Mack, Peter. "Montaigne's Use of His Reading." *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare*. : Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. 21–41. The WISH List. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472544902.ch-002>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 12:36 UTC.

Copyright © Peter Mack 2010. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

2. Montaigne's Use of His Reading

Although Montaigne was one of the great originals of world literature, the founder of a new genre, the discoverer of a new subject, his work is strongly marked by, and acutely conscious of, the role of reading. Reading stimulated him to thought and to writing. Because he studs his text with quotations and because of the survival of several annotated books from his library, we can learn more about his practices and uses of reading than about any other sixteenth-century writer. We learn that his reading prompted him to begin writing certain chapters, that it helped him find more moving expressions and that it stimulated questioning and reformulation of ideas. Montaigne's originality of thought and force of expression arise from his logical and rhetorical response to his reading. In this chapter I shall consider the contributions which Montaigne's reading of other authors made to his *Essais*.

While Montaigne rejects the emphasis on rote-learning in humanist education, arguing that the teacher should ask the pupil what he thinks rather than expecting him to repeat what the authors have said,¹ he nevertheless believes that readers ought to take over from others the arguments they believe to be true.

[A] Car s'il embrasse les opinions de Xenophon et de Platon par son propre discours, ce ne seront plus les leurs, ce seront les siennes ... La verité et la raison sont communes à un chacun, et ne sont non plus à qui les a dites premierement, qu'à qui les dict apres ... Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais elles en font apres le miel, qui est tout leur; ce n'est plus thin ny marjorlaine: ainsi les pieces empruntées d'autrui, il les transformera et confondera, pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien: à sçavoir son jugement. Son institution, son travail et estude ne vise qu'à le former (I, 26, V151–2, P157).

[A] If it is by his own reasoning that he adopts the opinions of Xenophon and Plato; they are no longer theirs: they are his ... Truth and reason are common to all: they no more belong to the man who first put them into words than to him who last did so ... Bees ransack flowers here and flowers there; but then they make their own honey which is entirely theirs and no longer thyme or marjoram. Similarly the boy will transform his borrowings; he will confound their forms so that the end-product is entirely his: namely his judgement, the forming of which is the only aim of his toil, his study and his education (S170–1).

The purpose of reading is to stimulate the mind and the judgement by providing materials for them to work on. Montaigne's comment on the use of reading depends heavily on Plutarch's essay 'How to Listen to Poetry' (2), which itself draws on Horace and Seneca.² Some of Montaigne's comments represent his own reading as self-consciously casual. 'I leaf through books; I do not study them'.³ 'I only look to books to give me pleasure through honest amusement'.⁴ 'If I come across difficult passages in my reading I never bite my nails over them, after making a charge or two I let them be ... If one book wearies me I take up another'.⁵ '[In my library] I turn the pages of one book at one time, of another at another, without plan or order, in short pieces; sometimes I dream, sometimes while walking I take note and dictate my dreams like this one'.⁶ But his detailed comments on his reading and his deep enthusiasm for a number of favourite authors (Plutarch and Seneca primarily, but also Ovid, Virgil, Lucretius, Horace, Catullus, Caesar) suggest that this is largely presentational *sprezzatura*.⁷ There is also good evidence in Montaigne's surviving books of the thoroughness and discriminating judgement with which he read.⁸ Elsewhere he claims that reading has a special role in stimulating his processes of thought.

[C] La lecture me sert specialement à esveiller par divers objects mon discours: à embesongner mon jugement, non ma memoyre (III, 3, V819, P860).

[C] Reading because of its different subjects particularly awakes my linguistic expression; it sets to work my judgement, not my memory (S923).

He insists that a *lecteur suffisant* (competent reader) 'can find many perfections in a text which the author did not put in and gives it richer meanings and perspectives'⁹ and he evidently includes himself in this category.

[C] J'ay leu en Tite Live cent choses que tel n'y a pas leu. Plutarque en y a leu cent, outre ce que j'y ay sceu lire, et, à l'adventure, outre ce que l'autheur y avoit mis (I, 26, V156, P162).

[C] I have read a hundred things in Livy which others have not found there. Plutarch has read a hundred beyond what I have known enough to read there, and perhaps, beyond what the author put there (S175–6).

He also hopes for this critical and creative reading from his own readers.¹⁰ He fully understands that there is no end to interpretation.

[A] Ceste opinion me ramentoit l'experience que nous avons, qu'il n'est aucun sens ny visage, ou droict, ou amer, ou doux, ou courbe, que l'esprit humain ne trouve aux escrits qu'il entreprend de fouiller (II, 12, V585, P621).

[A] This opinion reminded me of an experience which we all have, that there is no slant or meaning, strict or twisted, sweet or bitter, which the human mind cannot find in writings which it undertakes to read (S661).

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

[B] Quand j'escris, je me passe bien de la compagnie et souvenance des livres, de peur qu'ils n'interrompent ma forme. Aussi qu'à la verité, les bons auteurs m'abattent par trop et rompent le courage (III, 5, p. 874, P917).

[B] When I am writing I can do without the company and support of books because I am afraid that they will interfere with my form. Also, to tell the truth, because great authors overwhelm me and destroy my confidence (S989).

Nevertheless the amount of quotation and paraphrase indicates that Montaigne must have had books before him as he composed and revised his *Essais*. He gives different reasons for his quotations.¹¹ While attacking others for indiscriminate borrowing he claims that he uses other authors when they have expressed what he thinks better than he can ('I only speak others' words the better to express myself').¹² For all his criticism of humanist educational methods, it seems that Montaigne's thinking, which he prefers to describe as self-expression, generally forms itself as a response (sometimes appreciative, sometimes critical) to the texts he has been reading.

Montaigne's reading provides him with models for the processes and structures of composition. In the first stages of the early essays Montaigne collected historical and poetic examples illustrating moral lessons on the models of the training offered in the humanist grammar school and of compilations like Pietro Crinito's *De honesta disciplina* (1504) and Pedro

Mexia's *La Silva di varia leccion* (1542) which Montaigne used in the French translation by Claude Gruget (1552).¹³ But the decisive model for the initial stages of the more complex essays was Plutarch's *Moralia* in Amyot's French translation.¹⁴ These short prose treatises which discussed a range of moral and scholarly topics from many angles, embracing narrative, philosophy and poetry and permitting dialogue, combine many of the elements found in Montaigne's mature essays. Indeed it is quite possible that the appearance of Amyot's translation in 1572 was one of the factors which persuaded Montaigne to turn the leisure reading of his retirement into the intellectual labour of the *Essais*. Plutarch is the author whom Montaigne uses most, often in direct (but unmarked) quotation of the French translation, sometimes with light alteration. Isabelle Konstantinovic's valuable *Montaigne et Plutarque* lists 751 borrowings from the *Parallel Lives* and the *Moralia* in the *Essais*. Her tables show that these borrowings are spread across ninety-one of Montaigne's 107 chapters. The great majority of these borrowings (601 out of her subdivided total of 763) occur in the first published version of each *essai*.¹⁵ The greatest number of borrowings are from three less well-known 'essays' which are quite well adapted to Montaigne's purposes:¹⁶ *Whether Land or Sea Animals Are More Intelligent* (forty-six borrowings), which provides many of the examples for Montaigne's *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*; *Notable Sayings of the Spartans* (38) and *Sayings of Kings and Commanders* (33), collections of the quotations Montaigne likes to use as evidence or as provocations to contradiction and qualification. The Plutarch essays which Montaigne uses most in the 1588 revision and after tend to be ethical treatises (*How to Tell a Friend from a Flatterer* (twenty borrowings in 1588 and after), *Tanquillity of Mind* (10), *Why Divine Justice Delays* (8) and *How to Restrain Anger* (7); but also *How to Listen* (8), *Instructions for Politicians* (8) and *Sayings of Kings and Commanders* (25)) used particularly in Montaigne's third book. Among the *Lives* only *Alexander*, *Caesar* and *Lycurgus* are much used after the first edition.¹⁷ These numerical patterns suggest that Montaigne used Plutarch mainly as a starting point.

But on the whole the *Moralia* provides general rather than specific models.¹⁸ When Plutarch and Montaigne write essays on similar topics (e.g., education and friendship) there is usually little resemblance between them, but *De la colere* (II, 31) makes considerable use of *Moralia* 29, *On Restraining Anger*.¹⁹

Reading provided Montaigne with the starting point for some of his chapters. In *A demain les affaires* (II, 4) Montaigne's prefatory praise of

Amyot and Plutarch leads into a story about Rusticus at dinner declining to open a letter from the emperor from *Moralia* 36, *On Curiosity*, which opens the subject of the chapter. *De la conscience* (II, 5) takes its inspiration and some of its early examples from two pages of *Moralia* 41, *Why Divine Justice Delays*.²⁰ *De la solitude* (I, 39) begins its exploration of the contemplative life with some close translations from Seneca's *Epistolae morales*, 7 and 28 and draws material from other letters and treatises of Seneca as it continues.²¹ *Coustume de l'isle de Cea* (II, 3) takes its first examples of suicide as a form of defiance from Plutarch, *Moralia* 16, *Notable Sayings of the Spartans* before drawing on Stoic sources like Seneca, *Epistolae morales*, 70, 77 and 78, and Cicero, *De finibus*.²² The essay begins by citing quotations for and against suicide before developing Montaigne's own view through a discussion of narrative examples mostly taken from his reading.

In other cases I believe that Montaigne knew from quite early on in its composition that a chapter would conclude with a quotation or a passage based on quotation. *Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir* (I, 20) ends with a four-page imaginary speech (*ethopoeia*, speech for a character, an exercise from the *progymnasmata*) for Nature, based on Lucretius III, 931–62 (several quotations from here and elsewhere in Lucretius III were added in 1588) and translations from Seneca's *Epistolae morales*, 24, 30, 49, 77, 117, 120.²³ *De la solitude* (I, 39) ends with a letter constructed out of phrases translated from Seneca's *Epistolae morales*, 7, 22 and 68.²⁴ The second half of *De l'inégalité qui est entre nous* (I, 42) summarizes and elaborates the views of Hieron from Xenophon's dialogue *Hieron*, filling it out with examples from other sources.²⁵ Most strikingly (and wittily) of all, Montaigne ends his massive argument about the inability of the unaided human intellect to make theological conclusions in the *Apologie* with a long, just about acknowledged quotation from Plutarch's *Moralia* 24, *On the E at Delphi*, in which the pagan Plutarch argues that man should not fear death because man's experience of existence is wholly inadequate in comparison with the full existence of God.²⁶

Having established Montaigne's use of his reading as a model and as a starting and finishing point for particular essays, I now want to examine the more controversial suggestion that he undertook systematic research for some of his essays, deliberately reading particular texts which he thought might furnish material for particular chapters. For example Bernard Weinberg has shown that in *Des cannibales* Montaigne supplements the words of his informant with recollections and re-reading of travel narratives.²⁷ This

suggestion runs against the image which Montaigne likes to present of himself as a casual reader who picks up books from time to time, putting them down equally quickly and never reading for long. Montaigne was exceptionally perceptive and retained much of what he read. He liked to portray himself as a gentleman rather than a scholar, writing his works with a certain casual *sprezzatura*, but no one could have assimilated the range of works which Montaigne knew or have thought so profoundly about the implications of many of the stories and ideas he met in them without serious intellectual labour.

The case of Lucretius provides some indications.²⁸ We now know that Montaigne bought a copy of Lambinus's edition of Lucretius soon after its publication in late 1563 or early 1564.²⁹ Between the date of this purchase and 16 October 1564 he read the entire work carefully and made many annotations to the text. Simone Fraisse dates Montaigne's quotations of Lucretius in the *Essais* as follows: fifty (1580); two more (1582); ninety-five added (1588) and one more in 1595 (this last is quoted via Lipsius).³⁰ This suggests that after his reading of Lucretius in 1564, Montaigne must have re-read the work at least twice: at some time between 1572 and 1580 for the first edition and again in the second phase of the composition of the *Essais* in 1585–8. The likelihood is that he read sections of Lucretius even more frequently since he regarded him as one of his four favourite Latin poets, and at times even on a par with Virgil.³¹ But the use of Lucretius in the *Essais* is highly concentrated. Of the total of 148 quotations, ninety-eight occur in just three chapters. The seventy-six quotations in *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* (II, 12) form an essential part of the argument of that work. Montaigne takes delight in inverting Lucretius's arguments that unless we believe our senses we have no knowledge, to argue that, because the senses are unreliable, secure knowledge of any kind is unattainable.³² Montaigne quotes a series of excerpts from book IV of Lucretius to make this point.³³ It seems that Montaigne had certain pages of Lucretius before him at both stages of writing his longest essay.³⁴ The much shorter *Que philosophe c'est apprendre à mourir* (I, 20) includes sixteen quotations from Lucretius in its nineteen pages, many of them concentrated in the speech of Nature at the end. The next largest number of quotations (6) occurs in the ten page *De l'inégalité qui est entre nous* (I, 42), where Lucretius and Horace carry much of the argument and Lucretius is used to conclude. Three of the quotations are taken from the prefatory section of book two where Lucretius explains the irrelevance of splendour and glory. There are only four quotations from Lucretius in *Sur des*

vers de Virgile (III, 5) but one of them is the description of the lovemaking of Venus and Mars in the introduction to book one (I.32–40) which Montaigne compares with the Virgilian verses of the title.³⁵ Montaigne greatly admired Lucretius as a poet. Along with Horace,³⁶ he quotes him more than any other Latin poet, and sometimes at considerable length.³⁷ Many of the quotations bear witness to his admiration of his expression but in other cases he exploits the relevance of his arguments to the topic in hand.

Because of his atheistic outlook Lucretius was a dangerous author to appear to endorse in the sixteenth century. Montaigne sets all this aside, never using him to attack religion but never concealing the extent to which he quoted him or his admiration for Lucretius's powers of thought and expression. His extensive quotation helped establish Lucretius as a great poet who had to be read whatever people might think of his religious opinions. While this seems quite understandable for secular moderns it was a courageous and important attitude to promote in a century torn by religious wars, and in which accusations of atheism were common and sometimes murderous.

Even though Montaigne knew Seneca's *Epistolae morales* and some of the moral treatises (e.g., *De beneficiis*, *De clementia* and *De ira*) well,³⁸ in this case too his borrowings are strongly concentrated. Only nine chapters of the *Essais* have ten or more borrowings from Seneca's *Epistolae morales*, and of those the leading ones, which have already been mentioned, tend to focus especially on one or two of Seneca's letters: *Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir* (thirty-seven borrowings; especially from letters 26, 77); *De la solitude* (thirty-three, especially from 7, 28); *Coustume de l'isle de Cea* (sixteen, especially from 70); *De l'inegalité qui est entre nous* (fifteen, especially from 76). The relevance of these titles to the philosophical preoccupations of the *Epistolae morales* is clear. Looking at the question from the other direction the seven letters which are borrowed from more than five times are all closely linked with particular chapters.³⁹ Montaigne used Cornelius Agrippa's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* in only two essays but quite heavily in those two.⁴⁰

Furthermore there are particular sections of the *Essais* where one source is used consistently. For example, in the section of the *Apologie* on the rationality of animals a twenty-five page passage depends very heavily on Plutarch, *Moralia* 63, *Whether Land or Sea Animals Are More Intelligent*, and this is the only place where Montaigne uses this work.⁴¹ Some crucial sections of the later chapters in book three rely on the more strictly ethical treatises of the *Moralia*. Near the end of *De l'incommodité de la grandeur*

(III, 7) three stories of sycophantic behaviour are taken from *Moralia* 4, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, an obvious reference for this topic.⁴² In *De l'art de conferer* (III, 8) the crucial move towards accusing oneself of one's faults is made with a saying from Plato (which Montaigne reinforces from the source in the C text) taken from *Moralia* 29, *On Restraining Anger*.⁴³ Konstantinovic points out that the central part of *De la phisionomie* (III, 12), when, moralizing his story of the reaction of the poor to the plague, Montaigne finds that preparation for death is useless, is a reworking of a section from the beginning of Plutarch's *The Love of Parents for Their Children*, *Moralia* 32.⁴⁴ A little later in the same essay Montaigne writes a speech for Socrates which is an obvious reworking of Plato's *Apology*.⁴⁵ A section on the importance of plain-speaking to rulers from *De l'experience* relies on ideas and phrases from a few pages of *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, which, once more, would be an obvious place to look for suitable material on this topic.⁴⁶

For the later revisions of the book Montaigne appears to have undertaken a systematic programme of reading in histories of the new world and of Asia.⁴⁷ His reading of the second edition of Fumée's translation of López de Gómara's *Histoire générale des Indes occidentales* provided the material and the stimulus for one of the most moving sections of the whole work. All the examples and stories mentioned in the final section of *Des coches* (III, 6) are taken from Gómara's compilation history (apart from the story of Cuauhtémoc which comes from Gómara's life of Cortés). Montaigne has built arguments around them, shortened some of the stories and amplified the emotional effect of others and in so doing has entirely changed what he has taken over while at the same time introducing a new and strong element to his own thought. Gómara had written his history to celebrate the Spanish conquest and justify Cortés's actions. Montaigne reacts against the atrocities Gómara relates and takes his manner of telling the stories as a guarantee of their essential truth.

[B] Nous tenons d'eux-mesmes ces narrations, car ils ne les advouent pas seulement, [C] ils s'en ventent et les preschent. (V913, P958)⁴⁸

[B] These accounts we have from the Spaniards themselves. They do not merely confess to them, they [C] boast of them and proclaim them. (S1034)

Montaigne compares the new world to a young child, a new brother, whose development has been crippled by the corruption of the old world.⁴⁹ He uses examples from Gómara's history to argue first that the new world was superior

to the old in craftsmanship, piety and bravery and second that the conquerors (whom he usually identifies with as 'we', *i.e.*, fellow representatives of the old world, but sometimes distances himself from as 'the Spaniards') were superior only in the destructive power of their weapons. Then he comments on the motivations and effects of the European conquest.

[B] Au rebours nous nous sommes servis de leur ignorance et inexperience à les plier plus facilement vers la trahison, luxure, avarice et vers toute sorte d'inhumanité et de cruauté, à l'exemple et patron de nos moeurs. Qui mit jamais à tel prix le service de la mercadence et de la trafique? Tant de villes rasées, tant de nations exterminées, tant de millions de peuples passez au fil de l'espée, et la plus riche et belle partie du monde bouleversée pour la negotiation des perles et du poivre: Mechaniques victoires. (V910, P955)

[B] We, on the contrary, took advantage of their ignorance and lack of experience to pervert them more easily towards treachery, debauchery and cupidity, toward every kind of cruelty and inhumanity, by the example and model of our own manners. Whoever else has rated trade and commerce at such a price? So many cities razed to the ground, so many nations wiped out, so many millions of individuals put to the sword, and the most beautiful and the richest part of the world shattered, on behalf of the pearls-and-pepper business! Tradesman's victories! (S1031)

By reorganizing Gómara's account of a dialogue between a Spanish captain and the rulers of a local port, he allows the Indians' words to speak for their rationality and restraint in comparison with the rapaciousness of their conquerors.⁵⁰ Their calm and reasonable response is then contrasted with two atrocity stories of the murder and torture of the Inca Atahualpa and the Aztec Emperor Cuauhtémoc.⁵¹ Desperate to discover their treasure the Spaniards tortured the king's favourite lord in his presence.

[B] Ce seigneur, se trouvant forcé de la douleur, environné de braziers ardents, tourna sur la fin piteusement sa veue vers son maistre, comme pour luy demander [C] mercy de ce qu'il n'en pouvoit plus. [B] Le Roy, plantant fierement et rigoureusement les yeux sur luy, pour reproche de sa lascheté et pusillanimité, luy dit seulement ces mots, d'une voix rude et ferme: Et moy, suis je dans un bain, suis je pas plus à mon aise que toy? (V912, P957)⁵²

[B] That lord, overcome with pain, surrounded by blazing braziers, finally turned his gaze piteously towards his sovereign as if to beg [C] forgiveness because he could stand it no longer. [B] That King proudly and severely fixed his eyes on him to reproach him for his cowardice and faint-heartedness and simply said these words in a firm hoarse voice: 'And me, am I having a bath? Am I any more at ease than you are?' (S1033)

Elsewhere Montaigne quarries Gómara for additional examples to support arguments he had already formulated. These 1588 additions include new instances of civilized behaviour on the part of cannibals (I, 31), many new instances to illustrate the extraordinary customs which different people accept as normal (I, 23) and a new section for the *Apologie* on similarities of belief between the old and new worlds.⁵³ While these additions form part of his wider project to add examples from Asian and American history and culture to existing arguments, *Des coches* shows how a new reading in history prompted Montaigne to develop a new response.

It can be argued that Montaigne deliberately re-read the Latin poets in order to add to the Latin quotations of the 1588 edition. Of the total 739 quotations, 464 (roughly 63 per cent) were added then.⁵⁴ On the other hand, a good deal of Montaigne's reading must have stuck with him. When he sets out a Stoic idea, searching for the precise passage in Seneca's letters from which he took it may well be fruitless, even though he may have first come across the idea there. Montaigne's instructions on reading always emphasize the need to ingest the substance of an author's idea rather than remembering the words or the source. By the same token, Montaigne owes his knowledge of Epaminondas primarily to Plutarch's *The Daemon of Socrates*,⁵⁵ but we must not expect that he needed to re-read that work every time he mentioned him. The use of Plato's *Apology* in *De la phisionomie* offers a middle case. Montaigne would obviously have remembered the general tenor of Socrates's speech from his earlier readings of the text. That would have prompted him to think it suitable for that particular point in his developing argument. But once he decided to re-work the speech rather than simply referring to it he surely would have opened Ficino's translation and worked from it. Reviewing the text at a later stage he decided to extend his summary of the speech and turned again to his translation of Plato to do so.⁵⁶

Speculation about Montaigne's methods of working is also encouraged by the frequency with which, especially in the 1588 edition, new Latin quotations are added to passages where the French text is not otherwise changed.⁵⁷ Of

the twenty-one Latin quotations added to *Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir* (I, 20) in 1588, fifteen are added to the existing French text without any other additions. It seems likely that Montaigne combined two related procedures. On one side we may imagine that as he re-read Latin poetry while he was preparing the second edition between 1585 and 1588 he inserted passages into his existing text where it seemed appropriate.⁵⁸ On the other side we can imagine that while he was re-reading his own text in order to improve it (he must have done this because he made many additions in his own voice), he found places where short sections of poetry he knew would add to the effect.

Montaigne may well have employed indexes in finding quotations from Latin literature suitable for inclusion in his book. We know that he compiled an index for the copy of Lucretius he bought in 1563⁵⁹ as well as marking or commenting on particular passages, several of which later turn up in the *Essais* as he read or re-read the text.⁶⁰ There is evidence, too, that he preferred to buy editions with indexes (e.g., of Plutarch, Virgil and Seneca).⁶¹ The opening quotations and stories about Homer in *Des plus excellens hommes* (II, 36) are taken (and slightly rearranged) from the alphabetical index of Amyot's translation of the *Moralia*.⁶² In the *Apologie* he expresses the wish that Lipsius would produce a classified list of the opinions of the ancients on metaphysics and ethics.⁶³ It may well be, as Michel Magnien has suggested,⁶⁴ that Montaigne or his secretary kept an index to the *Essais* to assist them in finding appropriate locations for new extracts from his reading. In II, 27 he justifies including a story from Livy that is not entirely suitable to his theme at that point by saying that 'beautiful subjects always justify their place, wherever you put them'.⁶⁵ This implies that there were some stories that he liked so much that he decided to include them before finding the place in which to put them.

I know of only one instance in which Montaigne quotes the same lines of poetry twice, using Cicero's translation of two lines from Homer's *Odyssey* to explain the changeability of human moods (II, 1) and the inconsistency of our judgement (II, 12), both originating in the 1580 edition.⁶⁶ There are several cases in which he uses a series of adjacent quotations, some within a short passage of the same essay but others quite far apart. For example, consecutive lines of Horace, *Odes*, III, 3 are used in relation to despising death in I, 20 and considering suicide in II, 3. The strong-minded man stands firm against death and fear in both cases.⁶⁷ Consecutive lines from Evander's speech lamenting Pallas's impetuosity (*Aeneid* XI, 154–7) were added in 1588 to *De la cruauté*

(II, 11) and *Couardise mere de la cruauté* (II, 27), in the first case showing the thoughtless bravery of inexperienced warriors, in the second, comparing Frenchmen who travel to Italy to learn fencing with overenthusiastic novice soldiers.⁶⁸ Both these paired examples may show Montaigne re-reading passages from Horace and Virgil and finding two distinct places in his book for the expression which has impressed him. Mary McKinley suggests that on some occasions the B text additions deliberately revisit texts which were in Montaigne's mind when he first composed a passage but which he did not then quote.⁶⁹ Once (in *Du démentir*, II, 18, B addition) in the Bordeaux copy he removes four words from a quotation of Persius which also appeared in the 1588 text of *Des Boyteux* (III, 11).⁷⁰ This suggests that in re-reading his text he remembered a repetition which he wished to avoid.⁷¹ But in at least one case he uses the same exemplum to make strongly contrasted points. In *Des plus excellens hommes* (II, 36) Alexander's remorse after the killing of Clytus is a sign of his goodness and generosity but in *De l'inconstance de nos actions* (II, 1) this excessive remorse demonstrates his inconstancy of mind.⁷²

All these examples suggest that Montaigne was engaged in an intricate process of re-reading, of his own text and of the philosophy and poetry which inspired it. At each stage he must have questioned the appropriateness of a particular quotation (including whatever associations it brought with it from its context) to the particular section of his own work in which he placed it. In the examples we have considered so far Montaigne's reading provides him with: statements of views which support his own; which offer confirmation, authority or admirable expression; inherited responses to problems against which he can react; evidence and opinion on the subject of the chapter; arguments; preselected collections of relevant maxims and stories; and stories reflecting new experience. Different conclusions about the effect of his reading can be obtained by analysing the impact on particular chapters of reading in different authors.⁷³

The thirty-six Latin quotations of *Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir* (I, 20), which has already been mentioned in relation to Lucretius and Seneca, will offer some basis for further analysis. This essay presents a consistent strongly but not exclusively Stoic case for thinking about death frequently in order to live better. People are helped by awareness of death because life is uncertain and because a proper detachment from life and an understanding that death is an essential part of the cycle of life enables a person to live fully and without fear. Montaigne urges people to prepare for

death by thinking about it continually. By stripping away its macabre masks people can increase their understanding and diminish their apprehension of death. At the end of the essay Montaigne weaves a tapestry of quotations from Seneca's letters and the soliloquy of Nature in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, III to produce a speech in which Nature proclaims the rightness of death and answers various objections to it.⁷⁴ Sixteen of the poetic quotations, almost all from Lucretius, occur in this section.

In most cases (twenty-one out of thirty-six) the poetic quotations repeat the material which immediately precedes them, sometimes plainly, sometimes with amplification and sometimes only partially.⁷⁵ But what is the force of this repetition? The first quotation (Horace, *Odes*, II 3, 25–8, added in B) is used to support the idea that death is inevitable. It functions both as confirmation of the point and as poetic elaboration.⁷⁶ It enriches the text. The third, immediately following (Claudian, *In Ruffinum*, II, 137–8, added in B), expands on the idea of death overhanging condemned criminals by picturing the man numbering the days of life remaining. These quotations support the idea that death changes perceptions, but they also make the thought of the chapter more concrete and emotional as well as introducing examples of a more elegant use of language, for Montaigne firmly believed that Latin was more forceful than French.⁷⁷ The sixth quotation (Horace, *Epistles*, II 2, 126–8 present in A) heralds a new development in the argument. Montaigne's text states that he would happily find any way to avoid pain. The quotation rephrases this slightly differently (As long as my faults pleased me or at least deceived me, I would prefer to be mad or foolish than to be wise and unhappy), but the restatement makes Montaigne realize that he does not wish to endorse this position. By providing another voice which states the point in a more extreme form, the quotation prompts Montaigne to oppose that view.⁷⁸

Something rather similar to this occurs later in the chapter. Quotation 13 (Lucretius, III.898–9, added in B) amplifies the French text's description of different men complaining of what death has prevented them from doing, with a common voice expressing misery at the rewards which have been lost on a single day. A few lines later B again adds the lines immediately following in which Lucretius counters that once the complainants are dead they will desire nothing of the kind. Here the addition of a quotation which amplifies a previous thought leads on to a new reason for rejecting this approach to death, though this reason is not developed further, as he returns to the text he had already published in 1580.

In between these two quotations from Lucretius a line from Ovid offers a useful *caveat*. Between two statements of the need for people to be active which before C preferred noblemen to die on their feet, Montaigne amplified with a quotation from Ovid (When I die, I would like to be in the middle of my work). In Montaigne's context this Latin phrase repeats the ideas of the French on either side of it. But in Ovid, *Amores*, II 10, 36, the reference was clearly to wishing to die while making love, a sentiment which would contradict Montaigne's argument here. So while Montaigne's Latin quotations often bring with them the flavour of their original context, as many scholars have argued, nevertheless there are occasions when the passage works better without awareness of the context.⁷⁹

Montaigne is quite critical of Cicero's approach to moral philosophy (S464–6) but Cicero's works state some opinions which are also important to Montaigne. Examples of Montaigne-like arguments from the *Tusculan Disputations* would include: the whole life of a wise man is a preparation for death (*Tusc.* I.74, V81, P82–3, S89); if pain is not real there is no place for courage (II.33, V56, P265, S59); intense pain does not last long (II.44, V57, P265–6, S60); be thoughtful in prosperity, not in adversity (III.30, V947, P991, S1072); the natural needs of human beings are small and few (III.56, V471, 1009, P495, 1054–5, S526, 1141–2); sexual pleasure is trivial and humiliating (IV.68, V877, P920, S991–2); Socrates brought philosophy back to the level of ordinary people (V.11, V1037, P1082–3, S1173). In his final revisions to the work Montaigne adds many references to Cicero's philosophical works. For example he inserts five Latin quotations and one exemplum from Cicero's *De officiis*, whose topic is obviously relevant to this chapter, in *De l'utile et de l'honneste* (III, 1).⁸⁰ Perhaps Cicero always influenced Montaigne more than he admits or perhaps he came across a particular opinion through another work or without direct reference to Cicero. Adding the Cicero quotations later might have been either a matter of intellectual honesty or a realization that for some of his readers Cicero's authority would add weight to the view.

While acknowledging that the majority of Latin quotations repeat the ideas of Montaigne's French text I should like to consider some cases in which the quotation moves the argument on in an important way, taking examples from *De la vanité* (III, 9). After a tale from Guevara, Montaigne introduces a quotation from Juvenal, *Satires*, XIV, 233–4, which denounces the viciousness of sons. Montaigne's response to the story and the quotation drives the essay in a new direction.

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

*Nemo satis credit tantum delinquere quantum
Permittas.*

Il seroit à desirer qu'il y eust plus de proportion du commandement à l'obeïssance: Et semble la visée injuste, à laquelle on ne peut atteindre. (V990, P1036)

[B] 'I don't know these books', said Laïs the courtesan, 'nor their wisdom and philosophy, but these men knock at my door as often as anyone else'. Just as our licence always takes us beyond what is lawful and permissible, we have often made the precepts and laws for our lives stricter than universal reason requires.

No one thinks that it is enough to offend as much as you allow.

It would be preferable if there were more proportion between command and obedience. A target we cannot reach appears unfair. (S1120)

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

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

[B] Je doibs beaucoup à la fortune dequoy jusques à cette heure elle n'a rien fait contre moy d'outrageux [C] au moins au delà de ma portée. [B] Seroit ce pas sa façon de laisser en paix ceux de qui elle n'est point importunée?

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

Si elle continue, elle me r'envoyera tres-content et satisfait,
Nihil supra

Deos lacezzo.

Mais gare le heurt. Il en est mille qui rompent au port. (V998, P1044)

[B] I am deeply indebted to Fortune in that, up to the present, she has done me no outrage, [C] at least, none above what I can bear. [B] Perhaps it is her custom to leave in peace those who do not pester her?

*The more a man denies himself
The more he receives from the Gods
Although I have nothing I join the camp of those
Who desire nothing ...
... Those who ask for much
Lack much.*

If she continues she will dispatch me well satisfied.
I harass the Gods

For nothing more.

But watch out for the snag! Hundreds founder within the harbour.
(S1129)

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

Here the quotation states a point of view which Montaigne wants to hear but which he decides to reject.

Uniquely among the earlier chapters *De l'exercitation* (II, 6) is centred on the narrative of an event from Montaigne's own life, the time he was knocked unconscious and gradually recovered his sensations and his memory.⁸¹ The quotations in this chapter (many of them added in the 1588 edition) help him understand and generalize his experience. When he initially doubts the possibility of practising for death, he amplifies his claim that none have returned to tell us about it with a 1580 quotation from Lucretius.⁸² Speaking of those in torment he backs up his claim that the gods mercifully assist them to die with a line from Virgil.⁸³ When he wants to describe the weakness of his sight as he begins to recover, a simile from Tasso helps him do so, in a 1582 addition.⁸⁴ In 1588 he uses a line from Ovid's *Tristia*, in which the poet about to be exiled compares himself to a man struck by a thunderbolt, still living but unaware that he is alive, to explain his belief that in spite of their appearance of sighing and groaning the dying experience no sensations.⁸⁵ When he narrates his own awakening he underlines the event with a quotation from two lines later in the same passage, in which the poet begins to come to his senses.⁸⁶ He connects his own unconscious actions with Virgil's description of dying fingers clutching at their sword.⁸⁷ This essay relates his own experience of recovering from unconsciousness in order to justify his belief that acquaintance with death will lessen fear of it. The quotations amplify and generalize his experience but they also seem to help him understand it.

We have come across several examples which depend on the philosophical aspect of Horace's *Odes* or Lucretius and one using the social-historical aspect of Juvenal. So what is the special role of Latin poetry in the *Essais*? Poetry has a special contribution to make in certain types of subject matter.⁸⁸ There is a wider range of poetry in *Sur des vers de Virgile* (III, 5), whose subject is love, than in any other chapter. Eleven of the twenty-nine quotations from Catullus occur there.⁸⁹ In parts of that essay Montaigne uses Latin poetry to express what he could not say in French. Quotations from epigram and satire sometimes express misogynist commonplaces about women and sex.⁹⁰ The amatory subject matter of *Que nostre desir s'accroît par la malaisance* (II, 15) gives poetry (and especially Ovid) an important place in that chapter. Floyd Gray tells us that nature only enters the *Essais* through Montaigne's quotations from his favourite poets.⁹¹

Poetry can also be important in establishing a mood. The opening of *Sur des vers de Virgile* emphasizes the need for relaxation when stern moral

thoughts can become oppressive. In old age Montaigne finds it necessary to think debauched, intemperate thoughts. Wisdom has its excesses as much as folly does. Ovid and Petronius decorate this turn of thought but the mood of joyful looking back is really established by a maxim from Martial, *Epigrams*, X, 23, 7–8.

Hoc est

*Vivere bis, vita posse priore frui.*⁹²

To confirm this atmosphere the C text adds Plato's instruction to old men to watch the gymnastic exercises of the young, so as to enjoy in others what they no longer possess in themselves. When the prose asks him to acquire toys to succour his old age, the concision and liveliness of Horace's phrase (from a poem inviting Virgil to dinner) makes the idea dance:

*Misce stultitiam consiliis brevem (Odes, IV 12, 27)*⁹³

The connection between wisdom and jesting is recalled later in the essay, notably in another pithy quotation from Horace.

ridentem dicere verum

*quid vetat? (Satires, I, 1, 24)*⁹⁴

At the beginning of the chapter its force is immediately highlighted by the contrast of quotations from Ovid's exile on the fragility of the mind that needs this help.⁹⁵ He preserves this mood by announcing the subject matter of his essay in quotations from Euripides⁹⁶ and Lucretius (I, 22–4, slightly adapted).

Those who strive too much to flee from Venus
Fail as much as those who follow her too much.

You, Goddess, you alone govern the nature of things.
Without you nothing rises to the heavenly shores of light,
And nothing becomes joyful, nothing amiable. (V848, P890, S957)

The first quotation establishes the importance of balance, neither seeking Venus too avidly nor avoiding her. The second praises the power of love in

creating being, joy and pleasure in the universe. The direct linkage of the two quotations, one warning, the other praising, also conveys the crucial information about the identity of the goddess. The quotations then prepare Montaigne's next point, on which the whole essay turns, about the mutual dependence of poetry and love.⁹⁷

Quoting poetry gives Montaigne the opportunity to write eloquently about the poet's use of language and about the effect of poetry more generally. When he reacts to the quotation from Lucretius describing the love of Venus and Mars (*De rerum natura*, I.33–40), he evokes also the language Virgil had used to describe Venus's seduction of Vulcan (*Aeneid*, VIII.387–92, 404–6).

[B] Quand je rumine ce, *rejecit, pascit, inhians, molli, fovet, medullas, labefacta, pendet, percurrit*, et cette noble, *circunfusa*, mere du gentil, *infusus*, j'ay desdain de ces menues pointes et allusions verballes qui nasquirent depuis. A ces bonnes gens, il ne falloit pas d'aiguë et subtile rencontre; leur langage est tout plein et gros d'une vigueur naturelle et constante; ils sont tout epigramme, non la queue seulement, mais la teste, l'estomach et les pieds. Il n'y a rien d'efforcé, rien de trainant, tout y marche d'une pareille teneur. [C] *Contextus totus virilis est; non sunt circa flosculos occupati* [Seneca, *Moral epistles*, 32, 1]. [B] Ce n'est pas une eloquence molle et seulement sans offence: elle est nerveuse et solide, qui ne plaist pas tant comme elle remplit et ravit, et ravit le plus, les plus forts esprits. Quand je voy ces braves formes de s'expliquer, si vifves, si profondes, je ne dis pas que c'est bien dire, je dis que c'est bien penser. C'est la gaillardise de l'imagination qui esleve et enfle les parolles. [C] *Pectus est quod disertum facit* [Quintilian, X.7.15]. [B] Nos gens appellent jugement, langage; et beaux mots, les pleines conceptions. Cette peinture est conduite non tant par dextérité de la main comme pour avoir l'object plus vivvement empreint en l'ame. Gallus parle simplement, par ce qu'il conçoit simplement. Horace ne se contente point d'une superficielle expression, elle la trahiroit. Il voit plus clair et plus outre dans la chose; son esprit crochette et furette tout le magasin des mots et des figures pour se représenter; et les luy faut outre l'ordinaire, comme sa conception est outre l'ordinaire. (V872–3, P915–16)

[B] When I chew over those words *rejecit, pascit, inhians* and then *molli fovet, medullas, labefacta, pendet, percurrit*, and Lucretius's noble *circunfusa* mother to Virgil's elegant *infusus*, I feel contempt for those

little sallies and verbal sports which have been born since then. Those fine poets had no need for smart and cunning wordplay; their style is full, pregnant with a sustained and natural power. With them not only the tail but everything is epigram: head, breast and feet. Nothing is strained. Nothing drags. Everything progresses steadily on its course. [C] *The whole texture of their language is virile. They are not concerned with little flowers.* [B] Here is not merely gentle eloquence where nothing offends: it is solid and has sinews; it does not please you so much as invade and enrapture you. And the stronger the mind the more it enraptures it. When I look upon such powerful means of expression, so dense and full of life, I do not conclude that it is said well but thought well. It is the audacity of the conception which fills the words and makes them soar. [C] *It is the mind which makes for good style.* [B] Nowadays when men say judgement they mean style, and rich concepts are but beautiful words. Descriptions such as these are produced not by skilful hands but by having the subject vividly stamped upon the soul. Gallus writes straightforwardly because his concepts are straightforward. Horace is not satisfied with such superficial vividness; that would betray his sense; he sees further and more clearly into his subject: to describe itself his mind goes fishing and ferreting through the whole treasure-house of words and figures of speech; as his concepts surpass the ordinary it is not ordinary words that he needs. (S986–7)

Montaigne's comments are detailed and forceful. Though he writes less about literature than Plutarch had, his words give us more sense of what he responds to in poetry and of how strong poetry might teach its readers how to express themselves better. For Montaigne poetry is at the centre of education not merely for its subject matter but for the reaction its imagination and expression evoke. In *De la vanité* Montaigne expresses his admiration for poetry, his belief that the best prose can embody the same qualities and his hope that what he has learned from his reading informs his own work.⁹⁸

The poetry competition that concludes *Du jeune Caton* (I, 37) at first relies more on the reader to respond to each text in turn. It is greatly improved by the C addition in which Montaigne both gives reasons for his decision and describes the development of his own taste in poetry from the gay and genial fluidity (*fluidité gaye et ingénieuse*) of Ovid, through the keen and sublime subtlety (*subtilité aiguë et relevée*) exemplified by Lucan, to the ripe and constant power (*force meure et constante*) of Virgil.⁹⁹ The passage he

chooses from Virgil is notable for the force of its concision but Montaigne distorts the context to amplify what he says about its ambition. For in *Aeneid* VIII, Cato is portrayed on the shield of Aeneas giving laws to the virtuous souls in Hades rather than to the greatest of all the Romans.¹⁰⁰

Montaigne uses quotations from poetry as the best expression of the deepest emotions at the end of *De l'amitié* (I, 28) where Aeneas's recollection of his father before the funeral games, Horace's lament for the loss of half himself in anticipation of Maecenas's death and Catullus's elegy for the loss of his whole soul and all pleasure at his brother's death are written out to express his own feelings at the death of La Boétie.¹⁰¹ Montaigne uses Virgil's similes as a source of emotional power in *De la colère* when he illustrates the frenzy of anger with the simile of the cauldron from Turnus's response to Allecto's visitation (*Aeneid* VII, 462–6).¹⁰² In *Des plus excellens hommes* (II, 36) the simile of the forest fires, which illustrated the impact of Turnus and Aeneas on different sides of the battle in *Aeneid* XII, 521–5, is applied to his comparison of Caesar to Alexander, evoking the destruction wrought by both these 'excellent men'.¹⁰³ The impact of poetry on Montaigne's use of imagery has been discussed by Friedrich and Metschies.¹⁰⁴

As important as poetry was to Montaigne, not least for its forceful concision in moral philosophy, the hard thoughts which get the final chapter underway derive from proverbial wisdom read through the scholarly lens of Erasmus's *Adagia*. The questioning of similarity and difference is founded on *Non tam ovum ovo simile* (as alike as two eggs), which provides the story of the man from Delphi who could tell eggs apart.¹⁰⁵ Montaigne's development of the idea that commentary buries meaning in obscurity is founded on the adages *Mus in pice* (a mouse in pitch) and *Davus sum non Oedipus* (I am Davus, not Oedipus).¹⁰⁶ In the last phase the exceptional insights of poetry have to take their place beside the fruit of the centuries' experience expressed in proverbs.