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# HOW TO LIVE

— OR —

## A LIFE OF MONTAIGNE

IN ONE QUESTION AND  
TWENTY ATTEMPTS  
AT AN ANSWER

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4. *Q. How to live? A. Read a lot, forget most of what you read, and be slow-witted*

READING

THE CLOSE GRAMMATICAL study of Cicero and Horace almost killed Montaigne's interest in literature before it was born. But some of the teachers at the school helped keep it going, mainly by not taking more entertaining books out of the boy's hands when they caught him reading them, and perhaps even by slipping a few more his way—doing this so discreetly that he could enjoy reading them without ceasing to feel like a rebel.

One unsuitable text which Montaigne discovered for himself at the age of seven or eight, and which changed his life, was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This tumbling cornucopia of stories about miraculous transformations among ancient gods and mortals was the closest thing the Renaissance had to a compendium of fairy tales. As full of horrors and delights as a Grimm or Andersen, and quite unlike the texts of the schoolroom, it was the sort of thing an imaginative sixteenth-century boy could read with eyes rounded and fingers white-knuckled from gripping the covers too tightly.

In Ovid, people change. They turn into trees, animals, stars, bodies of water, or disembodied voices. They alter sex; they become werewolves. A woman called Scylla enters a poisonous pool and sees each of her limbs turn into a dog-like monster from which she cannot pull away because the monsters are also *her*. The hunter Actaeon is changed into a stag, and his own hunting-dogs chase him down. Icarus flies so high that the sun burns him. A king and a queen turn into two mountains. The nymph Samacis plunges herself into the pool where the beautiful Hermaphroditus is bathing, and wraps herself around him like a squid holding fast to its prey, until her flesh melts into his and the two become one person, half male, half female. Once a taste of this sort of thing had started him off, Montaigne galloped through other books similarly full of good stories: Virgil's *Aeneid*, then Terence, Plautus, and various modern Italian comedies. He learned, in

defiance of school policy, to associate reading with excitement. It was the one positive thing to come out of his time there. ("But," Montaigne adds, "for all that, it was still school.")



Many of his early discoveries remained lifelong loves. Although the initial thrill of the *Metamorphoses* wore off, he filled the *Essays* with stories from it, and emulated Ovid's style of slipping from one topic to the next without introduction or apparent order. Virgil continued to be a favorite too, though the mature Montaigne was cheeky enough to suggest that some passages in the *Aeneid* might have been "brushed up a little."

Because he liked to know what people really did, rather than what someone imagined they might do, Montaigne's preference soon shifted from poets to historians and biographers. It was in real-life stories, he said, that you encountered human nature in all its complexity. You learned the "diversity and truth" of man, as well as "the variety of the ways he is put together, and the accidents that threaten him." Among historians, he liked Tacitus best, once remarking that he had just read through his *History* from beginning to end without interruption. He loved how Tacitus treated public events from the point of view of "private behavior and inclinations," and was struck by the historian's fortune in living through a "strange and extreme" period, just as Montaigne himself did. Indeed, he wrote of Tacitus, "you would often say that it is us he is describing."

Turning to biographers, Montaigne liked those who went beyond the external events of a life and tried to reconstruct a person's inner world from the evidence. No one excelled in this more than his favorite writer of all: the Greek biographer Plutarch, who lived from around AD 46 to around 120 and whose vast *Lives* presented narratives of notable Greeks and Romans in themed pairs. Plutarch was to Montaigne what Montaigne was to many later readers: a model to follow, and a treasure chest of ideas, quotations, and anecdotes to plunder. "He is so universal and so full that on all occasions, and however eccentric the subject you have taken up, he makes his way into your work." The truth of this last part is undeniable: several sections of the *Essays* are paste-ins from Plutarch, left almost unchanged. No one thought of this as plagiarism: such imitation of great authors was then considered an excellent practice. Moreover, Montaigne subtly changed everything he stole, if only by setting it in a different context and hedging it around with uncertainties.

He loved the way Plutarch assembled his work by stuffing in fistfuls of images, conversations, people, animals, and objects of all kinds, rather than

by coldly arranging abstractions and arguments. His writing is full of *things*, Montaigne pointed out. If Plutarch wants to tell us that the trick in living well is to make the best of any situation, he does it by telling the story of a man who threw a stone at his dog, missed, hit his stepmother instead, and exclaimed, "Not so bad after all!" Or, if he wants to show us how we tend to forget the good things in life and obsess only about the bad, he writes about flies landing on mirrors and sliding about on the smooth surface, unable to find a footing until they hit a rough area. Plutarch leaves no neat endings, but he sows seeds from which whole worlds of inquiry can be developed. He points where we can go if we like; he does not lead us, and it is up to us whether we obey or not.

Montaigne also loved the strong sense of Plutarch's own personality that comes across in his work: "I think I know him even into his soul." This was what Montaigne looked for in a book, just as people later looked for it in him: the feeling of meeting a real person across the centuries. Reading Plutarch, he lost awareness of the gap in time that divided them—much bigger than the gap between Montaigne and us. It does not matter, he wrote, whether a person one loves has been dead for fifteen hundred years or, like his own father at the time, eighteen years. Both are equally remote; both are equally close.

Montaigne's merging of favorite authors with his own father says a lot about how he read: he took up books as if they were people, and welcomed them into his family. The rebellious, Ovid-reading boy would one day accumulate a library of around a thousand volumes: a good size, but not an indiscriminate assemblage. Some were inherited from his friend La Boétie; others he bought himself. He collected unsystematically, without adding fine bindings or considering rarity value. Montaigne would never repeat his father's mistake of fetishizing books or their authors. One cannot imagine him kissing volumes like holy relics, as Erasmus or the poet Petrarch reportedly used to, or putting on his best clothes before reading them, like Machiavelli, who wrote: "I strip off my muddy, sweaty, workaday clothes, and put on the robes of court and palace, and in this graver dress I enter the courts of the ancients and am welcomed by them." Montaigne would have found this ridiculous. He preferred to converse with the ancients in a tone of camaraderie,

sometimes even teasing them, as when he twits Cicero for his pomposity or suggests that Virgil could have made more of an effort.

Effort was just what he himself claimed never to make, either in reading or writing. "I leaf through now one book, now another," he wrote, "without order and without plan, by disconnected fragments." He could sound positively cross if he thought anyone might suspect him of careful scholarship. Once, catching himself having said that books offer consolation, he hastily added, "Actually I use them scarcely any more than those who do not know them at all." And one of his sentences starts, "We who have little contact with books . . ." His rule in reading remained the one he had learned from Ovid: pursue pleasure. "If I encounter difficulties in reading," he wrote, "I do not gnaw my nails over them; I leave them there. I do nothing without gaiety."

In truth he did work hard sometimes, but only when he thought the labor was worthwhile. Annotations in Montaigne's hand survive on a few books from his collection, notably a copy of Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*—





clearly a text that merited close attention. This is exactly the kind of book, idiosyncratic and intellectually adventurous, that you would expect Montaigne to want to take such trouble over.

Presenting himself as a layabout, flicking through a few pages before tossing the book aside with a yawn, suited Montaigne. It accorded with the dilettantish atmosphere he wanted to evoke in his own writing. As the copy of Lucretius shows, the truth must have been more complicated. But no doubt he did abandon whatever bored him: that was how he had been brought up, after all. Pierre taught him that everything should be approached in "gentleness and freedom, without rigor and constraint." Of this, Montaigne made a whole principle of living.

#### MONTAIGNE THE SLOW AND FORGETFUL

Whenever Montaigne did exert himself to flick through a book, according to him, he promptly forgot almost everything he had read. "Memory is a wonderfully useful tool, and without it judgment does its work with difficulty," he wrote, before adding, "it is entirely lacking in me."

There is no man who has less business talking about memory. For I recognize almost no trace of it in me, and I do not think there is another one in the world so monstrously deficient.

He admitted that this was a nuisance. It was annoying to lose his most interesting ideas simply because they came to him while he was out riding and had no paper on which to write them down. It would have been nice to remember more of his dreams, too. As he wrote, quoting Terence, "I'm full of cracks, and leak out on all sides."

Montaigne often sprang to the defense of the mnemonically challenged. He felt "indignation" and "personal resentment" when reading, for example, about Lyncestes, who was obliged to give a speech of defense to a whole army after being accused of conspiring against Alexander the Great. Lyncestes memorized an oration, but, when he tried to deliver it, he got only a few words out before becoming confused and forgetting the rest.

While he stammered and hedged, a nearby group of soldiers lost patience and ran him through with their pikes. They thought his inability to speak proved his guilt. "That certainly was good reasoning!" exclaimed Montaigne. It proved only that, under stress, an overburdened memory is likely to take fright at its load like a panicky horse, and dump the lot.

Even if one's life was not at stake, learning a speech by heart was not necessarily a good idea. Spontaneous talk was usually more enjoyable to listen to. When Montaigne himself had to speak in public, he tried to be nonchalant, and used "unstudied and unpremeditated gestures, as if they arose from the immediate occasion." He particularly avoided announcing a sequence of numbered points ("I will now discuss six possible approaches . . .") because it was both boring and risky: one was likely either to forget some of them or to end up with too many.

Sometimes the very significance or interest of a piece of information drove it out of his mind. Once, being lucky enough to meet a group of Tupinambá people brought over by French colonists from Brazil, he listened eagerly to their answers when they were asked what they thought of France. They replied with three remarks, all fascinating—but when Montaigne came to recount the conversation in his *Essays*, he could remember only two. Other lapses were worse. In a published letter describing the death of La Boétie—the man he loved most in his life—he confessed that he might have forgotten some of his friend's final acts and parting words.

Montaigne's admission of such failings was a direct challenge to the Renaissance ideal of oratory and rhetoric, which held that being able to think well was the same as being able to speak well, and being able to speak well depended upon remembering your flow of argument together with sparkling quotations and examples to adorn it. Devotees of the art of memory, or *ars memoriae*, learned techniques for stringing together hours' worth of rhetoric, and even developed these techniques into a whole program of philosophical self-improvement. This had no appeal for Montaigne.

From the start, some readers have refused to believe that his memory could really be as bad as he claimed. This irritated him so much that he complained about it in the *Essays*. But doubters continued to point out that,

for example, he seemed to have no difficulty remembering quotations from his reading: so many appear in the *Essays*, not least the one about feeling like a leaking pot. Either he was less leaky than he claimed, or he was less lazy, for if he did not remember the quotations, he must have written them down. Some people became positively angry about this. One near-contemporary of his, the poet Dominique Baudier, said that Montaigne's lamentations about his memory drove him to "nausea and laughter"—an extreme reaction. The seventeenth-century philosopher Malebranche felt Montaigne was lying to him, a serious charge against a writer who always made much of his honesty.

It was a charge that had something to it. Montaigne surely did remember more than he let on. It is not unusual to feel let down by one's memory: this is part of the imperfect human condition. An undisciplined memory is also just what one might expect from Montaigne's easygoing upbringing and his dislike of forcing himself in anything. His apparent modesty on this subject can also be translated into a subtle claim to virtues which he thought more important. One of these, ironically, was honesty. As the old saying had it, bad memories make bad liars. If Montaigne was too forgetful to keep stories straight in his head, he had to tell the truth. Also, his lack of memory kept his speeches brief and his anecdotes concise, since he could not remember long ones, and it enabled him to exercise good judgment. People with good memories have cluttered minds, but his brain was so blissfully empty that nothing could get in the way of common sense. Finally, he easily forgot any slight inflicted on him by others, and therefore bore few resentments. In short, he presented himself as floating through the world on a blanket of benevolent vacancy.

Where Montaigne's memory did seem to work well, if he wanted it to, was in reconstructing personal experiences such as the riding accident. Instead of resolving them into neat, superficial anecdotes, he could recover feelings from the inside—not perfectly, because the Heraclitan stream kept carrying him away, but very closely. The nineteenth-century psychologist Dugald Stewart speculated that Montaigne's lack of control of his memory made him better at such tasks. Montaigne was attuned to the kind of "involuntary" memory that would one day fascinate Proust: those blasts from the past that irrupt unexpectedly into the present, perhaps in response

to a long-forgotten taste or smell. Such moments seem possible only if they are surrounded by an ocean of forgetfulness, as well as a suitable mood and sufficient leisure.

Montaigne certainly did not like to strain at things. "I have to solicit it nonchalantly," he said of his memory. "It serves me at its own time, not at mine." Any effort to haul something back on demand just drove the sought item further into the shadows. Conversely, he noticed, nothing made an incident stick in the memory more than a conscious effort to forget it.

"What I do easily and naturally," he wrote, "I can no longer do if I order myself to do it by strict command." Allowing his memory to follow its own path formed part of his general policy of letting nature govern his actions. In his childhood, the result was that he often appeared to be lazy and good for nothing, and in many ways he probably was. Despite his father's constant efforts to motivate him, he wrote, he turned out to be "so sluggish, lax, and drowsy that they could not tear me from my sloth, not even to make me play."

By his own estimation, he was not only idle but slow-witted. His intelligence could not penetrate the slightest cloud: "There is no subtlety so empty that it will not stump me. Of games in which the mind has a part—chess, cards, draughts, and others—I understand nothing but the barest rudiments." He had a "tardy understanding," a "weak imagination," and a "slow mind," none of which was helped by his lack of recall. All his faculties slumbered along together, snoring gently: he makes his brain sound like a tea party at which all the guests were Dormice.

But, again, there were benefits. Once he had grasped something, he grasped it firmly. Even as a child, he says, "What I saw, I saw well." Moreover, he deliberately used his inert manner as a cover under which he could hide any number of "bold ideas" and independent opinions. His apparent modesty made it possible for him to claim something more important than quick wits: sound judgment.

Montaigne would make a good model for the modern "Slow Movement," which has spread (in a leisurely fashion) to become something of a cult since its inception in the late twentieth century. Like Montaigne, its adherents make slow speed into a moral principle. Its founding text is Sten Nadolny's novel *The Discovery of Slowness*, which relates

the life of Arctic explorer John Franklin, a man whose natural pace of living and thinking is portrayed as that of an elderly sloth after a long massage and a pipe of opium. Franklin is mocked as a child, but when he reaches the far North he finds the environment perfectly suited to his nature: a place where one takes one's time, where very little happens, and where it is important to stop and think before rushing into action. Long after its publication in Germany in 1983, *The Discovery of Slowness* remained a best seller and was even marketed as an alternative management manual. Meanwhile, Italy generated the Slow Food movement, which began in protest against the Rome branch of McDonald's and grew to become an entire philosophy of good living.

Montaigne would have understood all this very well. For him, slowness opened the way to wisdom, and to a spirit of moderation which offset the excess and zealotry dominating the France of his time. He was lucky enough to be naturally immune to both, having no tendency to be carried away by the enthusiasms others seemed prone to. "I am nearly always in place, like heavy and inert bodies," he wrote. Once planted, it was easy for him to resist intimidation, for nature had made him "incapable of submitting to force and violence."

As with most things in Montaigne, this is only part of the story. As a young man he *could* fly off the handle, and he was restless: in the *Essays* he says, "I know not which of the two, my mind or my body, I have had more difficulty in keeping to one place." Perhaps he only played the sloth when it suited him.

"Forget much of what you learn" and "Be slow-witted" became two of Montaigne's best answers to the question of how to live. They freed him to think wisely rather than glibly; they allowed him to avoid the fanatical notions and foolish deceptions that ensnared other people; and they let him follow his own thoughts wherever they led—which was all he really wanted to do.

Slow wits and forgetfulness could be cultivated, but Montaigne believed he was lucky in having his by birth. His tendency to do things his own way became evident from an early age, and was accompanied by a surprising degree of confidence. "I remember that from my tenderest childhood people noticed in me some indefinable carriage of the body and certain

gestures testifying to some vain and stupid pride," he wrote. The vanity was superficial: he was not deeply infused with the stuff, only lightly "sprinkled." But his inner independence kept him cool. Always prepared to speak his mind, the young Montaigne was also prepared to make other people wait for what he had to say.

#### THE YOUNG MONTAIGNE IN TROUBLED TIMES

Montaigne's air of nonchalant superiority was made more difficult to carry off by his having a smallish physical build: something he bemoaned constantly. It was different for women, he wrote. Other forms of good looks could compensate. In men, stature was "the only beauty," and it was just the quality he lacked.

Where smallness dwells, neither breadth and roundness of forehead, nor clarity and softness of eyes, nor the moderate form of the nose, nor small size of ears and mouth, nor regularity and whiteness of teeth, nor the smooth thickness of a beard brown as the husk of a chestnut, nor curly hair, nor proper roundness of head, nor freshness of color, nor a pleasant facial expression, nor an odorless body, nor just proportion of limbs, can make a handsome man.

Even Montaigne's employees did not look up to him, and, when he traveled or visited the royal court with a retinue of servants, he found it most annoying to be the one asked, "Where is the master?" Yet there was little he could do, other than go on horseback wherever possible—his favorite ploy.

A visit to Montaigne's tower suggests that he was telling the truth: the doorways stand only around five foot high. People in general were shorter then, and the doors were built before Montaigne lived there, but clearly he did not bang his head often enough to go to the trouble of having them raised. Of course it is hard to know whether it was his self-proclaimed smallness or his self-proclaimed laziness that was the deciding factor.

He may have been diminutive, but he tells us that he had a strong, solid

build, and that he conducted himself with flair, often strolling with a stick on which he would lean "in an affected manner." In later life, he took up his father's practice of dressing in austere black and white, but as a young man he dressed with stylish ease according to the fashion of the day, with "a cloak worn like a scarf, the hood over one shoulder, a neglected stocking."

The most vivid picture of the young Montaigne comes from a poem addressed to him by his slightly older friend Étienne de La Boétie. It shows both what was troubling about Montaigne and what made him attractive. La Boétie thought him brilliant and full of promise, but in danger of wasting his talents. He needed guidance from some calmer, wiser mentor—a role in which La Boétie cast himself—but he had a stubborn tendency to reject this guidance when it was offered. He was too susceptible to pretty young women, and too pleased with himself. "My house supplies ample riches, my age ample powers," La Boétie has Montaigne say complacently in the poem. "And indeed a sweet girl is smiling at me." La Boétie compares him to a beautiful Alcibiades, blessed by fortune, or a Hercules, capable of heroic things but hesitating too long at the moral crossroads. His greatest charms were also his greatest faults.

By the time this poem was written, Montaigne had already traveled a long way from his schoolboy days; he had entered upon his career in the Bordeaux *parlement*. Having disappeared from biographical view for some years after finishing his studies at the Collège, he reappeared in the city as a young magistrate.

To embark on such a course, he must have studied law somewhere. He is unlikely to have done this in Bordeaux; more likely cities are Paris and Toulouse. Perhaps he spent time in both. Remarks in the *Essays* show that he knew Toulouse well, and he also had a lot to say about Paris. He tells us that the city had his heart since childhood—which could mean any stage of his youth, up to around twenty-five. "I love her tenderly," he says, "even to her warts and her spots." Paris was the only place where he didn't mind feeling like a Frenchman rather than a proudly local Gascon. It was a great city in every way: "great in population, great in the felicity of her situation, but above all great and incomparable in variety and diversity of the good things of life."

Wherever Montaigne acquired his training, it fulfilled its function: it propelled him into the legal and political career that may have been envisaged for him from the start. It then kept him there for thirteen years. This period usually shrinks small in biographies, since it is patchily documented, but they were important years indeed, running from just before Montaigne's twenty-fourth birthday to just after his thirty-seventh. When he retired to his country life, growing wine and writing in his tower, he had already accumulated a wealth of experience in public service, and this was still fresh in his mind in the early essays. By the time he came to the later ones, even tougher responsibilities had taken over.

Montaigne's first post was not in Bordeaux, but in another nearby town, Périgueux, northeast of the family estate. Its court had only recently been founded, in 1554, and would almost immediately be abolished, in 1557. The main purpose of it had been to raise money, since public offices were always sold for cash. The abolition ensued because the more powerful Bordeaux *parlement* objected to Périgueux's existence, and even more strenuously to the fact that, for some reason, officials there received a higher salary than they did.

Montaigne went to Périgueux in late 1556, and the court survived just long enough to start his career. As things turned out, it even put him on a fast track into Bordeaux politics, for when Périgueux closed many officials were transferred there. Montaigne was among them: his name appears on the list. They were not exactly welcomed, but Bordeaux's magistrates had no choice in the matter. They made up for it by making life as uncomfortable for the Périgueux men as possible, allotting them a cramped working space and depriving them of the service of court ushers. The resentment is understandable: the Périgueux men were still receiving their higher salaries. These were helpfully cut in August 1561, which in turn made the Périgueux contingent unhappy. Although he was still junior, at twenty-eight, Montaigne was chosen to present their appeal to the court. His speech, reported in the Bordeaux records, marks his first appearance there. No doubt he used his newly honed public speaking tricks—all spontaneity and unrehearsed charm—but it did not work. The *parlement* ruled against the protesters, and their salaries went down after all.

Despite the unharmonious office politics, life in the Bordeaux *parlement* must have been more interesting than in Périgueux. It was one of eight key



city *parlements* in France, and, even with its privileges still only partially restored, Bordeaux was among the most powerful. It had responsibility for most local laws and civic administration, and could reject royal edicts or present formal remonstrances to the king whenever he issued a law they did not like—as happened often in these troubled times.

At first, Montaigne's daily life involved the law more than politics. He worked primarily for the *Chambre des Enquêtes*, or court of inquiry, where his task was to assess civil cases too complex to be resolved immediately by the judges of the main court, the *Grand'chambre*. He would study the details, summarize them, and hand his written interpretation to the councillors. It was not up to him to pass judgment, only to sum things up intelligently and lucidly, and capture each party's point of view. Perhaps this was where he first developed his feeling for the multiplicity of perspectives on every human situation, a feeling that runs like an artery through the *Essays*.

Thinking of his job in these terms makes sixteenth-century law sound an engrossing pursuit, but it was hampered by extreme pedantry. All legal arguments had to be based on written authorities, and fitted into pre-defined categories. The facts of each case were often secondary to codes, statutes, documented customs, jurisprudential writings, and above all commentaries and glosses—volumes and volumes of them. Even simple cases required the study of seemingly infinite verbiage, usually by some long-suffering junior such as Montaigne.

It was the commentaries Montaigne hated most, as he did secondary literature of any kind:

It is more of a job to interpret the interpretations than to interpret the things, and there are more books about books than about any other subject: we do nothing but write glosses about each other.

Rabelais had satirized the mountain of documents that piled up around every case: his character Judge Bridlegoose spent hours reading and pondering before making his final decisions by tossing dice, a method he found as reliable as any other. Many authors also attacked the widespread corruption among lawyers. In general, justice was recognized as being so unjust that, as

Montaigne complained, ordinary people avoided it rather than seeking it out. He cited a local incident in which a group of peasants found a man lying stabbed and bleeding on a path. He begged them to give him water and help him to his feet, but they ran off, not daring to touch him in case they were held responsible for the attack. Montaigne had the job of talking to them after they were tracked down. "What could I say to them?" he wrote. They were right to be afraid. In another case he mentions, a gang of killers confessed to a murder for which someone had already been tried and was about to be executed. Surely this ought to mean a stay of execution? No, decided the court: that would set a dangerous precedent for overturning judgments.

Montaigne was not the only one to call for legal reform in the sixteenth century. Many of his criticisms echoed those being put forward at the same time by France's enlightened chancellor, Michel de L'Hôpital, in a campaign which resulted in real improvements. Some of Montaigne's other arguments were more original and far-reaching. For him, the greatest problem with the law was that it did not take account of a fundamental fact about the human condition: people are fallible. A final verdict was always expected, yet by definition it was often impossible to reach one that had any certainty. Evidence was often faulty or inadequate, and, to complicate matters, judges made personal mistakes. No judge could honestly think all his decisions perfect: they followed inclinations more than evidence, and it often made a difference how well they had digested their lunch. This was natural and thus unavoidable, but at least a wise judge could become conscious of his fallibility and take it into account. He could learn to slow down: to treat his initial responses with caution and think things through more carefully. The one good thing about the law was that it made human failings so obvious: a good philosophical lesson.

If lawyers were error-prone, so too were the laws they made, since they were human products. Again, that was a fact that could only be acknowledged and accommodated rather than changed. This sideways step into self-doubt, self-awareness, and acknowledgement of imperfection became a distinctive mark of Montaigne's thought on all subjects, not just the law. It does not seem a great stretch to trace its initial spark to those early years of experience in Bordeaux.

When not in court, Montaigne's job involved another field of activity calculated to bring home to anyone how limited and unreliable human affairs are: politics. He was often sent on errands to other cities, including several to Paris, a week or so's journey away, where he had to liaise with the Paris *parlement* and sometimes with the royal court. The latter, in particular, was an education in human nature.

The first court Montaigne got to know was that of Henri II. He must have met the king in person, for he complained that Henri "could never call by his right name a gentleman from this part of Gascony"—presumably himself, this being a time when he still went under the regional name of Eyquem. Henri II was nothing like his brilliant father François I, from whom he had inherited the throne in 1547. He lacked François's political insight and relied heavily on advisers, including an aging mistress, Diane de Poitiers, and a powerful wife, Catherine de' Medici. Henri II's weakness was partly to blame for France's later problems, as rival factions sensed an opportunity and began a power struggle that would dominate the country for decades. The competition centered on three families: the Guises, the Montmorencys, and the Bourbons. Their private ambitions mixed poisonously with religious tensions already building up in France, as in much of Europe.

In matters of religion, Henri II was more repressive than François, who had cracked down on heresy only after an aggressive Protestant propaganda campaign in 1534. The French Reformist leader John Calvin fled to Geneva and made it a sort of revolutionary headquarters in exile. It was Calvinism, rather than the milder-mannered Lutheranism of the early Reformation, that now became the main form of Protestantism in France. It represented a real threat to royal and Church authority.

Calvinism is a minority religion today, but its ideology remains impressively powerful. It takes as its starting point a principle known as "total depravity," which asserts that humans have no virtues of their own and are dependent on God's grace for everything, including their salvation and even the decision to convert to Calvinism. Little personal responsibility is required, for everything is preordained, and no compromise is possible. The only possible attitude to such a God is one of perfect submission. In exchange, God grants His followers invincible strength: you give up your

personal will, but receive the entire weight of God's universe behind you. This does not mean that you can sit back and do nothing. While Lutherans tend to stay aloof from worldly affairs, living according to their private conscience, Calvinists are supposed to engage with politics, and work to bring about God's will on earth. In the sixteenth century, accordingly, Calvinists were trained in Switzerland in a special academy, and sent to France armed with arguments and forbidden publications to convert the natives and destabilize the state. At some point in the 1550s, the name "Huguenot" became attached to Calvin's followers both inside and outside the country. The word probably derived from an earlier branch of exiled Reformists, the "Eidgenossen" or "confederates." It stuck: French Protestants used it of themselves, and their enemies used it of them too.

In the early days, the Catholic Church had responded to the Protestant threat by trying to reform itself. Montaigne thus grew up within a church committed to soul-searching and self-questioning, activities religious institutions do not often embrace with much fervor. But while this was going on, more militant forces gained strength. The Jesuit order, founded by Ignacio López de Loyola in 1534, set itself to fighting a battle of ideas against the enemy. A fiercer, less intellectual movement, arising in France from the 1550s, was loosely grouped under the name of the "Leagues." Their aim was not to outwit the heretics by fancy argument but to wipe them from the face of the earth by force. They and their Calvinist counterparts faced each other without a shred of compromise in their hearts, as fanatical mirror images. Leaguists opposed any French king who made feeble attempts at tolerance of Protestantism; this opposition became stronger as the decades went on.

Henri II was easily swayed by Leaguit pressure, so he introduced tough heresy laws and even a new chamber of the Paris *parlement* devoted to trying religious crimes. From July 1557, blasphemy against the saints, the publication of banned books, and illegal preaching were all punishable by death. Between such moves, however, Henri reversed gear and tried to soothe Huguenot sensibilities by allowing limited Protestant worship in certain areas, or reducing the heresy penalties again. Each time he did this, the Catholic lobby protested, so he accelerated forward into repression. He moved back and forth, satisfying no one.

During these years, other problems troubled France, including runaway inflation, which injured the poor more than anyone and benefited the landed gentry, who received higher rents and responded by buying more and more property—as happened with several generations of Montaigne's family. For less fortunate classes, the economic crisis fed extremism. Humanity had brought this misery on the world with its sins, so it must appease God by following the one true Church. But which was the true Church?

It was from this religious, economic, and political anguish that the civil wars would arise—wars which dominated France through most of the rest of the century, from 1562, when Montaigne was twenty-nine, to 1598, well after his death. Before the 1560s, military adventures in Italy and elsewhere had provided an outlet for France's tensions. But in April 1559 the treaty of Câteau Cambrésis ended several of the foreign wars at a blow. By removing distractions and filling the country with unemployed ex-soldiers amid an economic depression, this peace almost immediately brought about the outbreak of a much worse war.

The first bad omen occurred during jousting tournaments held to celebrate two dynastic marriages linked to the peace treaty. The king, who loved tournaments, took a leading role. In one encounter, an opponent accidentally knocked his visor off with the remains of a broken lance. Splinters of wood pierced the king's face just above one eye. He was carried away; after several days in bed, he seemed to recover, but a splinter had entered his brain. He developed a fever on the fourth day, and on July 10, 1559, he died.

Protestants interpreted the death as God's way of saying that Henri II had been wrong to repress their religion. But Henri's death would make things worse for them rather than better. The throne now passed successively to three of his sons: François II, Charles IX, and Henri III. The first two were minors, succeeding at fifteen and ten years old, respectively. All were weak, all were dominated by their mother Catherine de' Medici, and all were inept at handling the religious conflict. François II died of tuberculosis almost immediately, in 1560. Charles took over, and would reign until 1574. During the early years, his mother ruled as regent. She tried to achieve a balance between religious and political factions, but had little success.

The situation at the beginning of the 1560s, the decade during which Montaigne developed his career in Bordeaux, was thus marked by a weak throne, greedy rivalries, economic hardship, and rising religious tensions. In December 1560, in a speech expressing a feeling widespread at the time, the chancellor Michel de L'Hôpital said, "It is folly to hope for peace, repose, and friendship among people of different faiths." Even if desirable, it would be an impossible ideal. The only path to political unity was religious unity. As a Spanish theologian remarked, no republic could be well governed if "everyone considers his own God to be the only true God . . . and everyone else to be blind and deluded." Most Catholics would have considered this too self-evident to be worth mentioning. Even Protestants tended to impose unity whenever they got their own state to manage. *Un roi, une foi, une loi*, went the saying: one king, one faith, one law. Hatred of anyone who ventured to suggest a middle ground was practically the only thing on which everyone else could agree.

L'Hôpital and his allies did not promote tolerance or "diversity," in any modern sense. But he did think it better to lure stray sheep back by making the Catholic Church more appealing, rather than driving them back with threats. Under his influence, the heresy laws were relaxed somewhat at the beginning of the 1560s. An edict of January 1562 allowed Protestants to worship openly outside towns, and privately within town walls. As with earlier compromises, this satisfied no one. Catholics felt betrayed, while Protestants were encouraged to feel they should demand more. Some months earlier, the Venetian ambassador had written of a "great fear" spreading through the kingdom; this had now grown into a sense of imminent disaster.

The trigger came on March 1, 1562, at the town of Vassy, or Wassy, in the Champagne area of the northeast. Five hundred Protestants gathered to worship in a barn in the town, which was illegal, for such assemblies were allowed only outside the walls. The duc de Guise, a radical Catholic leader, was passing through the area with a group of his soldiers and heard about the meeting. He marched to the barn. According to survivors' accounts, he allowed his men to storm in shouting, "Kill them all!"

The Huguenot congregation fought back; they had long expected trouble and were ready to defend themselves. They forced the soldiers out and barricaded the barn door, then climbed out on scaffolding over the roof

to pelt Guise's men with stones, piled there in case of need. The soldiers fired their arquebuses, and managed to reenter the barn. The Protestants now fled for their lives; many fell from the roof or were shot down as they ran. About thirty died, and over a hundred were wounded.

The consequences were dramatic. The national Protestant leader, Louis I de Bourbon, prince de Condé, urged Protestants to rise up to save themselves from further attacks. Many took up arms and, in response, Catholics did the same—both sides being driven more by fear than hatred. Catherine de' Medici, acting on behalf of the twelve-year-old Charles IX, ordered an inquiry into Vassy, but it fizzled out as public inquiries do, and by now it was too late. Leaders of both sides converged on Paris with crowds of their supporters. As the duc de Guise entered the city, he happened to pass a Protestant procession led by Condé; the two men exchanged cold salutes with the pommels of their swords.

One observer, a lawyer and friend of Montaigne's named Étienne Pasquier, remarked in a letter that all anyone could talk about after the Vassy massacre was war. "If it was permitted to me to assess these events, I would tell you that it was the beginning of a tragedy." He was right. Increasing clashes between the two sides escalated into outright battles, and these became the first of the French civil wars. It was savage but short, ending the following year when the duc de Guise was shot, leaving the Catholics temporarily without a leader and reluctantly willing to conclude a treaty. But there was no feeling of resolution, and neither side was happy. A second war would be set off on September 30, 1567, by another massacre, this time of Catholics by Protestants, at Nîmes.

The wars are generally described in the plural, but it makes at least as much sense to consider them a single long war with interludes of peace. Montaigne and his contemporaries often referred to outbreaks of fighting as "troubles." The consensus is that there were eight of these, and it may be convenient to summarize them here to get a sense of how much of Montaigne's life was conditioned by war:

First Trouble (1562–63). Started by the massacre of Protestants in Vassy, ended by the peace of Amboise.

Second Trouble (1567–68). Started by a massacre of Catholics in

Nîmes, ended by the Peace of Longjumeau.

Third Trouble (1568–70). Started by new anti-Protestant legislation, ended by the peace of Saint-Germain.

Fourth Trouble (1572–73). Started by the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres of Protestants in Paris and elsewhere, ended by the Peace of La Rochelle.

Fifth Trouble (1574–76). Started by fighting in Poitou and Saintonge, ended by the "Peace of Monsieur."

Sixth Trouble (1576–77). Started by anti-Protestant legislation at the Estates-General of Blois, ended by the Peace of Poitiers.

Seventh Trouble (1579–80). Started by Protestants seizing La Fère in Normandy, ended by the Peace of Fleix.

Eighth Trouble (1585–98). By far the longest and worst: started by Leaguist agitation, ended by the Treaty of Vervins and the Edict of Nantes.

Each followed the pattern established by the first and second wars. A period of peace would be interrupted by a sudden massacre or provocation. Battles, sieges, and general misery would ensue, until signs of weakness on one side or another led to a peace treaty. This would leave everyone dissatisfied, but would stay roughly in place until another provocation—and so the pattern cycled on. Even the last treaty did not please everyone. Nor were there always two clearly defined opponents. At least three factions were involved in most of the troubles, driven by desire for influence over the throne. These were wars of religion, like those brewing in other European countries during this period, but they were just as much wars of politics.

The end of one foreign conflict had made the civil wars possible in the first place, and the beginning of another would ultimately bring them to a close, after Henri IV declared war on Spain in 1595. The beneficial effect of this act was well understood at the time. During the final "trouble," Montaigne observed that many wished for something like this. The violence needed draining out, like pus from an infection. He had mixed feelings about the ethics of the method: "I do not believe that God would favor so unjust an enterprise as to injure and pick a quarrel with others for



our own convenience." But it was what France needed, and what it got at last, from Henri IV, the first clever king it had had for years.

That was still a long way off in the 1560s, when no one dreamed that the horror could go on so long. Montaigne's years in *parlement* spanned the first three troubles; even during periods of peace, there was much political tension. By the time the third war ended, he had had enough and was on his way to retirement from public life. Until then, his position in Bordeaux placed him in the thick of it, amid a particularly complex community. Bordeaux was a Catholic city, but surrounded by Protestant territories and with a significant Protestant minority, which did not hesitate to indulge in icon-smashing and other aggressive acts.

In one especially violent confrontation, on the night of June 26, 1562—a few months after the Vassy massacre—a Protestant mob attacked the city's Château Trompette, bastion of government power. The riot was quelled, but, as with the salt-tax riots, the punishment proved worse than the crime. To teach a lesson to a city that seemed incapable of running its own affairs, the king sent in a new lieutenant-general named Blaise Monluc, and ordered him to "pacify" the troublesome area.

Monluc understood "pacification" to mean "mass slaughter." He set to work hanging Protestants in large numbers without trial, or having them broken on the wheel. After one battle at the village of Terraube, he ordered so many of its residents killed and thrown in the well that you could put your hand in from above and touch the top of the pile. Writing his memoirs years later, he reminisced about one rebel leader who begged him personally for mercy after Monluc's soldiers captured him. Monluc responded by grabbing the man's throat and throwing him against a stone cross so violently that the stone was smashed and the man died. "If I had not acted thus," wrote Monluc, "I would have been mocked." In another incident, a Protestant captain who had served under Monluc himself in Italy, many years earlier, hoped that his former comrade would spare his life for old times' sake. On the contrary, Monluc made a point of having him killed at once, and explained that he did this because he knew how brave the man was: he could never be anything other than a dangerous enemy. These were the kinds of scene that would recur frequently in Montaigne's essays: one person seeks mercy, and the other decides whether or not to grant it. Montaigne was

fascinated by the moral complexity involved. What moral complexity? Monluc would have said. Killing was always the right solution: "One man hanged is more effective than a hundred killed in battle." Indeed, so many executions took place in the area that the supply of gallows equipment ran low: carpenters were commissioned to make more scaffolds, wheels for breaking limbs, and stakes for burning. When the scaffolds were full, Monluc used trees, and boasted that his travels through Guyenne could be traced in bodies swinging by the roadside. By the time he had finished, he said, nothing stirred in the whole region. All who survived kept their silence.

Montaigne knew Monluc, though mainly in later life, and took more interest in his private personality than his public deeds—especially his failings as a father and the regrets that tormented him after he lost a son,



who died in his prime. Monluc confessed to Montaigne that he realized too late that he had never treated the boy with anything other than coldness, although in reality he loved him a great deal. This was partly because he had followed an unfortunate fashion in parenting, which advocated emotional frigidity in dealings with one's children. "That poor boy saw nothing of me but a scowling and disdainful countenance," Monluc would say. "I constrained and tortured myself to maintain this vain mask." The talk of masks is apt, since, in 1571—around the time of Montaigne's retirement—Monluc was disfigured by an arquebus shot. For the rest of his life, he never went out without covering his face to conceal the scars. One can imagine the disconcerting effect of an actual mask on top of the inexpressive mask-like face of a cruel man whom few people dared to look in the eye.

Throughout the troubled 1560s, Montaigne often went to Paris on *parlement* business, and apparently remained away through much of 1562 and early 1563, though he popped back to Bordeaux almost as readily as a modern car driver or train passenger might. He was certainly in the area in August 1563 when his friend Étienne de La Boétie died. And he must have been in Bordeaux in December 1563, for a strange incident occurred then, the most noteworthy of Montaigne's few appearances in the city records.

The previous month, an extremist Catholic named François de Péruse d'Escars had launched a direct challenge to the *parlement's* moderate president, Jacques-Benoît de Lagebâton, marching into the chambers and accusing him of having no right to govern. Lagebâton successfully faced him down, but d'Escars challenged him again the following month, and in response Lagebâton produced a list of the court members he believed to be in cahoots with d'Escars, probably working for him for pay. Surprisingly, among these names appear those of Montaigne and of the recently deceased Étienne de La Boétie. One would have expected to find both firmly on Lagebâton's side: La Boétie had been working actively for the chancellor L'Hôpital, of whom Lagebâton was a follower, and Montaigne too expressed admiration for that faction in his *Essays*. On the other hand, d'Escars was a family friend, and La Boétie had been at d'Escars's home when he came down with the illness which would kill him. This was suspicious, and perhaps Montaigne came under scrutiny by association.

All the accused had a right to defend themselves before *parlement*—a chance for Montaigne to use his rhetorical skills again. Of them all, he was the speaker who made the biggest impression. "He expressed himself with all the vivacity of his character," reads the note in the records. He finished his speech by stating "that he named the whole Court," then he flounced off.

The court called him back and ordered him to explain what he meant by this. He replied that he was no enemy of Lagebâton, who was a friend of his and of everyone in his family. But—and there was clearly a "but" coming—he knew that accused persons were traditionally allowed to make counter-claims against their accuser, so he wished to take advantage of this right. Again, he left everyone puzzled, but the implication was that it was Lagebâton who was guilty of some impropriety. Montaigne made no further explanation. Pressed to withdraw the remark, he did, and there the matter ended. The accusations apparently came to nothing serious, and were quietly forgotten.

It remains an enigmatic incident, but it certainly shows us a different Montaigne from the cool, measured writer of the *Essays*, or his own portrait of his youthful self a-slumber over his books. This is a man known for "vivacity" and given to rushing in and out of rooms, making accusations which he cannot substantiate, and jabbering so wildly that no one is sure what he means to say. Montaigne does admit, in the *Essays*, that "by my nature I am subject to sudden outbursts which, though slight and brief, often harm my affairs." The last part of this makes one wonder if he damaged his career in *parlement* with his intemperate words, on other occasions if not on this one.

Even more surprising than meeting the hot-headed side of young Montaigne is seeing him bracketed with the bigots and extremists. His political allegiances were complicated; it is not always easy to guess where he will come out on any particular topic. But this case may have had more to do with personal loyalties than conviction. His own family had connections on both sides of the political divide, and he had to stay on good terms with them all. Perhaps the strain of this conflict made him volatile. The accusation was also an insult—to himself and, more seriously, to La Boétie, who was no longer around to offer any defense. Lagebâton was querying the honor of the most honorable man Montaigne had ever known:

the person he probably loved most in his entire life, and whom he had just lost. A response of helpless rage is understandable.

Slowness and forgetfulness were good responses to the question of how to live, so far as they went. They made for good camouflage, and they allowed room for thoughtful judgments to emerge. But some experiences in life brought forth a greater passion, and called for a different sort of answer.

- 55 "We volleyed our conjugations," but little later knowledge of Greek: I:26 157. See also II:4 318.
- 55 Woken by musical instrument: I:26 157. Only twice struck with rod, and "wisdom and tact": II:8 341.
- 55 Erasmus: Erasmus, D., *De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis declamatio* (Basel: H. Froben, 1529). "All the inquiries a man can make": I:26 156-7.
- 56 Decline through lack of practice: II:17 588; Latin exclamation: III:2 746.
- 57 Ephemeral quality of French gave him freedom: III:9 913.
- 57 Latin commune: Étienne Tabourot, sieur des Accords, *Les Bigarrures* (Rouen: J. Bauchu, 1591), Book IV, ff. 14r-v. Experiments were also tried by Robert Estienne and François de La Trémouille. See Lazard 57-8.
- 57 Montaigne's advice on education: I:26 135-50.
- 58 "There is no one who": III:2 746.
- 58 Montaigne blames his father for changing his mind: I:26 157. On other possibilities: Lacouture 19-21.
- 60 Bordeaux in Montaigne's time: Cocula, A.-M., "Bordeaux," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 123-5.
- 60 Collège de Guyenne: Hoffmann, G., "Étude & éducation de Montaigne," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 357-9. Curriculum from Elie Vinet, *Schola aquitanica* (1583). On the school regime: Lazard 62-3; Trinquet; Porteau, P., *Montaigne et la vie pédagogique de son temps* (Paris: Droz, 1935). Montaigne says he lost his Latin at school: I:26 158.
- 61 Montaigne's acting: I:26 159.
- 61 Gouvéa: Gorris Camos, R., "Gouvéa, André," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 438-40.
- 61 The salt-tax uprising: Knecht, *Rise and Fall* 210-11, 246. Closing of the Collège: Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps* 85.
- 61 Killing of Moneins: I:24 115-16.
- 62 On Montmorency, the "pacification," and Bordeaux's loss of privileges: Knecht, *Rise and Fall* 246-7, Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps* 81-2.

4. Q. How to live? A. Read a lot, forget most of what you read, and be slow-witted

- 64 Montaigne's reading, and not being discouraged by the tutor: I:26 158. For hypotheses on who this tutor was, see Hoffmann, G., "Étude & éducation de Montaigne," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 357-9.
- 64 Montaigne's discovery of Ovid: I:26 158. On Ovid and Montaigne, see Rigolot, and McKinley, M., "Ovide," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 744-5.
- 64 Montaigne's early discoveries, and "but, for all that, it was still school": I:26 158.
- 66 Thrill of Ovid wore off: II:10 361. But still emulated style: II:35 688-9. Villey found 72 references to Ovid in the *Essays*: Villey, *Les Sources* I:205-6. See Rigolot 224-6. Virgil could be brushed up a little: II:10 362.
- 66 The "diversity and truth" of man, and "the variety of the ways he is put together": II:10 367. Tacitus: III:8 873-4.
- 66 Montaigne after Plutarch: "He is so universal": III:5 809. He is "full of things": II:10 364. "Not so bad after all!" and flies on mirrors: Plutarch, "On Tranquillity of Mind," *Moralia* VI, 467C and 473E, Loeb edn VI: 183, 219. Plutarch points where we are to go if we like: I:26 140. "I think I know him even into his soul": II:31 657. It does not matter how long a person one loves has been

- dead: III:9 927. Montaigne admired the two celebrated French translations of Plutarch by Jacques Amyot: Plutarch, *Vies des hommes illustres* (Paris: M. de Vascosan, 1559), and *Oeuvres morales* (Paris: M. de Vascosan, 1572), both tr. J. Amyot. See Guerrier, O., "Amyot, Jacques," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 33–4.
- 67 On Montaigne's library: Sayce 25–6. The collection was dispersed after his death; attempts have since been made to reconstruct a list. See Villey, *Les Sources* I:273–83; Desan, P., "Bibliothèque," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 108–11.
- 67 Petrarch, Erasmus and Machiavelli: Friedrich 42. Machiavelli's letter is cited in Hale 190. Cicero: II:10 365; Virgil: II:10 362.
- 68 "I leaf through now one book" and "Actually I use them": III:3 761–2. "We who have little contact": III:8 873. "If I encounter difficulties": II:10 361.
- 68 Lucretius: Screech, M.A., *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius* (Geneva: Droz, 1998).
- 69 "Gentleness and freedom": I:26 157.
- 69 "Memory is a wonderfully useful tool": II:17 598. "There is no man": I:9 25.
- 69 Wishing he could remember ideas and dreams: III:5 811. "I'm full of cracks": II:17 600. Source is Terence, *The Eunuch*, I:105.
- 69 Lyncestes: III:9 893. Source is Quintius Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander the Great* VII:1. 8–9.
- 70 Montaigne on public speaking: III:9 893–4.
- 70 Tupinambá: I:31 193. La Boétie's death: Montaigne's letter to his father, in his edition of La Boétie's works: La Boétie, *La Mesnagerie* [etc.], and in Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, tr. D. Frame, 1276–7.
- 70 Irritation that people did not believe him: I:9 25. On his ability to remember quotations, see Friedrich 31, 338. Baudier: from a prose commentary attached to his Latin verses. "To'the noble heroine Marie de Gournay," Baudier, D., *Poemata* (Leyden, 1607), 359–65. Cited Millet 151–8, and Villey, *Montaigne devant la postérité* 84–5. Malebranche: Malebranche 187–8.
- 71 A bad memory implies honesty: I:9 26–7; II:17 598. It keeps anecdotes brief: I:9 26. It makes for good judgment: I:9 25. It prevents petty resentments: I:9 27.
- 71 Stewart: Stewart, D., *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, in *Collected Works*, ed. W. Hamilton (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1854–60), II:370–1.
- 72 "I have to solicit it nonchalantly": II:17 598. The effort to remember makes one forget: III:5 811. The effort to forget makes one remember: II:12 443.
- 72 "What I do easily and naturally": II:17 599. "So sluggish, lax, and drowsy": I:26 157.
- 72 "There is no subtlety so empty": II:17 600–1. "Tardy understanding": I:26 157.
- 72 What he grasped he grasped firmly: II:17 600. "What I saw, I saw well.": II:10 31. "Bold ideas": I:26 157.
- 72 Nadolny, S., *Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit* (München: Piper, 1983), translated by R. Freedman as *The Discovery of Slowness* (New York: Viking, 1987). On the Slow Movement, see <http://www.slowmovement.com/>. See also Honoré, C., *In Praise of Slow* (London: Orion, 2005). There is a World Institute of Slowness: <http://www.theworldinstituteofslowness.com/>.
- 73 "I am nearly always in place": III:2 746. "Incapable of submitting": I:26 159.
- 73 "I know not which of the two": III:13 1034.
- 73 "I remember that from my tenderest childhood": II:17 582. Only "sprinkled": II:17 584.
- 74 "Where smallness dwells" and "Where is the master?": III:17 590. Lack of respect because of height: II:17 589–90. Horseback play: III:13 1025.

- 74 Strong, solid build: II:17 590. Leaning on stick: II:25 633. Dressing in black and white: I:36 204. Cloak: I:26 155.
- 75 La Boétie's poem: this is the second of two poems to Montaigne included in Montaigne's edition of La Boétie's works: La Boétie, *La Mesnagerie* [etc.], ff. 102r–103r ("Ad Belotium et Montanum") and 103v–105r ("Ad Michaëlem Montanum"). They have been published in *Montaigne Studies* 3, no. 1, (1991) with an English translation by R. D. Cottrell (16–47).
- 75 Toulouse: Montaigne says he met the physician Simon Thomas there (I:21 82) and mentions its Martin Guerre trial, though he does not say that he attended it in person: III:11 959. Paris: III:9 903.
- 76 Montaigne's magistracy: see Almqvist, K., "Magistrature," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 619–22. On early years in Périgueux and the transfer to Bordeaux: Frame, *Montaigne* 46–51, including Frame's translation of the report of Montaigne's speech.
- 77 Montaigne's job: five of Montaigne's interpretations have survived. See Lazard 89.
- 77 "It is more of a job": III:13 996. Judge Bridlegoose: *Tiers livre*, chaps 39–44, in Rabelais, *The Complete Works*. Tossing dice: 457.
- 78 Cases of injustice: III:13 998. Montaigne on the law: see Tournon, A., "Justice and the Law," in Langer (ed.), *Cambridge Companion* 96–117, and "Droit," in Desan, *Dictionnaire* 284–6. On other contemporary critics of the law, see Sutcliffe, F., "Montaigne and the European legal system," in Cameron (ed.), *Montaigne and his Age* 39–47.
- 78 Fallibility of judges: II:12 514. Fallibility of laws: III:13 1000.
- 79 Trips to Paris: Montaigne is known to have made several between 1559 and 1561. See Lazard 91, 107.
- 79 Henri II "could never call by his right name": I:46 244.
- 79 On the French political and religious background in the 1550s and 1560s: see Holt; Knecht, *Rise and Fall* and *The French Civil Wars*; Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*.
- 82 "It is folly": Michel de L'Hôpital cited in Knecht, *Rise and Fall* 338. "Everyone considers his own God" and "Un roi, une foi, une loi": Elliott, J. H., *Europe Divided 1559–1598* (London: Fontana, 1968), 93–4, the former a quotation from Pedro Cornejo's *Compenio y breve relación de la Liga* (Brussels, 1591), f. 6.
- 82 "A great fear": Knecht, *Rise and Fall* 349. Vassy and the outbreak of war: *ibid.*, 352–5.
- 83 Pasquier to M. de Fonsomme, Spring 1562: Pasquier, E., *Lettres historiques* 98–100. Cited Holt 50.
- 84 "I do not believe that God": II:23 628–9.
- 85 Monluc's stories: Monluc 246–72. More wheels and stakes ordered: Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps* 144.
- 87 Montaigne on Monluc: II:8 348.
- 87 The d'Escars plot and Montaigne's response: see Frame, *Montaigne* 53–5; which also translates the report of Montaigne's speech, from Payen, J.-F., *Recherches sur Montaigne. Documents inédits*, no. 4 (Techener, 1856), 20. Montaigne's admiration for the Lègebâton faction: II:17 609.
- 88 "By my nature I am subject to sudden outbursts": III:5 824. The response is discussed in Frame, *Montaigne* 52–5.