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3. Montaigne's Logic of Fragment and Sequence

This chapter will address issues of form, method and interpretation. In portraying a mind in motion, Montaigne recorded successive thoughts, which were always subject to elaboration and revision. In the *Apologie* Montaigne spoke of the strength of feeling with which he believes one opinion at a certain moment, only to change his mind entirely at a later stage.¹ I shall argue that Montaigne's method of additive construction requires that we attend first to the individual fragments of which he constructs the chapters and (even more importantly) relatively short sequences of such fragments. Montaigne generally develops his thought in short sequences (rarely longer than two or three pages). As readers we need to grasp those short sequences alongside attempting to understand a chapter as a whole. Philippe Desan has written of the open form of the essays and of Montaigne's need to juxtapose different points of view and to move freely between contrary positions.² André Tournon has shown that the additive techniques evidenced by later revisions of the essays also played a part in the construction of the 1580 version.³ In his study of the successive versions of *Des prieres* (I, 56) Alain Legros argues that reconstructing the process of thought which brought about the changes is more important than interpreting the 1595 state of the text, since further revision was always possible.⁴ Terence Cave writes of Montaigne's method as involving, the collection of commonplaces, improvisation, soundings and testing, but also a hidden logic.⁵ I shall argue that many of the building blocks from which the essays are constructed (and some of the primitive structures into which they are placed) are derived from Renaissance rhetorical training. Sixteenth-century rhetoric and dialectic also provide us with categories for studying the ways in which these fragments are combined and the ways in which one thought leads on to another.

I need to begin by looking at the impact of Montaigne's method of constructing his essays through successive additions. The different published and manuscript states of the text (1580, 1582, 1587, 1588 and 1595/Bordeaux copy) show plainly that Montaigne added in new material for each publication. Deletions (apart from the substitutions of individual words) are comparatively rare. For some of the simpler chapters from books one and two one can produce reasonably convincing accounts of the sequence of additions within the different published states of the text. I have some reservations about this approach which I shall explain later but for now

I shall consider how the recovery of the sequence of additions affects our understanding. The 1580 stage of *Des Menteurs* (I, 9) can be analysed as containing eight elements:

1. I have no business talking about memory because mine is so bad.
2. **People with weak memories should not tell lies.**
3. Distinction between to tell an untruth (*dire mensonge*) and to lie (*mentir*).
4. Liars either (a) alter parts of the truth or (b) make everything up.
5. Solution to (a): question them repeatedly and they will falter.
6. Solution to (b): usually they will forget some part of it under questioning.
7. **Story of Francis I and Francesco Taverna.**
8. Story of Henry VIII and Papal Ambassador.

It seems likely that the original germ of this essay is contained in the connection between element 2 (a general statement) and element 7 (a story). The precept that you need a good memory to tell lies effectively is illustrated by the story of the way in which Francis I uncovered Francesco Sforza's murder of his secret representative (Merveille) by questioning of the Milanese ambassador (Francesco Taverna) who had been instructed to provide a false explanation. The combination of narrative and moral maxim reflects school training, both because pupils were trained to extract maxims and stories from their reading and because the writing exercise of the fable, the first of the *progymnasmata*, required pupils to place maxims and illustrative stories side by side. In this case the combination of story and maxim also suits the title of the chapter.

It is reasonable to believe that between this initial germ and the published essay, other elements were added as a result of different kinds of reflection on what was already there. Thus, for example, the story about Henry VIII and the papal ambassador is not strictly a story about a lie. After the papal ambassador attempts to persuade Henry to go to war against Francis, his reply to Henry's counter-arguments about the difficulty of such a war reveals to Henry that the ambassador's private sympathies are with the French. When Henry recounts this to the Pope the ambassador is disgraced. Where Francis detected an ambassador's lie told on behalf of his master, Henry found that the ambassador's private political sympathies were opposed to the instructions he had been given. The stories are parallel because both involve a monarch and an ambassador who is treacherous and whose words reveal more than he intends, but the story about Henry VIII has nothing to do with

lying or memory. No doubt the parallelism persuaded Montaigne to place the second story (which is interesting and memorable in itself) alongside the first. Similarly the first element (the opening comment on his own memory) seems to be called up logically by the maxim, even though it concerns memory rather than lying. Element three looks like a typical piece of humanist grammatical clarification, noting the difference between two words and signalling which meaning of lying he has in mind. This comment could be taken from Aulus Gellius or from Montaigne's reading of the expanded French edition of Pedro Mexia's *Silvae*.⁶ Elements 4, 5 and 6 take the logical form of a dilemma. Montaigne distinguishes between two approaches to lying and explains how each kind may be uncovered through questioning. They belong in the chapter because Montaigne wants to give advice on how to combat lying. This advice in turn is reinforced by the ways in which Francis and Henry uncover truths the ambassadors did not intend to reveal.

In 1588 Montaigne adds after element 1 further comments on his own bad memory and after element 6 more comments on lies in general, giving the following structure:

1. I have no business talking about memory because mine is so bad.
 - 1.1. This is naturally inconvenient.
 - 1.2. And even worse because in Gascony memory is equated with intelligence.
 - 1.3. But this is wrong. Experience shows that people with good memories often have bad judgement.
 - 1.4. Worse still people think because of my bad memory that I am ungrateful.
 - 1.5. But this is untrue. I have always rejected ingratitude.
 - 1.6. But there are advantages of a bad memory.
 - 1.7. First, I talk less since it is always easier to remember than to think.
 - 1.8. That this is a vice is confirmed by the boring material which my relatives dredge up from their memories to say. They weigh their stories down with irrelevant details.
 - 1.9. Secondly, I never remember insults.
 - 1.10. Places and books always seem fresh to me.
2. People with weak memories should not tell lies.
3. Distinction between to tell an untruth (*dire mensonge*) and to lie (*mentir*).
4. Liars either (a) alter parts of the truth or (b) make everything up.
5. Solution to (a): question them repeatedly and they will falter.

6. Solution to (b): usually they will forget some part of it under questioning.
 - 6.1. Experience supports this. The lies of flatterers are often shown up by the way they have to change their words to fit changed circumstances.
 - 6.2. No memory could ever be good enough to remember all they devise.
 - 6.3. Some people are proud of a reputation for this sort of skill; they should instead be ashamed.
 - 6.4. Lying is a terrible vice.
 - 6.5. Only words keep us together and keep us human.
 - 6.6. Lying is the worst of crimes and children should be punished for it in order to discourage it.
 - 6.7. Because lies go in so many directions and are not merely the opposite of the truth, it is even harder to discern the truth from them.
 - 6.8. I don't think I could bring myself to lie, even to avoid danger.
 - 6.9. Quotation from St Augustine: those whom we cannot understand are not fully human for us.
 - 6.10. Lying is even worse than not being understood.
7. Story of Francis I and Francesco Taverna.
8. Story of Henry VIII and Papal Ambassador.

Montaigne's first set of additions are loosely arranged into advantages and disadvantages of a bad memory. Even within this structure he adds rebuttals of his neighbours' negative views of his bad memory. It is characteristic (or at least very frequent) that once he has set out a view (even as the view of somebody else) he immediately gives a counter-argument. Montaigne's arguments for the apparently paradoxical view that a bad memory may be an advantage are especially rich and interesting. Although there is a strong element of self-justification in this position, the surprise and interest of the arguments make them charming to the reader.

The first three additions to element 6 concern flatterers, seen as a sub-category of liars. Montaigne first explains that the same process of listening to a number of comments and comparing them will find flatterers out. Then he denounces them. His love of paradox is amused by the pride they take in their shame. Then he adds a series of forceful arguments against lying, giving reasons for his dislike of lying (6.5, 6.7, 6.9, 6.10). Since lying undermines human communication and human society he argues (making the connection

with his preferred topic of education) that children should be punished much more severely for lying than for other crimes. Again this has the force of paradox because (apart from lying under oath) most societies treat a lie as less serious than a physical crime, perhaps because lying is so widespread.

Although these 1588 additions obscure the structure of the essay, tending (apart from 6.2) to develop separately the two parts of the principal maxim which connects memory and lying, they are much more interesting in their thought and expression than the more structurally significant parts of the essay. These are also the sections where we see Montaigne developing arguments, putting up ideas (some of them attributed to other people) and then responding with counter-arguments. They seem more characteristic of what readers generally value in Montaigne.

The changes of 1595 all add to the first set of 1588 additions, so that the structure of the relevant section now becomes:

1. I have no business talking about memory because mine is so bad.
 - 1.1. This is naturally inconvenient.
 - 1.1.1. Because memory is so important that Plato calls it a goddess.
 - 1.2. And even worse because in Gascony memory is equated with intelligence.
 - 1.3. But this is wrong. Experience shows that people with good memories often have bad judgement.
 - 1.4. Worse still people think because of my bad memory that I am ungrateful.
 - 1.5. But this is untrue. I have always rejected ingratitude.
 - 1.6. But there are advantages of a bad memory. First
 - 1.6.1. It corrects the worse vice of ambition.
 - 1.6.2. A bad memory is an intolerable defect for a politician.
 - 1.6.3. Nature has strengthened other faculties in response.
 - 1.6.4. If I had a good memory I would think less for myself. Then
 - 1.7. I talk less since it is always easier to remember than to think
 - 1.7.1. If I had a good memory I would deafen my friends with talk.
 - 1.7.2. Memory would have given me more material to extend my arguments.
 - 1.8. That this is a vice is confirmed by the boring material which my relatives dredge up from their memories to say. They weigh their stories down with irrelevant details.
 - 1.8.1. Once you have started talking it is hard to stop.
 - 1.8.2. The ability to pull up short is important in a horse.

- 1.8.3. Some men want to stop their gallop of speech but can't.
- 1.8.4. This is a particular problem in old men.
- 1.8.5. They remember the story but forget they have told it already.
- 1.8.6. Old men can make even good stories boring.
- 1.9. Secondly, I never remember insults.
 - 1.9.1. I would need someone like the servant of Darius who had to remind him at every meal of the injuries done him by the Athenians.
- 1.10. Places and books always seem fresh to me.

The general tendency of these C additions is to reinforce and develop the additional points made in 1588. The first and last of them confirm and decorate a point already made by displaying knowledge of ancient philosophy and history. From 1.6.1 onwards, more advantages of Montaigne's poor memory are added. He is thereby rendered unfit for the public career which might otherwise have tempted him. He implies that men in public life need the same skills as liars. Because his memory does not recall other people's opinions he is forced to develop his own intellectual resources and think things out for himself.⁷ Setting himself the apparently paradoxical task of finding the advantages of a bad memory prompts him to ideas about practical conduct more generally (ambition, political life) and about the workings of his mind. From 1.7.1 and 1.8.1 he elaborates the idea of the bad effect of a good memory on speech, loading our words with additional circumstances, providing ever more material which itself can be developed in new directions.

These passages tend to draw Montaigne and his reader together, laughing at the follies of the old men who ruin their stories because they are unable to stop talking. One could also take Montaigne's comments as an implicit criticism of the whole doctrine of *copia* and even as self-criticism, since he doesn't hesitate elsewhere in C additions to number himself among those whose judgements are weakened by age. One could notice too the repetition between the additions to 1.7 and 1.8, as if he is giving an example of the difficulty of stopping the gallop (*clorre leur pas*) of language.

The way that these arguments are added to his discussion of memory (*e.g.*, by adding to the arguments in favour of a poor memory to the point where the reason which he still states to be his second (1.9) is now actually his fourth) enhances the picture of a mind in movement, following one idea and then another. We would almost be justified in separating this section off as a sort of mini-essay on memory, but even if we treated it in this way it would not be a particularly orderly essay and it would not build to a conclusion.

My aim in giving this temporal analysis of the successive accretions of *Des Menteurs* has been to show how Montaigne develops original argument, reflection on his experience and interaction with his reader in an essay which starts from inherited maxims and stories. That liars need a good memory is one of the maxims from the *Sententiae pueriles*, the first Latin reader of the grammar school.⁸ The proverb occurs in Quintilian (IV.2.91) and Erasmus.⁹ But this type of temporal analysis of structure also makes me uneasy, first because it can only really be applied in detail to the simpler essays (which we tend to think of as Montaigne's less accomplished works), and second because it tends to privilege the structural elements present in an essay from the beginning without giving due weight to the impact which additions may have on the way we read an essay. For example, the following plan of *Par divers moyens on arrive a pareille fin* (I, 1) enables one to see how the essay evolved.¹⁰

Key: (A) 1580 edition; (B) additions in 1588; (C) additions in 1595

1. (A) (General observation) Usually we obtain mercy from those about to harm us by appealing for pity but sometimes bravery and defiance leads to pity.
2. Example of Black Prince at Limoges.
3. Example of Scanderbeg.
4. Example of Conrad III.
5. (B) Comment (personal): Both bravery and pity appeal to me; if anything compassion moves me more.
6. (A) Comment (conclusion): My examples show that souls which steadfastly resist one approach (compassion) are moved by the other (bravery).
7. Cause: Perhaps affable natures and women are more apt to pity whereas strong noble minds prefer to respond to valour.
8. Objection: But less magnanimous minds can also respond the same way.
9. Supporting example: Story about Thebans being merciful to a general who defied them.
10. (C) Story: Dionysius captures Phyton, tortures him in spite of his bravery, then has him secretly murdered, because of the effect of his enemy's noble defiance on his own troops.
11. (A) General conclusion: Man is a wavering creature, moved first in one direction, then another. Two examples pointing in opposite directions.
12. (B) Contrary to my other examples: Story of Alexander provoked to extreme cruelty by the valour of Betis in opposing him.

13. Cause: Was this because Alexander was so accustomed to valour that it didn't move him?
14. (C) Further reflection: Or did he think valour belonged only to him? Or did the violence of his anger reject all opposition?
15. Example of slaughter at Thebes to confirm Alexander's violence and his lack of response to the bravery of those who opposed him.

Using this plan as a key we can now give a plan of the 1580 version of the essay:

General observation (1)

Three Supporting examples (2, 3, 4)

Conclusion (6)

Cause (7)

Objection to part of cause (with supporting example) (8, 9)

General conclusion (11)

We may surmise that the essay originally consisted of a general observation which may be useful advice for a soldier. Usually we obtain mercy by appealing for pity but sometimes it is bravery and defiance that succeed. This was followed by one or more examples and a conclusion (that souls which resist one approach may be won over by the other). On further reading Montaigne probably added extra examples and began to think more about the causes and consequences of his general observation. Perhaps the reason for the occasional success of defiance is that noble minds respond to valour. This offered cause is immediately met by a partial objection (that less magnanimous minds can react the same way), again backed up with an example from history. This in turn leads to a more general conclusion (that man is a changeable creature). So the simple initial structure of observation plus examples and conclusion is enlarged by a suggested cause, an objection to that cause and a new conclusion taking account of the objection. This is the shape of the essay when it is first published.

In the second edition of 1588 Montaigne adds two new elements:

Personal reflection complicating the conclusion (5)

Story about Alexander which functions as a counterexample, with a suggested reason (12–13)

Re-reading the 1588 edition prompted Montaigne to make further additions, published in 1595:

Story of Dionysius about attitude to resistance: Complicates question of effect of bravery (10)

Further reflection on causes of Alexander's action and another story showing his lack of mercy (14, 15)

An essay which began as an offer of advice to a soldier has turned into a perplexed acknowledgement of the different motives which may move people (since human reactions are so varied, it is impossible to make constant judgements of people) and an analysis of the character (more especially the cruelty) of Alexander the Great.

The impetus for Montaigne's rethinking in each case comes from reading. Reading the works of others contributes new examples; re-reading his own text in the light of his judgement of logical reasoning leads to reflection, statement of objections, conclusions and causes. Instead of providing advice on practical conduct supported by historical examples, Montaigne now invites his readers to follow him in a process of drawing conclusions and making judgements.

Such an analysis offers a way of understanding the structure and development of the chapter but it underplays the changes brought about by the final additions. Many readers of the essay will find that the two new stories turn it from a Renaissance military man's discussion of the best line of conduct in a difficult circumstance to an Erasmian condemnation of the cruelty of Dionysius and Alexander. The stories are told so vividly and with such telling amplified detail that they change the reader's whole attitude to the chapter and to its subject.

Paola Iemma's analysis of the Bordeaux copy changes to book one identifies four kinds of change. In the first place, as we have seen, Montaigne adds new stories and quotations, drawn from his reading, and new comments reacting to his own text and his quotations. Secondly he makes numerous stylistic changes: changes of spellings, forms and vocabulary; repositioning of phrases, reduction of binomial phrases, shortening and simplification of arguments.¹¹ In some sections these stylistic changes predominate. For example, in the C text Montaigne makes many changes to the crucial final pages of *De l'expérience*, the conclusion of the whole book, but almost all the changes attempt improvements of expression; the thought of these important pages hardly alters from B to C. Thirdly he adds to the sense of oral presentation, of the mind in motion and of the presence of the self.¹² Finally he removes some repetitions. A note to the printer instructs him that if he finds the same

thing said twice with the same meaning he should remove whichever seems to him less effective.¹³ Although Iemma finds that reductions of repetition account for 20 per cent of Montaigne's changes she also acknowledges that other changes add to repetitions. The repetitions removed are also generally at a local level within a particular essay rather than across the whole book.¹⁴

Keeping the evolution of *Des Menteurs* and *Par divers moyens* in mind for further discussion, I want to analyse a short section from *De la vanité* (III, 9), one of the late essays in which everyone would agree that Montaigne is writing at his absolute peak. This time I will quote the essay itself, instead of summarizing, using my commentary to discuss the structural progression.

[B] Il n'en est à l'avanture aucune plus expresse que d'en escrire si vainement. Ce que la divinité nous en a si divinement exprimé debvroit estre soigneusement et continuellement medité par les gens d'entendement. Qui ne voit que j'ay pris une route par laquelle, sans cesse et sans travail, j'iray autant qu'il y aura d'ancre et de papier au monde? Je ne puis tenir registre de ma vie par mes actions: fortune les met trop bas; je le tiens par mes fantasies. Si ay-je veu un Gentilhomme qui ne communiquoit sa vie que par les operations de son ventre: vous voyiez chez luy, en montre, un ordre des bassins de sept ou huict jours; c'estoit son estude, ses discours; tout autre propos luy puoit. Ce sont icy, un peu plus civilement, des excremens d'un vieil esprit, dur tantost, tantost lache et tousjours indigeste. Et quand seray-je à bout de représenter une continuelle agitation et mutation de mes pensées, en quelque matiere qu'elles tombent, puisque Diomedes remplit six mille livres du seul subject de la grammaire? Que doit produire le babil, puisque le begaiement et desnouement de la langue estouffa le monde d'une si horrible charge de volumes? Tant de paroles pour les paroles seules! O Pythagoras, que n'esconjuras-tu cette tempeste! (V945–6, P989–90)¹⁵

[B] Perhaps there is no more manifest vanity than writing so vainly about it. That which the Godhead has made so godly manifest should be meditated upon by men of intelligence anxiously and continuously. Anyone can see that I have set out upon a road along which I shall travel without toil and without ceasing as long as the world has ink and paper. I cannot give an account of my life by my actions; Fortune has placed them too low for that; so I do so by my thoughts. Thus did a nobleman I once knew reveal his daily life only by the workings of his bowels: at home he paraded before you a series

of seven or eight days' chamberpots. He thought about them, talked about them: for him any other topic stank. Here (a little more decorously) you have the droppings of an old mind, sometimes hard, sometimes squittery, but always ill-digested. And when shall I ever have done describing some commotion and revolution of my thoughts, no matter what subject they happen on, when Diomedes wrote six thousand books upon the sole subject of philology? What can babble produce when the stammering of an untied tongue smothered the world under such a dreadful weight of volumes? So many words about nothing but words! O Pythagoras! Why couldst thou not conjure away such turbulence! (S1070–1)

Taking his starting point from his title, Montaigne begins with a paradox, expressed as a suggestion: perhaps the most evident vanity is to write so vainly about vanity. He immediately supports this notion by alluding to Ecclesiastes (1: 2, 14). For the rest of this paragraph he takes a different tack. The vanity of his enterprise is illustrated by its excessive size. Everyone can see that he will need all the paper and ink in the world because, owing to the unimportance of his actions, he has to register his thoughts instead. The vanity of *his* obsession leads to an amusing comparison with the gentleman who gives an account of his life through the contents of his bowels. Montaigne turns to the topic of idleness with a story about the Emperor Galba taken from Suetonius.¹⁶

On accusoit un Galba du temps passé de ce qu'il vivoit oyseusement; il respondit que chacun devoit rendre raison de ses actions, non pas de son séjour. Il se trompoit: car la justice a cognoissance et animadversion aussi sur ceux qui chaument. Mais il y devoit avoir quelque coercion des loix contre les escrivains ineptes et inutiles, comme il y a contre les vagabons et faineants. On banniroit des mains de nostre peuple et moy et cent autres. Ce n'est pas moquerie. L'escrivainerie semble estre quelque symptome d'un siecle desbordé. Quand escrivismes nous tant que depuis que nous sommes en trouble? quand les Romains tant que lors de leur ruyne? Outre ce, que l'affinement des esprits ce ne'en est pas l'assagissement en une police, cet embesognement oisif naist de ce que chacun se prent laschement à l'office de sa vacation, et s'en desbauche. (V946, P990)

A certain Galba in days gone by was criticized for living in idleness. He replied that everyone should have to account for his actions but not for his free time. He was deceiving himself: for justice also takes note and

cognizance of those who are not employed. The Law ought to impose restraints on silly useless writers as it does on vagabonds and loafers. Then my own book and a hundred others would be banished from the hands of our people. I am not joking. Scribbling seems to be one of the symptoms of an age of excess. When did we ever write so much as since the beginning of our troubles? And whenever did the Romans do so as just before their collapse? Apart from the fact that to make minds more refined does not mean that a polity is made more wise, such busy idleness arises from someone slacking over the duties of his vocation and being enticed away. (S1071)

Rejecting Galba's reply to his critic, Montaigne suggests that useless writers should be forbidden, just as vagabonds are. The effect of this would be to save the French from his book and many others. He supports this proposal by suggesting a historical connection between excessive writing and political ruin, both in present-day France and in ancient Rome. Not only does writing fail to make people wiser, idle writing is evidence that people are neglecting their true duties. Both Montaigne's protest that he intends his suggestion seriously (*Ce n'est pas moquerie*) and the discrepancy between the problem and the proposed solution invite us to read some of this vehemence ironically, opening up the way to a comically amused view of vanity. Then he has to consider the epoch in which he lives more broadly.

La corruption du siecle se fait par la contribution particuliere de chacun de nous: les uns y conferent la trahison, les autres l'injustice, l'irreligion, la tyrannie, l'avarice, la cruauté, selon qu'ils sont plus puissans; les plus foibles y apportent la sottise, la vanité, l'oisiveté, desquels je suis. Il semble que ce soit la saison des choses vaines quand les dommageables nous pressent. En un temps où le meschamment faire est si commun, de ne faire qu'inutilement il est comme louable. Je me console que je seray des derniers sur qui il faudra mettre la main. Ce pendant qu'on pourvoira aux plus pressans, j'auray loy de m'amender. Car il me semble que ce seroit contre raison de poursuyvre les menus inconveniens, quand les grands nous infestent. Et le medecin Philotimus, à un qui luy presentoit le doigt à penser, auquel il recognoissoit au visage et à l'haleine un ulcere aux poulmons: Mon amy, fit-il, ce n'est pas à cette heure le temps de t'amuser à tes ongles. (V946–7, P990)

Each individual one of us contributes to the corrupting of our time: some contribute treachery, others (since they are more powerful) injustice, irreligion, tyranny, cupidity, cruelty: the weaker ones like me contribute silliness, vanity and idleness. When harmful things press upon us, then, it seems, is the season for vain ones; in an age when so many behave wickedly it is almost praiseworthy merely to be useless. I console myself with the thought that I shall be one of the last they will have to lay hands on. While they are dealing with the more urgent cases I shall have time to improve, for to me it seems contrary to reason to punish minor offences while we are ravished by great ones. Philotimus, a doctor, recognized the symptoms of an ulcerated lung from the features and breath of a patient who brought him his finger to be dressed. 'My friend,' he said, 'this is no time to be thinking about fingernails!' (S1071)

Everyone contributes in different ways to the corruption of our times. So perhaps those who contribute only vanity should be seen as *less* corrupt than others when there are more serious crimes to be denounced. Where before he lacerated his project with the accusation of vanity, Montaigne now consoles himself. In these bad times *his* crime could be so much worse. Since rulers need to concern themselves with more serious errors first, he may be allowed some time of respite in which to improve. The idea that when great things are in danger, lesser problems can be neglected is confirmed with a story about Philotimus taken from Plutarch's *Moralia*. In comparison with the worst vices of his time his own fault (of vain writing) seems much less serious. Consoling himself with the thought that his writing resembles overlong fingernails strikes a humorous tone. But a parallel example from recent history suggests a different conclusion.

Je vis pourtant sur ce propos, il y a quelques années, qu'un personnage, de qui j'ay la memoire en recommandation singuliere, au milieu de nos grands maux, qu'il n'y avoit ny loy, ny justice, ny magistrat qui fist son office non plus qu'à cette heure, alla publier je ne sçay quelles chetives reformatiions sur les habillemens, la cuisine et la chicane. Ce sont amusoires dequoy on paist un peuple mal-mené, pour dire qu'on ne l'a pas du tout mis en oubly. Ces autres font de mesme, qui s'arrestent à deffendre à toute instance des formes de parler, les dances, et les jeux, à un peuple abandonné à toute sorte de vices execrables. Il n'est pas temps de se laver et decrasser, quand on est atteint d'une bonne fièvre. [C] C'est à faire aux seuls Spartiates de

se mettre à se peigner et testonner sur le poinct qu'ils se vont precipiter à quelque extreme hazard de leur vie. (V947, P990–1)

While on this subject, a few years ago a great man, whom I recall with particular esteem, in the midst of our ills, when there was no justice, law or magistrate functioning properly any more than today, went and published edicts covering some wretched reform or other of our clothing, eating and legal chicanery. Such things are tidbits on which we feed an ill-governed people to show that we have not entirely forgotten them. Others do the same when they issue detailed prohibitions of swear-words, dances and sports for people sunk in detestable vices of every kind. It is not the time to wash and get the dirt off you once you have caught a good fever. [C] It is right only for Spartans about to rush into some extreme mortal danger to start combing and dressing their hair. (S1071–2)

In a time of national crisis a great man published footling reforms. Because worrying about clothing and food at a time when civility is collapsing would seem to be foolish, Montaigne appears at first to use the story to confirm the relative triviality of vanity, but the historical event described in the anecdote works in the other direction, since it provides an example of a law-maker occupying himself with repressing vanity at a time when he might have been thought to have had better things to do. In the previous passage, Montaigne was trying to reassure himself that in the present state of crisis his vanity in pursuing his writing would be safe from this kind of interference.

This second interpretation seems to be confirmed in the next sentence, which speaks of the reassurance which such laws may have given the populace, though the political value of such prudential actions is again questioned by the tone. A parallel example follows: when you have a fever there is no need to worry about washing. But C adds a counterexample, which it treats as an exception: leave it to the Spartans to put their hair in order before a battle. At this point we may remember that Montaigne often admires the Spartans and that the battle in question was the glorious defeat of Thermopylae. If we are to admire the Spartans then perhaps we *should* concern ourselves with vanities (such as hairdressing or writing *essais*) at moments of crisis. Or perhaps the difference between the Spartans and ourselves makes them an inappropriate model.

Montaigne's main tactic here seems to be to relativize the attitude to vanity. For good people and in good times vanity is to be condemned but in bad times either it may be a lesser evil than the others being committed,

or such times may make vain preoccupations seem even more worthless, or to concern yourself with vanities may run so much against the imperatives of the time as to constitute a sort of heroism. By the way he has set up the oppositions and parallels in the section and through his manipulation of tone, Montaigne throws his readers beyond their normal ways of thinking and reduces any sense of certainty they may have. His next move destabilizes his readers' judgements even further by insisting on the difference between his own habits and other people's.

[B] Quant à moy, j'ay cette autre pire coustume, que si j'ay un escarpin de travers, je laisse encores de travers et ma chemise et ma cappe: je desdaigne de m'amender à demy. Quand je suis en mauvais estat, je m'acharne au mal; je m'abandonne par desespoir et me laisse aller vers la cheute [C] et jette, comme l'on dict, le manche apres la coignée; [B] je m'obstine à l'empirement et ne m'estime plus digne de mon soing: ou tout bien ou tout mal. (V947, P991)

[B] I have a worse habit myself: if one of my shoes is askew then I let my shirt and my cloak lie askew as well: I am too proud to amend my ways by halves. When my condition is bad I cling violently to my illness: I abandon myself to despair and let myself go towards catastrophe, [C] casting as they say the haft after the axe-head; [B] stubbornly, I want to get worse and think myself no longer worth curing. Either totally well or totally ill. (S1072)

Where the previous paragraph suggested that in times of crisis it may be foolish to make small alterations in behaviour or dress, here Montaigne proclaims that he has an even worse habit. He will not correct small faults at any time. Rather than straighten his shoe he will leave both his cloak and his shirt at odd angles. Once he sees himself getting ill, rather than try to cure his illness by half measures, he will embrace it and expect to get worse. Montaigne invites the reader to condemn this 'pire coustume', which he even calls 'abandoning himself to despair' but the reader can hardly agree to this without having to question the whole process of thought which he or she has been following so far.

The logical connection between these sections is the notion of whole and part. In the previous paragraph the danger to the whole society meant that vanity in an individual could be ignored. By the same token, when the whole body

was fevered, it was hardly worthwhile to wash away dirt on the skin. In this paragraph Montaigne says that for him (by contrast) if even one part is wrong he would prefer the whole thing to be bad. 'Je desdaigne de m'amender à demi ... ou tout bien ou tout mal'. The next paragraph extends this play of part and whole by considering the impact of the ruin of his whole society on Montaigne.

Ce m'est faveur que la desolation de cet estat se rencontre à la desolation de mon aage: je souffre plus volontiers que mes maux en soient rechargés, que si mes biens en eussent esté troublez. Les paroles que j'exprime au mal-heur sont paroles de despit; mon courage se herisse au lieu de s'applatir. Et, au rebours des autres, je me trouve plus devost en la bonne qu'en la mauvaise fortune, suyvant le precepte de Xenophon, sinon suyvant sa raison; et fais plus volontiers les doux yeux au ciel pour le remercier que pour le requerir. J'ay plus de soing d'augmenter la santé quand elle me rit, que je n'ay de la remettre quand je l'ay escartée. Les prosperitez me servent de discipline et d'instruction, comme aux autres les adversitez et les verges. [C] Comme si la bonne fortune estoit incompatible avec la bonne conscience, les hommes ne se rendent gens de bien qu'en la mauvaise. Le bon heur [B] m'est un singulier aiguillon à la moderation et modestie. La priere me gaigne, la menace me rebute; [C] la faveur me ploye, la crainte me roydit. (V947, P991)¹⁷

It is fortunate for me that the forlorn state of France should correspond to the forlorn age I have reached. It is easier for me to accept that my ills should be augmented by it than that such good things as I have should be troubled by it. The words I utter when wretched are words of defiance: instead of lying low my mind bristles up. Contrary to others I find I am more prayerful in good fortune than in bad. Following Xenophon's precept, though not his reasoning, I am more ready to make sheep's eyes at heaven in thanksgiving than in supplication. I am more anxious to improve my health when it beams upon me than to restore it when I have lost it; prosperous times serve to discipline me and instruct me, as rods and adversities do to others. [C] As though good fortune were incompatible with a good conscience, men never become moral except when times are bad. For me good luck [B] is a unique spur to measure and moderation. Entreaties win me over: menaces I despise; [C] good-will makes me bow: fear makes me unbending. (S1072)

It suits Montaigne that the ruin of his country should coincide with his old age. If both body and state were not in ruin he might regret the impact of either (the pronouns are just about ambiguous) on his well-being. While this sentence draws on the idea of a correspondence between part and whole the rest of the paragraph relies on the contrast between *his* reaction to outside circumstances, good and bad, and that of other people. Where ill-fortune makes others humble and prayerful, it makes him defiant.¹⁸ For him, in contrast to others, it is good fortune that acts as a moral school, making him grateful and urging him to self-improvement. The effect of the C additions here is both to amplify his point by restating it succinctly (good-will makes me bow; fear makes me firm) and to argue that the behaviour of others is not just different from his own but actually absurd (as if good fortune were incompatible with a good conscience; as if men were only made good by bad fortune).

[B] Parmi les conditions humaines, cette-cy est assez commune: de nous plaire plus des choses estrangeres que des nostres et d'aymer le remuement et le changement.

*Ipsa dies ideo nos grato perluit haustu
Quod permutatis hora recurrit equis.*

J'en tiens ma part. Ceux qui suyvent l'autre extremité, de s'aggreer en eux-mesmes, d'estimer ce qu'ils tiennent au dessus du reste et de ne recognoistre aucune forme plus belle que celle qu'ils voyent, s'ils ne sont plus advisez que nous, ils sont à la verité plus heureux. Je n'envie point leur sagesse, mais ouy leur bonne fortune. (V948, P991–2)

[B] Among human characteristics this one is common enough: to delight more in what belongs to others than to ourselves and to love variation and change:

*Ipsa dies ideo nos grato perluit haustu
Quod permutatis hora recurrit equis.*

(Even the daylight only pleases us because the hours run by on changing steeds)

I have my share of that. Those who go to the other extreme, who are happy with themselves and who esteem above all else whatever they possess and who recognize no form more beautiful than the one they behold, may not be wise as we are but they are truly happier. I do not envy them their wisdom but I do envy them their good fortune. (S1072–3)

From the vanity of writing with which the essay began and the idleness of Galba, the petty-mindedness of the legislator and the hairdressing of the Spartans with which it continued, Montaigne turns to the vanity of preferring other people's possessions and customs to one's own and seeking change (exemplified with a quotation from Petronius fragments, 42, 5–6).¹⁹ This form of vanity Montaigne admits to sharing. He explains and justifies himself by imagining the contrary. Those who are not interested in what others have must be happy with themselves. Montaigne exaggerates their self-satisfaction to the point of caricature. He will envy their good fortune in being so happy but he can hardly admire the wisdom of what he implies is their complacent lack of judgement. Apparently Montaigne is poking fun at Stoic notions of self-reliance. Stoics would certainly not want to be praised for their good fortune at the expense of their wisdom. But he is also making the more serious point that the vanity of curiosity is part of what he takes to be his own nature (and, if we apply the logic of *Du repentir*, human nature more generally).²⁰ The person who does not want to urge his mind to novelty of experience and thought cannot really be wise.

Most structural accounts of *De la vanité* will treat this section as a prelude to the discussion of travel which begins in the next paragraph and to which Montaigne frequently returns in the course of the essay. One could even subtitle the section 'a defence of vanity'. But neither of these reactions accounts for the dense process of thought we have already been through or for the pleasure which Montaigne's jokes, allusions and extravagances have given us on the way. This is an example of Montaigne's representation of thought in action. It is also a mental gymnasium for the reader.²¹ Following the logical connections is hard work and the hard work we are forced to do in order to understand the connections makes us question our assumptions and see beyond our ordinary ways of thinking. The joking tone liberates us to think freshly and lightens the labour but does not detract from the impact of these ideas on our normal ways of thinking.²² The rapid movement of ideas justifies the claim that the essay presents thought in process.²³ But I would also want

to argue that even though Montaigne always keeps moving, still he makes successful points (scores goals, if you like) before continuing with the game.

Writing is a form of vanity. It may be less blameworthy than other sins. The vanity of curiosity probably is a constitutive part of the make-up of Montaigne, his contemporaries and most of his readers. Arguments which rely on the inter-relationship of part and whole raise troubling questions and draw our minds in unexpected directions. Parts can be similar to wholes (and can in that sense represent them) or they can contribute to the whole by differing from it in some respect (in which case the meaning of the whole may be more subject to negotiation and interpretation).²⁴ Such thoughts may or may not form part of an overall impression of this chapter but they arise in the reading and readers may take them away as conclusions or develop them in new directions of their own. At the same time no one's mind can work as hard over sixty pages as we have over the first two and a half and retain the fruits of that thought. Even though there are pages where the amplification is greater and the movement of thought slower than in these, the combination of extreme density of thought and considerable length makes it almost inevitable that a reader will attend unevenly within a chapter, focusing strongly on some passages, skipping lightly over others. This feature ensures the enduring freshness of the *Essais*. We never fully possess them; there are always places where more thought can bring us the pleasure of new understanding, to set alongside the growing pleasure of the familiarity of other passages. It may also help explain why such very different people can share the experience of finding themselves in reading Montaigne. Helpfully Montaigne says something similar about his own experience of reading.

[A] Quand je prens des livres, j'auray apperceu en tel passage des graces excellentes et qui auront feru mon ame; qu'un'autre fois j'y retombe, j'ay beau le tourner et virer, j'ay beau le plier et le manier, c'est une masse incognue et informe pour moy. [B] En mes escrits mesmes je ne retrouve pas tousjours l'air de ma premiere imagination: je ne sçay ce que j'ay voulu dire, et m'eschaude souvent à corriger et y mettre un nouveau sens, pour avoir perdu le premier, qui valloit mieux. (II, 12, V566, P600)

[A] I pick up some books: I may have discovered outstanding beauties in a particular passage which really struck home: another time I happen upon the same passage and it remains an unknown, shapeless lump for me, however much I twist it, and pat it and bend it or turn it. [B] Even

in the case of my own writings I cannot always recover the flavour of my original meaning; I do not know what I wanted to say and burn my fingers making corrections and giving it some new meaning for want of recovering the original one, which was better. (S637–8)

We now need to consider the elements from which Montaigne builds his sequences and the ways in which he relates and develops them. Montaigne takes over two types of material from his reading: stories and quotations (some of which are ethical axioms). I shall call these two types of material 'fragments', because they are typically short sections taken from his reading of longer books.

Montaigne was taught to quarry maxims, stories and quotations from his reading. We find him doing just this in constructing the essays. Since his audience was taught in the same way, it follows that from the Renaissance point of view one entirely legitimate way to read Montaigne is to read him for the sake of fragments (such as quotations, stories, fine phrases) which can be stored up and used elsewhere. There are plenty of examples of Renaissance authors reading contemporary and ancient texts in this way and indeed Montaigne's publishers promoted such a reading by adding a topic index, 'Les Pages du Sieur de Montaigne', to the editions of 1602 and 1604.²⁵ But if we want to follow Montaigne's own thought or to state that a particular opinion is his, the meaning of each particular fragment will need to be clarified by reading its immediate predecessors and successors. A comment may be made and then immediately contested and contradicted; indeed some statements seem to be introduced for the sake of the responses which can be made to them. In such cases the initial statement might be a stage of Montaigne's thought (or a provocation to his thought) which we can reuse because it is fruitful for our thinking in other ways but which could not reasonably be claimed to be Montaigne's view. When we look at a sequence of fragments, though, the connections between them will usually give us some indications about the role of each particular fragment. In cases where there is a sequence of arguments the meaning of the whole sequence may seem more secure than the meaning of the fragments considered separately. There will be other cases where the sequence of fragments has the effect of questioning all the ideas which are put forward and this questioning (sometimes relativizing, sometimes setting up contradictions) will be Montaigne's point in that passage. So, while the chapter is evidently made up of fragments, the sequence will usually be more capable of definite interpretation as well as richer in meaning. Equally the

meaning of fragments and sequences will alter when new material is added in successive stages.

In the earliest forms of the chapters maxim and story are connected directly. The story is offered as a particular exemplification of the general proposition encapsulated in the maxim or the maxim is placed after the story as an abstract (and generalizing) summary of its message. The story provides detail, interest and often emotion, where the maxim proposes meaning. Stories can be compared to other stories; maxims can form the starting points for arguments. The combination of story and maxim offers a range of possibilities for further development. At the same time there can always be questions about the degree to which the moral is applicable to the story or the extent to which this particular story illustrates one maxim rather than another. Sometimes Montaigne will take us into a story expecting one idea and will emerge from it with others as well. The relations between story and maxim, which are linked by the idea of generality and particularity, are confronted in the grammar school *progymnasmata* exercises.

The most common move for Montaigne to make after stating a maxim is to provide some justification for it. The justification may take the form of a quotation from philosophy or poetry. Or Montaigne may give an example or a cause. In the later versions of *Des menteurs* Montaigne says (as one of the advantages of a bad memory) that he talks less than other people because it is harder to think up things to say than to remember them. Later he makes the converse point that his bad memory causes him to think things out more for himself. When in *Par divers moyens on arrive a pareille fin* he suggests that souls which steadfastly resist pity may be moved by bravery he gives as a cause for this that affable natures and women are more inclined to pity whereas noble minds respond to valour. In *De la vanité* after he states that scribbling may be a symptom of an age of excess, he justifies this statement first by giving historical examples (both ancient Rome and modern France went to ruin at a time of excessive writing) and then by providing two causes (writing does not make people better; excessive writing may in fact be caused by neglect of other duties). Sometimes the justification involves a comparison from the greater to lesser. In *De la vanité* men have to account for their hours of inactivity because the law concerns itself with the unemployed as well as with those who labour. All these forms of justification are set out in the *progymnasmata* exercise of the *sententia*, in which the pupil is trained to confirm the maxim using the topics of cause, similarity, example, testimony of the ancients and contrary.

Parallel to justification (and not easily separable from it) is exploration of the meaning of a maxim. This may involve distinguishing the particular shade of meaning in which one of the words is employed, as happens near the beginning of *Des Menteurs*. Or Montaigne may examine the logical consequence of a statement or look at the effects which arise from some phenomenon. In *Des Menteurs*, the exclamation that lying is a terrible vice is justified by the larger claim that only language keeps people human and keeps society together. The implication is that since lying corrupts the use of language, it also has the effect of damaging people and society. For Montaigne it is a consequence of this view that in the process of education children should be punished for lying in order to dissuade them from acquiring this bad habit. In *De la vanité* he suggests that if in times of disaster vanity is one of the less serious vices, the consequence may be that punishment is delayed with the possible effect of allowing him time to change his ways.

Clarifying the meaning or consequence of a proposition can be linked to amplification, when something is made to seem more significant by going into detail or by repeating the same idea in different words. Near the beginning of *De la vanité* Montaigne dramatizes the verbal excesses implied in his project of recounting himself through his fantasies, by envisaging the paper and ink which he will require and by comparing the 6,000 volumes which Diomedes devoted to the much more limited subject of grammar. Quintilian discusses the use of consequences and causes in amplification (8.4.17–20) in a passage which is also taken up in Erasmus's *De copia*. The use of detailed, concrete images to put across the implications of an idea is considered by Erasmus in his treatment of description as part of the fifth method of acquiring *copia*. Restatements of ideas in different words are described in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (under *expolitio*, IV.54) and in the first book of Erasmus's *De copia*.

Much of Montaigne's most important thought is driven by the motive of opposition. This can take the form of questioning a proposition by immediately stating its contrary and backing this up with a further maxim or an example. In *Par divers moyens on arrive a pareille fin* Montaigne follows his statement that strong noble minds may respond better to bravery by stating the objection, that less magnanimous minds can be moved in the same way and providing an example to illustrate this. The example of Alexander's cruelty to Betis is introduced in 1588 as a contrary to the earlier examples of defiance provoking mercy. In *Des Menteurs* the second and third disadvantages of a bad memory are immediately refuted by a statement of their contrary. In *De la vanité* the consolation that small

vices may be ignored in times of crisis is contradicted by the example of the great man publishing edicts on small matters, but this example is soon contrasted with the maxim that when you have a strong fever it is no time to wash. The structure of statement followed by its contradiction sometimes develops into a sort of dialogue, as when, later in *De la vanité*, a series of reasons not to go travelling are stated and then in turn argued against. In *De l'art de conferer* Montaigne gave his own appreciation of the role of contradiction in clarifying and advancing thought:

[B] Les contradictions donc des jugemens ne m'offencent ny m'alterent; elles m'esveillent seulement et m'exercent. Nous fuyons la correction; il s'y faudroit presenter et produire ... Quand on me contrarie, on esveille mon attention, non pas ma cholere; je m'avance vers celui qui me contredit, qui m'instruit. La cause de la verité devoit estre la cause commune à l'une et à l'autre. Que respondra-il? (III, 8, V924, P968)

[B] Contradictory judgements neither offend nor irritate me: they merely wake me up and provide me with exercise. We avoid being corrected; we ought to come forward and accept it ... When I am contradicted it arouses my attention, not my wrath. I move towards the man who contradicts me; he is instructing me. The cause of truth ought to be common to us both. What will his answer be? (S1046–7)

In conversation people learn from each other by testing points of contradiction. The method of contraries is equally important to the internal conversation of the essays.²⁶ The contrary was one of the major topics expected in the earlier *progymnasmata*, such as *chreia* and *sententia* (and also in commonplace). The exercise of *subversio* is devoted to different methods of rejecting a proposition. In later *progymnasmata*, like *thesis* and *legislatio*, the later part of the composition involves the statement of objections and their refutation (*contradictio* and *solutio*), as if in anticipation of the university exercise of disputation. In the *Apologie* Montaigne tells us that when he finds himself arguing a certain position he sometimes puts the arguments for the contrary position as a mental exercise and then finds himself believing those arguments.

[B] Maintes-fois (comme il m'advient de faire volontiers) ayant pris pour exercice et pour esbat à maintenir une contraire opinion à la mienne, mon esprit, s'appliquant et tournant de ce costé là, m'y attache si bien que

je ne trouve plus la raison de mon premier advis, et m'en despars. (II, 12, V566, P600)

[B] Many's the time I have taken an opinion contrary to my own and (as I am fond of doing) tried defending it for the fun of the exercise: then, once my mind has really applied itself to that other side, I get so firmly attached to it that I forget why I held the first opinion and give it up. (S638)

His aim in this passage is to illustrate the changeability of human reason using himself as an example but it also provides an insight into the way he directs his mind. The topic of contraries is usually treated as one of the most important sources of arguments in dialectic textbooks and handbooks of rhetorical invention. Textbook discussions of declamation emphasize the strength of arguments which can be discovered by imagining the opponent's replies and replying to them. Some of Montaigne's most original and stimulating thoughts arise from setting up contrary positions on an issue and trying to work a positive statement out of his objections to both contradictory positions. We do not know exactly where Montaigne studied logic, but it is hard to imagine that he could have pursued his legal career without it. Disputations (which require some logical training) were an important part of the curriculum at the Collège de Guyenne and logic was studied in the first year of the philosophy course there.²⁷

Montaigne's characteristic move from a general statement of an issue to exploring his own experience and opinions is often related to this statement of opposition. Most often his own habits and opinions are contrasted with the generality of other people. In *De la vanité* his habit of being defiant in bad times and prayerful and ready to learn when times are good is contrasted with the general custom, which he mocks. But there are times when his own experience is used to support a position which he has taken in the essay or when he wishes to affirm the community of experience between himself and other men. In *Du repentir* he asserts that every man bears the whole form of the human condition, to imply that his account of his own life has exemplary value for others.²⁸ In *Des menteurs*, the first turn to himself in the first sentence of the essay begins as modesty but then offers the opportunity for a disquisition on memory, not without self-justification. Later when he declares (as it will later turn out, misleadingly)²⁹ that he could never bring himself to tell a lie, the effect is to emphasize further the strong critique of lying. This turning to himself is rightly regarded as one of Montaigne's most

important and innovative characteristics, but there are some intimations of it in the rhetoric textbooks, for example in Quintilian's discussion of Cicero's use of his own persona in the conclusion of *Pro Milone* (*Institutio oratoria*, 6.1.24–7, developed by Rudolph Agricola, *De inventione dialectica*, pp. 199–201) and in discussions of *prosopopeia* and the speaker's use of ethos.

The movement to expressing his own view may be linked to the more general issue of comparison. Montaigne may use comparison at a very local level as a way of illuminating a particular idea or he may juxtapose similar statements or stories with the aim of eliciting difference as well as similarity. In *Des Menteurs* the image of the horse, which is more capable than many other horses because of its capacity to stop, illuminates the feared torrent of words but also suggests that a well-trained animal may be more susceptible to control than people. The later comparison with a quotation from St Augustine, in which those who cannot be understood (even though they are thereby deprived of the advantages of humanity) are said to be better off than those who lie, serves to amplify the vice of lying. In *De la vanité*, the comparison with the nobleman who displays chamber pots is largely comic in effect. The comparison with those who are content with themselves serves to improve the status of vanity with an effective sideswipe at Stoicism. The comparisons with the legislators complicate the reader's understanding of the dangers the vain man runs into, both belittling the significance of vanity by the comparison and threatening people who engage in vain pursuits with the illogicality of those in power. Comparison is one of the later *progymnasmata*, where it is linked with the rhetoric of praise and blame, and one of the major resources for producing amplification and *copia*. We shall see later that the relations between similarity and difference interested Montaigne as a general issue of logical theory as well as a practical device.

Alongside comparison we may notice moves which Montaigne makes to place a particular occurrence in a wider context, perhaps of the historical time in which it takes place, or perhaps of human experience viewed more generally. The effort to try to understand things as in harmony with their time or as having their value changed by differences between national or temporal customs forms one of Montaigne's most important manoeuvres for questioning received opinions or commonsense reactions. In *De la vanité* Montaigne appeals to the connection between part and whole in order to make a whole series of moves to destabilize the reader's sense of the implication of vanity. Rhetorical training envisages the use of attendant circumstances mainly as a device of amplification but humanist commentary, with its

newly won sense of the difference between classical and modern times, is sympathetic to the usefulness of context in arriving at judgements.

Sometimes Montaigne makes use of the larger scale structuring device of the list. In *Des menteurs* he gives a list of advantages and disadvantages of a bad memory. In *De la vanité* there is a sequence of objections to travel. These lists provide him with a series of statements which he responds to using the logical techniques I have been outlining. When he has (temporarily) finished developing his position on a particular statement, he turns from it to the next statement on his list. A slightly similar effect is achieved by his occasional interjecting of a structuring comment, on the lines of, 'but to return to my argument'. Both devices provide for a non-linear logical structure to the essay. Both in some sense run against his various protestations that he is not concerned with Aristotelian or Ciceronian methods of organizing what he has to say, preferring to rely on fortune or to depict the minute-to-minute alterations in his mind.

I have analysed the connections between fragments and the logical moves Montaigne makes in relation to the sections from the three essays analysed above in order to argue that Montaigne's most important interventions typically involve combining several connecting motifs (or logical moves). In the earlier stages of the essays there will be a link (*e.g.*, of justification, clarification or opposition) between a story and a maxim. Later he will build a succession of logical moves from a single proposition. It is this worrying away at the significance, the truth value and the personal applicability of an argument which leads Montaigne to new ideas. By specifying the typical basic components (which I have called the fragments) and the principal methods of combination I have described a way of analysing the sequences, which I take to be the most important part of Montaigne's thinking. Looking for the ways in which Montaigne combines these logical moves will help readers notice the methods and the content of his thought. I have already compared the reading of Montaigne to the appreciation of a game. I have been trying to describe the pieces in play and the elementary moves which can be made with them. Skill in the game and knowledge in the spectator (who as a reader of the essays is led to re-enact the sequences of Montaigne's thought) consist in the art of combination. Students of chess usually devote more attention to unusual or beautiful combinations in particular sections of a master game they are reading than they do to the eventual result. In practical terms these are the new ideas which they may take from the study of that game and perhaps apply in a different situation. In aesthetic terms the delight which comes from understanding the logical implications of the combinations is what makes the games of the masters worth playing over.

I have also tried to show that the basic methods of connecting fragments (and of building on propositions) are closely related to composition exercises practised in the grammar schools. This historical claim has two implications. In the first place this is an instance of something which other scholars have noticed. Although Montaigne is very critical of rhetoric (and of most aspects of grammar school training) he makes extensive and innovative use of rhetorical techniques. It seems to me that the extent to which Montaigne adds questioning, clarification and opposition at every stage suggests that he was highly self-conscious about the possibilities of each move. When you have been taught to notice and label topics of invention or figures of speech, you can learn from the ways others have used them and you can use them more self-consciously and artistically yourself. The second implication concerns the audience. Insofar as Montaigne employed methods corresponding to the teaching of the grammar schools (whether or not school training affected Montaigne himself), his logical moves became readable by his contemporaries. The training provided them with a means of reading which helped them look out for certain logical connections and enabled them to appreciate the ways in which these connections were being combined. And this in turn helped them follow his new ideas.

In the last part of the chapter I want to consider the role of the sequences in relation to the structure of complete chapters. I have already provided analyses of the whole of two early chapters (*Par divers moyens on arrive a pareille fin* and *Des Menteurs*). We found that simple initial structures were developed into complex shapes by the addition of new material, which added to or changed the emphasis of the subject matter and altered the implication of the whole essay. A truly detailed plan of one of the late essays would take up several pages and in so doing would fail to provide an intelligible view of the whole. A smaller scale map of *De la vanité* might look like this:³⁰

		V	P	S
1	Introduction: Vanity, Idleness and Writing, Self, Travel	945–8	989–92	1070–3
2	Household Management (linking passage) travel	948–55	992–9	1073–81
		955–6	999–1000	1081–2

		V	P	S
3	Political Change and Civil War (digression) problems about writing	956–62 962–5	1000–6 1006–10	1082–9 1089–92
4	Trying to avoid obligations to others (linking passage) effects of the civil wars	965–70 970–2	1010–15 1015–17	1092–8 1098–1100
5	Travel: refutes reasons against; his habits in travel (interspersed with Marriage and Friendship Death Writing)	972–87 974–7 978–80 983–4 980–1 982–3	1017–33 1019–22 1023–5 1029–30 1025–7 1028–9	1100–16 1102–5 1106–8 1112–13 1108–10 1111–12
6	Vanity, Human Inconsistency, Philosophy	987–91	1033–7	1116–21
7	Problems of Public Service	991–4	1037–40	1121–4
8	Writing	994–6	1040–2	1124–7
9	Rome and Roman Citizenship	996–1000	1042–7	1127–32
10	Coda on Vanity	1000–1	1047	1132–3

Such a plan gives some idea of the succession of major topics in the essay (and will be of some help in locating particular passages) but it cannot show us how Montaigne's thought develops.³¹ Rather unusually *De la vanité* has a conclusion but the conclusion concerns only one of the main subjects and by no means implies a rejection of the others. The fact that Montaigne discusses public service after his main sections on travel does not imply that what he has to say about public service answers or is more fundamental than his remarks on travel. Nor is it likely that Montaigne worked with a plan like this in composing the essay. Because of the complexity of a chapter like this we can only guess at the stages of composition. My suspicion is

that Montaigne knew at the beginning that the essay would involve vanity, travel (partly seen as an instance of vanity) and the issue of one's duties to others (perhaps seen as a counterweight to his idea that all we do is vanity). As he wrote, these leading issues would have become entangled with the problems of household management (which encouraged him to travel), the trials of the civil war, general observations on the conduct of life and reflections on his processes of writing. The structure of this essay is not impressive in itself. It is effective because it allows a place (and a degree of mutual reflection) to exceptionally searching and eloquent sequences of fragments and thoughts.

The work which sets the reader's mind thinking in new directions is to be found in local sequences of the essay. In what I have called the sixth section Montaigne admits that his love of travel is a symptom of a lack of constancy and security but he insists that this is an essential part of being human.

[B] Je sçay bien qu'à le prendre à la lettre, ce plaisir de voyager porte tesmoignage d'inquietitude et d'irresolution. Aussi sont ce nos maistresses qualitez, et praedominantes ... Il y a de la vanité, dictes vous, en cet amusement? Mais où non? Et ces beaux preceptes sont vanité, et vanité toute la sagesse ... Ces exquisés subtilitez ne sont propres qu'au presche: ce sont discours qui nous veulent envoyer tous bastez en l'autre monde. La vie est un mouvement materiel et corporel, action imparfaicte de sa propre essence, et desreglée; je m'emploie à la servir selon elle.

Quisque suos patimur manes

... A quoy faire ces poinctes eslevées de la philosophie sur lesquelles aucun estre humain ne se peut rasseoir, et ces regles qui excedent nostre usage et nostre force? Je voy souvent qu'on nous propose des images de vie, lesquelles ny le proposant ny les auditeurs n'ont aucune esperance de suyvre ny, qui plus est, envie. De ce mesme papier où il vient d'escrire l'arrest de condamnation contre un adultere, le juge en desrobe un lopin pour en faire un poulet à la femme de son compagnon. [C] Celle à qui vous viendrez de vous froter illicitement, criera plus asprement tantost, en vostre presence mesme, à l'encontre d'une pareille faute de sa compaignie que ne feroit Porcie. [B] Et tel condamne des hommes à mourir pour des crimes qu'il n'estime point fautes ... D'autant que nostre licence nous porte tousjours au delà de ce qui nous est loisible et permis,

on a estressy souvent outre la raison universelle les preceptes et loix de nostre vie ... Il n'est si homme de bien, qu'il mette à l'examen des loix toutes ses actions et pensées, qui ne soit pendable dix fois en sa vie ... L'humaine sagesse n'arriva jamais aux devoirs qu'elle s'estoit elle mesme prescript et, si elle y estoit arrivée, elle s'en prescriroit d'autres au delà, où elle aspirast tousjours et pretendist, tant nostre estat est ennemy de consistance ... La vie commune doit avoir conference aux autres vies. La vertu de Caton estoit vigoureuse outre la mesure de son siècle; et à un homme qui se mesloit de gouverner les autres, destiné au service commun, il se pourroit dire que c'estoit une justice, sinon injuste, au moins vaine, et hors de saison ... La vertu assignée aux affaires du monde est une vertu à plusieurs plis, encoigneures et couddes, pour s'appliquer et joindre à l'humaine foiblesse, meslée et artificielle, non droite, nette, constante, ny purement innocente. (III, 9, V988–91, P1034–7)³²

[B] I am well aware that, taken literally, this delight in travelling bears witness to restlessness and inconstancy. But these are indeed our dominant master-qualities ... 'There is vanity,' you say, 'in such a pastime.' – Yes. Where is there not? Those fine precepts are all vanity and all wisdom is vanity ... Those exquisite subtleties are only good for sermons: they are themes which seek to drive us into the next world like donkeys. But life is material motion in the body, an activity, by its very essence, imperfect and unruly: I work to serve it on its own terms.

Quisque suos patimur manes (each suffers his own torments, *Aeneid*, 6.743)

... What is the use of those high philosophical peaks on which no human being can settle and those rules which exceed our practice and our power? I am well aware that people often expound to us ideas about life which neither the speaker nor the hearers have any hope of following or (what is more) any desire. The judge filches a bit of paper on which he has just written the sentence on an adulterer in order to send a billet-doux to the wife of a colleague. [C] The woman you have just been having an illicit tumble with will soon, in your very presence, be screaming harsher condemnations of a similar fault in a friend of hers than Portia would. [B] Some condemn people to death for crimes which they do not actually believe to be even mistakes ... Since our licence

always takes us beyond what is lawful and reasonable, we have often made the precepts and laws for our lives stricter than universal reason requires ... No man is so moral but that, if he submitted his deeds and thoughts to cross-examination by the laws, he would be found worthy of hanging on ten occasions in his lifetime ... Human wisdom has never managed to live up to the duties which it has prescribed for itself; and if it had done so, it would have prescribed itself more, further beyond them still, towards which it could continue to strive and aspire, so hostile is our condition to consistency ... A life lived in society must bear some relationship to other lives. Cato's virtue was excessively rigorous by the standards of his age; and in a man occupied with governing others and destined to serve the commonwealth, we could say that his justice, if not unjust, was at least vain and unseasonable ... The virtue allotted to this world's affairs is a virtue with many angles, crinkles and corners so that it can be applied and joined to our human frailty; it is complex and artificial, not straight, clear-cut, constant, nor purely innocent. (S1117–21)

The passage begins with two arguments generalizing both halves of his starting proposition (the person and the activity). To like travel is a sign of inconstancy, but inconstancy is a dominant feature of human beings. Travel itself is vain but so are all human activities. The next move is from general to specific: if all activity is vain then so are precepts and so is wisdom itself. He then justifies the statement that moral precepts are vain by describing their goal and contrasting this with the reality of human life (seen here in a Lucretian way as bodies in movement). This leads to a further contrast, with the characteristic turn to the self: while others seek to impose rules, I try to respond to the reality of change.

After the quotation from Virgil he elaborates on (with amplification and rhetorical question) and argues for the bad fit between ethical axioms and human life. He gives examples of humans ignoring the rules. These draw their detail and vigour from satirical portrayals of hypocrisy but Montaigne's point is that such behaviour is the norm. Rather than being outraged by such behaviour he finds it amusing and instructive. This leads him to an extraordinary exposé of both sides of the contradiction he has set up. For exactly the same reasons that humans always break the rules they fix, they always set rules which are beyond their capacity to keep. People are equally excessive in their lawmaking and lawbreaking (hence the adulterous judge of

adultery). Montaigne then amplifies both sides of this equation. If anyone's life were examined carefully that person would be judged worthy of hanging ten times. Our reason is incapable of living up to our rules. But if it could keep its rules it would immediately make further rules which would be impossible to keep. This argument is then linked back to the recurring theme of this passage, the perpetual movement and lack of constancy of the human condition.

The next argument appeals to the context of human life and draws in one of Montaigne's favourite specific examples. Living in the world involves living in relation to other people. But the austere virtue of Cato goes so far beyond what others can manage that in relation to other people it too is vain. So vanity now includes not only the commonality of human behaviour but also (in the different light cast by social context) one of the strongest exemplars of moral virtue. Having exemplified and amplified the corruption of mankind on one side and having established the vanity of moral rules and examples on the other, Montaigne attempts to reconstruct a possible human virtue (*une vertu à plusieurs plis, encoigneres et couddes*), while remaining acutely aware of its limitations in relation to the two contradictory pressures he has observed and deployed around it.

Passages like this represent what is extraordinary in the essays. The chosen subject(s) of a chapter provides the armature within which fragments can be combined in breathtaking sequences of thought. Such sequences are then embedded together and further elaborated in order to produce whole chapters. Rather than the sections being subordinated to the whole, the structure exists for the sake of the perceptive sequences of thought which emerge within it. Even though (untypically) this chapter returns to the topic of vanity for its brilliant concluding page, the conclusion neither repeats nor replaces the arguments we have been tracing here and from the beginning of the essay. Instead it develops the implications of the human involvement with vanity in a different way. As readers we can choose to work from all three sections separately or we can, if we wish, make connections and comparisons between them.