written his essays as letters. He then reflects, however, that he could have written this work as letters only if he had had a genuine addressee in mind, a 'settled intercourse,' and a real situation. He cannot stand falsification, 'traffic with the wind.'

Conclusions.

Montaigne is sensitive to the unique genre of the essay, the author of which must be honest to himself, must speak directly from his private life, While great letter writers, like Cicero and Pliny, may also pride themselves on wondrous careers, Montaigne appreciates the value of a writing genre, which frees its author from all temptations to speak to the grand.

Essay 40 That the relish for good and evil depends in great measure upon the opinion we have of them.

Introductory

Montaigne opens with classic views of man's condition: man can control his sufferings, moderate his joys, and give cheer to the pains of being human. The power for this control is in the individual's hands, a lesson we have been taught by the great religions, which universally offer what they consider a path to peace and control over our lives. Despite his own entry, into a crowded and familiar field of traditional wisdoms on the matter of our condition, Montaigne manages to establish thoughtful perspectives of his own, which repeatedly take us back to the freshness of his genius. The following examples will provide some instances of the pathways he treads.

Examples

Cheer in face of death Montaigne's text proliferates with examples of cheer in the presence of pain or death. (His anecdotal example list proves the fastidious use he made, of his large library of contemporary accounts and street wisdoms.) In the kingdom of Narsangah wives gladly go to be buried with their deceased husbands—a cultural practice which supersedes anxiety. Examples of enthusiastic suicide, even large scale suicide—think Jamestown—abound, say in the case of groups wishing to escape mass slavery. Anxiety lies behind much anticipatory suffering: the Greek philosopher Pyrrho, standing on the deck of a sinking ship, surrounded by weeping passengers, points to a hog which is being transported in the hold: 'is he worried,' asks Pyrrho pungently, watching the stolid pork. In the face of death, it is our attitude that counts.

What about pain? Montaigne notes, again in great anecdotal detail, that pain can for many of us prove more fearsome than death. Pain, he continues, is the true test of our virtue, and can only be faced by recourse to the soul, the body's partner. While the body is uniform, solid and of a piece, the soul is multiform and flexible, and can adapt to threats to the person. The body is of course strong—we are reminded of the Spartan lad who hides a fox in his coat, so that his theft of the animal will not be discovered, but who lets the animal chew out his guts rather than reveal the theft—but it has no ingenuity. A man can read a book while he's under surgery, Montaigne says, but that's because the soul can protect us from the body's vulnerability. The soul can protect that vulnerability even under the pains people can

voluntarily impose on themselves, in order to beautify their flesh or rearrange their teeth—matters of concern to the finer ladies of Montaigne's Paris. The soul can invite onto its body such hair-shirt or self-whipping exercises as many religious worshippers have turned to in search of their savior's path.

How about personal self-protection? Montaigne is fully aware of the fear and anxieties that riddle the mind of every mortal. He knows those anxieties from inside, but he also knows, as he shows in the above examples, ways to make life's hardest issues tolerable. In the latter part of this essay he sketches out practices that are his own, and that he thinks helpful. He avoids personal entanglements; has rather little use for children or for marriage when it goes beyond child raising; believes in strict payment of debts; views avarice as one of the chief pitfalls of the elderly; despises the marketplace, hating nothing more than 'driving a bargain'. Almost as his ultimate advice, he recommends trusting other people, which is the true test of our virtue.

Conclusions.

Despite deep references into the mystery of Christ's (and mankind's) suffering, Montaigne remains practical in his discussions of the human condition. He sketches out perspectives, onto death and pain, which can alleviate anxiety and fortify behavior. Like many best seller psychologists of our moment, he generates purviews onto anxiety and dread, which target our weakness, and show us paths to living well. But Montaigne surpasses contemporary psychology by his fascination with what he calls the soul, which can be understood only as a category of faith.

Essay 41. Not to communicate (partake in, share) a man's honor

Introductory

Montaigne opens by reminding us how precious our honor is to us. (He lived at a time when honor, especially among the elite, was a powerful personal treasure, not to be shared or lost. In the industrialized West, today, we may have diluted the honor issue with a portion of old Green Odyssean wiliness, which recognizes the value of success above all.) Montaigne goes on to remark, however, that though nothing is more precious to a man than his honor, nothing is more foolish than the pursuit of glory and honor. Honor and glory are of very little actual value—says Montaigne who is, of course, a man of principle—and yield, in nobility, to the act of furthering another man's glory. A new virtue is thus created by this discussion, the virtue of consciously not partaking in another man's honor, not sharing his honor, so that he will have full credit for it. Not to share, in this case, provides us with the rare opportunity for respite from the demand for private, personal glory. Let's look at a few examples, of this finely facetted form of virtue.

Examples

Faking Catulus, a spirited leader, finds in the midst of battle that his men have turned tail and are fleeing. Reluctant to expose them to the inevitable obloquy, he fakes a counter fear, and himself flees along with his men, in order to save them from the charge of cowardice.

Self-abnegation In 1537 Charles V prepared for battle in Provence. His chief counsellor, although in fact in agreement with Charles ' battle plan, was anxious to direct all the strategy glory to his imperial leader, and therefore, consciously, opposed Charles' plan in the final battle preparations. The counsellor wanted to enhance his boss's individually conceived plan, and not to horn in on the glory that was sure to accompany it.

Refusal King Edward of England refused to support his son in battle; after first informing himself that his son was going to prevail, Edward felt safe in assuring that he himself would consume no part of his son's glory.

Provocative The mother of the Spartan commander, Brasidas, was devasted by the news of her son's death, but in order to provoke a good round of admiration from the Spartan crowd, she went before them

and in announcing her son's death remarked that many Spartans were more doughty fighters than her son. In this fashion she provoked an outpouring of grief and admiration for her son.

Conclusions.

Montaigne has a fine sense of inmost turns of the human mind, and has invariably a subtly pertinent set of examples to back up his point. Worth noting: the fine differences among the four examples given above, each of which has differently illustrated the concept of promoting another's honor.

Essay 42 Of the inequality amongst us

Introductory

In imagination Montaigne strips down mankind to its bare essentials, and asks of what value success, power, and leadership are to this hairless animal. He concludes, on the basis of various examples, that to rule over others is a source of strain, unhappiness, confusion, and illness. The ruler has no friends, the ruler has no solitude, the ruler has no access to honest opinions. Only men who are simple and true of soul lead happy lives, and it makes no difference whether they are poor or rich, powerful or weak. Let's look at some illustrations of Montaigne's thinking.

Examples

Sole power The King of Thrace had sole power over his people, and in fact had his own private gods, which enabled him to wield control. But he was powerless to escape any of the ills and ailments of all men.

Real Blood Bleeding from a wound, Alexander—reputedly the son of an immortal—remarked to his courtiers that the blood flowing from the wound in his thigh was as real and mortal as it gets.

Abundance 'There is nothing so distasteful and clogging as abundance.' Montaigne makes a wide ranging point here, implying subtle downsides of the life of power: that one is never alone, can never trust others, and cannot be relieved of pains: therefore he is always bumping up against impediments and has a clogged life, without freedom.

The long way around the barn King Pyrrhus explains, to his philosopher-counsellor, some of the upcoming battles he intends to undertake, to Italy, Sicily, Egypt, North Africa and eventually back to Greece, where he can settle down. His counsellor asks him, wrily, why he cannot just settle down where he is and relax? We hear Montaigne in the counsellor.

Conclusions.

We occupy different statuses in life, but our fundamental destinies—birth, copulation, death—are in common. Wealth cannot exempt us from the stones, or cancer; power cannot win us friendship or trust. What is the best response to this situation? Voltaire, at the end of *Candide*, after empathizing with the innumerable pitfalls that assail his literary figure, settles for the answer that one should just cool it; 'il faut cultiver son jardin,' 'we must attend to our gardens.'

Essay 43 Of Sumptuary Laws

Introductory.

Sumptuary laws, pronouncedly enacted during the European Middle Ages (12th-14th centuries) were laws intended to minimize luxury spending within courtly society. It is Montaigne's opinion that, by limiting the taste for such fine items as meat, turbot, and highly decorative robes, a government does nothing but stimulate the taste for such items. If only princes can eat turbot and wear lace, then everybody will want these items. However, because the populus in general is without taste, they will fail in their efforts to

upbeat and updress, and will end up, as is in fact the case, wearing comical dirty garments, and plain cloth. In other words, Montaigne sees little value in sumptuary laws, which accomplish the opposite of their intent. Some examples follow.

Examples

Social change The nouveaux riches acquired a taste for fine food and clothing, and especially after the death of Henri II, when for a while plain clothes were required, that taste escalated into a rash of unbecoming social developments. Able again to appear in their finery, such now wealthy people as doctors and surgeons turned to the elegant dressing and fine dining they valued. The taste of the vulgar, however, was whetted in a direction which proved deleterious to society. Long effeminate locks, elegantly woven robes from Miletus, great bellied doublets; all these follies of poor judgment were opened onto the public. Elaborate and irrelevant gestures of greeting were exchanged by half-educated people 'in the know.' Since all these developments took place essentially around the court, and the court set the style for the nation, the nation-state as a whole lost its cultural poise and judgement.

Norms Zeleucus, King of the Locrians, was much concerned to bring discipline and uniformity to his people. Each man was permitted only one gold ring. No effeminate clothing was permitted. Norms of decent dress and thus behavior were strictly enforced. This was a gesture toward finer taste, but unfortunately the result of coercion.

Traditions Montaigne himself is no friend of the innovative in social behavior, including dress and diet. Proper dress and proper respect are the essentials of his code of behavior. Don't stand bare headed before the nobility. Don't stand before them without your sword on the ready. Proper behavior is the proper goal of the sumptuary perspective, but for Montaigne the source of all values lies deep and hidden in the social fabric .It cannot be legislated. He commends the thought of Plato, in the Laws: 'change nothing unless it's evil,' may no one know when a law was first instituted, but simply live it as part of his social existence. From this highly traditional perspective, Montaigne views with some contempt the efforts of society to manipulate the social customs of his age.

Conclusions.

In the large picture Montaigne is no friend of social engineering. He has little good to say for the limiting of people's foods or dress, although he finds many social behaviors—elaborate greetings, long locks, effeminate cloaks—objectionable. By and large Montaigne is true to the traditions of the nobility—of which he is one, and of the upbringing of one of which he had written extensively in his Essay on The Education of Children. He lives in and accepts a highly traditional society, for which change is not welcome—in and of itself..

Essay 44 Of Sleep

Introductory

Montaigne opens with the topic of the dignified and calm soul, one of his ideals in the seasoned male. The ethos of dignity and the honor that go with it seem to Montaigne particularly tested in the case of sleep, a restorative condition that makes up a good third of our lifespan. During sleep we seem vulnerable to outside pressures, anxieties, noises, and hopes which the man of calm soul and good conscience can often sail effectively through. What examples does Montaigne collect, to illustrate his anthology of sleep behaviors?

Examples.

Alexander Before one of his greatest battles Alexander slept like a log. His plans were fully formed, and his conscience cleared. Montaigne particularly admires the calm of the justifiably great.

Emperor Otho The Emperor Otho decided to commit suicide during the night. Prior to the hour he had set for his demise, he had been waked by a messenger, issued orders in the usual manner, then fallen back into a deep sleep, from which he awakened near dawn, at his self-appointed time, and calmly killed himself.

Cato and Augustus The imperturbable Cato found himself blindsided by an arch traitor, Metellus, with whom he had a face to face confrontation, in which deadly words were exchanged. Cato then went directly to bed, slept like a log, and in the morning had to be manually roused by his servant. In a similar vein, the Emperor Augustus, having properly planned a crucial naval strategy for the following morning, fell fast asleep, and had to be waked the next morning, after the battle was over, to receive the news of his victory.

Sleep deprivation At Rome, men have been killed while being deprived of sleep. Sleep that is, is essential to life.

Sleep excess With what attitude we are not certain, Montaigne recounts two ancient tales about sleep. He cites Herodotus—who was such a fabulous tale teller—who refers to a country where the men 'sleep by 500 year increments.' And he reminds us that the sage Epaminondas was known to have slept seven hundred and fifty years.

Conclusions.

Amidst the anecdotes, Montaigne clearly targets a single point. A great man, of good conscience, and of course the necessary sang froid, can fall deeply and undisturbedly asleep, no matter what is at stake around him, and may need to be waked in the morning. This is the kind of man we might expect to be admired by the Montaigne who has earlier given us such a manly roadmap for the education of a young scion.

Essay 45 Of the Battle of Dreux

Introductory

The Battle Montaigne discusses, here, proved to be of decisive importance for the development of the Wars of Religion which were starting to spread in mid sixteenth century France. The two other battles discussed in this essay, are only partially germane to that first battle, of Dreux, which was fought on Dec. 19, and turned out to be a powerful Catholic victory. Certain aspects of the battle of Dreux, as Montaigne describes it, overlap with the two battle accounts which follow, both of them drawn from antiquity, and only peripherally related to the account of the battle of Dreux. The overlapping points in all three of the battles will be of interest to military historians, for all three accounts involved the importance of clearly defined military strategy, and the dangers either of slowing your command pace, in mid conflict, or modifying your ultimate point of assault in the middle of the battle.

Examples.

Halting The first example is immediately contemporary to Montaigne, and proved to be of central importance for the Wars of Religion. The complaint under discussion, here, is that the duc de Guise, who was commanding the Catholic forces in the battle, halted in mid battle, to reconsider his point of attack, and in so doing let down on the concerted effort he was making with his Chief Constable, to close a fatal pincers lock on the enemy. By this error in timing and judgment, the Duc left many of his own contingents helpful victims of the foe, and although by the completion of the battle he had decimated the rear guard of

the enemy army, he was considered guilty of a most expensive failure in consistency. His halting was seen as an abuse of his commanding Constable, who was beaten and imprisoned in the conflict.

Philemon The Greek general, Philemon, like the Duke de Guise, succeeded at the end of a crucial struggle, to decimate his enemy from the rear. In order to achieve this, he too, like The Duke de Guise, had had to pass through the hell of seeing his own men hacked to death as he worked out his masterplan strategy.

Agesilaus and the Boeotians In the conflict referenced here Agesilaus too played a waiting game, letting his opponents rush by, while he held his fire and scrutinized the situation. In the end, although facing superior odds, he decided upon sending his men into a valorous, rather than just a dutiful, assault, and he carried the day.

Conclusions.

It is probable that Montaigne, immersed in the Wars of Religion, failed (in the present writing) to bind together the three military strategies conjoined in the present essay. His attention appears to be on the Battle of Dreux itself, and even on that he appears rather to outline a battle plan, than to enter the moral details of decision making that make that battle distinctive. (His attitude toward the Duc de Guise is less clearly his own, than a report on how the people in general evaluated the battle.) Montaigne's conception of the essay, a new and fascinating literary form at the time, left him room for entries like the present, in which a personal voice moved freely over a sequence of loosely related events, and little obligation lay in the matter itself, to draw pungent conclusions from it.

Essay 46 Of Names

Introductory

Montaigne opens on the theme of his essays, 'apologizing,' as it were, for their simplicity and unpretentiousness of approach. This mock apologetic, common in Montaigne, cloaks a great repertoire of learning, anecdotal alertness, and simulated relaxations of language, despite the actual fact in our face that Montaigne never wastes a word, invariably discovers an erudite word that serves his purposes, and deplores his own weaknesses, but only to the end of supporting points about the human condition in general.

There are two main themes in the rest of the essay. Montaigne points out the main issues of naming, among people of all ranks. His reflections turn around the connotations of certain names—for good or for ill. Names can connote the nobility or the valorous, who proudly carry the family name. Frequently, however, we see names dissipated when through marriage new names replace old relationships. It is at such times that the fragility of the name is clearest. What is a name, after all, except a brush or pen stroke, easily erased?

The last point ushers in the true Montaignian theme, for the fragility of the name serves the writer to move back into the issue of vanity, that unshakeable accompaniment of the human struggle for fame, dignity, and recognition. A dignified name, it is felt on all levels of society, can provide extra security for the ambitious human, eager to leave behind him a legacy of respect and honor.

Examples.

Good repute names Montaigne values good repute, has no problem with such time-honored monikers as reflect rustic Anglo Saxon virtues. Noble names, reflecting the greatness of distinguished houses—his own was one—were far too likely to dwell on the proper use of titles, the memory of which was quickly forgotten, although their presence remained an honor to the house.

Names as toys 'Nature has given us this passion –naming—as a pretty passion to play with.' Montaigne brings up the case of a poet who was continually changing his name, transposing its letters to

make fantastic variations on itself. It is the whim of many families to play with their ancestral names, adding unknown dignities and distant relationships to them. A tale is told of a gentleman who invited many old buddies to dinner at his chateau. Each of them presented himself, in every case expounding on the distinguished new foreign and hitherto undiscovered dignitaries who had added themselves to his family. Tiring of the hyperbole, the host retired to a basement room, alleging that he no longer felt worthy to dine in such company.

Miracle Montaigne includes the tale of a young man who has been frequenting prostitutes, and is waiting for a visit from one. When the lady arrives at his door he asks her her name, and is given 'Mary,' which, who knows why, he takes to be a sign of the Virgin Mary. He ushers the lady out, has nothing further to do with women whose lives do not 'magnify the lord.'

Conclusions.

Montaigne assembles a variety of thoughts around the topic of names. He admires old names, that live up to their promise of integrity. He is contemptuous of fake or artificially added names. He is a friend of first names rooted in national tradition.

Essay 47 Of the uncertainty of our judgment

Introductory

Montaigne, as we know, often interests himself in the moral and tactical issues generated by jousting or military endeavors. Such events brought into play the skills of the elite, in Montaigne's time, and played an unending role in the Roman culture texts—especially Plutarch—which Montaigne regularly cites for examples. The current essay, though entitling itself as a broad piece of philosophy, is primarily intent on practical issues of military statecraft.

A broad thesis of the essay overarches the specific military issues that arise. Montaigne, always moderately skeptical, is raising the question of 'certainty of judgment,' in general. Does the human being typically exercise accurate and efficient judgment—in life, generally—or is judgement—of whom to marry, how much to invest, what to eat for dinner—inevitably approximate and of uncertain worth? The following examples will suggest the slant Montaigne adopts, toward the issues raised here.

Examples.

Victory or restraint? Montaigne's essay opens with examples concerning whether military commanders are wise to press through to victory, at all costs, or to consider limiting their assaults, not pressing quickly or dominantly for a complete victory. It is of course Montaigne's position to claim that there are rival perspectives, and that even the best decision is in the end a hostage of fortune. Within that large category, fortune, there will be a hundred intangibles—lay of the land, time of day, condition of the men—hovering over the commander's final decision over whether to move slowly or go for broke. Unfortunately we must revisit precisely this issue in our own time, as we watch heavy armor driven over the enemy or strategically delayed.

Insult the enemy? Within the broader theme of victory or restraint, Montaigne entertains the pros and cons of verbal harassment of the enemy. We are dealing here with fixed enemy cavalry lines, or regiments of bayonet carrying foot soldiers, and the issue is whether one should insult them, attempt to humiliate them, or leave them alone. Will they be humiliated or enraged? Who knows? The commander's judgment will be faced with an imponderable, for once again, as in the dilemma of absolute victory or restraint, there are many imponderables, and fortune has the last word.

Pageantry or Simplicity? Montaigne recognizes two opposite ways of equipping an army, each representing a different, and supportable, view of the best way to engage in battle. Some commanders dress their troops to the teeth, with elegant vestments and stunning weaponry, figuring that this display of elegance will demoralize the foe, while boosting the morale of the troops. On the other hand

certain commanders clothe their troops in modest fabrics and style, encouraging them to fight like true men of the soil, with no trace of dandyism. Once again, there is no room for a simplified answer. Fortune is smiling in the corner. There is no cut and dried answer to fall back on. Our judgements are uncertain, and rarely definitive.

Conclusions

Montaigne pays abundant tribute to Lady Fortuna, as a decision maker. The examples he chooses are from the military sphere. His central point is that life confronts us with multiple decisions, upon which we have to exercise our own judgment, without the benefit of certainty. Luck seems the field In which this state of affairs most clearly displays itself, although Montaigne faced heavy papal criticism for bowing too deeply to a condition, Fortuna, over which God himself may seem to have had too little control.

Essay 48 Of war horses or *dextrarios*

Introductory

Chivalry, the social political driver of elite mediaeval society, was still an active factor in Montaigne's day, and the cheval (horse) who empowered the chivalric system was a valued commodity. The incessant early modern wars, among families and mini states and principalities, promoted a regular trade in fine horses, and fine military equipment— crafted pikes, lances. spears, daggers, saddles, spurs; all of which was part of a thriving and aesthetically demanding industry. Montaigne, as we know, was much concerned with castles, knights, and sieges, and was himself both seasoned in horsemanship and fighting, and an influential player in the negotiation of military/economic deals.

The present essay is both an analysis of horses and horsemanship in Montaigne's world, and an anecdotal reflection on other cultures' relations to the horse. Throughout runs a theme of admiration, for high skills of horsemanship, for adroit and powerful horses, and for military infighting.

Examples.

Service horses (dextrarios) Montaigne opens his examples with the *dextrarius* or service horse, which was familiarly used in ancient Rome as an adjunct to the rider's main steed, a second, so to speak, to which the rider could jump, when in the midst of battle he found himself threatened. This kind of twin horse galloped in unison with his brother, and was trained to carry the rider, now on his own back, to a different position from which he could continue fighting. A skillful horseman and a nimble service horse were required for this act.

Military horsemanship Montaigne greatly admires the bond that forms between distinguished cavalry leaders and their favorite horses, who get to know their masters and the nature of battle. Such horses can, in the midst of battle, throw themselves against enemy riders or horses, and gnash a powerful path of infighting for their riders. Not only do the riders of such fine cavalry benefit from the infight savvy of their steeds, but they bond with their steeds. Such heroic figures as Alexander and Caesar virtually belonged to their fighting horses. Caesar was able to manage his favorite horse –give him proper direction, control his speed, demand that he jump—all bareback, and with his hands tied behind him. Alexander's steed, Bucephalus (bull-head), was a powerful driving force in all his major battles and greatly feared attacks.

The arts of horsemanship Montaigne himself, no military hero, asserts his own great pleasure at bareback riding, and takes us in thought to those northern tribes, the Parthians, and their habit of virtually living on horseback, where they conduct their business, converse, and carry on affairs of state. When properly managed and understood, as they are by the noble riders in Italy, Italian horses are taken into battle carrying gleaming spears and lances; the finest and proudest of horses were the formidable heart of the army.

Conclusions.

From his own childhood, as Montaigne recounts at the end, he remembers Itinerant trick riders who passed through his village, performing brilliant tricks, standing upright In their saddles, leaping from horse to horse. So deep lies Montaigne's fascination with the beauty and adroitness of the horse. What would he have said to the upstart Iowa farm boy who reminded him—I believe this is accurate—that in fact pigs are among the smartest domesticated animals, and horses far from the top.

Essay 49 Of Ancient Customs

Introductory

We know by this point that Montaigne is interested in customs and traditions from around the known world, and especially in those which deviate from the norm in his own culture. In discussing 'cannibals,' military practices, and codes of dress and behavior, in other and ancient (usually Roman) cultures, Montaigne frequently disparages his own culture, not least for its provincialism, in the present case the French suspicion of the foreign, and particularly the French passion for trendy styles of clothing—doublets reaching one day up to the chest, on the next day descending to some point between the thighs-- and behavior, styles which may be gone tomorrow only to be ardently resurrected in a few years.

The springboard of the present essay is its critique of French faddishness, but the substance of the discussion rapidly passes to traits of ancient Roman culture which particularly deviate from the French world. Let's look at some examples Montaigne offers, of ancient non-French customs:

Examples.

Bathing practices For both the Greeks and the Romans, the baths were socially and culturally important meeting places. The Romans preferred bathing in perfumed water; women frequently bathed naked before the servants and friends, and often allowed themselves to be rubbed down by a male slave. This female practice had no place in Greek life, where the men bathed naked, and were scrubbed down by acolytes.

Coiffure Women's (men's too sometimes) hair was often pinched off, as was also the style in the Paris of Montaigne's day. One popular Roman hair style—which Montaigne sees as effeminate and absurd—was shaving the hair at the back of the head, and permitting it to grow long at the front. (Some professional wrestlers in America fancy this style today. Can you remember Gorgeous George?)

Eating The Greeks and Romans generally ate reclining on a couch, though Cato introduced the practice of eating in a sitting position. (The Turks of Montaigne's day ate reclining, Montaigne adds, joining his ancient historian brother, Herodotus, in noting things by the by, as he passes through life.)

Urination and defecation Montaigne notes the Roman practice of cleaning the anus, after defecation, with a wet sponge. He does not discuss the French practice, but goes far simply by bringing the issue up. (Daring language and inquiry, on the level of strong thinking and high art, had already been sanctioned by Montaigne's predecessor Rabelais) Montaigne seemingly admires the practical Roman solution to pissing in public, and praises the (male oriented) policy of placing urination tubs on the sides of busy streets in ancient Rome.

Luxury The wealthy of ancient Rome enjoyed such amenities as freshwater streams flowing through the ground level of their mansions. (Petronius, in the *Satyricon*, depicts a setting for such an amenity.) At dinner time, guests would descend to the water, choose their fish for the evening, and settle down to drink while the cooks and carvers busied themselves in the kitchen.

Conclusions.

In the end, after having bedeviled the French for their provincialism, Montaigne has fun with Roman social practices. His main point is that the French should wake up. The world is old and big! But like Herodotus he is fascinated by difference and doesn't mind, shocking the home folks.

Essay 50 Of Democritus and Heraclitus

Introductory

Montaigne puts together large pieces of what we might call, at this point in the essays, his 'emergent philosophy,' giving us a fundamental account of the knowing and spiritual processes of the mind, then sharing with us his view of humanity as seen through those processes (the way we perceive, think, evaluate, make wholes of the fleeting drama of phenomena that constantly deploy before our inner eye.) Finally he turns to a pair of emblematic ancient Greek philosophers, Democritus and Heracleitus, to portray two fundamental ways of viewing mankind, the former scornful of his kind, the later pitying of mankind. Montaigne adds to the profile of his 'emerging philosophy' by siding with Democritus, believing mankind is 'not so full of mischief as inanity, '

Examples.

Judgment Our judgement is uncertain. When faced with important decisions we humans are often unclear on which way to move. It depends, Montaigne says, on our angle of approach to any given problem. We have little internal guidance. Montaigne's own governing procedure for judgment is ignorance. Remember how stereotypically he is remembered for his portmanteau query, 'que sais-je?,' 'what do I know?' with which he inclines to answer difficult conundrums.

Governing method Montaigne's governing method, by which he approaches life's issues and problems, is 'ignorance.' He simply does not know the truth in many situations. He is followed in this agnostic belief by Rene Descartes, whose *Discours de la Méthode* was a constructive metaphysics built on systematic doubt.

The Soul For Montaigne the soul is the knowing principle inside us that sees the world passing by and establishes meaning here and there, as she feels right. Our souls continually reprocess death, love, hope, remaking those conditions of existence as she feels right. 'Our good or ill has no other dependence but on ourselves.'

Person mixture The individual is a mixture of good and bad, ignorant and insightful. Alexander, the King of the World, was given to carousing, and to playing chess—a game Montaigne ridicules—and thus to diluting the greatness of his person.

Democritus and Heraclitus Montaigne, as we said in the introduction, views these two ancient Greek philosophers as emblematic of two main views of mankind: *contempt* and *commiseration*. Montaigne is all about contempt, thinking mankind a fatuous blunder.

Conclusions.

Montaigne comes clearly into the open, perhaps for the first time in the essays. He does indeed view the human mind with skepticism, but, even more clearly, thinks the human being flawed, incapable of true understanding or knowledge, and unable to judge clearly. Is this a Christian perspective? Are we talking 'original sin'?

Essay 51 Of the Vanity of Words

Introductory

We know, from Montaigne's preference for Democritus over Heraclitus, that he has a generally low opinion of mankind, one in which, savingly, he also includes himself, having made amply clear that he has

no memory, that his judgment is shaky at best, and that he has no place among the great thinkers. In the present essay he targets the vanity of words, the often meaningless sounds human utter, especially in the quest to magnify themselves. With that perspective Montaigne turns his criticism first of all on rhetoricians, those builders of empty vanity, skilled in 'making the worse appear the better argument,' and in 'magnifying the ordinary.' We find here several examples of the vanity of words.

Examples

Pericles Thucydides complains that he is unable to beat Pericles in wrestling, because when Pericles loses, is pinned, he instantly leaps up with a breathless account of how he was tricked, or of how he was fact the winner. Is there any point, then, in trying to beat Pericles on the mat? Have you wrestled Donald Trump?

Well governed states Well governed states—Athenian and Muslim instances are offered—do not need or welcome either orators or rhetoricians. What is is good enough and needs no puffery to be described. By contrast, especially In Rome, rhetoric most flourished when the affairs of state were out of order, anld the statement of plain truth was not in fashion.

Word extravagance Montaigne describes in detail a conversation recently had, with a new member of his household staff. The gentleman let himself go into extravagant detail, about the sequence, freshness, and appropriateness of his menu items until he had reached a climax of breathless admiration, which Montaigne viewed with an inner smirk.

Grammar Montaigne has earlier explained that he is no grammarian, that he began his language learning by rote absorption of Latin, and that to his day he speaks his own provincial French in the language of the streets. When he hears would be academicians—and they abound around him—speak of metonymy, metaphor, allegory, he wonders if they know what they are talking about. He doubts it.

René Descartes (1596-1650)

Discourse on Method (1637)

Historical change

With Rene Descartes, a French philosopher, mathematician, and moralist , we move away from the full-bloom of the Renaissance—with its vibrant reassertion of the Greek and Roman classics, its devotion to historical precedent, and its warm embrace of the new—and into a period in which math and cosmic sciences are beginning to redesign our sense of the world, in fact to adumbrate the world view predominant in many cultures of our world today.

The text before us.

It is worth thinking about the full title of the text before us: 'Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting one's Reason and of seeking Truth in the sciences.' The writer was particularly sensitive to the claims of skepticism, and for this reason he laid emphasis on the correct access to works of thought. It is hard not to view him as the harbinger of a new cultural world, and in the very broad sense, yes, Descartes seems to belong to a new era, as sharply distinct from Montaigne as Moliere (Descartes' contemporary) was from the author of the *Heptameron,* Marguerite de Navarre. Yet at the same time, Descartes was particularly picky about the conditions demanded by truth statements, and about the folly of giving its head to ignorance. Descartes was a stickler for style and clarity.

Gemeral structure and leading tenets of the *Discourse on Method*

The Discourse on Method addresses six issues, which Descartes characterizes:

Cognitive care

Various scientific issues, the first rule for tangling with which is *common sense*—an expression unapologetically employed for *intelligence* in Descartes' age. Descartes was extremely disappointed by his own education, which he thought deficient in rigor and insufficiently skeptical—that is too ready to accept the presented world without questioning it. (In this epistemological skepticism. Descartes reminds us constantly of Montaigne, with his 'que sais-je,?' 'what do I know,? and his own semi systematic querying of all alleged but untested truths. Descartes is a new version of the skeptic so deeply embedded in Montaigne.

Principal rules of proceeding in thought

Descartes carried out his seminal thinking inside a large heated room, in a building in Germany— where he had gone to study .(And also to observe the fall out of the religious wars, which were playing out as savagely in Germany as in France.) The truth came to Descartes in an angelic shower, three overwhelming dreams offering insights into the whole thought-scope ultimately available to him. With the expression of that purity of thought commitment, Descartes will come to realize that he must think for himself, construct one set of ideas in seamless sequence with another, until he has constructed homogeneous structures of thought, in the fashion that would be followed by a savvy architect. (There is to be no place in Descartes' thought for scattered design or digression, just as, we shall discover later, there is no room for erroneous measurement or ignorant guesswork.) His skepticism is a guard rail against wandering thoughts. Moral strategies for carrying out the methods of skepticism.

Descartes' radical skepticism, the thought project he holds out before himself, as his revolutionary experiment in philosophizing, was too experimental—too nearly involved a bracketing of all effectual thought in the real world—so that he needed simply to live it as an experiment. (Who can live the thought practices he is simultaneously employing as his contribution to thinking?) An experiment like skepticism is an experiment. Compromises with day by day existence were necessary, even for a skeptic, and from the range of necessities grew Descartes's practices for moral existence. It was necessary to accept the

practices and assumptions of the society in which you found yourself placed. You could not carry your skepticism beyond that point. You needed to conform. All manner of extremism was excluded by Descartes, as was \any questioning of the overall presence of God. Resolute adherence to these necessary conditions was a requirement of the skillfully managed life. One's own thoughts were the battlefield in which one should struggle to control and take responsibility; don't try vainly to control fortune, but control yourself. All these personal measures will guarantee freedom for the practices in pure thought which are the philosopher's unique engagement with the truth.

Radical skepticism turned on its head

Unwilling to accept radical skepticism—his philosophic adventure—without putting it to its own test, Descartes asks whether the practice of systematic doubt is itself to be accepted as firmly based. His first conclusion, in this self-reflexive inquiry, is that even to doubt assumes a person behind the doubting*, je pense, donc je suis.* ('I think therefore I am 'takes its place as the banner assertion of Descartes' work, and as a turning point in the development of modern philosophy.) The presence of the knowing I, even in the process of doubting the validity of his own knowledge, is the ultimate discovery of the limits of doubt. Not only the self, but the reason by which self-assesses the knowable, is also beyond doubt; it is a sine qua non of the doubting process. The introduction of reason, as an irremovable element in thedoubting process, introduces the presence of God, as a third unquestionable factor supporting the doubting process—God is not to be doubted as the foundation supporting doubt; a point shored up, by Descartes, with recourse to the three classical proofs of the existence of God. The onto- Logical proof of the existence of God—St. Anselm's argument for the power greater than all—serves as the capstone for the proofs existence gives of the most indubitable form of construction in the mind.

Cosmology

Physics is the study of the way God assembled the parts of the universe to follow a coherent pattern of laws.(By retracing the origins of these laws, we can gradually, and systematically, think our way back into the making mind God is. In carrying out that return in thought we put ourselves inside God's plan, the order which regulates the pace, function, and durability of the bodily organs—particularly with reference to the circulation of the blood and the regularities which make the heart a central support of our mortal existence. It is to be remembered that in thinking science Descartes is observing phenomena, doing science as we intend it today, but at the same time maintaining the integrity of his thought experiment, the absolute skepticism which compels his entire cognitive construction to stand the test of being denied or radically questioned.

Truth and the senses

Descartes is a scrupulous thinker, trusting God and his world, including the discoveries of the senses. (The mediaeval axiom, *nothing is in the mind which was not previously in the senses,* formulates Descartes' conviction that God's created world, as it lays itself out before us, is trustworthy. (Trustworthy, though demanding a skeptical access.) At the same time, as we note from the entire thrust of the *Discourse,* a skeptical lens must test convictions. Idea and sense may align with one another, but only a kind of suspension of disbelief will give the go ahead to the truth of nature. In the interests of guaranteeing the trustworthiness of that truth, doubt must have provided its dour vetting. It will be evident, from this widely spread view, taken from more than one location in the *Discourse*, that truth not only expresses itself in the material of the senses, in what we learn from our eyes, ears, touch, but that the truth belongs to God's revelation and not to the creative mind in man.

The misleading charms of imagination

As a mathematician, who will join algebra to geometry in his invention of what we call analytic geometry, Descartes is above all interested in the truth, and in God as the creator of it. Imagination, which we will find a dominant presence in humane thinking later in the European centuries would continue—say in Romanticism-- to consummate the critical thought of the Enlightenment, and to provide a key driver of modern philosophic and aesthetic thought. (The highest priority for transformative imagination would be

the poetry of Wordsworth, who transformed nature into a presence that 'hath ample power to chasten and subdue.') In the seventeenth century thinking of Descartes, however, and in contemporaries like Locke and Hobbes, imagination would continue to be viewed as little other than 'decaying sense.') In Descartes' thinking, imagination is deviant thought, in no way furthering the search for truth or inspiration.

Opening the seventeenth century

The *Discourse on Method* cannot fail to remind us of Montaigne, who is as concerned as Descartes with methods of correct thinking, moves for the assurance of clarity, and the issue of the importance of human creativity as a marker of change. Montaigne writes about imagination, and does so warily, referring us back to the Roman concept of *imago* (visual image) and *imaginatio*, which is not much more transformative than we might understand by 'depiction.' Yet as we track Montaigne's thought we see how deftly he marks the transitions of his observations—for example in the wry and often piquant descriptions of indigenous people's customs, or in the adroitness with which he characterizes the irrationalities of sorrow or the dangers of counterfeiting. Fanciful Montaigne is not, but extremely alert to the potential of the world to almost be a fanciful replica of itself. One might say that the imaginations of More, Erasmus, or Campanella wear the same clothes as those of Montaigne, opening spaces through which the world can be seen transformed, into a new light of itself—though into a display of God's truth, as we find it shining in Descartes.

Opening the seventeenth century

The *Discourse on Method* cannot fail to remind us of Montaigne, who is as concerned as Descartes with methods of correct thinking, moves for the assurance of clarity, and the issue of the importance of human creativity as a marker of change. Montaigne writes about imagination, and does so warily, referring us back to the Roman concept of *imago* (visual image) and *imaginatio*, which is not much more transformative than we might understand by 'depiction.' Yet as we track Montaigne's thought we see how deftly he marks the transitions of his observations—for example in the wry and often piquant descriptions of indigenous people's customs, or in the adroitness with which he characterizes the irrationalities of sorrow or the dangers of counterfeiting. Fanciful Montaigne is not, but extremely alert to the potential of the world to almost be a fanciful replica of itself. One might say that the imaginations of More, Erasmus, or Campanella wear the same clothes as those of Montaigne, opening spaces through which the world can be seen transformed, into a new light of itself—though into a display of God's truth, as we find it shining in Descartes

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Descartes attributes ultimate importance to truth and clarity of thought which discerns truth. 'Thought' is what he calls the search for truth, and in pursuing 'thought' he makes a crucial discovery for his and for western 'philosophy.' He formulates his discovery in this way, 'je pense donc je suis, ' 'I think therefore I am,' which founds existence on thought. The ontological centrality given to thought, here, guarantees to being an intelligible character. The implications of Descartes' point would fly in the face of a materialism, like that of Descartes' contemporary, Thomas Hobbes, which would find matter the fundamental stuff of the universe. What is your own position, in this radical ontological issue?

It is tempting to dwell on Descartes' concern with clear and distinct ideas. Greek and Latin, as inflected and on the whole self-consistent languages, with a strong pull on the sense of shaping and organization, were the stuff of the educational growth of the majority of Renaissance creators; and thus, of course, of the mind and thought sets of the majority of Western European writers far into the nineteenth century. (What do you think was the turning point that broke the continuity of the power of the classical languages in education?) How did the classical tradition entrench itself in the western European systems of education, not to mention into literary work materials?

Like Montaigne, Descartes proclaims himself a skeptic. However there is a sharp difference between the skepticism of the two men. Montaigne recognizes an inherent occludedness to problems presented by daily life. The moral, social, and religious dilemmas, which confront the individual as he examines himself,

are not inherently resolvable. Montaigne behaves as though he is inherently unable to penetrate all these perplexities. Descartes, however, begins by promoting the supreme importance of 'idées claires et distinctes,' 'clear and distinct ideas.' He believes intensely in the order of thoughts, and in drawing conclusions strictly from their orderliness, and the pathway by which they can be tracked back to God, the author of the chain of *intelligibilia*. From the orderly processes of investigation, which this world picture assumes, one can indeed uncover and learn to understand the truth, though to do so is only as possible as the individual's capacity for clarity of thought. Do you feel that Descartes' is what we would today call the basis of scientific thinking? If so, what kind of thinking would you call Montaigne's?

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

Pensées (Thoughts) 1669

Background

Blaise Pascal was the privileged son of a tax collector from the City of Rouen. Already as a young teen ager he had shown prodigious gifts for mathematics, and by the age of twenty nine had distinguished himself for his experiments in probability theory, projective geometry, and by the creating one of the first European calculating machines. Still at an early age, and not much later, he was, like Descartes, both a genius with numbers and figures, and a keen student of the moral and epistemological life. In both men the blend of cognitive ethic —'*je pense donc je suis*,' *'man is but a reed but he is a thinking reed'*—with elevated and practical speculation on the properties of liquids and solids, the pressure of the air and the measurement of it, assures their lasting presence in the new era forming around them.

God as center: Descartes

God figured centrally in the thinking of both Pascal and Descartes, and belonged to the inner structure of their thought. For Descartes the creator was the source and actuality of those meaningful miracles—the extensions and truths of geometry and algebra—which gave infinitely growing intelligibility to the phenomena of nature. (The truth was the immanence of God in nature, and for Descartes represented the standard for ethical value and human development.) God as testimony: Pascal Pascal was immersed in religious experiences—existential and intense—which followed on his complex interactions with the religious community at Port Royal, the so called Jansenists, and what would then be his life-lasting testimony to the place of the Deity in his own life. On scraps of paper sewn into his clothing, and kept with him until the opening of the lining of this cloaks, after his death, Pascal gave scribbled testimony to his faith in 'Fire. The god of Abraham, god of Isaac…,' and concluded on the same scraps by addressing *Psalm 119:16* and assuring Its author that 'I will not forget thy Word.' This evidentiary fragment, *The Memorial*, is noteworthy as a ticket of fidelity, but the finest writing of Pascal would be just ahead in his *Provincial Letters* (1656-7) in which he not only clarified his unique theology but slashed out at the orthodoxies of the Church, which he saw as an obstacle to belief. In 1669, after Pascal's death, appeared his religious masterpiece, *Les Pensées*, which the author intended as a comprehensive perspective of the nature of Christianity. As it turned out, this series of texts was far less systematic than intended, but in the end addresses itself to the major issues of Christian theology, as felt, seen, and understood. It will be noted, from the start, that Pascal's style here is original, interspersing one sentence assertions, often highly allusive and poetic, with longer paragraphs of discursive (but always intimate) thought. The ultimate effect is a widening of language perspective, and a poetic release of inspiration from what might seem passively received statements of tradition.

*The Pensees . Thoughts on Mind and on Styl*e

This first stion é the *Pensées* stuns us with its blend of personality analyses: distinctions between the 'esprit de géometrie' (the spirit of geometry) and the 'esprit de finesse' (the spirit of finesse). Some minds, Pascal explains, grasp the principles of mathematics instinctively, and thrive on the knowledge and use of those principles. For them the rules governing the development of understanding are immediately apparent. When those same people turn to the principles governing the thought development within a literary text or a painting they are baffled, for they find no starting points or dividing lines. They are baffled

by the profusion of intricately overlapping sets of principles. They see a seamless whole of propositions that are not specifically interrelated. Fixed though we are as persons of individual character, we yet most admire those among us who are ‘universal persons,’ of whom we can say, not that he is a mathematician or a writer, but that he is a ‘gentleman.’ He isa skilled human being.

The misery of man without God.

Pascal exceeds himself in portraying the minuteness of the human being In the vastness of the cosmos. ‘For in fact what is man in nature? A nothing In comparison with the infinite, an all in comparison with the nothing; a mean Between nothing and everything.’ The misery of man without God lies In our Inability to fathom the depths of our being here—why we are here and where we are going? It is exactly at this point, says Pascal, that Descartes, who insists on knowing god, is most deeply frustrated, for the conditions of knowledge are here impossibly skewed against the knower, while the existential searcher, like Pascal who lives for the encounter with God, is at least able to bring home such testimonies as the lived awareness of his limitations. Many perspectives oflater French existentialism—in Simone Weil, in Gabriel Marcel, in Jean-Paul Sartre—are anticipated here.

Self-love, need

Miserable man, without God, hides away in a corner, where he can indulge the comfort of self-love. ‘But what will man do? He cannot prevent this object that he loves from being full of faults and wants. Here begins the series of dissatisfactions inherent to mankind. Stability is nowhere, in time as we live it.’ ‘He no longer loves the person whom he loved ten years ago. I quite believe it. She is no longer the same, nor is he. He was young, but so was she; she is quite different. He would perhaps love heryet, if she was as she was then.’

Diversion and Idleness

It is part of the human tragedy that men cannot ‘stay quietly in their own chamber.’ The ‘natural poverty of our feeble and mortal condition’ keeps us hopping ceaselessly from one activity to another…they do not know that it is the chase and not the quarry that they seek.’ ‘Faced with the futility of this needy condition, man turns to diversions which preoccupy him in his low times..’ Is there a solution to this inherent weakness? Cannot God help? ‘How hollow and full of ribaldry is the heart of man!’ ‘Diversion amuses us, and leads us unconsciously to death.’ We are always preparing to be happy, and thus it is inevitable that we should never be so…’

Of the necessity of the wager

With the multiple issues Pascal lodges under the above caption lie many harsh observations on the life that has befallen us, and it is in this region of thoughts that Pascal redirects his attack against Montaigne, whose brilliant but gentle skepticism seems to Pascal too mildly accepting of the essential brokenness of the human condition. The renowned wager, on which Pascal relies In the development of his perspective, inserts itself precisely where hope is required in the face of a hapless attitude like that of Montaigne, who has passed the stage of terror with which the human condition should by now have surrounded him. That God exists, is present to our very being, is the key wager we need to make, in confronting the actual desperation of our condition. To make that wager is to see your entire existence and its setting in a new light, and to open onto your hopelessness radiant paths of reinterpretation.

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T S Eliot’s introduction to Pascal’s *Pensées*

The British-American poet, publisher, and the author of *The Wasteland* (1922), wrote (published 1958) an Introduction to Pascal’s *Pensées*, from which we can draw instructive lessons about the directions and genius of Pascal’s thought in *The Pensées.* Eliot’s epic poem dealt in fact with the desolate social and spiritual landscape of post WW 1 Europe, which devastated landscapes and persons. It was Eliot’s

obvious belief that a return to religious sensibility was the only path back into cultural survival. He did not mean, by this belief, to exclude from the healing path to recovery such skepticism as that of a Montaigne, who was no narrow skeptic, but a universally minded one, but he was eager to show the special existential relevance of a thinker like Pascal, who gave his listeners the very struggle of the way back to sanity, in a time of widespread uncertainty and pain. Pascal, for Eliot, had the 'mind to conceive, and the sensibility to feel, the disorder, the futility, the meaninglessness, the mystery of life and suffering; the mind of those who can only find peace through a satisfaction of the whole being.' The depth lag separating Montaigne from Pascal, in this discussion initiated by Eliot, bears on the entire motion of early seventeenth century French thought, to go beyond the Renaissance life-fascination of a figure like Montaigne. Both Descartes and the Pascal who carried reflection onto a newly passionate level, gave all they could to the reformulation of the human condition, and Pascal in particular went to the center of history's furthering, showing us new operational pathways into formulating ,and ideally solving, the unremitting dilemmas of 'being here as a person.'

God as testimony: Pascal

Pascal was immersed in religious experiences—existential and intense—which followed on his complex interactions with the religious community at Port Royal, the so called Jansenists, and what would then be his life-lasting testimony to the place of the Deity in his own life. On scraps of paper sewn into his clothing, and kept with him until the opening of the lining of this cloaks, after his death, Pascal gave scribbled testimony to his faith in 'Fire. The god of Abraham, god of Isaac…,' and concluded on the same scraps by addressing *Psalm 119:16* and assuring Its author that 'I will not forget thy Word.' This evidentiary fragment, *The Memorial*, Is noteworthy as a ticket of fidelity, but the finest writing of Pascal would be just ahead in his *Provincial Letters* (1656-7) in which he not only clarified his unique theology but slashed out at the orthodoxies of the Church, which he saw as an obstacle to belief. In 1669, after Pascal's death, appeared his religious masterpiece, *Les Pensées*, which the author intended as a comprehensive perspective of the nature of Christianity. As it turned out, this series of texts was far less systematic than intended, but in the end addresses itself to the major issues of Christian theology, as felt, seen, and understood. It will be noted, from the start, that Pascal's style here is original, interspersing one sentence assertions, often highly allusive and poetic, with longer paragraphs of discursive (but always intimate) thought. The ultimate effect is a widening of language perspective, and a poetic release of inspiration from what might seem passively received statements of tradition.

The Pensees: Thoughts on Mind and on Style

This first section of the *Pensées* stuns us with its blend of personality analyses: distinctions between the 'esprit de géométrie' (the spirit of geometry) and the 'esprit de finesse' (the spirit of finesse). Some minds, Pascal explains, grasp the principles of mathematics instinctively, and thrive on the knowledge and use of those principles. For them the rules governing the development of understanding are immediately apparent. When those same people turn to the principles governing the thought development within a literary text or a painting they are baffled, for they find no starting points or dividing lines. They are baffled by the profusion of intricately overlapping sets of principles. They see a seamless whole of propositions that are not specifically interrelated. Fixed though we are as persons of individual character, we yet most admire those among us who are 'universal persons,' of whom we can say, not that he is a\mathematician or a writer, but that he is a 'gentleman.' He is a skilled human being.

The misery of man without God.

Pascal exceeds himself in portraying the minuteness of the human being In the vastness of the cosmos. 'For in fact what is man in nature? A nothing In comparison with the infinite, an all in comparison with the nothing; a mean Between nothing and everything.' The misery of man without God lies In our Inability to fathom the depths of our being here—why we are here and where we are going? It is exactly at this point, says Pascal, that Descartes, who insists on knowing god, is most deeply frustrated, for the conditions of knowledge are here impossibly skewed against the knower, while the existential searcher, like Pascal who lives for the encounter with God, is at least able to bring home such testimonies as the lived

awareness of his limitations. Many perspectives of later French existentialism—in Simone Weil, in Gabriel Marcel, in Jean-Paul Sartre—are anticipated here.

Self-love, need

Miserable man, without God, hides away in a corner, where he can indulge the comfort of self-love. 'But what will man do? He cannot prevent this object that he loves from being full of faults and wants. Here begins the series of dissatisfactions inherent to mankind. Stability is nowhere, in time as we live it.' 'He no longer loves the person whom he loved ten years ago. I quite believe it. She is no longer the same, nor is he. He was young, but so was she; she is quite different. He would perhaps love her yet, if she was as she was then.'

Diversion and Idleness

It is part of the human tragedy that men cannot 'stay quietly in their own chamber.' The 'natural poverty of our feeble and mortal condition' keeps us hopping ceaselessly from one activity to another…they do not know that it is the chase and not the quarry that they seek.' 'Faced with the futility of this needy condition, man turns to diversions which preoccupy him in his low times..' Is there a solution to this inherent weakness? Cannot God help? 'How hollow and full of ribaldry is the heart of man!' 'Diversion amuses us, and leads us unconsciously to death.' We are always preparing to be happy, and thus it is inevitable that we should never be so…'

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Study guide

While Christianity has served as a background theme throughout our earlier Renaissance investigations—of course there was no anti-Christian working in the thought climate of the early modern, no opponent harsher than the inevitable sceptics, with their unquenchable doubts about the origins of human life. Pascal, in fact, will be the first professed Christian, in our anthology, to make worship of god central to the understanding of man. Or should we pause there, and look more carefully into the thinking of Erasmus, a priest like several of our studies, whose view of fallen man, in *In Praise of Folly*, clearly aligns with The Christian view of 'fallen man,' or with the entire Miltonic vision of the 'fruit of the tree of good and evilc, with which we have sickened ourselves.

Pascal avoids routine tributes to the Christian way, and in a truly existential fashion concentrates of the direct presence of the Christian in the texture of daily life. Philosophy has long been satisfied with stressing the existential qualities of this author, his emphasis on Christianity as part of a iived historical tradition. In marking this emphasis Pascal seems to have come onto many fresh ways of talking about God as a requirement for men, without which man is 'miserable.' In the course of marking this emphasis he learned how to describe his Christian choice as a bet, how to talk about the 'esprit de finesse' required for any mature reading of Christian scriptures, or the precious image of man as infinitely small in contrast to his creator. Does Pascal's Christianity seem to you to have broken through into the modern world? How does Pascal's Christianity compare with that of Descartes, equally a 'believer?'

What—to take stock of the position of our adventure into the new world—would you say about the growing modernity of Pascal and Descartes, as believers? In what ways would they speak to contemporary Christians? Does either of these early modern thinkers, by the way, say much about Jesus Christ? If not, what is the central point of emphasis in their theological thought?

GERMANY

Angelus Silesius (1624-1677)

The Cherubic Pilgrim; The Soul's Spiritual Delight (1657)

Setting

The Christian read on man's situation expresses itself volubly in the seventeenth century, to which we are indebted both for the most daring moves in math and physical science—Descartes, Leibniz, Newton—and the most penetrating literature of the Christian experience. The literature in question could hardly be more dramatically developed than in the very period of the birth of Angelus Silesius.

The Christian tradition

Within the decade surrounding the year of Silesius' birth, 1524, other powerrful writers of the Christian experience were born: Blaise Pascal, 1623; John Bunyan, 1628; John Milton 1631. Were one to reach to examples from music and visual art, and to let the temporal canvas fly more broadly, it would soon appear that we find ourselves at a high point in the history of Christianity. Can we embed this observation in our broader issue of 'the coming into being of the modern mind?' Are the early modern moves, toward the self-awarenesses ripening in our own time, still broadly Christian? What has the Christian religion to do with the making of the modern western consciousness?

Christianity and the making of the modern mind

The four diverse authors referenced above-- John Milton, Blaise Pascal, John Bunyan, Angelus Silesius—will illustrate the range of ways the Christian perspective can enhance a deepening awareness of the self. For Bunyan the Christian perspective, in *Pilgrim's Progres*s, is one of humility, hope, and tenacity, mind-conditions in which the eternal is parceled out in minima of patience and hope. (Not for a moment to imply that such strengths of the Christian perspective were not rich in the pre-modern social-cultural world, but only that a valence of spiritual availability was being lived into the repertoire of 'modern mind,' which we are going to allow ourselves to say, throughout these entries, continues to deepen the much valued comprehension of human finititude and potential.

Layers of inheritance: John Milton and John Bunyan

John Milton, born seven years after Bunyan, and serving his Lord on a level aor more lofty and influential than Bunyan's, left for posterity a deeply layered imagination of man's evil and fallen condition, and of the diabolic inventions of the evil, in their readiness to turn the advance of humanity into various shades of the calamity of being human. The seventeenth century reader of Milton and Bunyan—who was in fact the more the more popular of the two, and arguably the more formative for the human advance, the 'modern man' up for tackling his existential condition.

The existential of Christianity: Pascal

Pascal's *Pensées* will have spoken most directly to the arts-creators with a new 'modern Western mind, for whom the sense of the 'poverty of man without god' becomes an illuminated perspective, ripening constantly as the daring and brevity of modern cultural life declares itself. The modern literary mind—think Gabriel Marcel, Graham Greene, T.S. Eliot, Simone Weil, Francois Mauriac—is unthinkable without the world views of any number of innovative traditionalists working in the Catholic vein, while the man on the

street is enabled, ty the stable if controversial advance of Catholic thinking, to shed light on the darkest issues of living in our time.

The presence of Angelus Silesius in religious conflict

A different and unique imprint on the modern mind can be tracked to the kind of Christian thinking we owe to Angelus Silesius, the Catholic priest who was ordained in l652 and known by his writings throughout the literate Christian world in the centuries after his death. To a great extent, and in a fashion quite different from Milton, Bunyan or even Pascal, Silesius brought fresh understandings of Christianity to the centuries unfolding from the Christian stock.

Silesius and Protestanism

Silesius differed greatly, after all, from these other Christian writers: he converted to Catholicism in 1653 opening to himself the way to a priestly career; he entered the Franciscan order; he took Holy Orders in 1661. These decisive steps satisfied a powerful dislike of Protestantism—we were in the midst the of those religious wars which were rocking sixteenth century France, and which would so savagely impact the mind-world of Montaigne--and Silesius was to pass the bulk of his remaining life in priestly duties, which of course included the considerable weight of his poetry, as well as well as of a great number of tracts, many of which were crafted as anti-Protestant diatribes.

The fresh perspective of Silesius

Silesius remains best known for two works of jubilant faith: *The Cherubic Pilgrim*, 1657, for which Silesius is best known as a poet; 'The Soul's Spiritual Delight,' a collection of more than 200 religious songs, many of which have entered into both Catholic and Protestant hymn books.

The Cherubic Pilgrim

The Cherubic Pilgrim is a collection of more than 1600 rhymed couplets dealing with morals and manners, but particularly with the presence of God within human experience; it is this latter relationship, with all its intricacies in the midst of simplicity, that has rendered Silesius congenial and distinctive to elements of the western mind—and to more than a few opponents of what has been called (and decried) by the name of quietism. The insights flowering in Silesius' couplets and epigrams were by some taken to dissolve the soul of the worshipper in the God he worshipped, reducing the individual to a dysfunctional passivity, while for others—examples would be the Quaker movement in religion, or branches of that Buddhism which left its mark on the greener America of the twentieth century. It has been the view of the Catholic Church—which approved the publishing of Silesius' work—that his writings were orthodox in doctrine, and fully acceptable.

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An optic onto five couplets of Silesius

1.

Even before I was Me, I was God in god.
And I can be once again, as soon as I am dead to myself

Orthodox opinion can raise the question: Is 'dead to myself an acceptable way to describe the 'norm state' from which we can become 'God in god'? Is death the path to being God in god? What were we *before* we were god.' The charge levelled against the Pietists and Quietists, often in the seventeenth century, was that these perspectives minimized the vitality of the process of knowing god, and appeared to advance passivity as the fruitful state for the knowing of God.

2.

The World doth not imprison Thee.
Thou art thyself the World, and there, within Thyself,
Thou hold'st thyself, thy self-imprisoned Prisoner.

Silesius' persistent concern is with the nature of the self, which in the previous couplet had in itself the potential to become God, by dying to itself. In the present couplet the self has the potential to be the world, though it has the potential to imprison itself within that world. For the orthodox Christian theologian, of the seventeenth century, the self is a subtly dangerous bridge into identification with the world. Are we looking ahead to William Blake, who, a century later, grows ecstatic over envisioning the 'world in a wildflower?'

3.

A loaf holds many grains of corn
And many myriad drops the sea.
So is God's oneness multitude,
And that great multitude are we.

Do God and we flow into one another? (What else can we read, from the last two lines?) Are we not still faced with the problem of quietude, and its strategy of reducing God to man, or man to God? And does that absorptive thought-process not blur out of existence the role of the believing human?

4.

The rose is without 'why,' it blooms simply because it
Blooms It pays no attention to itself, nor does it ask whether anyone sees it.

A new register, built over the theme of the interchangeability of God and man. The universe, with its spectrum of diverse beings and attitudes. Is a given. It simply takes place. From this standpoint God and man and the rest of the creation do not exactly intra –exist; the creator and man are co- present, but form a stable ensemble.

5.

True prayer requires no word, no chant,
No gesture, no sound.
It is communion, calm and still,
With our own godly ground.

This account of 'true prayer' is the point at which opponents of Silesius' vision step back. They 'have their doubts.' Is any room lefi in this universe, for 'true difference'? If everything is stable, as is, assumed by everything else, if God and what-is absolutely imply one another, what need or use is there for a Church which becomes the center stage of a dramatic narrative, there to represent the meaning of the universe?

The contribution of Angelus Silesius

Angelus Silesius provides one important access point, for the spiritual theme in modern western mind. That mind was obliged to understand itself newly, with the passing of the modern centuries, until, in our own time, seriously spiritual but prone to questioning the dominant Christian narrative, we turn with vivid interest to the mind-remaking of the universe, that turn in consciousness by which we gain an indispensable enrichment of our stance in reality. Humble but wholistic, God-preoccupied but sensitive to the human immensity, Angelus Silesius sustains an honorable line of silence at the heart of the religious experience. What better substantiates the perspective of Angelus Silesius than the thinking of Susan Cain, for many years now a New York Times Best Seller, with her book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talkin*g (2012).

Study guide

Silesius passed through a formative stage that deepened his knowledge of Quietism, one meditative Christian theology that emerged during the religious wars of the early Renaissance. Unlike Descartes and Pascal, for instance, Silesius turns to silence and meditation, for the sources of his belief. (Descartes turns to the structure of the created world, while Pascal turns to a crushing analysis of the weakness of man without God.) Historically speaking, Silesius aligns with those German mystics of the Middle Ages, like Tauler qnd Eckehart, who shared his belief in the depths of interiority. But he also aligns with the modernist Protestant trend, to break with the complex rituals of the Catholic Church. That trend, powerfully driven into our time by Martin Luther and his followers, is a strong instance of the power of change to modernize theology as well as science. Are you friendly to the movement furthered by Silesius? Does it seem to you to be on an enriching course into its future?

Does Silesius contribute to the enrichment of theology, understood as a growing edifice of understandings about our creator? Or would you say that Silesius is an insightful poet, who strikes sharp sparks of brilliant awareness, then passes on? Is the Modernity we track, here, all about the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and self-awareness? (If so, we will have to welcome Silesius as a bringer of insight or awareness, rather than a bringer of 'knowledge.' Are we not, here in Silesius, dealing with a technique of thought, like Buddhiist mindfulness techniques, rather than a system devoted to 'advancing knowledge'? And would a system for meditating effectively te a workable step into the future for man? We face here the problem of what the 'modern mind' means. Is it technical know=-how? If so,we will find that the three centuries following 1600, the Renaissance and more, are hardly centuries of practical discovery in western Europe. They are centuries of great development in math, astronomy, and physics, but not in the kinds of practical advance—in transportation, communication, road construction, or industrial organization—which become prominent in the early nineteenth century. The meditative tradition opens spiritual alternatives to the early modern growth spurt, but for larger cultural build ups offers little more than Mahayana Buddishm did to its culture; a lot and little.

ITALY

Marsilio Ficino. (1433-1499)

A Book on Life Divided into Three Books (1489)

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) is arguably an archetype of the Renaissance mind, announcing in itself the outset of new perspectives onto 'modern man' The late fifteenth century marks a turn toward modernity in western man's self-discovery, on the turbulent road toward self-awareness, and toward those extremes of self-consciousness which pervade the culture of our present moment. In the following pages we will look briefly Into one text by Ficino, his *Book on Life Divided into Three Books* .

Ficino's *Book on Life* opens with a preface by Ficino himself, offered passionately to the reader. The author offers love to any who come through this verbal portal into the presence of his care and good will, and he strongly advises any who bear hatred to stay away from his home. A more attentive welcome could hardly be imagined, and it can hardly surprise the courted reader to learn that the welcoming text before him is intended as a guide to heavenly ascent and to the governing ground rules of the created world. Nine governing principles are gathered for the use of the pilgrim.

The nine guides: the first set

Nine guides will lead us toward our highest destination—the high temple of the nine Muses; the home of beauty and its splendor. (In the spirit of Neoplatonism, which emerges from the center of Ficino's thought, the aesthetic and the godly will invariably be twinned; the moral will be a resultant of beauty and divinity joined.) The first three of the nine guides, with which we journey upward on Ficino's wings, 'lead us in the heavens, the next three in the soul, the last three on earth.'

Gods as guides

Mercury, Venus, and Phoebus Apollo conduct the individual through the supernal realms, serving in order as guide to the realm of the Muses. (A guide book of the heavens, in other words, is composed by the welcoming author who is present to lead his reader to beauty and bliss.) Inside this guide book, the pilgrim soul is housed and oriented. This housing is 'religious' in the sense that the pilgrim is being guided by 'gods,' the culture gods of ancient Greece, to be sure, but metaphysical gods, in the sense that the wandering soul is organizing itself within 'being,' as it follows its proffered guidance, Christianity, transformed and Christo-centric, is a constant theme within guidance.

The nine guides: the second set

The second set of guides directs mankind in the journey he takes through the soul. (The first guide was to the realm of the heavens, the second to that of the soul.) Elements of this guide are *powerful memory, unshakable will power*, *keen intelligence.* One begins to see the direction of this entire tableau of orientations for the pilgrim on earth. First, a guide through the heavens, then a guide through the soul, then a guide to the body.

The nine guides: the third set

The first guidance instructions played out in the heavens, the second in the soul, the third on earth, where one's basic living conditions are given. Essential, towards a fruitful life on earth, are a *wise father*, a *learned teacher*, and an *excellent physician.* Ficino himself offers to serve as that physician—his role has been paternal, from the preface on—and takes as his supremely needy pilgrim the 'literary scholar,' the man central to the culture. (In an age of the printing press, the splendor of painting and architecture, the literary scholar acquires a key importance.

The mindset of Ficino

The universe, for this Renaissance Neoplatonist, is not exactly the universe of Plato, the fourth century B.C. ancient Greek student of Aristotle. Although Ficino is best known for his complete translation of Plato, into Latin, Ficino works Platonic 'themes' –the world-guiding centrality of love, the healing properties of valid thought; the unity of morality with erudition—but not precisely as a disciple of Plato, but rather as a fellow striver toward *the origins*, in company with Plato. Like Pico de la Mirandola, his contemporary, Ficino views the whole creation as in a state of Increasing consciousness, intelligibility, and consequently health and bliss. It is the religious-philosophical-healing role of the individual to support this cosmic growth.

Movements on high

Mercury, Venus, and Phoebus Apollo conduct the individual through the supernal realms, serving as guide to the realm of the Muses. (A guide book of the heavens, in other words, is composed by the welcoming author who is present to lead his reader to bliss.) Inside this guide book, the pilgrim soul is housed and oriented. This housing is 'religious' in the sense that one is being guided by 'gods,' the culture gods of ancient Greece, but metaphysical, in the sense that the wandering soul is organizing itself within 'being,' as it follows its own guidance.

The mind of the literary scholar

Ficino is concerned with three different journeys of the individual consciousness, en route toward the supernal pastures of beauty and grace. For Ficino the physician, the intricate implications of spirit, brain, heart, and kidneys makes for a elegant imbrication, which is the very definition of the third or bodily condition of the human journey; the literary scholar is deeply concerned with his kidneys, or other organs as the presence they make of his being-here is an intricate element of his life journey. There is no separation, in Ficino's map of the body world, between the journey in materiality and the quest search for the highest work of mind. The blood is the fluid constant, in which the functioning of the organs leads the brain upward, and qualifies it for the highest lucubrations of arrival.

The perfusion of body with mind

To be a physician was natural to Ficino—as it was for another voluminous Renaissance writer—Rabelais. The body was in mediaeval medical thinking an intimate and articulate element in the life journey of the soul. For Ficino the physician, learned men's greatest plague was black bile, the source of melancholy and depression; the first responsibility of the physician was to disperse bodily phlegm which generate black bile and depression. Care for the inter functioning of body parts was the essential launchpad for Ficino, toward higher bodily health, toward brilliance of spirit, and toward a healthy old age.

The perfusion of Ficino's Neoplatonism, into his culture

Like his own cosmic thinking, Ficino's life famously entered the blood flow of his own culture. In the sophisticated milieu of later fifteenth century Florence, Ficino found that passion for the arts, that love of subtle conversation, and a much needed support system, to aid him in his studies of language and literature. Though not of a wealthy family—Ficino's dad was a capable country physician, steeped not only in the 'modern' versions of healing, but in imaginative folk healing traditions. Ficino was favored by his father's medical services to one of Europe's wealthiest merchants, the Florentine Cosimo dei Medici. It was thanks to this acquaintance, and to this man's generous property grant to Ficino, that the young man was enabled to set up and establish one or more 'clubhouses,' in Florence, where he could host a smallish circle of coequal intellectuals. It was this setting, locally called by the name of the 'Platonic Academy,' that enabled spiritual discourse among the intellectually daring of Florence, young me like Pico de la Mirandola, who speculated on morals and their cosmic foundations, and who helped Florence with its reputation for a growing world center of speculation and culture.

The place of philosophy in the work of Ficino

After the often rigid, and logically sequential, thinking of the Middle Ages, Aristotelian and then Thomistic, the openness of Neoplatonism offered a welcome site for looser and more imaginative speculation. While Christian doctrine was still firmly entrenched, it presented itself under diverse, sectarian guises—sources of turmoil and war throughout the seventeenth century—and among the elite, iike Ficino and Pico, the Christian emphasis on grace and compassion bled over into a sympathetic world picture—note the intelligibility of the Greek gods—in which aesthetic-ethical-moral optics joined in sustaining the powerful notion of sources and origins.

The visionary in Ficino the philosopher

Ficino is less a philosopher than a fellow visionary, who joins cohorts of self-investigative thinkers, in western Europe, to open up mind to broad new horizons of world-interpretation. To the critical philosophers of the eighteenth century, Ficino was to seem part of a loose movement developing within culture, rather than as a rigorous philosopher, as in fact the Plato he translated was both rigorous and robust. Ficino's own answer was of course built into his whole world vision; that Plato, like Ficino himself, was simply a stage by which the universe comes to consciousness of itself.

Pico de la Mirandola (1463-1494)

Oration on the Dignity of Man (1496)

Historical Setting

With our entries on Pico de la Mirandola (1463-1494). we watch the Middle Ages begin to peel off behind us. We have had our experience of Ficino's 'neoplatonic' embrace of the intelligible world, and of the guides implanted in that world, to lead us to deeper awareness of our divinity, our ensouledness, and then of our bodily existence. We feel we stand in a fresh air of time, and peer around us to find a changing cultural landscape, in which man appears with a fresh self-sufficiency, no longer the sin burdened figure of the Middle Ages, for whom it was of foremost importance to clear himself from the sins of Adam, and to reach out a paternal grace giving at the end of life.

Pico's youth

Pico de la Mirandola, on the threshold of a new century, carries with him strange and copious baggage from the century that dies with him.. He is an aristocrat of the old world, born in the Aemilia Romagna region in the north of Tuscany. Well connected throughout intellectual circles in Italy he was on the move by the age of fourteen, travelling to one aristocratic home after another, then, in 1485, he made his first trip to Paris, a city then renowned—in matters of philosophy—for being a hotbed of Aristotelian Scholasticism. In the course of this travelling, and of brushing against the many schools of philosophy competing with one another in Italy, the still young Pico found himself drawn to the goal of creating a universal system of world philosophies, in which he would be able to bring together, in a single truth statement, the great philosophies (and religious-philosophical systems).

Global schemes

It was from such a characteristically ambitious drive that Pico decided to call together a Vatican conference at which 900 globally valued theses would be brought together, for spiritual ratification at the highest level, and with the most advanced attention to the variety of world religions—Egyptian, Hebrew, Chaldaean, Greek, Roman—and their philosophical values. What Pico called his *Conclusions*, the sum of the 900 theses, was printed at Rome in 1486, and shortly after he completed a work, an *Oration on the Dignity of Man,* intended to clarify and *promote* the theses he had already written. This work, originally intended as explanatory material, an exordium surrounding the 900 theses which Pico had gleaned from his global reading in culture and linguistics, was left as an addendum to the theses, while in the end Pope Innocent found all of Pico's theses heretical, cancelled Pico's plans for a global conference in Rome, and in essence, from Pico's blaze of plans, left the reading world the single text, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, which is the chief bearer of Pico's genius to the 'modern world.'

Earlier Writings

Prior to the publication of his *Oration,* Pico had written fitfully, and precociously, on magic and Kabbalism, which system attracted him already as a teen ager, drawn as he was to the intersecting mysteries of language and number, to Chaldaean and Hebrew religious traditions and to Christianity as a profoundly coded cult, not to mention the noosphere of Hellenic gods, who were bearers of syncretic meanings of the most concealed power. *The Oration* bears many traces of a wide search for hidden meanings, as a redemptive pathway of man's prospects.

The core of the Oration

While the esotericism of the *Oration* opened global perspectives, and freed cultural literacy from its dependence on an often bland set of reference points in Greek and Roman culture, the greatest freshness of the harmony-text, to which Pico brought all the power of brilliant youth, was its uncompromising defense of man as the miracle of the world. Behind this conviction, which had its roots everywhere in the Renaissance—in the dramatic new impulses of art and writing—was once again a revamping of the same Platonism, which in the early Christian period—among thinkers like Porphyry or Plotinus—had soared, taking with it a companion Christian theology, in which knowledge shared a place with love, at the heart of a profound conviction of the meaningfulness of human existence.

Neo Platonism as Knowledge

For Pico, Platonism meant a conviction that knowledge is the true path to human achievement. He meant, of course, knowledge as spiritual knowledge, fusion with the ideas that are constitutive for the universe. This kind of knowledge, for Pico, was an amalgam of the wisdoms accumulated among all the great knowing traditions, since the beginning of time. The construction and spread of this knowledge, which reached man through the grace of the creator, was sufficient to elevate the individual man to the heights of understanding, in fact, if pursued full souledly, to raise man above the level of the Cherubim and Seraphim, divine simulacra who assume their potency just under the Level of the creator himself. Man, paradoxically enough, is enabled by his godly formation to appreciate the peculiar superiority conferred on him by his lofty role in creativity. He cannot do anything, however, without the prior collaboration of the creator. God makes it possible for men to rise above god.

A daring formula

The formula enounced here, and implicit in the early Neoplatonists of Alexandria and Athens, was destined to collide with the position of the Catholic Church, and clearly shared nothing with the world view of Mediaeval Christendom, for which Christianity was the religion of sinful man, whose life was best spent in trying to earn salvation. The daring of Pico's Neo Platonist is perhaps sharpest, according to Pico, when we 'put ourselves into the mind of the creator.' From the standpoint of that divine empathy, we can best understand the colossal drama instituted by God, when he chose to people his entirely intelligible universe, peopled already with Cherubin and Seraphim, divine principles of intelligibility, with man as testimony to the glory of the intelligible universe. It is as though, Pico says, God requires a witness of his unendingly perfect creation. Man is that witness.

Witness and more

Man is a witness, then, who is required to complete God's creation. In addition to serving as witness, man is an intermediary, by which intelligibility transverses the whole of god's creation. For this power to inhere in man he must be able to be 'the proud shaper of his own being,' that is must be able to elevate himself to the highest level of intelligibility, while at the same time being capable of descending into the coarsest forms of materiality. Only this radical freedom enables man to deserve his powers, which he exercises at his discretion: God observes that 'we have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being,

fashion yourself in the form you may prefer.' With this mandate God, to whom all the wisdoms of the world are imparted, gives man the absolute freedom of the godhead itself.

The vision of Pico

Of special daring—and of course a threat to the powers of the Church—is Pico's insistence that man, unlike the brutes who are born smeared with mire, and can never emerge from that condition, that man is born with the seeds of pure eternity, and will persist forever. This tribute to man's available immortality, to his place among the '*spermatikoi logoi*,' the 'spermatic principles of meaningfulness,' as Plotinus put it, is Pico's most radical and absolute expression of Humanism. That this world view outraged the church, giving man a parity with god, and that Pico seems to encapsulate, here, the most radical expression of Renaissance Humanism, is no surprise. We find ourselves here at the potency level of a Prometheus or Faustus; absolute daring places man among the creative principles of the universe.

The place of Pico in the new world

We have omitted much that characterizes this dramatic figure, whose death in 1494 so nearly coincides with the beginning of a new century. The Renaissance was itself well underway, the High Middle Ages were being diluted by patchwork growths of new economies, religious dissension was eating away at the foundations of the Roman Catholic Church; we were in transition from the practical math of the market place to the higher calculations of scientific math. Risky practices like magic, which to Pico seemed an essential tool in breaking open cosmic secrets, and exotic learning strategies, like Kabbala, or ancient Hebrew lore, were new pathways toward expansive human consciousness. The new man of Pico's intuition, who was essentially a chameleon, able to adapt to a flexible world free of many of its old strictures, was in fact a forerunner of the man of our own time, who can adapt to and make use of improbable and unheard of situations.

Our own time

It is in fact this chameleon image with which we would feel most at home, in trying to re understand Pico for ourselves; where we are most cornered today, in the decaying trap of an eroding planet—nature forcibly deserting us, toxicity invading land and ocean—contemplating egress into the cosmos itself. The University of Iowa offers classes in the Arizona desert, where nature is trained to simulate Martian challenges, and to give us passages into a threatened life on a (we hope) still livable biosphere. If ever biosphere is to transmute into noosphere, place to convert into mind, it may well be in the Pico-like fervor of a man-driven mission.

Study guide

Ficino and Pico de la Mirandola were born at the end of the fifteenth century, a century which began to see the explosion of trade, which brought ancient texts and modern goods into the purview of the literate and privileged, and made budding city states like Florence centerpieces of modern development. The two intellectuals we encounter here, at our onset, were beneficiaries of this unparalleled new world, which was destined to flow deeper, into what we are (loosely) to call a growing modernization in time, a change in perspective and cultural self-awareness, which in a winding and sterterous transition will delta out into a complex alluvium in which the mind we are today has been enabled. Neoplatonism, which serves as a bridge from man to the supernal realm of ideas, served both of our philosopher figures as the zone by which they could prove out both as 'antique philosophers' and as men to whom we can feel related at the present moment.

Niccolo Macchiavelli (1469-1527)

The Prince, published 1532, written 1513

Transition

With Macchiavelli we enter a cultural ambience which Erasmus would have understood, though it would have perplexed, at the least, Ficino and Pico. It is not just a question of changing economies and geopolitical jockeying—for we are, with all three men still in the small state Florentine culture which had been so richly confident during the fifteenth century. But where Ficino and :Pico worked out of and from that small state culture, Macchiavelli worked in it as a professional diplomat, and devoted his thought to the way the state worked. He was a hard-headed and practical sociologist of his time and place, and a cold blooded analyst of power politics within a world of sophisticated mini states. The resultant mind shift, from the Florentine Neo Platonist to the Florentine sociologist, was sudden and fruitful. Did it bear promise of a new way of thinking, the first glimpse of a modern mindset? While Macchiavelli was a man of god and of order, he embraced effective guile, and political infighting—if it brought victory. Here is a fragment of the modernization of the European mind, devoted not to penetrating the mysteries of the cosmos, like Ficino, but to the adjustment of power and influence within the state.

Background

Macchiavelli spent his years of formative thought as a senior diplomat in the Florentine Republic, at a time when the most dramatic cultural and political developments of the Italian Renaissance were making of the many Italian city-states the cultural centers of the early modern world. From 1498 to 1512 Macchiavelli worked as secretary to the Second Chancery of the Republic of Florence. Thanks to a wide range of writing—dramas, poems, investigations in political practice and theory—Macchiavelli attracted wide attention in his mature work; ultimately, reaching to our own day, virtually worldwide attention for his brilliant and sometimes puzzling work in political science. It was this latter work, much of it seeming to bear a dark and cynical cachet, which had already in Niccolo's own time made his name synonymous with self-interested and strategically questionable politics.

The Text of *The Prince*

The political world of Machiavelli, as expressed in his master text, *The Prince*, was one of several smallish city states—think back to the ancient Greek polis, that self-sufficient, independent, political unit which became the repository of so much of ancient creativity, in politics and the arts. The great Italian city-states—Florence, Milan, Perugia, Rome, Siena—were centers of painting, philosophy, and of great universities, some of the foundational institutions of the increasingly influential tradition of higher education which contributed so greatly to the shaping of the modern world. The competitive artistic fervor, and rapid growth of early capitalism all contributed to the daring ideas of the intellectual milieu, in which Macchiavelli lived and worked.

Macchiavelli in retirement

The Prince plunges us into many of the thoughts Macchiavelli formulated after retiring from active political life .(In a letter to Francesco Vettori he describes the ease. with which he typically shifted into the end of the day and into his other life, the world of the past, and of its meaning. 'I enter the ancient courts of rulers who have long since died…I feed on the only food I find nourishing and was born to savor…' From those succulent feasts of ancient Greek and Roman culture, and from his vast reading and experience in the culture of his own just post classical world, Macchiavelli formulated an original and often startling theory of ruling, dealing with one's enemies and with one's peoples, and guaranteeing the independence and security of one's own governing environment.

The initial premise

There are old fashioned principalities, in which a governed body traditionally inherits a static ruling system passed down from an hereditary ruler to his descendants. This is the classical form of principality,

governed in succession by members of the same family. There is also a new kind of principality, which Machiavelli will characterize in his booklet about *The Prince*. This new type of polity brings to the ruler's job perspectives which vary greatly from those of, say, the *principes* of ancient Greece or Rome, which were by and large gatekeepers of a certain tradition of state-sustaining. The new *princeps* envisioned by Macchiavelli has much to do with shaping new perspectives on ruling and power, and is tangibly a *practitioner* inside the new world system of Early Modernism, or Renaissance. The new *princeps* of Macchiavelli's perception is a shaper of his own as well as his principality's destiny.

Taking hold as ruler

In *The Prince* Macchiavelli is giving us a recipe book, precisely intended for the Prince of his city-state world. This ruler both inherits possessions or acquires them, in the course of building and protecting his state. In either instance the prince must from the get go look into the best way to preserve his realm. The best ways, Macchiavelli argues, are either to settle one self into his newly acquired territory, or to plant settlements there, if possible grafting the acquired territory onto one's own native culture. This kind of organic absorption will be a way of investing fully in the prince's chief undertaking, *war and acquisition*. If, however, the defeated and occupied territory is accustomed to its own freedom, and its own constitution, the best way to confirm one's governance is to devastate the occupied territory. Wiping it out, you will be able to begin from the beginning with this particular piece of real estate. Macchiavelli's friendship with such ruthless power-families as the Borgias and the Medici prepared him for this kind of last ditch annihilation.

'Whoever is responsible for another's becoming powerful ruins himself'

As the above suggests, Macchiavelli is eager to advise the prince on the details of the power game. Why else, after all, should one be so concerned about holding onto occupied and acquired possessions. Power, only power and not money, drives this *Machtpoliti*k advice, with which Macchiavelli is so prodigal. Why else should the state of his arms and weaponry be the foremost concern of the prince?

What makes for a 'great leader'?

Both luck (*Fortuna*) and prowess *(virtu*) need to favor the great leader, not arms in a vacuum. Macchiavelli may surprise us with his examples of great leaders in the past: Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus. In Macchiavelli's book, these are all prophetic or persuasive, or harmony-importing rulers of that great past into which, as we observed earlier, Macchiavelli himself subsided, after deepening himself into retirement. F*ortuna* comes to us in this way. For *Fprtuna* to support one, one has to have been needed by one's historical setting in its specifics—for example one's people need to have had a leader who was in a position to take them out of Egypt, or who (lke Cyrus) knew how to speak to the hearts, and the unique historical needs, of the Persians. *Fortuna* must coincide with prowess, for neither of these forces is enough by itself, to guarantee great leadership. It needs repeating that *virtu,* manliness, is the foremost requisite of leadership. Effeminacy is across the board scorned in Macchiavellian culture.

Fear or hatred?

The present considerations, of a great leader, segue into issues of public opinion. How did such great leaders as mentioned above, or as are abundantly interspersed across the landscape of Macchiavelli's Italy, hold their grip, not on their colonies—discussed above—but on their citizens. Was the fear one's subjects felt more effective, or was love the finest security? Macchiavelli is glad enough to accept the power of benign wisdom, as in the case of the great Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, but in the case of lesser rulers, who lack the experience or charisma, he returns to his insistence on power. Instances of overtly criminal rule are introduced, and examples like that of Oliverotto, who sequestered and butchered his competition in Fermo, are included among those justified in taking any recourse necessary to guarantee their own power. While Macchiavelli declares his enmity to evil, and his belief in a good god, he is not easily persuaded by any behavior that reduces a man's ability to win out through prowess, or even guile. He has a remarkable tolerance for such behaviors as those of Oliverotto, a man with a tainted past who returned to his old city of Fermo, played nice guy for as long as he could, then found an

occasion to massacre those fellow citizens so careless as to question his power. A wise prince is careful always to render his people dependent on him, so that when the prince is forced into extreme circumstances he will be able to rely on a fund of support from the citizens under him.

A healthy state

Lest one underestimate the range of Macchiavelli's sensibility, be in known that he had an active sense of what makes a state or principality healthy. To this point we have been discussing game plans essential to the individual prince. Clearly, though, Macchiavelli values the benefit to himself which can accrue from satisfied and loyal citizens. 'The main foundations of every state…are good laws and good arms…' Macchiavelli looks to his own immediate culture, in asserting this, and discovers that his point is not a truism. The kicker is that many of the armies that protected the city states of Italy were mercenary forces, ultimately loyal to no one. 'Mercenaries are disunited, thirsty for power, and disloyal; they are brave before their friends, and cowards before the enemy.' Only citizen armies play into a healthy state. Even at that, there is a kind of army which is more harmful than mercenaries, that is auxiliary armies. These armies, which are loaned to a principality from outside, can fight more professionally than mercenaries, who simply want your money, but are more dangerous than mercenaries. Auxiliaries form a standing army dependent on a foreign power, with sufficient training that, if turned against the prince of one state, they can do him irreparable harm.

Centrality of war

Macchiavelli puts it all bluntly, as we have seen: 'a prince must have no other object nor thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war…' 'The art of war is all that is expected of a ruler. 'One will doubtless be struck, in such a formulation, by the utter indifference to the arts and culture, or to the spiritual dimension --we recall the author's allegiance to God. Just as virtu, or prowess, are the key values of a man, so war is the true test of his value, not least because of the security and wealth it secures for the prince. The mindset of the prince must constantly reflect this centrality of war. The prince himself must think war and military affairs in every part of his life, skilling himself at the hunt, training his body in military exercises, preparing himself for self-defense. (No missing the carry over, here, to Castiglione's portrait of the Courtier, in the book devoted to that iconic figure of Renaissance Italian court and military life. It was mandatory that the 'courtier' be at all times ready to defend himself, whether with sword or dagger, or with wrestling. It is equally mandatory that the prince be alert to geographical and geo- logical details, as they might any day prove relevant to the jobs of fortressing or assaulting.

The training of the prince

While we have had little cause to stress the grandeur of Renaissance art and culture, under the regimes of the Italian prince, we need to add that the study of history emerges as a sine qua non for the Prince. Like Montaigne, Macchiavelli strongly stresses the importance of following the examples of 'the ancients,' who, especially Romans, actually formed the dominant base of historical education in Western Europe during the Renaissance. While it is unclear whether Macchiavelli read Greek, he was full of examples of Roman literature and political history; citing his detail like a true scholar. It was a matter of course for him to think in algorithms like this: 'Alexander the Great imitated Achilles; Caesar imitated Alexander; and Scipio, Cyrus.' The examples favored here are predominately military.

Ostentatiousness of the prince

Machiavelli is keenly interested in the initial impressions made on the people by the actions of a new ruler. Conspicuous public works, like fortifications and bulwarks, can impress the people as well as adding to their security. The same can be said for displays of extravagance, at which the people can enjoy unaccustomed food and drink, and the seemingly straightforward pleasure of hobnobbing with their rulers. The form this sociability assumes will depend on the ruler's strategies. Does he want special favors from the populace? Does he want to stress his disciplined if humane side? Above all, does he want to instill fear or affection in the people? Both a lion and a fox, the smart ruler will know how to frighten, even to exercise cruelty, but only under circumstances that direct and shape policy. He will at all stages of

rule be conscious of keeping his people on his side. It will at times be necessary to stir up dissension or conflict among the people—so that one can ostentatiously pacify a rough situation, thereby proving magnanimity—but such occasions are rare, and in the present, says Machiavelli, there is very little to be said for dissension.

Princely alliances

It should be the prince's practice to take sides, and to continue faithfully in the allegiances he has undertaken. Any effort to avoid war is likely to generate a wider outburst of fighting, and to bring on additional disadvantages for the actor, who will inevitably get caught up in factional disputes. For good service in military campaigns, the prince must be ready to hand out handsome rewards. He mut treasure reliable and talented ministers, who will consequently feel indebted to the prince. The advice of objective minded ministers, who can truly see and pursue valuable opinions, and can root out flattery wherever it can be found, is of great value to the ruler. A new ruler is always of special interest, as opposed to a fixed hereditary ruler, and should satisfy the people's hunger for fresh and unfamiliar ideas. While doing so, he should keep in mind that, as Macchiavelli puts it, 'our lives are half dependent on fortune, and half on our own determination.' so that we must keep unexpected turns of fate In mind. We must do our best to promote situations in which control falls into our own hands. 'Fortune is a woman, and if she is to be submissive it is necessary to beat and coerce her.'

Themes

The Prince is a succinct, subtle book of advice for the princely leader of a Renaissance state. While its aim is in part practical, it is also a launchpad for the serious study of political science. Aristotle and Plato were of course the forefathers of the theories of politics inherited by Macchiavelli, but neither Plato's *Republic* nor Aristotle's *Politics* entered the practice of state management in the concrete, and for each of those Greeks, politics heavily intersected with theories of human nature, human destiny, and chance, as distinct with the dialogics of social shaping. There are, nonetheless, speculative themes in Macchiavelli's work, and they are the theoretic leaven that raises his thought.

Princely rule.

Macchiavelli's book is concerned with the prince, or ruler of a small scale principality. The author is himself a veteran of diplomatic court life, and has drawn his thinking and examples from his own personality. Thus individual experience builds the theme of ruling, here, and the stratagems and intuitions of a particular ruler are the foundation of the prince's procedure. How to lead, how to exert power, how to milden your discourse when needed, how and when to exercise cruelty. The ins and outs of skillful principality-ruling are the dominant theme of *The Prince*. As such, T*he Prince* is an instructive and realistic novelty.

Craftiness

Macchiavelli is proud to think of himself as a fox, and as an experienced person privy to many tactics and stratagems for manipulating a city-state. He is a subtle judge of appropriateness: of when to block dissension within the community, of when to make war—almost always, if there is any significant provocation; of what kind of ministers to choose for delicate diplomatic conflicts, of how to learn military procedures from the example and study of the past, of how to deal with flatterers and how to choose ministers who will give you accurate advice.

Dignity and Honour

Machiavelli sees no conflict between honor and craftiness. Honour, in fact, may be most clearly expressed by the keen sightedness that enables you to anticipate hostile behaviors, or language intended to demean or disparage you. Honor is sustained by being crafty. Manliness, virtu, is another element of the honorable man. To be effeminate is, in the understanding of Machiavelli's culture, to be less than a man, in no condition for honor, in this treatise for which the culture arts play so small a role. Again it is

worth comparing Macchiavelli's manly ideal with that of Castiglione, whose courtier can fight on a dime or thrill a coterie of ladies.

The past

Macchiavelli puts great stress on the value of the historical, especially the Roman historical, past. Plutarch, Tacitus, or Livy serve as regular benchmarks for value thinking, as Machiavelli seeks for models around which to construct his crafty image of the prince. The Italian city states were themselves republics in the ancient Roman sense, independent, self-reliant, and tuned to one-man control.

The future prince

It will be remembered that Macchiavelli devotes The Prince to the 'new prince,' no archaic autocrat, but a man of modern temper, who understands the 'psychology' of governance and of being governed' For Macchiavelli, that understanding is part of the modern temper—I borrow a term from Joseph Wood Krutch's book of the same name—to which practical realism is the effective insight. The romantic trappings of governance were, for Machiavelli, nothing but ostentatious facades intended to bluff the man on the street—might Macchiavelli not have levelled the same critique at the televised funeral of Queen Elizabeth? Machtpolitik, stripping rulership to the self-interest of a ruling cadre, was our prince's gesture of welcome to the modern mind.

Study guide

With Erasmus and Macchiavelli, different as they are, we see in common their birth on the modern side of the year 1600 and thus, in e literal sense, both are figures of Renaissance culture.
In actuality the passage of one century into another is a textbook convenience, and in fact leaves us with nothing more definite than the realization that spiritualized points in time are only as significant as we make them.

In this study guide please expand our inquiry into the broad issue of historical time. Is it real? What is it that separates Pico and Ficino from Erasmus and Macchiavelli? Is it historical time? But what is that? Presumably it has gone? We would not know where to go to find it. Shall we then say that it is a fiction created by humans as an extrapolation from recorded numerals, dates of births and dates of deaths? Has the historical reality of us, the fiction makers, any more substantiality than that of the temporal outline we construct to represent history?

Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti (1475-1564)

Sonnets, madrigals

Poetry and visual art

Transitions

Strikingly, the first examples we chose for the cracking open of the modern western mind are Italian. Ficino and Pico were visionaries and ecstatics, as well as adroit philosophers. This is not surprising. Ancient cultures were at the root of Renaissance European culture, and Rome, the cultural center of Italy, was the place in Europe most directly built both into and out of the ancient world. Ancient Roman

monuments proliferated in the Holy City, the Holy See itself was at the heart of the ancient Italian traditions, the new city states of Renaissance Italy were modeled on classical prototypes.

Michelangelo

Hundreds of sonnets and madrigals, verbal out pourings of love, dread of death, religious faith, passion, hope (for salvation) were among the ranges of Michelangelo's literary opus: yet these distinguished poems, which flowed from his pen in later life, have been little remembered in the massive achievements of the artist's life work as a painter, sculptor, architect. Shall we say that this artist, who was prematurely gifted In painting, sculpture, and architecture, was preeminently blessed with certain senses—tactile, visual, neurally empathetic?—more than others—aural, symbolic? If we follow that path, of explanation of Michelangelo's achievement, we will oversimplify the power of his actual poetry. That poetry shares the intensity of Michelangelo's sense of immediacy and existence, which are tense as springs in this visual creator's mind.

The sources of Michelangelo's creation

Though Michelangelo took great pride in his visual artwork—which was recognized for its greatness from youth on-- he had a much more humble view of his poetry, calling it, "something foolish". But this something foolish contained consistent themes and was worked through with high skill. Michelangelo wrote over 300 poems. Many of his most impressive sonnets were written to close friends, notably to his beloved Vittoria Colonna ,a distinguished and creative widow whom he had met in Rome in 1536 , and with whom he exchanged passionate—and philosophically intricate-- sonnets until her death. In 1542, Michelangelo met Cecchino dei Bracci upon whose death, a year after their meeting, Michelangelo wrote forty eight funeral epigrams. The most intense love sonnets Michelangelo wrote were directed to Tommaso dei Cavallieri', and constituted the first long love poetry addressed by one man to another, predating by fifty years Shakespeare's sonnets to his mysterious beloved. Whether this verbal tribute to the handsome youngster was intertwined with erotic love—whether Michelangelo was gay—is impossible to judge, though our own sensitivities to this issue may well make a judgment on the matter impossible. So reluctant to accept of this gayness were earlier scholars of the Renaissance, that until the brilliant translation work of John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) the pronouns used for the beloved, in Michelangelo's sonnets, were confined to the female gender form, despite the evident choice of the masculine, in the original.

Tommaso

Tommaso was an aristocratic young man of exquisite manners, style, and of a physical beauty which Michelangelo gave his best to celebrate in poetry. Michelangelo's verbal intoxication with this beautiful young man—Tommaso was twenty three, when Michelangelo first met him, at the age of fifty seven, and whether their love was physical or not we don't know (what we do know is that Michelangelo made every effort to teach Tpmmaso to draw, and in the course of this instruction created many of his own most masterful drawings. We also know, from Tommaso's response to Michelangelo, that at least the two men's statements of love were in sync: 'I swear to return your love. Never have I loved a man more than I love you, never have I wished for a friendship more than I wish for yours.') To read Michelangelo's love poetry and his beloved's responses to it, is to read through the lesns of that Neoplatonic exaltation with which the late fifteenth century Italian philosophers. Ficino and Pico de la Mirandola,were so generous. Like other Neoplatonists Michelangelo courts through the stylized rhetoric of the romantic elegants of his time.

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Love's Justification

Yes! hope may with my strong desire keep pace,
And I be undeluded, unbetrayed:

For if of our affections none find grace
In sight of Heaven, then wherefore hath God made

the world which we inhabit? Better plea Love cannot have, than that in loving thee

Glory to that eternal peace is paid,
Who such divinity to thee imparts
As hallows and makes pure all gentle hearts.

His hope is treacherous only whose love dies
With beauty, which is varying every hour;
But, in chaste hearts uninfluenced by the power
Of outward change, there blooms a deathless flower,
That breathes on earth the air of paradise.

(Translation of "Love's Justification" was composed by William Wordsworth) (1770-1850).

What is the core concept of this poem? Fortified by a robust rhyme scheme, Michelangelo establishes a few main points:

Love is inherent to the universe

1 He has hope in hope; especially for the purity of his beloved's affection

2 If love is hopeless in the world god made, why did God make it so?

Love proves God's approval of love

3. The existence and validity of love is proof enough that God puts his stamp of approval on the love in the world.

4The very existence of love is proof that the world responds in kind to the trust we put in love.

5. Love is immortal.

6. Unless it is deceptive or faithless—not believing in its own eternity—love is eternal,

7. and breathes on earth the air of paradise.

Love's justification, to return to the sonnet's title, is that without love the universe is without meaning. (This resembles the theological argument, born during the late Middle Ages, that for anything at all to exist it must be good. Existence is good. What justification could there be for the existence of the bad?) The sonnet in question celebrates the reasonable proposition that my love for my beloved would not exist without the implicit approval of the divine creator of the universe.

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Joy may kill

by: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)

Too much good luck no less than misery
May kill a man condemned to mortal pain,
If, lost to hope and chilled in every vein,
A sudden pardon comes to set him free.
Thus thy unwonted kindness shown to me
Amid the gloom where only sad thoughts reign,
With too much rapture bringing light again,
Threatens my life more than that agony.
Good news and bad may bear the self-same knife;
And death may follow both upon their flight;
For hearts that shrink or swell, alike will break.
Let then thy beauty, to preserve my life,
Temper the source of this supreme delight,
Lest joy so poignant slay a soul so weak.

This translation of "Joy May Kill" was composed by John Addington Symonds

The Renaissance Love Sonnet

The Renaissance love sonnet, as we know from the innovating Englishmen Wyatt and Surrey, from Sir Philip Sidney or from Michelangelo, is not a bleeding heart and unashamed statement, a confession of hopeless l ove, though it is normally about love. (The fourteenth century Italian poet, Petrarch, built the first sonnets out of courtly romance, out of what might have been the cultural amusement of ears like those of Castiglione's Courtier.) Rather the first sonnet takes wing as a highly disciplined word package. The sentiments of Shakespeare or Petrarch in their sonnet forms are subjects of intense subtlety and concentration—and the love expressed within is typically subject to God's approval, without which it is hollow.

Spiritual and Geometric form

The sonnet's dependence on formalized rhyme and metrical schemes, and the interplay of perspectives resulting from these diverse forms, is frequently heightened by the ironies of the themes—the dependence of love on despair-generated hope, in the former sonnet above, the painful susceptibility of the lover to the shock of being restored by the beloved. (These two sonnets, typically of the Renaissance form, eschew distinctive portraits, and philosophize wittily on the anomalies of the human condition.) Rhyme, as we note in our two examples, is of the essence of the track we follow, for rhyme is wrap-up, closure, and fights a fascinating battle with paradox, which pervades the two typical sonnets we have analyzed, and which has everything to do with freedom, escape from enclosedness.

Sparse discipline

Given the themes of such Renaissance sonnets as Michelangelo's-- mortality, time, and love recur constantly—the relation of rhyme scheme and prosody to the point of such sonnets as Michelangelo's is startling, and goes far to define the unique character of such poetry. In the instance of 'Joy may Kill' we

look at a rhyme scheme which patterns out to abba/ cddc/ efg/ efg, a code familiar to Michelangelo, and to the traditional Italian Petrarchan sonnet. The connection among time, mortality, and love—three tightly interwound foregrounds of the human experience—and the sparely disciplined word-geometry of the Italian sonnet form—constitutes a uniquely intense binding of thought to music.

Study guide

Best known for his bewildering visual imagination, and the blend of power and grace which he imparts to his sculpture and paintings, Michelangelo nonetheless created many fine poems, especially sonnets in which he gave free vent to his homoeroticism, exquisite ear, and fidelity to that strand of Neoplatonism which we have seen dominant in the work of earlier Italians, Ficino and Pico, and which shares so much with Renaissance Italian painting, perfused as it is with love for love and milky divine hues. What do you make of the rich intertwining of the visual with the aural in Michelangelo's life work. Can you name other poet/artist combinations? Do Michelangelo's poems, for that matter, seem to you to reflect a visual insight or are they predominately poems of the ear?

How do you explain the long lasting interest in the sonnet—Michelangelo's preferred form—in Renaissance literature? The origins of the sonnet form go back to the pre modern imagination of Petrarch, whose sonnets to Laura established the genre decisively, stamping it with romance and formality conjoined. And why was the sonnet rooted in Western Europe and Italy? Is it a western form? Are there sonnet traditions in other parts of the world? What about the Arabic ghazals?

We are working on the making of the modern western mind. What form is that historical portraiture entitled to assume? Say we continue to align significant creators from the two centuries separating Ficino from Dryden. Are there a number of points at which we will want to say that a landmarking is being encountered? Will those landmarks be established by certain authors—eminently great ones? Eminently controversial or direction-setting? If the latter, what velleities of literary or cultural history have shaped the choice of landmark events or people? Is proximity of birthdates a significant explanation of placing together of the memories of two indiv8duals?

The 'making of the modern mind,' our theme,' will be viewed differently at different moments in the cultural spectrum. In certain instances, however, 'universal' minds surge from the continuum, and seem to grow exempt from the ordinary caviling of cultural historians? What do you think of that kind of 'putting on a pedestal'? The kind of hallowed space we put up around Sophocles, or Shakespeare, or Michelangelo? Is that action of pedestalling a commendable instance of our willingness to feel awe, or is it a freezing of our critical capacities, which makes it difficult to see things as they are?

Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529)

The Book of the Courtier. 1528

Setting

While serving as The Holy See's Ambassador to Spain (1524-1529) Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529) took advantage of the opportunity to observe many ins and out of elite court life in early sixteenth century western Europe. He formed a notion of what constitutes the ideal courtier, a role commonly played in the regal and regional courts which dotted the pre nation-state political landscape of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Castiglione eventually decided to convert his observations into a fictive picture of life in his own home city, Urbino . He developed a kind of presentation which we might now call a frame story, in which tales told on four successive nights, after dinner at court, were joined into an on running closet drama, in which a blend of actual figures, from the time, discussed issues of importance to their world and lives; In doing so Castiglione created a genre which was unfamiliar but en route toward the early novel. (The plot was the ideas developed in conversation, while the characters were figures of contemporary reality.) Books without this degree of literary potential—development toward the novel was culture formative—were making themselves seen, as the boundaries between art and actuality were under exploration; princely etiquette or court books were popular in the Italy of the day—what they lacked was the fictive dialogue that Castiglione had built so substantially into his Courtier.

Fictive reality

Fictive is the word, for Castiglione intended to do more than analyze the reigning social styles of his time—no televised Emmies, no *America you've got talent*, but plenty of room here for the central concept of the present kind of social drama, among highly placed court figures; for pieces of mini novel, advances over the tale telling that we find, say, in Boccaccio or Marguerite de Navarre. Much room, here, for the portrayal of *sprezzatura*, nonchalance, which will be the defining trait of the defining figure of the social drama we track here; the portrayal of the figure of the ideal courtier, in discussing whom a central figure of the age found itself unpackaged. Stylish sophistication, blended with a handsome mien and a wide range of social talents—horsemanship, musicianship, skill as a tennis player, wrestler and thrower, conversationalist above all— a key figure of the social scene dominant in court life was the nonchalant and multi-talented central figure—usually male It should be added-- that is the subject of Castiglione's interest. (The courtier, be it said, is himself but a step below the Prince, that other idealized figure whom Italian culture devotes much of its Renaissance energy to polishing and characterizing. Macchiavelli's *Prince* was another novel in germ, which was rising from the hot milieu of Renaissance Italian culture.

Conversation

Conversation—which is arguably the central activity of the courtier, is of course the raw material of the novel as well. (The full text of *The Courtier* consists of four books, each devoted to one night's *conversation* at the court of the Duke of Urbino. While one book, the third, gives voice to women's attitudes, and to advice on womanly behavior at court, the first book is a closet drama in which the Duke and Duchess of Urbino are the central figures—surrounded by congenial fellow elitists-- on the far side of a good dinner, and ready to meander into a rich conversation about social issues, and especially about a kind of personality, the courtier himself, whom historical destiny has put in a prominent position in Italian culture. The art of this book consists in the fluency with which a conversation about conversation—the courtier's—carries the tensions among the characters, weighting this person's traits, diminishing that figure's presence, tracking mood and attitude from one perspective to another, with the result that ideas function almost as characters. As the courtier himself is the principal topic of interest, we are induced to let our own emphasis circle around this talking figure.

Experience

Castiglione's own experience, as Ambassador to the Holy See, will have plunged him into the world of high level diplomacy, where the always implication full in-talk is both idle and absorbing—to its

participants. Arguably we are on the sill of the early novel, here; say, of works like *Don Quixote*, 1605, which were just beginning to appear, and in which character interaction and plot imagination are coalescing to support an already burgeoning post-Gutenberg printing industry. (We are also looking at the first glimpses of that social fiction, in eighteenth century novelists like Richardson, which will make stories out of conversation, and nothing else.) The social political milieu, in Urbino, will have resembled that of a mini-Washington D.C. in which the news of the Beltway pervades and colors all social discourse, and in which certain kinds of personality rise to prominence, thanks to qualities highly valued in the culture--such as, in the present case, the courtier, a key figure in society and politics, and a character so implicitly valued that he deserves a central position in any discussion of the day's higher society. The courtier is not a figure for analysis, here, but a forceful character in the account he is being subject to.

Real life dialogue

The closet drama text we open into thus blends 'real life' characters—Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) a noted poet and wit; Lodovico de Canossa (1475-1532) favorite of King Francis I, who granted him the precious Bishopric of Bayeux; Unico Aretino (1458-1535) a distinguished Tuscan poet in much social demand for his ability to extemporize and dazzle in language; Elisabette Gonzaga ('The Dutchess), wife of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, her witty and talented husband, who was unable to bear children for her; plus a diverse additional group of upper class wits and dignitaries. The distinction of this court was a ripe seedbed for discussions of personal styles and the skills that ought by rights to go with them; and those discussions were, as befitted the new literary genre, themselves playing roles in the development of the text. The people were real, the issues they discussed were ample to join them in extended conversation, and Castiglione's genius was sufficient to bind them into tale units, which filled with their own humor and local reference. Castiglione's was not the first work of this distinctive genre—there were Della Casa's *Galateo* (1558) or Stefano Guazzo's *The Civil Conversation* (1574)—but those books fell into the camp of manners and etiquette more than of cultural style, and help us to see the uniqueness of the work of Castiglione. Where etiquette books instruct, fiction makers convince.

The ply of the argument; thought as plot

In Book 1 the Count (Lodovico da Canossa) takes it on himself to advance directly into the issue of what makes a true model of a man in society. He reviews a number of possibilities: a 'man of talk,' popular and sought out, and him they call 'a pleasant fellow'; a modest man; an 'active man that is 'always doing'; 'one that shows quiet and respect in every matter'; and so on, each with his favorite attributes, vices always being renamed as virtues, and vice versa. Having disclaimed any special wisdom of his own, the Count weighs in with his own first choice, for the model of a man in society. He prefers for 'this our Courtier' to be 'a gentleman born and of a good house.' The Count's praise, for a man of finest birth, will seem exaggerated. He finds an unmistakably godlike character, to the man born with such perfections. Understandably, this contentious and hyper aristocratic proposition becomes a discussible talking point around which a diverse set of opinions—which function virtually as 'characters' themselves, aligns itself. There are pragmatists in the group, who would be sociologists a few centuries later, but there are also idealists, who speak up for the potential of the courtier as a type.

Leonardo

(Mustn't one think, in the background of this interplay of characters, and especially of the dynamic presence of the Courtier, of the inner visual ideal, say Leonardo da Vinci's, of the incarnate ideal human form; or of the Platonic ideal which rivetted the attention of the Italian Renaissance? Isn't the courtier a kind of potency of being which moves people and events, himself a force for tale, and a character in a tale about the courtier?) The stakes of achievement are high, with such a well born concept-person, for he will naturally be judged by expectations, which start out high. (The population of Castiglione's dialogues all come from 'approved stock.') The count goes on, expatiating on the history of great families, and on the internal obligations the men of those lines experience; life as a challenge to excel. In the ply of argument—this the pattern of the Castiglione dialogue—others raise voices on top of the argument leader, the Count, and the qualities important to the courtier grow in richness and tone.

The large picture of the courtier; who he really is: sprezzatura

In the present turn of 'discussion,' other views of the courtier emerge. Each opinion acts its own role in the force vectors of the story. The speaker directly following the Count declares that 'armes' are the 'chief profession' of the courtier, not least because he must be able at all times to defend his honor—which, once stained—will leave an indelible spot on the man. From that point the discussion of the first Book splays out into colorful efforts to deal with the concept of *sprezzatura*, the Italian term for *nonchalance,* a try in English to appropriate an Italian term which had come to the courtly center at the time Castiglione was writing. (Has our contemporary American 'cool' any value here as a parallel bit of language or is it too tainted with vulgarity and the shreds of the ad culture?)

Modesty etc.

It is not long before the Count returns to the discussion, amidst reminders that in antiquity the Romans customarily, when appropriately, praised themselves, but always and (ideally) only with reason. The discussion winds from this fruitful spool of thoughts out into the virtues and vices of pride—which challenges us usefully—and which can lead to noble men—while passing through the complexities that make up true conversation—such observations as that cowards are sometimes tough as nails, or that a successful lover may come on as a squat, bowlegged guy--in other words which can help us to see wrinkles on the notion that one should try to be perfect, in an imperfect world, or that *sprezzatura* can be bought at bargain basement values. Being nonchalant is not conforming to a label, but accepting character status as part of the life drama. Observations are traded, at such points in the conversation, at the expense of Bernard Bibbiena, a wit and self-mocker or at the grand issue of 'men who look like women,' a product of the highly style conscious turn of the talk, which at subsequent points will turn heavily into matters of proper and elegant dress.) These conversational observations are moving pieces in our closet drama.

Prowess and attention as characters and characteristics

The courtier must be able to fight, and to defend his honor readily. (Castiglione, the narrator, makes no bones about the difference, in this regard, between the genders. Men are by nature hot and passionate, and know how to fight and protect, while women are cold and passive.) Prowess and modesty, collaborating, guarantee the courtier a conspicuous place on many parts of life as athletic field. The exercise of social-athletic skills, in tandem with the required modesty, creates a kind of tightrope personality, in which, like a fine stallion, the courtier is forever ready to stand for himself. We approach the quality of *sprezzatura*, again, and realize that in *nonchalance* the courtier must wrap up all his most prominent characteristics—off hand bravery, readiness to protect, true competence and wit, not to mention many fine points touched throughout *The Courtier.* While much of the later part of *The Courtier* repeats familiar themes, spoken by a changing landscape of characters, the author's attention remains fixed on the character of court life; the new inflections are toward women, and their court worlds, and toward increasing finesse in the description of the courtier's own attributes.

Ultimate refinements of the courtier

Later in the text we move into finer points about the courtly man of *sprezzatura*; we learn that he is not simply a composite of nimble strong body with sensitive mind system and responses, but that further training is required, to prepare a courtier for the true attainment of his ideal existence. (In a sense the ideal courtier of *sprezzatura* comes before us, in this entire text, as an ideal, hardly to be fully realized in any individual—although admirable partial portraits are scattered through the text. As an ideal, the perfect courtier is present in the culture formation of Renaissance society—did he not exist, we might want to say, we would have to create him, as a regulatory principle of social value, around which to build the actual complexity of court life in the sixteenth century. The savvy necessarily realized in the ideal courtier carries over into proper usages of language and awareness of the finer creativity of the arts.)

Language and the arts

Conversation is the formative milieu of the mini dramas that compose *The Courtier*.

Conversation is a character if anyone is. As a creature composed foremost of language, and continually on display through the manner of his speech—which should be gallant and contemporary—the courtier should be careful to speak carefully the language of his moment. Rather than inserting 'rare Tuscan words' into his dialogue, he should stick close to the language of Northern Italy (Urbino is fine), Piedmontese varieties of Italian; as for insertion of foreign language—the courtier must here, too, be on a careful walk path between too much eloquence—we are after all talking of a man who carries a rapier, can wrestle an opponent to the ground--and the presence of one who will defend his honor to the death. The courtier must manage plain educated speech—no tricks or arcane references—but—and this caveat is thunderous, given the educational mode in which Renaissance culture is steeped--the courtier must absolutely be prepared to grasp, use, and invent with classical Greek and Roman examples. Those scriptures-- for we hear little about religious scriptures in the *Courtier*-- will be the springboard for the courtier's own work in writing. The courtier as a machine for writing is part of the text written by Castiglione. It is important that the courtier should be able to compose—poems, songs for his lady, comic dramas, or whatever additionally qualifies him as proper participant in the circle of the court. If the courtier should be so multi- gifted as to work in the plastic arts—sculpture or painting—so much the better. The complete courtier, a vague notion within a discussion which is in any case 'ideal,' will embrace as many fine achievements as possible, though always, we remember, within the limits imposed by 'existence.'

Study guide

With Castiglione, as with Macchiavelli, we are introduced to the intimacies of life inside the Italian city-state court. (in Machiavelli we considered advice to the Prince, in his argnments with fellow court figures, among whom he was supreme. The stress was on the diplomatic skills, the international political know-how, and the craftiness of the courtier, who borrowed from Macchiavelli's play book.

The valued trait of the courtier, sprezzatura, was an agility of mind and social behavior, which enabled him to make his way among contending (and shrewdly observant) figures on the political scene. How does this figure differ from the Prince, Macchiavelli's central concern? Do the two characters intersect?

Was Macchiavelli's Prince expected to have mastered the arts and skills required of the socially adept? The Prince was, after all, a leader in the intra-state conflicts which preoccupied much of the state-building of pre-national community conflict in Italy in the early sixteenth century. He was not, however, trained in the social and cultural skills of which the courtier was an exemplar. The prince might have you skillfully poisoned, but he was not likely to have run you through with his rapier, or downed you in a sonnet-contest.

What was the level of erudition expected of the prince? Were both the courtier and the prince products of formal education, or were they simply parts of a classically formed 'intellectual' milieu? The answer will lie in a combination, and yet the education is part of the required persona. We may say the same, of course, for Michelangelo, whose self-education, tools and genius in hand, surpassed all the etiquettes of 'knowledge,' and yet had time to train him thoroughly in the niceties of the sonnet.

Are you not struck by the prominence of Italianate culture, as we discuss the formation of a modern mind in the West? Is it just the luck of the text choices we have made? (Luck cannot be disregarded, in the selection of materials for a proving ground like the present anthology. Add in the chance of the position from which the writer is working, even the accident of the texts available to that writer; there you have the unforeseeable product of an exercise in thought. In the present instance 'luck' in formation is also checked by an historical state of affairs, that Italian culture, arguably still close to its Roman origins, had a vigorously ancient underpinning, from which to 'become modern.' The transition of the Middle Ages had in Italy less readjustment to make than in France, or of course in Germany, where there was little to build on, from the remains of an antiquity never really part of the German perspective.

Michelangelo, Sir Thomas More, Castiglione: born within three years of one another, entering culture history at three widely differing points—as a polyvalent genius in the visual arts; as a statesman/social

critic; as a critic of his contemporary society, in terms of one of its prominent cultural types, the courtier. Two Italians and an Englishman. The tapestry of unfolding cultural history is like the tight green cloth of the billiard room, across which the cue scatters the multiple and disparate energies of the billiard balls, the diverse individuals who by nudging, slamming, and tickling their fellow contemporaries, mobilize the kaleidoscope of disengaging and mutually impinging fellows. The modern mind, being established throughout this process, will find itself, by the fulness of the Renaissance, variegated and enriched, no longer the superstition susceptible and unscientific ground of, say, Ficino or Pico.

What does the growing modernity of society mean to you? Has modernity a single meaning? Is it measurable in terms of a new practicality, as we see it in Erasmus or More, a new self-awareness, as we see it already in Macchiavelli or Castiglione, or a daringly powerful new sense of body, as we see it in Michelangelo? All of these questions coagulate around the sense of 'progress,' which will in a couple of centuries—cf. J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress*----be a reigning doctrine in Western academic circles. Will this set of developments, this gradual movement toward the 'modern,' survive into our own time? Is the notion of the 'modern' already now past its prime? Would we still christen a hallowed art treasure by enshrining it in The Museum of Modern Art, or refer, as to a self-evident part of our intellectual landscape, to the University Department of Modern History? If not, what kinds of nomenclature would more fittingly apply to the ultra new in culture? Would whatever terminology we settle for need now to include a reference to the Age of Technology?

Tomasso Campanella (1568-1639)

The City of the Sun (1602)

Early modern Europe was marked with intellectual investigation—moves toward empiricism in philosophy and science, toward spiritual vision in painting and music, and toward visionary speculation, as in the utopian thinking of such as Thomas More, whose *Utopia* has drawn our attention, or, now, Tommaso Campanella, a Dominican friar, astrologer and theologian, a man of colossal brilliance, raised by an illiterate cobbler friend and aid to Popes, and victim of judicial intolerance which kept him imprisoned for decades. His decline from popular estimation began with his rejection of the dominant Aristotelian philosophy of the Italian schools, while increasingly, throughout his life, his preoccupation with astrology drew him into a questionable limelight, in the midst of which he found himself imprisoned for twenty seven years, in various Neapolitan fortresses, where he was tortured repeatedly, and given a life sentence. It was during this turbulent period that he composed his most admired works, including *The City of the Sun*, in which he lets his mind move freely over the ideal society of which he had been so cruelly deprived.

The narrative setting

The City of the Sun is a thinly framed narrative, purporting to relate the Conversation between a Knight Hospitalier and a sea captain, who has Just returned from a journey to the distant lands lying below the equator. (He has, in fact, been snatched up by a crowd, and forcefully led into an adventurous tour of a vast construction, a visionary city.) The text Campanella presents us with is the narration of the sea captain, to his avidly interested audience. The minimal stage dressing, of the narrated account, signals the avidity of Campanella's audience for those new world adventures so fascinating to Montaigne and Rabelais, not to mention Sir Thomas More, in his *Utopia.*

The City of the Sun

What confronts the captain, as he approaches the megalopolis to which his guide leads him, is a simulacrum of the planets in their motion around the earth. Our eyes travel a vast city of seven rings and seven planets, setting for symbolic actions, in whose sacred space the captain will be guided. (Nothing is without a symbolic significance, in this unfolding megalopolis.) Above seven huge gates rise conspicuous galleries for promenades, ornamented with stunning pictures, artifices layered upon artifice. What the sea captain is narrating, from visual memory, the listener is recreating as though from the inside of this new urban creation.

Astronomical Piety

At the center of the astronomical structure, stands a tall temple, itself perched on the summit of a pyramid. A single altar is within it, and the vast temple, three hundred fifty paces in width, glistens luminously. (The reader, following the captain's narration, grows increasingly aware of the Pythagorean symbolic of this radiant city into which he is walking; he suspects that every step he takes is being converted into symbolic meaning). The universe shaping into the visitor's imagination is seductive—with profusions of ornamental plants, outspreading galleries for Edenic walks, and interior decoration—elegant portable chairs—on all sides. Around the upper galleries of the temple stretch the cells for the priests, who dress in white gowns, and see to the everyday governing of the religious rites in the temple, in fact see to the governing of the entire polity, which is founded on itsidentity with the perfect harmony of Pythagorean harmony.

Leaders of the Universe

The supreme ruler of the universe worshipped by the temple personnel is Metaphysic assisted by Power, Wisdom and Love. A single book, sprinkled with varied Pythagorean holy formulae, is the sacred bible of the community. Onthe walls of the holy Chamber of governing, are vigorous paintings of all the finest species of animals and foliage. Frescoes of the most ingenious of the mechanical arts —cannon and typographic devices, for both of which we are indebted to China--stretch from walls to ceilings, and cunningly concealed throughout are dramatic portraits of the saving heroes of mankind—Caesar, Hannibal, Moses, Jupiter, Jesus, --while a diffuse spirit of Love, which generates the human race, hovers over all these individuals.

Social and physical health

The thus inspirited race, from which this holy instance of the human condition springs, Is originally Indian. In and around the vast holy structures, around which the ship captain has been stunningly observant, lives this ideal as a single communal whole, sharing all possessions in common, and so arranging their goods that no one is denied. (This is the main theme of More's *Utopia*, in which too all is in common, and none wants.) Age differentiations are essentialamong this otherwise homogeneous folk. All men over twenty-one are fathers, the minimum age for acquired wisdom is thirty-five, the young eat and interact together, men and women are assigned to distinct jobs, peculiar to their gender. Robust health is expected from both genders, while for women special emphasis is placed on clear complexions and sparkling garments.

Strength, discipline, wholeness

Work is not allowed to reach compulsive levels, in this society. Everyone works about four Hours a day, The workers are intelligent and precautious during their no- work time, and, in particular, alert to the every present need of self-protection. They are everywhere on the guard against warring enemies. While they are ready to fight, to protect themselves, and are well armed, with well cared for iron weapons, their goal in military matters is rather to humiliate than to crush the enemy. Within their own walls they are free and independent, making no use of money, except for trading at the gates to their city. There they show their ready friendliness tp foreigners. They facilitate citizenship for strangers; .In fact this robust grasp on life is part of the vitality of the entire culture.

Skills and Intellect

Specialists work toward skill in languages, their own native and 'Arabic,' which is prominently visible. Games are enjoyed, but active ones, no sitting games, like chess, which make for a slothful population. As for foods, no meat is eaten, vegetables and dairy products are freely consumed. Frugality of consumption, added to very limited consumption of alcohol, assures that the society will be little troubled by problems of indigestion or flatulence.

Nature and Freedom

By and large the City of the Sun is one in which the presence of nature—good complexion, baths in wine, healthy games, light food consumption, action in daily life, physical fitness and readiness for the rigors of the military, all contribute to well being and support an environment in which none are made to be the victims of others. Skills, as we have seen, are portals to significant positions in the society, in which justice and honor prevail over personal gain. Thanks to the benign atmosphere thus created, there is no need for a judicial or prison system; instead of a central prison there is a lofty and meditative Tower. It is taken for granted that the World was made, that only God's compassion for mankind permits him to sustain it, and that continual prayer—which is enjoined on the population—is essential to the lasting health of the society. It is in an effort to sustain the health of the whole that prayer is put to work sustaining the made world, to the splendor and power of which the early parts of *the text are devoted. What is the magnificent* architecture of the astronomical world, to which the ship captain is initially introduced, but a visual hymn to the praise of the supreme Pythagorean metaphysic, around which the planets revolve?

More and Campanella: Utopians

Both More and Campanella grew up into a pre-capitalist economy—sixteenth century Western Europe—in which, although there was no large scale competition, or any richness of institutions creating wealth and power—there were pockets of wealth among the nobility and the landed gentry, from which alert minds could read the gradual advent of economically ccmpetitive society. It was growingly clear that the feudal agricultural underpinnings of mediaeval society were no longer going to define social tone. We read in the early work of Shakespeare *(Henry VI, Part II*) that Jack Cade's rebellion brought a new type of social dissident onto the social consciousness of London. We see, with the advent of increasingly secularized universities and commercial newspapers, the advent of an open society. More and Campanella, working from deep within the assumptions of the Catholic Church, dreamed felicitously of new societies in which humans could claim their natural equality, and live in respect for one another.

Study guide

Within the same decade, Bacon (*New Atlantis*) and Campanella published their visions of a new world in the imagination. We have to suppose that Thomas More, as well, cast his Utopia as an act of speculative mind, by which he was enabled to work through ideas about the pros and cons of diverse social living styles. What, among these three utopian thinks, is the trigger? Were they all proto scientists, in search of a deeper understanding of the given world?

Is Campanella's *City of the Sun* a 'divine' or 'religiously privileged' spot? Were the principles practiced there of special moral elevation? Or would you rather say the alignment of the city, with the planets in their full meaning, was the source of the spirituality of the Sun? What place has the design philosophy of Pythagoras in conferring its distinctive character on Campanella's City?

From a literary view point, all three of the 'new world' discoverers, whom we have been mentioning, introduce their new world by means of a frame device, in which a speaker from 'distant places,' a sea captain, indigenes of an unknown island, suit perfectly, recounts journeys from which he returns to report to 'home,' or the base of the whole tale. What is the value of this kind of framing device, for the teller of the main tale?

A century after Sir Thomas More, the Spanish Jesuit priest, Tomasso Campanella, published his own new world vision. (To think about: was the gradual outflow of 'vision literature,' which made its way across Renaissance Europe, connected with the actual discovery of new lands, like the Americas? Was the opening up of the 'real world' an invitation to the opening up of the 'visionary world'? The possible interlinkages in question here may in fact have provided just the map by which history was at the time working itself out. The spirit of 'inquiry, behind the form of the essay, may have been just the driver required to make needed moves into science,' which today we are educated to take for granted. (Not all accept the invitation, in these post-pandemic days, which have brought to the light many versions of doubt about the scientific-technocratic revolution.)

NETHERLANDS

Desiderius Erasmus *(1466-1536)*

In Praise of Folly (Laus stultitiae) (1511)

Introduction

Nearly a contemporary of Ficino and Pico, Erasmus seems of another world from these two visionaries of Neoplatonism, men of the transition from mediaeval philosophy toward the first moves of man into a true and practical anthropology pf the human being. The man Pico and Ficino bring before them is deeply in need of guidance (Ficino), spiritual or physical, or of a replacement for God, as Pico puts it ecstatically.(He is, in other words, a man drunk with the power of the cosmos.) Erasmus, on the other hand, seems a real man of our world, of this side. To cross the boundary that separates the intellectually elite and mystical world of fifteenth century Florence into the already commercialized, diplomatic world of the Lowlands and international travel, was to pass from the very late mediaeval world into the very early business world of modern life.

Birth

Erasmus was a Dutch priest, theologian, and philosopher, who is viewed as a leading force in the Northern Renaissance, a culture shaping translator of the New Testament, and a prominent figure in the early Reformation. He is widely known for his linguistic skills, as well as for his theories of language. His own writing was voluminous and multi-faceted. He was suspect, to many of his fellow theologians, for both his moderation In theology—his ability to see the claims of free-thinkers and Protestants—and for his fidelity to the Catholic Church, to which he remained true all his life, believing that Its manifest weaknesses should be cured from within the Church. He was not one to give up on a useful and carefully nurtured 'system.'

Calamitous event

This extraordinary man was born as Geert Geerts, in Rotterdam (or Gouda), a Dutch citizen of the Holy Roman Empire. We believe that Erasmus lived for only four years in Rotterdam. In 1483 both of his parents, who were not legally married, died of the plague; forever after, Erasmus was to believe his origins stained by this calamitous event.

Education and Prominence

At the age of nine Erasmus and his brother were sent to a monastic school at Derventer, one of the best institutions in the country for Latin instruction. (Latin instruction was to pervade the education of the major figures of the Renaissance; in Erasmus' case the use and continuing study of Latin, and later Greek, as a language, was to be a lifelong pursuit. At Derventer Greek language was introduced for the first time in Holland, before the University level, and Erasmus eagerly took advantage of the historical innovation. A few. years later, moving to the canonry of Stein, in South Holland, Erasmus was ordained as a Catholic priest, though he appears not to have carried out this responsibility for long. It was at Stein that Erasmus fell in love dramatically, homosexually, with a fellow priest; he was later, on at least one occasion, dismissed as private tutor to the grandson of Thomas Grey, while there was no question of his male affairs during his lengthy period of living in England. In later life Erasmus made no mention of this stage in his development, and was always quick to condemn sodomy. Shorty after joining the priesthood, and thanks to his exceptional ability in Latin, Pope Leo X granted Erasmus a dispensation from the priesthood. The way was open for a freer existence. While stlll technically a priest, Erasmus was now a writer, theologian, and pioneering voice of his culture.

Visit to England

In l495 Erasmus moved to the College de Montaigu in Paris, a hub of Scholastic thinking, and in 1499 Erasmus was invited on a momentous trip to England, where he encountered many of the leaders of English thought, Thomas More, John Fisher, John Colet and others. Erasmus circulated at the University of Cambridge, where he lectured regularly, and was appointed Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity. He turned down the offer of a Life Professorship at Cambridge.

Peripatetic

The Queen's Library was enriched, during these years, by many texts of Erasmus' own writing, including his Translation of the New Testament from Greek. Worth noting, Erasmus returned from his first stupendous trip to England, with the express determination to master Greek to the point where he could provide a startlingly new contemporary translation of the New Testament, one in the making of which he would enter the intellectual field as a highly prepared linguist. Back in Europe he remained peripatetic, living for some time in Italy, assuming distinguished teaching posts at various universities but consistently refusing any invitation to settle down to a permanent position, He would not give up his free style of thinking and writing. Finally he moved to Basel, enjoying Swiss hospitality, and attracting scholars and friends from all over Europe.

Hunger for Greek

Much may seem to have been left out, in this sketch of Erasmus' rapid rise to intellectual celebrity. He was a free spirit, attractive as such to many partisans of one or another philosophical or theological position, and willing and able to discuss fine issues with a rare objectivity. All of that constituted an activity it itself. Then there was Erasmus' new Latin Testament, the fruit in part of his insatiable appetite for Greek, on which Erasmus had worked with hired teachers, borrowed books, and mid night oil for several years.

Translation

Erasmus began his biblical translation project in 1512, at the age of fifty, and through this work reached a widespread European and English audience, scholars and readers who were caught up, precisely at that time, with Reformation rethinking, and were without exception intensely following the doctrinal implications of each line of the translation. The keen interest in any new translation of the New Testament was magnified by the nearly universal fascination with the complete translation—both Testaments—of the Bible by a Spanish team directed by Bishop Cisneros, and set in motion already in 1502.

Erasmus' biblical translation work, as we can imagine, put him near the center of the issues which were to ignite what would soon be called the Protestant Reformation. The hurried conditions of Erasmus' work led to a plethora of text errors, but the contemporary heat, around many passages in Erasmus' translation, assured both translator and man a nearly global attention.

Theology, translation, philosophy, language

Erasmus worked tirelessly to translate the Greek New Testament into Latin, and to coordinate the two versions with one another. The work he was plunged into, as linguist-translator, and philosopher of language, transected the hottest theological issues of the day, controversial issues to which Erasmus tended to respond in a moderate and well humored fashion. (The issues were often linked to the question of *free will,* on which Erasmus declaimed against Luther, who was gaining prominence, both as a sharp tongued Reformer, a foe of Catholic tradition, and as a strong proponent of the doctrine of free will, around which this critic of Erasmus—though the two men initially admired one another—shaped his sharpest mutual charges against the corruption of the Catholic Church, and against the disheartening doctrine of *original sin,* against which Erasmus and many of his most distinguished predecessors had argued. The position of Erasmus on this theological issue was in the background of Erasmus' most widely read work, I*n Praise of Folly*, published in 1511.

In Praise of Folly

Popularity

In Praise of Folly proved to be the most popular of Erasmus' works, a highly original satire, drawing its social venom from the Latin satirist Lucian (Roman, 2nd century Syrian, Greek by culture and language), and from the affection of Sir Thomas More—Erasmus' closest British friend. Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* reads, by the end, like an across the board condemnation of the human condition, if not a diatribe on original sin at least an extended criticism of human behavior and needs. However it does not start that way. For Erasmus is a foxy narrator.

Comic mask

Erasmus introduces himself to his audience, as a comic performer, a mask, as in the Roman tradition, playing a part. He is addressing an audience, as though he were on stage, and essentially encouraging them to enjoy what they can of life. At the same time he is praising Folly. So he is praising himself for being the source of Joy that is giving his audience pleasure. Such tactics of a stand-up comedian, directed to an analysis of crowd psychology, is subtle and risky. The risk is that the stage master, Erasmus, may come off as a jokester, rather than as a voice commenting on the whole disastrous human comedy.

Satire

What in fact transpires is a thorough satire on the human race, which is always out for its pleasure but seldom identifies its true good or pleasure. With 'tongue in cheek' Erasmus claims the honor of being this global provider of pleasure, Mr. Folly. He notes that his mere appearance, on the stage of his audience, brings smiles to the faces of fellow humans. Folly is what brings the smiles to our faces. My father, continues Folly, was the ancient Greek god of wealth and comfort, Plutus, I was raised by two lovely nymphs, in happy green valleys: 'in those valleys is no drudgery or old age.' I have, Folly goes on to say, a happy formula for life, never to marry, never to inquire. 'To know nothing affords the easiest life.' And in that vein Folly continues, bathing her audience in the smiles of comfort. Only a perspicuous audience will have seen, approaching in the far distance of this *oratio*, the sharp critical turn ahead, the turn which will, eventually, show us Erasmus the embittered enemy of the inanity of mortals. Satire takes its time before laying its cards on the table.

Old Fools

Folly goes on, carefully assuring her well wishers that she can take the sting out of Old Age—a dose of Lethe takes care of that—making old folks into clowns, lovable left overs, happy vestiges. Emotions are given the central role, and reason gets little room, to darken the picture Folly is painting.

Inanity and Ignorance

The turns of argument begin to ready us for the awareness of our foolishness. Women are brought in to keep men cheerful, and to provide us beauty, but the results are not always what we desire. Anger and lust begin to intrude on the benefits we are accustomed to acquiring from our praise of Folly. (What women want, it turns out, is simply praise of their beauty). Marriage requires everyday wiles ,In order to work well. Even cuckoldry becomes essential to preserve the ingredients of desire. The fool who praises begins to resemble the stupidity of what he praises; wars break out from indiscriminate praise. Innocents and those without judgment are the loudest to praise Me. Those who scorn me have never lived, and indeed they die early. Fools who praise me go to the Elysian Fields, to have fun after death. Praising me may bring comfort and the ease of the resort community, yet there is no lasting pleasure to be had from the praise of Folly, Me.

Religious Folly

Following this 'summary' of *In* P*raise of Folly* has taken us on a roller coaster of attitudes, ranging from a contempt for the praiser of Me, Folly, to a margin of fascination with the blissful innocence (and stupidity) of the praiser. In the latter stages of the oration the Me, Folly, slides imperceptibly into a full bodied assault against the stupidity of the masses who praise. We shift into the religious zone, and are invited to see that religious superstition provides fertile examples of the folly of the P*raise of Folly*. Addiction to measuring out one's time In purgatory comes in for a good pommeling, reminding us of one recent 'violation of common sense' both Protestants and Catholics shared responsibility for, the cult of saints, the recitation of prescribed prayers or mantras, the Biblical texts prescribed for relief: all these 'praises of folly' could be classed with the abuses of reason the Praise of Folly invites. No one thanks Me for helping them recover from being a fool, but only for satisfying their desires.

The human rash

Folly enjoys looking down from above onto its pullulating devotees. Thoughtless humanity provides endless supplies of ant like creatures crawling across the surface of the globe. Pedants, school fools, bloodsucking merchants, writers and scholars scratching one another's backs, Scholastics, monks with their indifference to the vow of chastity , militant anti-Christ Popes: these are the rashes of the human animal, and they pop up unsystematically, when the earth has its way.

Other Writings

Prolific

Erasmus was a prolific author: it is claimed that by the 1530's from ten to twenty percent of all book sales in Europe were of books or texts by Erasmus. (From the time of his work with the famed printer, Aldus Minutius, Erasmus found himself enmeshed in issues of printing, qualities of paper stock, and the business of determining the number of copies texts required. (This close to the Gutenberg transformations, the hands on actuality of printing and distribution played a dominant role in the establishment of literary reputations.) Erasmus worked both for God and for his own purposes, in the pursuit of his values.

Adagia

Already in 1500, in his early thirties, Erasmus published his *Adagia* (*Adages), a collection of what we would call popular sayings—'in the* land of the one-eyed the blind man is king,' 'a stitch in time saves nine.' Respect for genuine wisdom lies normally at the root of such proverbs, which condense age old experiences.

Handbook of The Christian Soldier

In 1503 Erasmus published *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier*, a sharply focused, but non sectarian sermon-tract on the path to Christianity. His stress is quite naturally on New Testament love and mercy, in other words the inheritances of Jesus, rather than on more intricate patterns of doctrine. The handbook was issued in the very years, 1512-20, when Erasmus was issuing his new translations of the Old and New Testaments, and when his mind and learning systems were full go for mastering the linguistic aspects of translation. (He was also deeply immersed in the study of the Greek and Latin fathers—Jerome, Augustine, Origen—and bringing back direct attention onto the historical growth of the Christian religion.) The Erasmian tone continues moderate and non confrontative, avoiding adversarial self-positionings to which he barely opens himself, except in the most church-critical elements *of In Praise of Folly*.

'The Education of a Christian Prince'

In l516 Erasmus published 'The Education of a Christian Prince,' a text contrasting powerfully with Macchiavelli's *The* Prince, published only three years earlier. For Erasmus, the key traits required of the Christian ruler were honor and sincerity, and the Prince was above all seen as a protector of the people.

For Macchiavelli it was of central importance for the Prince to be in control of his people, and to understand in advance the strategies he may require, in order to outfox his opponents.

Sileni Alcibiades

Also in 1515 Erasmus published his *Sileni Alcibiades,* 'inner orgiastic figures' of the classical Greek playboy, Alcibiades, in which the central point is that what is interior, unseen, can be far more significant than what is on one's surface. The Church, Erasmus contends, is essentially such an invisible presence, encumbered with regaiia and architectonic trappings, but fundamentally interior. This perspective intersects with Erasmus' basic quietness of insight—one that led him into more than a few doctrinal quarrels, as with the German reformer, Ulrich von Huetten, but ultimately into a lifetime commitment to generosity and creativity in thought.

The Heritage of Erasmus: *The Church*

Erasmus was a prolific theologian, linguist, philosopher, moralist, and writer—for writerly he was, say In *In Praise of Folly*, with a verve and humanity which display both his linguistic skills and his sardonic nature. He was at the same time an ardent student of the works of the fathers of his Church—Aristotle, Augustine, Jerome, Saint Basil, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Ambrose—those foundational thinkers whose works required unearthing and reinterpreting. Erasmus' role, as a scholar constantly editing and representing such predecessors, was a precious example of scholarship in the interests of faith. Yet he revered the Church as the praying voice of humanity as a whole, and though carried forward into many theological disputes, he remained true to Christian notions of constructive dialogue. It is no wonder that the reputation of Erasmus as a moderate and conciliator has made him an increasingly respected element in our human search for roots from which we can grow even in the most threatening times.

Christian Humanism

Christian Humanism is in fact the sobriquet we gravitate toward, in characterizing the contribution of Erasmus to the cultural intelligence we carry into the nuclear world. As we have said, Erasmus was an ordained Catholic priest, who entered the priesthood in 1492—a date simultaneously made famous by Christopher Columbus, and equally emblematic of a new global social world lying on the horizon. Erasmus remained in this role for four years, before receiving a papal dispensation which allowed him to live as a scholar-priest, attention worthy chiefly for his mastery of Latin.

Traveling Representative

We might say that from that point on Erasmus became a widely traveling representative of his church, at home in various languages and cultures, and an alert participant in the Reformation issues storming across Europe. That participation lasted only so long, for Martin Luther, angered at Erasmus' rejection of original sin and trust in free will, grew increasingly contentious, and Erasmus took on an increasingly moderate role, happy to reconcile many thorny issues; he included, among the sources of supernatural understanding available to us, both the Bible and the seven sacraments sanctified in the Bible, the 'unwritten sacred tradition.' Such references as these enraged Luther but at the same time deeply offended the monastic faithful, in whose midst Erasmus had initially initiated his Christian vocation. Erasmus, on the way to the position that others were soon to call Christian Humanism, was stiffening his conciliatory position with the deep fund of scholarship he had made his own.

Faith and Education

The lynchpin of the position reached by Erasmus was his view of education. (Like other Early Modern thinkers, Erasmus found the proof of the pudding, when it comes to educational value, lies in its capacity in instruct and build human societies. Erasmus believed strongly in peace and cooperation as foundations of learning. By contrast with Luther, or for that matter Montaigne, Erasmus relied on the inherent decency of human beings to sustain in one another the skills of natural growth. Montaigne will lay out a specific

pattern of educational stages, see that it is reinforced, and in that structuring replicate his own background of tightly self-monitored discipline.

Study Guide

Erasmus was born only a few years after Pico, and thirty five years after Ficino . It is hard to pin point the cultural gap that is forming on both sides of the years 1600. There are however landmarks. Take for example the issue of Neoplatonism, which was so formative for the two Italian intellectuals, allowing them access to a mystical form of Platonism. Erasmus was no less devoted, than these two Florentines, to the Classics and to Plato, but his attraction to ancient wisdom veered more toward translation, scholarly interpretation, and 'life wisdom' than toward unfolding mysteries of spirit. Can you see, in the gap among these three men, some Just opening fissure between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance?

From the beginning of his private education, Erasmus was heavily drawn toward Greek, and toward the issues of translating Greek Biblical texts into Latin. Why was Greek so important to Erasmus? Was Greek widely studied in the early Renaissance? Was Greece, as a contemporary culture source, important to educated pan -uropeans like Erasmus?

What was the position of Erasmus, who was a lifelong Catholic priest, toward Luther and the Reformation? Do we see an answer in In Praise of Folly, where he extensively calumniates the shallowness and fickleness of human minds, and by contrast respects serious Christian thought? Was Erasmus, a Christian Humanist, wide-lensed enough to see both sides of the Catholic-Protestant controversy?

What kind of literature is Erasmus' In Praise of Folly? Take a look at Lucian's ancient satire on folly, from which Erasmus derived his impulse. That text will prepare you to assess the kind of comic-grave satire on the absurdity of the human condition, for which Erasmus, working his Catholic theology, felt such contempt. In the end of P*raise of Folly,* though, can you see a rich Christian pity for humanity?

Epilogue

Themes there absolutely are, in the incremental play out of a 'modern western mind.' But despite my founding intention, to establish master themes, in the making of the modern mind, I have had to yield, over and over, to mini themes, to linking b to c with the help of d. Straight lines, of unmixed basis, were not to be found.

The theme of antiquity.

Long pressed against the mediaeval belief-world, and before that the Greco Latin world, which was deeply embedded in the pre-modern educational system, the modern mind, in imagination and in its historical assumptions, grew increasingly distant from the classical world. We can observe this change in, say, that passage from the Neoplatonism of Pico and Ficino, to that of Erasmus. The two fifteenth century Italians are constitutionally steeped in the lore of antiquity; Erasmus, virtually their contemporary, is an erudite classicist, knowing more than living antiquity. Ronsard, Montaigne, and Sidney—a half century later-- are already inheritors of what we might call the 'classical tradition,' thinking out inherited wisdom,' living off the cultural emblems of antiquity. Sir Francis Bacon Is an essayist of his time, sensitive to good sense—as he finds it in his wide classical reading—picking the sane tones out of Plutarch and Epictetus, playing no games of modernity, talking like 'an antique Greek.' By the time we read Dryden, and follow the discussion of the ancient mind in drama, the dramaturgy of the Greeks, we realize that we are at a remove from that foundational world, and are living that intellectual conversation piece, the 'battle between the ancients and the moderns.' We are on the brink of 'writing in the classical tradition.'

The theme of demystification

The making of the modern mind? Shall we pause again on our first example, the theme of antiquity? We just rehearsed some of the landmarks of a slippery topography, which in stages moved us from examples of immersion in the ancient-- Neoplatonism culturally deep into the ancient—to examples, Dryden?—in

which the cultural habits of the ancients are scrutinized as though in the lens of sophisticated theater goers. We are watching the valence of attitudes, toward the ancient, which by the time of Matthew Arnold, so sensitive to the topic, so l9th century in his thinking, will seem to have reached a fork in the road: the classical tradition will be a precious artefact, rather than lived tradition; it will be time to fight for the classical, as for the Christian. The surprising tenacity of the classical, in new forms of vigor, will be made apparent again, not long after Arnold, in the works of such as Giono, Joyce, and Andre Gide. The modern literary mind will once again be a lived element of literary imagination.

The theme of religion and spirituality

Arguably, the omnipresence of the religious perspective, which flooded mediaeval literature and indeed daily life, readies itself, and with the beginning of the Renaissance—Montaigne, Erasmus, Sir Thomas More—will have begun to assume an increasingly diffuse, generically spiritual role across the cultures of Western Europe. (It is the modern mind in a broad sense that we trace here, not the western mind as such, although the mind of Western Europe, which consumes the depth of the Classical, has consistently foredriven the major zones of achievement, innovation, and speculation.) The struggles between orthodox Christianity, and an enlightenment program, generated in the eighteenth century, managed for a substantial time to suffuse the impression that the great Age of Religion had met its match. (Without question, the perspectives of such as Voltaire, d'Alembert, or Diderot were strong antidotes to Christian orthodoxy). Viewed from the present of the 20th century, however, it would
Be hard to argue that the religious impulse had ceased to shape cultural norms.

The theme of discontinuous drift toward a modern condition, which permits itself formulation in progress, in the course of things

*T*he insinuation is allowed in, throughout this text on modernization, that the gradual rise to a freshly modern perspective—say that of Eugenius on nature, in the final essay of the book,-is itself to be viewed through various lenses. The ages of technology, revolutions in communications, in which we live today has deeply inflected the meaning of 'the modern,' to the point where what we took as 'modern,' in the advances of the volume before us, will hardly seem 'modern' at all. The author will have taken note, while tracking his own nearly century on the ground, that in American culture what seemed 'modern' in the earlier twentieth century, has eighty or ninety years later come to seem part of some other kind of temporal category, modern inflected by the mechanical-technological to the point that it seems to be outdating itself at an unprecedented rate.