

Montaigne's

ESSAYS AND
SELECTED
WRITINGS

A Bilingual Edition

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^ACicéron dit que philosopher ce n'est autre chose que s'apprêter à la mort. C'est d'autant que l'étude et la contemplation retirent aucunement notre âme hors de nous et l'embesognent à part du corps, qui est quelque apprentissage et ressemblance de la mort; ou bien c'est que toute la sagesse et discours du monde se résout enfin à ce point, de nous apprendre à ne craindre point à mourir.

. . . Toutes les règles se rencontrent et conviennent à cet article. Et bien qu'elles nous conduisent aussi toutes d'un commun accord à mépriser la douleur, la pauvreté, et autres accidents à quoi la vie humaine est sujette, ce n'est pas d'un pareil soin, tant parce que ces accidents ne sont pas de telle nécessité (la plupart des hommes passent leur vie sans goûter de la pauvreté, et tels encore sans sentiment de douleur et de maladie, comme Xénophilus le Musicien, qui vécut cent et six ans d'une entière santé), qu'aussi d'autant qu'au pis aller la mort peut mettre fin, quand il nous plaira, et couper broche à tous autres inconvenients. Mais quant à la mort, elle est inévitable.

^BOmnes eodem cogimur, omnium
Versatur urna, serius ocius
Sors exitura et nos in æter-
Num exitium impositura cymbæ.²

^AEt par conséquent, si elle nous fait peur, c'est un sujet

¹ A statement of Montaigne's clearly dates part, and probably most, of this essay at 1572.

^ACicero says that to philosophize is nothing else but to prepare for death. This is because study and contemplation draw our soul out of us to some extent and keep it busy outside the body; which is a sort of apprenticeship and semblance of death. Or else it is because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world boils down finally to this point: to teach us not to be afraid to die.

. . . All rules meet and agree at this point. And though they all with one accord lead us also to scorn pain, poverty, and other accidents to which human life is subject, it is not with equal insistence; partly because these accidents are not so inevitable (most men spend their life without tasting poverty, and some also without feeling pain and illness, like Xenophilus the musician, who lived a hundred and six years in complete health), and also because at worst, whenever we please, death can put an end, and deny access, to all our other woes. But as for death itself, it is inevitable.

^BWe are all forced down the same road. Our fate,
Tossed in the urn, will spring out soon or late,
And force us helpless into Charon's bark,
Passengers destined for eternal dark.²

^AAnd consequently, if it frightens us, it is a continual

² Horace, *Odes*, II, iii, 25-28.

continuel de tourment, et qui ne se peut aucunement soulager. ^cIl n'est lieu d'où elle ne nous vienne; nous pouvons tourner sans cesse la tête çà et là comme en pays suspect: *quæ quasi saxum Tantalò semper impendet.*³ ^ANos parlements renvoient souvent exécuter les criminels au lieu où le crime est commis: durant le chemin, promenez-les par des belles maisons, faites-leur tant de bonne chère qu'il vous plaira,

^Bnon Siculæ dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporem,
Non avium cytharæque cantus
Somnum reducent,^{3a}

^A pensez-vous qu'ils s'en puissent réjouir, et que la finale intention de leur voyage, leur étant ordinairement devant les yeux, ne leur ait altéré et affadi le goût à toutes ces commodités?

^BAudit iter, numeratque dies, spacioque viarum
Metitur vitam, torquetur peste futura.⁴

^A Le but de notre carrière, c'est la mort, c'est l'objet nécessaire de notre visée: si elle nous effraie, comme est-il possible d'aller un pas en avant, sans fièvre? Le remède du vulgaire, c'est de n'y penser pas. Mais de quelle brutale stupidité lui peut venir un si grossier aveuglement? Il lui faut faire brider l'âne par la queue,

Qui capite ipse suo instituit vestigia retro.⁵

³ Cicero, *De Finibus*, I, xviii.

^{3a} Horace, *Odes*, III, i, 18-21.

source of torment which cannot be alleviated at all. ^cThere is no place from which it may not come to us; we may turn our heads constantly this way and that as in a suspicious country: *death always hangs over us, like the stone over Tantalus.*³ ^AOur law courts often send criminals to be executed at the place where the crime was committed. On the way, take them past beautiful houses, give them as good a time as you like—

^BNot even a Sicilian feast
Can now produce for him a pleasant taste,
Nor song of birds, nor music of the lyre
Restore his sleep ^{3a}

—^Ado you think that they can rejoice in these things, and that the final purpose of their trip, being steadily before their eyes, will not have changed and spoiled their taste for all these pleasures?

^BHe hears it as it comes, counts days, measures the breath
Of life upon their length, tortured by coming death.⁴

^AThe goal of our career is death. It is the necessary object of our aim. If it frightens us, how is it possible to go a step forward without feverishness? The remedy of the common herd is not to think about it. But from what brutish stupidity can come so gross a blindness! They have to bridle the ass by the tail,

Who sets his mind on moving only backward.⁵

⁴ Claudian, *In Rufinum*, II, 137-8.

⁵ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, IV, 472.

Ce n'est pas de merveille s'il est si souvent pris au piège. . . .

Qu'importe-t-il, me direz-vous, comment que ce soit, pourvu qu'on ne s'en donne point de peine? Je suis de cet avis, et en quelque manière qu'on se puisse mettre à l'abri des coups, fût-ce sous la peau d'un veau, je ne suis pas homme qui y reculasse. Car il me suffit de passer à mon aise; et le meilleur jeu que je me puisse donner, je le prends, si peu glorieux au reste et exemplaire que vous voudrez,

prætulerim delirus inersque videri,
Dum mea delectent mala me, vel denique fallant,
Quam sapere et ringi.⁶

Mais c'est folie d'y penser arriver par là. Ils vont, ils viennent, ils trottent, ils dansent, de mort nulles nouvelles. Tout cela est beau. Mais aussi quand elle arrive, ou à eux, ou à leurs femmes, enfants et amis, les surprenant en dessous et à découvert, quels tourments, quels cris, quelle rage, et quel désespoir les accable! Vites-vous jamais rien si rabaisé, si changé, si confus? Il y faut pourvoir de meilleure heure: et cette nonchalance bestiale, quand elle pourrait loger en la tête d'un homme d'entendement, ce que je trouve entièrement impossible, nous vend trop cher ses denrées. Si c'était ennemi qui se peut éviter, je conseillerais d'emprunter les armes de la couardise. Mais puisqu'il ne se peut, ^Bpuisque'il vous attrape fuyant et poltron aussi bien qu'honnête homme,

^ANempe et fugacem persequitur virum,
Nec parcit imbellis juventæ
Poplitibus, timidoque tergo,⁷

⁶ Horace, *Epistles*, II, ii, 126-8.

It is no wonder they are so often caught in the trap. . . .

What does it matter, you will tell me, how it happens, provided we do not worry about it? I am of that opinion; and in whatever way we can put ourselves in shelter from blows, even under a calf's skin, I am not the man to shrink from it. For it is enough for me to spend my life comfortably; and the best game I can give myself I'll take, though it be as little glorious and exemplary as you like:

If but my faults could trick and please
My wits, I'd rather seem a fool, at ease,
Than to be wise and rage.⁶

But it is folly to expect to get there that way. They go, they come, they trot, they dance—of death no news. All that is fine. But when it comes, either to them or to their wives, children, or friends, surprising them unprepared and defenseless, what torments, what cries, what frenzy, what despair overwhelms them! Did you ever see anything so dejected, so changed, so upset? We must provide for this earlier; and this brutish nonchalance, even if it could lodge in the head of a man of understanding—which I consider entirely impossible—sells us its wares too dear. If it were an enemy we could avoid, I would advise us to borrow the arms of cowardice. But since that cannot be, ^Bsince it catches you just the same, whether you flee like a coward or act like a man—

^AAs surely it pursues the man that flees,
Nor does it spare the haunches slack
Of warless youth, or its timid back ⁷

⁷ Horace, *Odes*, III, ii, 14-16.

^BEt que nulle trempe de cuirasse vous couvre,

Ille licet ferro cautus se condat ære,
Mors tamen inclusum protrahet inde caput,⁸

^Aapprenons à le soutenir de pied ferme, et à le combattre. Et pour commencer à lui ôter son plus grand avantage contre nous, prenons voie toute contraire à la commune. Otons-lui l'étrangeté, pratiquons-le, accoutumons-le, n'ayons rien si souvent en la tête que la mort. A tous instants représentons-la à notre imagination et en tous visages.

. . . Il n'est rien de quoi je me sois dès toujours plus entretenu que des imaginations de la mort: voire en la saison la plus licencieuse de mon âge,

^BJucundum cum ætas florida ver ageret,⁹

^A parmi les dames et les jeux, tel me pensait empêché à digérer à part moi quelque jalousie, ou l'incertitude de quelque espérance, cependant que je m'entretenais de je ne sais qui, surpris les jours précédents d'une fièvre chaude et de sa fin, au partir d'une fête pareille, et la tête pleine d'oisiveté, d'amour et de bon temps, comme moi, et qu'autant m'en pendait à l'oreille:

^BJam fuerit, nec post unquam revocare licebit.¹⁰

^AJe ne ridais non plus le front de ce pensement-là que

⁸ Propertius, *Elegies*, III, xviii, 25-26.

⁹ Catullus, *Poems*, lxviii, 16.

—^Band since no kind of armor protects you—

Hide as he will, cautious, in steel and brass,
Still death will drag his head outside at last⁸

—^Alet us learn to meet it steadfastly and to combat it. And to begin to strip it of its greatest advantage against us, let us take an entirely different way from the usual one. Let us rid it of its strangeness, come to know it, get used to it. Let us have nothing on our minds as often as death. At every moment let us picture it in our imagination in all its aspects.

. . . Since my earliest days, there is nothing with which I have occupied my mind more than with images of death. Even in the most licentious season of my life,

^BWhen blooming youth enjoyed a gladsome spring,⁹

^Aamid ladies and games, someone would think me involved in digesting some jealousy by myself, or the uncertainty of some hope, while I was thinking about I don't remember whom, who had been overtaken a few days before by a hot fever and by death, on leaving a similar feast, his head full of idleness, love, and a good time, like myself; and thinking that the same chance was hanging from my ear:

^BAnd soon it will have been, past any man's recall.¹⁰

^AI did not wrinkle my forehead any more over that

¹⁰ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, III, 915.

d'un autre. Il est impossible que d'arrivée nous ne sensations des piquûres de telles imaginations. Mais en les maniant et repassant, au long aller, on les apprivoise sans doute. Autrement de ma part je fusse en continuelle frayeur et frénésie: car jamais homme ne se défia tant de sa vie, jamais homme ne fit moins d'état de sa durée. . . .

26 *De l'institution des enfants*¹

A MADAME DIANE DE FOIX, *Comtesse de Gurson*

^AJe ne vis jamais père, pour teigneux ou bossé que fût son fils, qui laissât de l'avouer. Non pourtant, s'il n'est du tout enivré de cette affection, qu'il ne s'aperçoive de sa défaillance; mais tant y a qu'il est sien. Aussi moi je vois mieux que tout autre que ce ne sont ici que rêveries d'homme qui n'a goûté des sciences que la croûte première, en son enfance, et n'en a retenu qu'un général et informe visage: un peu de chaque chose et rien du tout, à la française. Car en somme, je sais qu'il y a une Médecine, une Jurisprudence, quatre parties en la Mathématique, et grossièrement ce à quoi elles visent. ^CEt à l'aventure encore sais-je la prétention des sciences en général au

¹ Composed in 1579 or 1580.

thought than any other. It is impossible that we should fail to feel the sting of such notions at first. But by handling them and going over them, in the long run we tame them beyond question. Otherwise for my part I should be in continual fright and frenzy; for never did a man so distrust his life, never did a man set less faith in his duration. . . .

26 *Of the Education of Children*¹

TO MADAME DIANE DE FOIX, *Comtesse de Gurson*

^AI have never seen a father who failed to claim his son, however mangy or hunchbacked he was. Not that he does not perceive his defect, unless he is utterly intoxicated by his affection; but the fact remains that the boy is his. And so I myself see better than anyone else that these are nothing but reveries of a man who has tasted only the outer crust of sciences in his childhood, and has retained only a vague general picture of them: a little of everything and nothing thoroughly, French style. For to sum up, I know that there is such a thing as medicine, jurisprudence, four parts in mathematics, and roughly what they aim at. ^CAnd perhaps I also know the service that the sciences in general

Italian at Magdalen College, Oxford, and, under King James I, working as a private tutor to the Crown Prince and the Queen Consort. Florio's works include *First Fruits, which yield Familiar Speech, Merry Proverbs, Witty Sentences, and Golden Sayings; A Perfect Induction to the Italian and English Tongues; Second Fruits, to be gathered of Twelve Trees, of divers but delightsome Tastes to the Tongues of Italian and English men; Garden of Recreation, yielding six thousand Italian Proverbs*; an Italian–English dictionary, *A World of Words* (the second edition of which was entitled *Queen Anna's New World of Words*); and his celebrated translation of Montaigne's *Essays*.

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SHAKESPEARE'S MONTAIGNE

The Florio Translation of the *Essays*

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Translated from the French by

JOHN FLORIO

Edited and with an introduction by

STEPHEN GREENBLATT

Edited, modernized, and annotated by

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^C'est ici un livre de bonne foi, lecteur. Il t'avertit dès l'entrée que je ne m'y suis proposé aucune fin, que domestique et privée. Je n'y ai eu nulle considération de ton service, ni de ma gloire. Mes forces ne sont pas capables d'un tel dessein. Je l'ai voué à la commodité particulière de mes parents et amis: à ce que m'ayant perdu (ce qu'ils ont à faire bientôt) ils y puissent retrouver aucuns traits de mes conditions et humeurs, et que par ce moyen ils nourrissent plus entière et plus vive la connaissance qu'ils ont eue de moi.

Si c'eût été pour rechercher la faveur du monde, je me fusse mieux paré, et me présenterais en une marche étudiée. Je veux qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans contention et artifice: car c'est moi que je peins. Mes défauts s'y liront au vif, et ma forme naïve, autant que la révérence publique me l'a permis. Que si j'eusse été entre ces nations qu'on dit vivre encore sous la douce liberté des premières lois de nature, je t'assure que je m'y fusse très volontiers peint tout entier, et tout nu.

Ainsi, lecteur, je suis moi-même la matière de mon livre: ce n'est pas raison que tu emploies ton loisir en un sujet si frivole et si vain.

A Dieu donc, de Montaigne, ce premier de mars mil cinq cent quatre-vingts.

¹ Montaigne's preface was presumably written at the 1580 date that he gives. Therefore it tells us not his original plan but his final one before publication.

^This book was written in good faith, reader. It warns you from the outset that in it I have set myself no goal but a domestic and private one. I have had no thought of serving either you or my own glory. My powers are inadequate for such a purpose. I have dedicated it to the private convenience of my relatives and friends, so that when they have lost me (as soon they must), they may recover here some features of my habits and temperament, and by this means keep the knowledge they have had of me more complete and alive.

If I had written to seek the world's favor, I should have bedecked myself better, and should present myself in a studied posture. I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray. My defects will here be read to the life, and also my natural form, as far as respect for the public has allowed. Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws, I assure you I should very gladly have portrayed myself here entire and wholly naked.

Thus, reader, I am myself the matter of my book; you would be unreasonable to spend your leisure on so frivolous and vain a subject.

So farewell. Montaigne, this first day of March, fifteen hundred and eighty.

That to Philosophize Is to Learn How to Die

I.20, I.19

CICERO sayeth, that to *Philosophize* is no other thing than for a man to prepare himself to death:¹ which is the reason that study and contemplation doth in some sort withdraw our soul from us, and severally² employ it from the body, which is a kind of apprenticeship³ and resemblance of death. Or else it is that all the wisdom and discourse of the world doth in the end resolve upon this point: to teach us not to fear to die. Truly either reason mocks us, or it only aimeth at our contentment, and in fine⁴ bends all her travel to make us live well and, as the holy Scripture sayeth, *at our ease*. All the opinions of the world conclude that pleasure is our end, howbeit they take diverse means unto and for it, else would men reject them at their first coming. For who would give ear unto him⁵ that for its end would establish our pain and disturbance?

The dissensions of philosophical sects in this case are verbal: *Transcurramus solertissimas nugas: Let us run over such over-fine fooleries and subtle trifles.*⁶ There is more willfulness and wrangling among them than pertains to a sacred profession. But what person a man undertakes to act, he doth ever therewithal personate⁷ his own. Although they say that, in virtue itself, the last scope of our aim is voluptuousness. It pleaseth me to importune their ears still with this word, which so much offends their hearing: And if it imply any chief pleasure or exceeding contentments, it is rather due to the assistance of virtue than to any other supply. Voluptuousness, being more strong, sinewy, sturdy, and manly, is but more seriously voluptuous. And we should give it the name of pleasure, more favorable, sweeter, and more natural; and not term it vigor, from which it hath his

denomination. Should this baser sensuality deserve this fair name, it should be by competency and not by privilege. I find it less void of incommodities and crosses than virtue. And besides that her taste is more fleeting, momentary, and fading, she hath her fasts, her eves, and her travels, and both sweat and blood. Furthermore, she hath particularly so many wounding passions and of so several sorts, and so filthy and loathsome a society waiting upon her, that she is equivalent to penitence.⁸

We are in the wrong to think her incommodities⁹ serve her as a provocation and seasoning to her sweetness, as in nature one contrary is vivified by another contrary: and to say, when we come to virtue, that like successes and difficulties overwhelm it, and yield it austere and inaccessible. Whereas much more properly than unto voluptuousness, they ennoble, sharpen, animate, and raise that divine and perfect pleasure, which it meditates and procureth us. Truly he is very unworthy her acquaintance, that counter-balanceth her cost to his fruit, and knows neither the graces nor use of it. Those who go about to instruct us, how her pursuit is very hard and laborious, and her jouissance¹⁰ well-pleasing and delightful: what else tell they us, but that she is ever unpleasant and irksome? For, what humane mean did ever attain unto an absolute enjoying of it?¹¹ The perfectest have been content but to aspire and approach her, without ever possessing her. But they are deceived; seeing that of all the pleasures we know, the pursuit of them is pleasant. The enterprise is perceived by the quality of the thing, which it hath regard unto: for it is a good portion of the effect, and consubstantial. That happiness and felicity, which shineth in virtue, replenisheth her approaches and appurtenances, even unto the first entrance and utmost bar.¹²

Now of all the benefits of virtue, the contempt of death is the chiefest, a mean that furnisheth our life with an easeful tranquility and gives us a pure and amiable taste of it, without which every other voluptuousness is extinguished. Lo, here the reasons why all rules encounter and agree with this article. And albeit they all lead us with a common accord to despise grief, poverty, and other accidental crosses, to which man's life is subject, it is not with an equal

care: as well because accidents are not of such a necessity, for most men pass their whole life without feeling any want or poverty, and other some without feeling any grief or sickness, as *Xenophilus* the musician, who lived an hundred and six years in perfect and continual health: as also if the worst happen, death may at all times, and whensoever it shall please us, cut off all other inconveniences and crosses. But as for death, it is inevitable.

*Omnes eodem cogimur, omnium
Versatur urna, serius, ocius
Sors exitura, et nos in æter-
Num exitium impositura cymbæ.*
All to one place are driv'n, of all
Shak't is the lot-pot,¹³ where-hence shall
Sooner or later drawn lots fall,
And to death's boat for aye¹⁴ enthrall.¹⁵

And by consequence, if she make us afraid, it is a continual subject of torment, and which can no way be eased. There is no starting-hole¹⁶ will hide us from her; she will find us wheresoever we are; we may as in a suspected country start and turn here and there: *quæ quasi saxum Tantalò semper impendet: Which evermore hangs like the stone over the head of Tantalus.*¹⁷ Our laws do often condemn and send malefactors to be executed in the same place where the crime was committed: to which place, whilst they are going, lead them along the fairest houses or entertain them with the best cheer you can,

*non Sicule dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporem:
Non avium, citharæque cantus
Somnum reducent.*
Not all King *Denys* dainty fare,
Can pleasing taste for them prepare:
No song of birds, no music's sound
Can lullaby to sleep profound.¹⁸

Do you think they can take any pleasure in it? Or be anything delighted? And that the final intent of their voyage being still before their eyes, hath not altered and altogether distracted their taste from all these commodities and allurements?

*Audit iter, numeratque dies, spatioque viarum
Metitur vitam, torquetur peste futura.*

He hears his journey, counts his days, so measures he
His life by his way's length, vex't with the ill shall be.¹⁹

The end of our carriere²⁰ is death. It is the necessary object of our aim: if it affright us, how is it possible we should step one foot further without an ague? The remedy of the vulgar sort is not to think on it. But from what brutal stupidity may so gross a blindness come upon him? He must be made to bridle his ass by the tail,

Qui capite ipse suo instituit vestigia retro.
Who doth a course contrary run
With his head to his course begun.²¹

It is no marvel if he be so often taken tripping; some do no sooner hear the name of death spoken of, but they are afraid, yea the most part will cross themselves, as if they heard the Devil named. And because mention is made of it in men's wills and testaments, I warrant you there is none will set his hand to them, till the physician hath given his last doom and utterly forsaken him. And God knows, being then between such pain and fear, with what sound judgment they endure him.

For so much as this syllable sounded so unpleasantly in their ears, and this voice seemed so ill-boding and unlucky, the Romans had learned to allay and dilate the same by a Periphrasis.²² In lieu of saying, he is dead, or he hath ended his days, they would say, he hath lived. So it be life, be it past or no, they are comforted: from whom we have borrowed our phrases *quondam*, *alias*, or *late such a one*.

It may happily be, as the common saying is, the time we live is

worth the money we pay for it. I was born between eleven of the clock and noon, the last of February 1533, according to our computation, the year beginning the first of January.²³ It is but a fortnight since I was 39 years old. I want at least as much more.²⁴ If in the mean time I should trouble my thoughts with a matter so far from me, it were but folly. But what? We see both young and old to leave their life after one self-same condition. No man departs otherwise from it than if he but now came to it. Seeing there is no man so crazed, bed-rell,²⁵ or decrepit, so long as he remembers *Mathusalem*,²⁶ but thinks he may yet live twenty years.²⁷

Moreover, seely²⁸ creature as thou art, who hath limited the end of thy days? Happily thou presumest upon physicians' reports. Rather consider the effect and experience. By the common course of things, long since thou livest by extraordinary favor. Thou hast already overpassed the ordinary terms of common life. And to prove it, remember but thy acquaintances and tell me how many more of them have died before they came to thy age than have either attained or outgone the same. Yea, and of those that through renoune²⁹ hath ennobled their life, if thou but register them,³⁰ I will lay a wager I will find more that have died before they came to five and thirty years than after. It is consonant with reason and piety to take example by the humanity of *Jesus Christ*, who ended his human life at three and thirty years. The greatest man that ever was, being no more than a man, I mean *Alexander* the great, ended his days and died also of that age.

How many several means and ways hath death to surprise us.

*Quid quisque vitet, nunquam homini satis
Cautum est in horas.*

A man can never take good heed,
Hourly what he may shun and speed.³¹

I omit to speak of agues and pleurisies; who would ever have imagined that a Duke of *Brittany* should have been stifled to death in a throng of people, as whilome³² was a neighbour of mine at *Lyons*, when Pope *Clement* made his entrance there? Hast thou not seen

one of our late Kings slain in the midst of his sports? And one of his ancestors die miserably by the chocke³³ of an hog?³⁴ *Eschilus*,³⁵ forethreatened by the fall of an house when he stood most upon his guard, stricken dead by the fall of a Tortoise shell, which fell out of the talons of an eagle flying in the air; and another choked with the kernel of a grape? And an Emperor die by the scratch of a comb, whilst he was combing his head? And *Lepidus* with hitting his foot against a door-sill? And *Aufidius* with stumbling against the council-chamber door as he was going in thereat? And *Cornelius Gallus*, the Prætor; *Tegiliinus* Captain of the Roman watch; *Lodovico*, son of *Guido Gonzaga*, Marquis of *Mantua*—end their days between women's thighs? And of a far worse example *Speusippus*, the Platonian philosopher, and one of our Popes? Poor *Bebius*, a judge, whilst he demurreth the suit of a plaintiff but for eight days, behold his last expired. And *Caius Julius* a physician, whilst he was anointing the eyes of one of his patients, to have his own sight closed forever by death. And if amongst these examples, I may add one of a brother of mine, called Captain *Saint Martin*,³⁶ a man of three and twenty years of age, who had already given good testimony of his worth and forward valor, playing at tennis, received a blow with a ball that hit him a little above the right ear, without appearance of any contusion, bruise, or hurt; and never sitting or resting upon it, died within six hours after of an apoplexy, which the blow of the ball caused in him. These so frequent and ordinary examples, happening and being still before our eyes, how is it possible for man to forgo or forget the remembrance of death? And why should it not continually seem unto us that she is still ready at hand to take us by the throat?

What matter is it, will you say unto me, how and in what manner it is, so long as a man do not trouble and vex himself therewith? I am of this opinion, that howsoever a man may shroud or hide himself from her dart, yea were it under an ox-hide, I am not the man would shrink back. It sufficeth me to live at my ease; and the best recreation I can have, that do I ever take; in other matters, as little vainglorious and exemplary as you list.

—*prætulerim delirus inersque videri,*
Dum mea delectent mala me, vel denique fallant,
Quam sapere et ringi.
 A dotard I had rather seem, and dull,
 Sooner my faults may please, make me a gull,
 Than to be wise, and beat my vexed scull.³⁷

But it is folly to think that way to come unto it. They come, they go, they trot, they dance: but no speech of death. All that is good sport. But if she be once come, and on a sudden and openly surprise either them, their wives, their children, or their friends, what torments, what out-cries, what rage, and what despair doth then overwhelm them? Saw you ever anything so drooping, so changed, and so distracted? A man must look to it, and in better times foresee it. And might that brutish carelessness lodge in the mind of a man of understanding (which I find altogether impossible), she sells us her ware at over-dear a rate. Were she an enemy by man's wit to be avoided, I would advise man to borrow the weapons of cowardliness. But since it may not be, and that be you either a coward or a runaway, an honest or valiant man, she overtakes you,

Nempe et fugacem persequitur virum,
Nec parcat imbellis iuuentæ
Poplitibus, timidoque tergo.
 She persecutes the man that flies,
 She spares not weak youth to surprise,
 But on their hams and back turn'd, plies.³⁸

And that no temper of cuirace³⁹ may shield or defend you,

Ille licet ferro cautus se condat in ære,
Mors tamen inclusum protrahet inde caput.
 Though he with iron and brass his head impale,
 Yet death his head enclosed thence will hale.⁴⁰

Let us learn to stand and combat her with a resolute mind. And being to take the greatest advantage she hath upon us from her, let us take a clean contrary way from the common; let us remove her strangeness from her; let us converse, frequent, and acquaint ourselves with her; let us have nothing so much in mind as death; let us at all times and seasons, and in the ugliest manner that may be, yea with all faces shapen,⁴¹ and represent the same unto our imagination. At the stumbling of a horse, at the fall of a stone, at the least prick with a pin, let us presently ruminare and say with ourselves: what if it were death it self? And thereupon let us take heart of grace and call our wits together to confront her. Amidst our banquets, feasts, and pleasures, let us ever have this restraint or object before us, that is, the remembrance of our condition, and let not pleasure so much mislead or transport us that we altogether neglect or forget how many ways, our joys, or our feasting, be subject unto death, and by how many hold-fasts she threatens us and them. So did the Egyptians, who in the midst of their banquetings and in the full of their greatest cheer, caused the anatomy of a dead man to be brought before them, as a memorandum and warning to their guests.

*Omnem crede diem ubi diluxisse supremum,
Grata superveniet, que non sperabitur hora.*
Think every day shines on thee as thy last,
Welcome it will come, whereof hope was past.⁴²

It is uncertain where death looks for us; let us expect her every where: the premeditation of death is a fore-thinking of liberty. He who hath learned to die, hath unlearned to serve. There is no evil in life for him that hath well conceived how the privation of life is no evil. To know how to die doth free us from all subjection and constraint. *Paulus Æmilius* answered one whom that miserable king of *Macedon*, his prisoner, sent to entreat him [that] he would not lead him in triumph: "let him make that request unto himself."

Verily, if nature afford not some help in all things, it is very hard that art and industry should go far before. Of myself, I am not much

given to melancholy, but rather to dreaming and sluggishness. There is nothing wherewith I have ever more entertained myself than with the imaginations of death, yea in the most licentious times of my age.

Iucundum, cum etas florida ver aqeret.
When my age flourishing
Did spend its pleasant spring.⁴³

Being amongst fair ladies and in earnest play, some have thought me busied or musing with myself how to digest some jealousy or meditating on the uncertainty of some conceived hope, when God he knows I was entertaining myself with the remembrance of some one or other that but few days before was taken with a burning fever and of his sudden end, coming from such a feast or meeting where I was myself, and with his head full of idle conceits, of love, and merry glee; supposing the same, either sickness or end, to be as near me as him.

Iam fuerit, nec post, unquam revocare licebit.
Now time would be, no more
You can this time restore.⁴⁴

I did no more trouble myself or frown at such a conceit than at any other. It is impossible we should not apprehend or feel some motions or startings at such imaginations at the first and coming suddenly upon us. But doubtless he that shall manage and meditate upon them with an impartial eye, they will assuredly, in tract of time, become familiar to him. Otherwise, for my part, I should be in continual fear and agony; for no man did ever more distrust his life, nor make less account of his continuance. Neither can health, which hitherto I have so long enjoyed and which so seldom hath been crazed, lengthen my hopes, nor any sickness shorten them of it. At every minute methinks I make an escape. And I uncessantly record unto myself, that whatsoever may be done another day may be effected this day. Truly hazards and dangers do little or nothing approach us at our end; and if we consider how many more there

remain besides this accident, which in number more than millions seem to threaten us and hang over us, we shall find that be we sound or sick, lusty or weak, at sea or at land, abroad or at home, fighting or at rest, in the midst of a battle or in our beds, she⁴⁵ is ever alike near unto us. *Nemo altero fragilior est, nemo in crastinum sui certior. No man is weaker than other; none surer of himself (to live) till to morrow.*⁴⁶ Whatsoever I have to do before death, all leisure to end the same, seemeth short unto me, yea were it but of one hour.

Somebody, not long since turning over my writing tables, found by chance a memorial of something I would have done after my death. I told him (as indeed it was true) that being but a mile from my house, and in perfect health and lusty, I had made haste to write it because I could not assure myself I should ever come home in safety. As one that am ever hatching of mine own thoughts and place them in myself, I am ever prepared about that which I may be. Nor can death (come when she please) put me in mind of any new thing.

A man should ever, as much as in him lieth, be ready booted to take his journey, and above all things look he have then nothing to do but with himself.

*Quid brevi fortes iaculamur avo
Multa?*

To aim why are we ever bold,
At many things in so short hold?⁴⁷

For then we shall have work sufficient without any more increase.⁴⁸ Some man complaineth more that death doth hinder him from the assured course of an hoped-for victory than of death itself; another cries out, he should give place to her before he have married his daughter or directed the course of his children's bringing up; another bewaileth he must forgo his wife's company; another moaneth the loss of his children, the chiefest commodities of his being.

I am now by means of the mercy of God in such a taking that, without regret or grieving at any worldly matter, I am prepared to dislodge whensoever he shall please to call me. I am everywhere free:

my farewell is soon taken of all my friends, except of myself. No man did ever prepare himself to quit the world more simply and fully, or more generally spake of all thoughts of it, than I am fully assured I shall do. The deadeest deaths are the best.

*Miser, o miser (aiunt) omnia ademit,
Una dies infesta mihi tot premia vite:
O wretch, O wretch (friends cry), one day,
All joys of life hath ta'ne⁴⁹ away.⁵⁰*

And the builder,

—*maneant (saith he) opera interrupta, minaeque
Murorum ingentes.
The works unfinished lie,
And walls that threatned hie.⁵¹*

A man should design nothing so long aforehand, or at least with such an intent, as to passionate himself to see the end of it; we are all born to be doing.

*Cum moriar, medium soluar et inter opus.
When dying I myself shall spend,
Ere half my business come to end.⁵²*

I would have a man to be doing, and to prolong his life's offices, as much as lieth in him, and let death seize upon me whilst I am setting my cabbages, careless of her dart, but more of my unperfect garden. I saw one die who, being at his last gasp, uncessantly complained against his destiny and that death should so unkindly cut him off in the midst of an history which he had in hand, and was now come to the fifteenth or sixteenth of our kings.

*Illud in his rebus non addunt, nec tibi earum,
Iam desiderium rerum super insidet una.*

Friends add not that in this case, now no more
Shalt thou desire or want things wished before.⁵³

A man should rid himself of these vulgar and hurtful humours. Even as churchyards were first placed adjoining unto churches and in the most frequented places of the city, to inure (as *Lycurgus* said) the common people, women, and children not to be scared at the sight of a dead man, and to the end that continual spectacle of bones, skulls, tombs, graves, and burials should forewarn us of our condition and fatal end.

*Quin etiam exhilarare viris convivia cæde
Mos olim, et miscere epulis spectacula dira
Certantum ferro, sæpe et super ipsa cadentum
Pocula, respersis non parco sanguine mensis.*

Nay more, the manner was to welcome guests,
And with dire shows of slaughter to mix feasts
Of them that fought at sharp, and with boards tainted
Of them with much blood, who o're⁵⁴ full cups fainted.⁵⁵

And even as the Egyptians after their feasting and carousings caused a great image of death to be brought in and showed to the guests and by-standers by one that cried aloud, *Drink and be merry, for such shalt thou be when thou art dead.* So have I learned this custom or lesson, to have always death, not only in my imagination but continually in my mouth. And there is nothing I desire more to be informed of than of the death of men: that is to say, what words, what countenance, and what face they showed at their death; and in reading of histories, which I so attentively observe. It appeareth by the shuffling and huddling up of my examples, I affect no subject so particularly as this. Were I a composer of books, I would keep a register, commented of the diverse deaths which, in teaching men to die, should after teach them to live. *Dicearchus* made one of that title, but of another and less profitable end.

Some man will say to me, the effect exceeds the thought so far

that there is no sense so sure, or cunning so certain, but a man shall either lose or forget if he come once to that point. Let them say what they list: To premeditate on it giveth no doubt a great advantage. And is it nothing at the least to go so far without dismay or alteration, or without an ague? There belongs more to it: Nature herself lends us her hand and gives us courage. If it be a short and violent death, we have no leisure to fear it; if otherwise, I perceive that according as I engage myself in sickness, I do naturally fall into some disdain and contempt of life. I find that I have more ado to digest this resolution that I shall die when I am in health than I have when I am troubled with a fever. Forsomuch as I have no more such fast hold on the commodities of life whereof I begin to lose the use and pleasure and view death in the face with a less undaunted look, which makes me hope that the further I go from that, and the nearer I approach to this, so much more easily do I enter in composition for their exchange. Even as I have tried in many other occurrences, which *Caesar* affirmed, that often some things seem greater, being far from us, than if they be near at hand. I have found that, being in perfect health, I have much more been frightened with sickness than when I have felt it. The jollity wherein I live, the pleasure and the strength, make the other seem so disproportionable from that, that by imagination I amplify these commodities by one moiety⁵⁶ and apprehended them much more heavy and burdensome than I feel them when I have them upon my shoulders. The same I hope will happen to me of death.

Consider we by the ordinary mutations and daily declinations which we suffer how Nature deprives us of the sight of our loss and impairing. What hath an aged man left him of his youth's rigor, and of his forepast life?

Heu senibus vitæ portio quanta manet!

Alas to men in years, how small

A part of life is left in all!⁵⁷

Caesar to a tired and crazed soldier of his guard, who in the open street came to him to beg leave he might cause himself to be put to

death, viewing his decrepit behaviour, answered pleasantly: *Dost thou think to be alive then?*⁵⁸ Were man all at once to fall into it, I do not think we should be able to bear such a change. But being fair and gently led on by her hand, in a slow and as it were unperceived descent, by little and little, and step by step, she rolls us into that miserable state, and day by day seeks to acquaint us with it. So that when youth fails in us, we feel, nay we perceive, no shaking or transchange at all in ourselves, which in essence and verity is a harder death than that of a languishing and irksome life or that of age. Forsomuch as the leap from an ill being unto a not being is not so dangerous or steepy as it is from a delightful and flourishing being unto a painful and sorrowful condition.

A weak bending and faint stooping body hath less strength to bear and undergo a heavy burden: so hath our soul. She must be roused and raised against the violence and force of this adversary. For, as it is impossible, she should take any rest whilst she feareth, whereof if she be assured (which is a thing exceeding human condition), she may boast that it is impossible unquietness, torment, and fear, much less the least displeasure, should lodge in her.

Non vultus instantis tyranni

Mente quatit solida, neque Auster,

Dux inquieti turbidus Adriæ.

Nec fulminantis magna Iovis manus.

No urging tyrants threatening face,

Where mind is found can it displace,

No troublous wind the rough sea's Master,

Nor *Jove's* great hand the thunder caster.⁵⁹

She⁶⁰ is made mistress of her passions and concupiscence, lady of indulgence, of shame, of poverty, and of all fortune's injuries. Let him that can attain to this advantage: herein consists the true and sovereign liberty that affords us means wherewith to jest and make a scorn of force and justice and to deride imprisonment, gyves,⁶¹ or fetters.

—*in manicis, et*

Compedibus, sævo te sub custode tenebo.

Ipse Deus simul atque volam, me solvet: opinor,

Hoc sentit moriar, mors ultima linea rerum est.

In gyves and fetters I will hamper thee,

Under a jailor that shall cruel be:

Yet, when I will, God me deliver shall,

He thinks, I shall die: death is end of all.⁶²

Our religion hath had no surer human foundation than the contempt of life. Discourse of reason doth not only call and summon us unto it. For why should we fear to lose a thing which, being lost, cannot be moaned?⁶³ But also, since we are threatened by so many kinds of death, there is no more inconvenience to fear them all than to endure one. What matter is it when it cometh, since it is unavoidable? *Socrates* answered one that told him, "The thirty tyrants have condemned thee to death"; *And Nature* them, said he.

What fondness is it to cark⁶⁴ and care so much, at that instant and passage from all exemption of pain and care? As our birth brought us the birth of all things, so shall our death the end of all things. Therefore is it as great folly to weep we shall not live a hundred years hence as to wail we lived not a hundred years ago. *Death is the beginning of another life.* So wept we, and so much did it cost us to enter into this life; and so did we spoil us of our ancient vale in entering into it.

Nothing can be grievous that is but once. Is it reason so long to fear, a thing of so short time? Long life or short life is made all one by death. For long or short is not in things that are no more. *Aristotle* sayeth there are certain little beasts alongst the river *Hispanis* that live but one day. She which dieth at 8 o'clock in the morning, dies in her youth, and she that dies at 5 in the afternoon, dies in her decrepitude. Who of us doth not laugh when we shall see this short moment of continuance to be had in consideration of good or ill fortune? The most and the least in ours, if we compare it with eternity, or equal it

to the lasting of mountains, rivers, stars, and trees, or any other living creature, is no less ridiculous.

But nature compels us to it.⁶⁵ *Depart, sayeth she, out of this world, even as you came into it. The same way you came from death, to death return without passion or amazement, from life to death. Your death is but a piece of the world's order and but a parcel of the world's life.*

—*inter se mortales mutua vivunt,
Et quasi cursores vite lampada tradunt.*

Mortal men live by mutual intercourse:

And yield their life-torch, as men in a course.⁶⁶

Shall I not change this goodly contexture of things for you? It is the condition of your creation: death is a part of yourselves; you fly from yourselves. The being you enjoy is equally shared between life and death. The first day of your birth doth as well address you to die as to live.

Prima quæ vitam dedit, hora, carpsit.

The first hour that to me

Gave life straight, cropped it then.⁶⁷

Nascentes morimur, fluisque ab origine pendet.

As we are born we die; the end

Doth of th'original depend.⁶⁸

All the time you live, you steal it from death: it is at her charge. The continual work of your life is to contrive death; you are in death, during the time you continue in life; for you are after death, when you are no longer living. Or if you had rather have it so, you are dead after life; but during life, you are still dying, and death doth more rudely touch the dying than the dead, and more lively and essentially.

If you have profited by life, you have also been fed thereby; depart then satisfied.

Cur non ut plenus vite conviva recedis?

Why like a full-fed guest,

Depart you not to rest?⁶⁹

If you have not known how to make use of it, if it were unprofitable to you, what need you care to have lost it? To what end would you enjoy it longer?

—*cur amplius addere queris*

Rursum quod pereat male, et ingratum occidat omne?

Why seek you more to gain, what must again,

All perish ill, and pass with grief or pain?⁷⁰

Life in itself is neither good nor evil; it is the place of good or evil according as you prepare it for them.⁷¹

And if you have lived one day, you have seen all: one day is equal to all other days. There is no other light, there is no other night. This sun, this moon, these stars, and this disposition is the very same which your forefathers enjoyed and which shall also entertain your posterity.

Non alium videre patres, aliumve nepotes

Aspicient.

No other saw our sires of old,

No other shall their sons behold.⁷²

And if the worst happen, the distribution and variety of all the acts of my comedy⁷³ is performed in one year. If you have observed the course of my four seasons, they contain the infancy, the youth, the virility, and the old age of the world. He hath played his part: he knows no other wiliness belonging to it but to begin again. It will ever be the same, and no other.

—*Versamur ibidem, atque insumus usque,*

We still in one place turn about,

Still where we are, now in, now out.⁷⁴
Atque in se sua per vestigia volvitur annus.
 The year into it self is cast
 By those same steps that it hath past.⁷⁵

I am not purposed to devise you other new sports.

*Nam tibi preterea quod machinor, inveniamque
 Quod placeat, nihil est, eadem sunt omnia semper.*
 Else nothing, that I can devise or frame,
 Can please thee, for all things are still the same.⁷⁶

Make room for others, as others have done for you. *Equality is the chief ground-work of equity. Who can complain to be comprehended where all are contained.* So may you live long enough, you shall never diminish anything from the time you have to die. It is bootless: so long shall you continue in that state which you fear as if you had died being in your swathing-clothes and when you were sucking.

—*licet, quod vis, vivendo vincere secla,
 Mors aeterna tamen, nihilominus illa manebit.*
 Though years you live, as many as you will,
 Death is eternal, death remaineth still.⁷⁷

And I will so please you that you shall have no discontent.

*In vera nescis nullum fore morte alium te,
 Qui possit vivus tibi te lugere peremptum,
 Stansque iacentem.*
 Thou knowst not, there shall be no other thou,
 When thou art dead indeed, that can tell how
 Alive to wail thee dying, standing to wail thee lying.⁷⁸

Nor shall wish for life, which you so much desire.

*Nec sibi enim quisquam tum se vitamque requirit,
 Nec desiderium nostri nos afficit ullum.*
 For then none for himself or life requires:
 Nor are we of our selves affected with desires.⁷⁹

Death is less to be feared than nothing, if there were anything less than nothing.

—*multo mortem minus ad nos esse putandum,
 Si minus esse potest quam quod nihil esse videmus.*
 Death is much less to us, we ought esteem,
 If less may be, than what doth nothing seem.⁸⁰

Nor alive, nor dead, it doth concern you nothing. Alive, because you are; dead, because you are no more.

Moreover, no man dies before his hour. The time you leave behind was no more yours than that which was before your birth and concerneth you no more.

*Respice enim quam nil ad nos anteacta vetustas
 Temporis aeterni fuerit.*
 For mark, how all antiquity fore-gone
 Of all time ere we were, to us was none.⁸¹

Wheresoever your life ended, there is it all. The profit of life consists not in the space, but rather in the use. Some man hath lived long that hath had a short life. Follow it whilst you have time. It consists not in number of years, but in your will, that you have lived long enough. Did you think you should never come to the place where you were still going? There is no way but hath an end. And if company may solace you, doth not the whole world walk the same path?

—*omnia te vita perfuncta sequentur.*
 Life past, all things at last
 Shall follow thee as thou hast past.⁸²

Do not all things move as you do, or keep your course? Is there anything grows not old together with yourself? A thousand men, a thousand beasts, and a thousand other creatures die in the very instance that you die.

*Nam nox nulla diem, neque noctem aurora sequuta est,
Quæ non audierit mistus vagitibus ægris
Ploratus mortis comites et funeris atri.*

No night ensued day light: no morning followed night,
Which heard not moaning mixed with sick-men's groaning.
With deaths and funerals joined was that moaning.⁸³

To what end recoil you from it, if you cannot go back? You have seen many who have found good in death, ending thereby many many miseries. But have you seen any that hath received hurt thereby? Therefore it is mere simplicity to condemn a thing you never approve, neither by yourself nor any other. Why dost thou complain of me and of destiny? Although thy age be not come to her period, thy life is. A little man is a whole man, as well as a great man. Neither men nor their lives are measured by the Ell.⁸⁴

Chiron refused immortality, being informed of the conditions thereof, even by the God of time and of continuance, *Saturn* his father. Imagine truly how much an ever-during life would be less tolerable and more painful to a man than is the life which I have given him. Had you not death, you would then incessantly curse and cry out against me that I had deprived you of it. I have of purpose and unwittingly blended some bitterness amongst it, that so seeing the commodity of its use, I might hinder you from over greedily embracing or indiscreetly calling for it. To continue in this moderation, that is neither to fly from life nor to run to death (which I require of you), I have tempered both the one and other between sweetness and sourness.

I first taught *Thales*, the chiefest of your sages and wise men, that to live and die were indifferent, which made him answer one very wisely who asked him wherefore he died not: *Because*, sayeth he, *it is*

indifferent. The water, the earth, the air, the fire, and other members of this my universe are no more the instruments of thy life than of thy death. Why fearest thou thy last day? He⁸⁵ is no more guilty and conferreth no more to thy death than any of the others. It is not the last step that causeth weariness; it only declares it. All days march towards death; only the last comes to it.

Behold here the good precepts of our universal mother Nature.⁸⁶ I have oftentimes bethought myself whence it proceedeth that, in times of war, the visage of death (whether we see it in us or in others) seemeth without all comparison much less dreadful and terrible unto us than in our houses or in our beds. Otherwise, it should be an army of physicians and whiners. And she⁸⁷ ever being one, there must needs be much more assurance amongst country people and of base condition than in others. I verily believe these fearful looks and astonishing countenances wherewith we encompass it are those that more amaze and terrify us than death. A new form of life: the outcries of mothers; the wailing of women and children; the visitation of dismayed and swooning friends; the assistance of a number of pale-looking, distracted, and whining servants; a dark chamber, tapers burning round about; our couch beset round with physicians and preachers; and to conclude, nothing but horror and astonishment on every side of us. Are we not already dead and buried? The very children are afraid of their friends when they see them masked; and so are we. The mask must as well be taken from things, as from men, which being removed, we shall find nothing hid under it but the very same death that a seely⁸⁸ varlet or a simple maid-servant did lately suffer without amazement or fear. Happy is that death which takes all leisure from the preparations of such an equipage.⁸⁹

found him; this I could not attend. But where I now find faults, let me pray and entreat you for your own sake to correct as you read, to amend as you list. But some errors are mine, and mine are by more than translation. Are they in grammar or orthography? As easy for you to right as me to be wrong. Or in construction, as misattributing him, her, or it to things alive or dead or neuter. You may soon know my meaning and eftsoones¹⁴ use your mending. Or are they in some uncouth terms, as entrain, conscientious, endear, tarnish, comport, efface, facilitate, amusing, debauching, regret, effort, emotion, and such like? If you like them not, take others more commonly set to make such likely French words familiar with our English, which well may bear them. If any be capital in sense mistaking,¹⁵ be I admonished, and they shall be recanted. Howsoever, the falseness of the French prints, the diversities of copies, editions, and volumes (some whereof have more or less than others), and I in *London* having followed some and in the country others; now those in folio, now those in octavo, yet in this last survey reconciled all. Therefore or blame not rashly or condemn not fondly the multitude of them set for your further ease in a table (at the end of the book) which, ere you begin to read, I entreat you to peruse.¹⁶ This Printer's wanting a diligent Corrector, my many employments, and the distance between me and my friends I should confer with may extenuate, if not excuse, even more errors.

In sum, if any think he could do better, let him try; then will he better think of what is done. Seven or eight of great wit and worth have assayed but found these Essayes no attempt for French apprentices or Littletonians.¹⁷ If thus done it may please you as I wish it may, and I hope it shall, I with you shall be pleased; though not, yet still I am the *same resolute*.

—JOHN FLORIO

The Author to the Reader

READER, lo here a well-meaning book. It doth at the first entrance forewarn thee that in contriving the same I have proposed unto myself no other than a familiar and private end. I have no respect or consideration at all, either to thy service or to my glory: my forces are not capable of any such design. I have vowed the same to the particular commodity of my kinsfolk and friends, to the end that, losing me (which they are likely to do ere long), they may therein find some lineaments of my conditions and humours, and by that means reserve more whole, and more lively foster the knowledge and acquaintance they have had of me.

Had my intention been to forestall and purchase the world's opinion and favour, I would surely have adorned myself more quaintly, or kept a more grave and solemn march. I desire therein to be delineated in mine own genuine, simple, and ordinary fashion, without contention, art, or study; for it is myself I portray. My imperfections shall thus be read to the life, and my natural form discerned, so far-forth as public reverence hath permitted me. For if my fortune had been to have lived among those nations which yet are said to live under the sweet liberty of Nature's first and uncorrupted laws, I assure thee I would most willingly have portrayed myself fully and naked.

Thus, gentle Reader, myself am the groundwork of my book; it is then no reason thou shouldst employ thy time about so frivolous and vain a subject. Therefore farewell.

From *Montaigne*,
the first of March, 1580.

EVERYMAN,
I WILL GO WITH THEE,
AND BE THY GUIDE,
IN THY MOST NEED
TO GO BY THY SIDE

MICHEL DE
MONTAIGNE

THE
COMPLETE
WORKS

ESSAYS, TRAVEL JOURNAL, LETTERS

TRANSLATED BY DONALD M. FRAME

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY STUART HAMPSHIRE



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the hardest. In everything else there may be sham: the fine reasonings of philosophy may be a mere pose in us; or else our trials, by not testing us to the quick, give us a chance to keep our face always composed. But in the last scene, between death and ourselves, there is no more pretending; we must talk plain French, we must show what there is that is good and clean at the bottom of the pot:

At last true words surge up from deep within our breast,
The mask is snatched away, reality is left.

LUCRETIUS

That is why all the other actions of our life must be tried and tested by this last act. It is the master day, the day that is judge of all the others. "It is the day," says one of the ancients [Seneca], "that must judge all my past years." I leave it to death to test the fruit of my studies. We shall see then whether my reasonings come from my mouth or from my heart.

"I know of many who by their death gave their whole life a good or a bad reputation. Scipio, the father-in-law of Pompey, redressed, by dying well, the bad opinion that people had had of him until then. Epaminondas, asked which of the three he esteemed most, Chabrias or Iphicrates or himself, said: "You must see us die before you can decide." In truth you would rob a man of much if you weighed him without the honor and greatness of his end.

God has willed it as he pleased; but in my time three of the most execrable and most infamous persons I have known in every abomination of life have had deaths that were ordered and in every circumstance composed to perfection.

There are gallant and fortunate deaths. I have seen death bring a wonderfully brilliant career, and that in its flower, to such a splendid end that in my opinion the dead man's ambitions and courageous designs had nothing so lofty about them as their interruption. He arrived where he aspired to without going there, more grandly and gloriously than he had desired or hoped. And by his fall he went beyond the power and the fame to which he had aspired by his career.

In judging the life of another, I always observe how it ended; and one of my principal concerns about my own end is that it shall go well, that is to say quietly and insensibly.

20

That to philosophize is to learn to die

Cicero says that to philosophize is nothing else but to prepare for death. This is because study and contemplation draw our soul out of us to some extent and keep it busy outside the body; which is a sort of apprenticeship and semblance of death. Or else it is because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world boils down finally to this point: to teach us not to be afraid to die. In truth, either reason is a mockery, or it must aim solely at our contentment, and the sum of its labors must tend to make us live well and at our ease, as Holy Scripture says. All the opinions in the world agree on this — that pleasure is our goal — though they choose different means to it. Otherwise they would be thrown out right away; for who would listen to a man who would set up our pain and discomfort as his goal?

The dissensions of the philosophic sects in this matter are merely verbal. *Let us skip over such frivolous subtleties* [Seneca]. There is more stubbornness and wrangling than befits such a sacred profession. But whatever role man undertakes to play, he always plays his own at the same time. Whatever they say, in virtue itself the ultimate goal we aim at is voluptuousness. I like to beat their ears with that word, which so goes against their grain. And if it means a certain supreme pleasure and excessive contentment, this is due more to the assistance of virtue than to any other assistance. This voluptuousness, for being more lusty, sinewy, robust, and manly, is only the more seriously voluptuous. And we should have given virtue the name of pleasure, a name more favorable, sweet, and natural; not that of vigor, as we have named it. That other baser sort of voluptuousness, if it deserved that beautiful name, should have acquired it in competition, not as a privilege. I find it less free of inconveniences and obstacles than virtue. Besides the fact that its enjoyment is more momentary, watery, and weak, it has its vigils, its fasts, and its hardships, its sweat and blood; and, more particularly, its poignant sufferings of so many kinds, and an accompanying satiety so heavy that it is the equivalent of penance. We are very wrong to suppose that these disadvantages act as a spur and a spice to its sweetness, as in nature a thing is enlivened by its opposite, and to say, when we come to virtue, that similar consequences and difficulties oppress it, make it austere and inaccessible; whereas, much more than in the case of voluptuousness, they ennoble, whet,

and heighten the divine and perfect pleasure that virtue affords us. That man is surely very unworthy of its acquaintance who balances its cost against its fruits; he knows neither its graces nor its use. Those who go on teaching us that the quest of it is rugged and laborious, though the enjoyment of it is agreeable, what are they doing but telling us that it is always disagreeable? For what human means ever attained the enjoyment of virtue? The most perfect have been quite content to aspire to it and to approach it, without possessing it. But those others are wrong; since in all the pleasures that we know, even the pursuit is pleasant. The attempt is made fragrant by the quality of the thing it aims at, for it is a good part of the effect, and consubstantial with it. The happiness and blessedness that shines in virtue fills all its appurtenances and approaches even to the first entrance and the utmost barrier.

Now among the principal benefits of virtue is disdain for death, a means that furnishes our life with a soft tranquillity and gives us a pure and pleasant enjoyment of it, without which all other pleasures are extinguished. ^AThat is why all rules meet and agree at this point. And though they all with one accord lead us also to scorn pain, poverty, and other accidents to which human life is subject, it is not with equal insistence; partly because these accidents are not so inevitable (most men spend their life without tasting poverty, and some also without feeling pain and illness, like Xenophilus the musician, who lived a hundred and six years in complete health), and also because at worst, whenever we please, death can put an end, and deny access, to all our other woes. But as for death itself, it is inevitable.

^BWe are all forced down the same road. Our fate,
Tossed in the urn, will spring out soon or late,
And force us helpless into Charon's bark,
Passengers destined for eternal dark.

HORACE

^AAnd consequently, if it frightens us, it is a continual source of torment which cannot be alleviated at all. ^CThere is no place from which it may not come to us; we may turn our heads constantly this way and that as in a suspicious country: *death always hangs over us, like the stone over Tantalus* [Cicero]. ^AOur law courts often send criminals to be executed at the place where the crime was committed. On the way, take them past beautiful houses, give them as good a time as you like –

^BNot even a Sicilian feast
Can now produce for him a pleasant taste,
Nor song of birds, nor music of the lyre
Restore his sleep

HORACE

^Ado you think that they can rejoice in these things, and that the final purpose of their trip, being steadily before their eyes, will not have changed and spoiled their taste for all these pleasures?

^BHe hears it as it comes, counts days, measures the breath
Of life upon their length, tortured by coming death.

CLAUDIEN

^AThe goal of our career is death. It is the necessary object of our aim. If it frightens us, how is it possible to go a step forward without feverishness? The remedy of the common herd is not to think about it. But from what brutish stupidity can come so gross a blindness! They have to bridle the ass by the tail,

Who sets his mind on moving only backward.
LUCRETIUS

It is no wonder they are so often caught in the trap. These people take fright at the mere mention of death, and most of them cross themselves at that name, as at the name of the devil. And because death is mentioned in wills, don't expect them to set about writing a will until the doctor has given them their final sentence; and then, between the pain and the fright, Lord knows with what fine judgment they will concoct it.

^BBecause this syllable struck their ears too harshly and seemed to them unlucky, the Romans learned to soften it or to spread it out into a periphrasis. Instead of saying "He is dead," they say "He has ceased to live," "He has lived." Provided it is life, even past life, they take comfort. We have borrowed from them our "late Mr. John."

^APerhaps it is true that, as the saying goes, the delay is worth the money. I was born between eleven o'clock and noon on the last day of February, 1533, as we reckon time now,² beginning the year in

¹ The French for *late* in this sense is *feu*, from Latin *fatutus*. Montaigne seems to think it comes from Latin *fu*t (*was*), Old French *feut*.

² In 1563 Charles IX set January 1 as the beginning of the year, and this decree took full effect in 1567. Until then the year had officially begun at Easter.

January. It was only just two weeks ago that I passed the age of thirty-nine years, and I need at least that many more; but to be bothered meanwhile by the thought of a thing so far off would be folly. After all, young and old leave life on the same terms. ^cNone goes out of it otherwise than as if he had just entered it. ^aAnd besides, there is no man so decrepit that as long as he sees Methuselah ahead of him, he does not think he has another twenty years left in his body. Furthermore, poor fool that you are, who has assured you the term of your life? You are building on the tales of doctors. Look rather at facts and experience. By the ordinary run of things, you have been living a long time now by extraordinary favor. You have passed the accustomed limits of life. And to prove this, count how many more of your acquaintances have died before your age than have attained it. And even for those who have glorified their lives by renown, make a list, and I'll wager I'll find more of them who died before thirty-five than after. It is completely reasonable and pious to take our example from the humanity of Jesus Christ himself; now he finished his life at thirty-three. The greatest man that was simply a man, Alexander, also died at that age.

How many ways has death to surprise us!

Man never can plan fully to avoid
What any hour may bring.

HORACE

I leave aside fevers and pleurisies. Who would ever have thought that a duke of Brittany would be stifled to death by a crowd, as that duke was at the entrance of Pope Clement, my neighbor,³ into Lyons? Haven't you seen one of our kings killed at play? And did not one of his ancestors die from the charge of a hog? Aeschylus, threatened with the fall of a house, takes every precaution – in vain: he gets himself killed by a sort of roof, the shell of a tortoise dropped by a flying eagle. Another dies from a grape seed; an emperor from the scratch of a comb, while combing his hair; Aemilius Lepidus through stumbling against his threshold, and Aufidius through bumping against the door of the council chamber on his way in; and between women's thighs, Cornelius Gallus the praetor, Tigillinus, captain of the watch at Rome, Ludovico, son of Guido de

³ Clement V (Bertrand de Got), Pope from 1305 to 1314, who transferred the papal seat to Avignon, had earlier been archbishop of Bordeaux and hence Montaigne's "neighbor."

Gonzaga, marquis of Mantua – and still worse, the Platonic philosopher Speusippus, and one of our Popes. Poor Bebius, a judge, in the act of granting a week's postponement to a litigant, has a seizure, his own term of living having expired; and Caius Julius, a doctor, is anointing the eyes of a patient, when along comes death and closes his. And, if I must bring myself into this, a brother of mine, Captain Saint-Martin, twenty-three years old, who had already given pretty good proof of his valor, while playing tennis was struck by a ball a little above the right ear, with no sign of contusion or wound. He did not sit down or rest, but five or six hours later he died of an apoplexy that this blow gave him. With such frequent and ordinary examples passing before our eyes, how can we possibly rid ourselves of the thought of death and of the idea that at every moment it is gripping us by the throat?

What does it matter, you will tell me, how it happens, provided we do not worry about it? I am of that opinion; and in whatever way we can put ourselves in shelter from blows, even under a calf's skin, I am not the man to shrink from it. For it is enough for me to spend my life comfortably; and the best game I can give myself I'll take, though it be as little glorious and exemplary as you like:

If but my faults could trick and please
My wits, I'd rather seem a fool at ease,
Than to be wise and rage.

HORACE

But it is folly to expect to get there that way. They go, they come, they trot, they dance – of death no news. All that is fine. But when it comes, either to them or to their wives, children, or friends, surprising them unprepared and defenseless, what torments, what cries, what frenzy, what despair overwhelms them! Did you ever see anything so dejected, so changed, so upset? We must provide for this earlier; and this brutish nonchalance, even if it could lodge in the head of a man of understanding – which I consider entirely impossible – sells us its wares too dear. If it were an enemy we could avoid, I would advise us to borrow the arms of cowardice. But since that cannot be, ^bsince it catches you just the same, whether you flee like a coward or act like a man –

^aAs surely it pursues the man that flees,
Nor does it spare the haunches slack
Of warless youth, or its timid back

HORACE

—^Band since no kind of armor protects you —

Hide as he will, cautious, in steel and brass,
Still death will drag his head outside at last

PROPERTIUS

—^Alet us learn to meet it steadfastly and to combat it. And to begin to strip it of its greatest advantage against us, let us take an entirely different way from the usual one. Let us rid it of its strangeness, come to know it, get used to it. Let us have nothing on our minds as often as death. At every moment let us picture it in our imagination in all its aspects. At the stumbling of a horse, the fall of a tile, the slightest pin prick, let us promptly chew on this: Well, what if it were death itself? And thereupon let us tense ourselves and make an effort. Amid feasting and gaiety let us ever keep in mind this refrain, the memory of our condition; and let us never allow ourselves to be so carried away by pleasure that we do not sometimes remember in how many ways this happiness of ours is a prey to death, and how death's clutches threaten it. Thus did the Egyptians, who, in the midst of their feasts and their greatest pleasures, had the skeleton of a dead man brought before them, to serve as a reminder to the guests.

Look on each day as if it were your last,
And each unlooked-for hour will seem a boon.

HORACE

It is uncertain where death awaits us; let us await it everywhere. Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom. He who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave. Knowing how to die frees us from all subjection and constraint. ^CThere is nothing evil in life for the man who has thoroughly grasped the fact that to be deprived of life is not an evil. ^AAemilius Paulus replied to the messenger sent by that miserable king of Macedon, his prisoner, to beg him not to lead him in his triumph: "Let him make that request of himself."

In truth, in all things, unless nature lends a hand, it is hard for art and industry to get very far. I am by nature not melancholy, but dreamy. Since my earliest days, there is nothing with which I have occupied my mind more than with images of death. Even in the most licentious season of my life,

^BWhen blooming youth enjoyed a gladsome spring,
CATULLUS

^Aamid ladies and games, someone would think me involved in digesting some jealousy by myself, or the uncertainty of some hope, while I was thinking about I don't remember whom, who had been overtaken a few days before by a hot fever and by death, on leaving a similar feast, his head full of idleness, love, and a good time, like myself; and thinking that the same chance was hanging from my ear:

^BAnd soon it will have been, past any man's recall.

LUCRETIUS

^AI did not wrinkle my forehead any more over that thought than any other. It is impossible that we should fail to feel the sting of such notions at first. But by handling them and going over them, in the long run we tame them beyond question. Otherwise for my part I should be in continual fright and frenzy; for never did a man so distrust his life, never did a man set less faith in his duration. Neither does health, which thus far I have enjoyed in great vigor and with little interruption, lengthen my hope of life, nor do illnesses shorten it. Every minute I seem to be slipping away from myself. ^CAnd I constantly sing myself this refrain: Whatever can be done another day can be done today. ^ATruly risks and dangers bring us little or no nearer our end; and if we think how many million accidents remain hanging over our heads, not to mention this one that seems to threaten us most, we shall conclude that lusty or feverish, on sea or in our houses, in battle or in rest, death is equally near us. ^C*No man is frailer than another, no man more certain of the morrow* [Seneca]. ^ATo finish what I have to do before I die, even if it were one hour's work, any leisure seems short to me.

Someone, looking through my tablets the other day, found a memorandum about something I wanted done after my death. I told him what was true, that although only a league away from my house, and hale and hearty, I had hastened to write it there, since I could not be certain of reaching home. ^CSince I am constantly brooding over my thoughts and settling them within me, I am at all times about as well prepared as I can be. And the coming of death will teach me nothing new.

^AWe must be always booted and ready to go, so far as it is in our power, and take especial care to have only ourselves to deal with then:

^BWhy aim so stoutly at so many things
In our short life?

HORACE

Posthumous
memoranda

Push

[^]For we shall have enough trouble without adding any. One man complains not so much of death as that it interrupts the course of a glorious victory; another, that he must move out before he has married off his daughter or supervised the education of his children; one laments losing the company of his wife, another of his son, as the principal comforts of his life.

[^]I am at this moment in such a condition, thank God, that I can move out when he chooses, without regret for anything at all, unless for life, if I find that the loss of it weighs on me. I unbind myself on all sides; my farewells are already half made to everyone except myself. Never did a man prepare to leave the world more utterly and completely, nor detach himself from it more universally, than I propose to do.

[^]"Wretch that I am," they say, "one all-destroying day
Takes every last reward of all my life away!"

LUCRETIUS

[^]And the builder says:

The works remain suspended,
And the high looming walls.

VIRGIL

We must not plan anything that takes so long, or at least not with the idea of flying into a passion if we cannot see it accomplished.

We are born to act:

When death comes, let it find me at my work.

OVID

AWC { I want a man to act, ^cand to prolong the functions of life as long as he can; [^]and I want death to find me planting my cabbages, but careless of death, and still more of my unfinished garden. I saw a man die who, in his last extremity, complained constantly that destiny was cutting short the history, on which he was at work, of the fifteenth or sixteenth of our kings.

[^]But this they fail to add: that after you expire
Not one of all these things will fill you with desire.

LUCRETIUS

[^]We must rid ourselves of these vulgar and harmful humors. Just as we plant our cemeteries next to churches, and in the most frequented parts of town, in order (says Lycurgus) to accustom

the common people, women and children, not to grow panicky at the sight of a dead man, and so that the constant sight of bones, tombs, and funeral processions should remind us of our condition -

[^]To feasts, it once was thought, slaughter lent added charms,
Mingling with foods the sight of combatants in arms,
And gladiators fell amid the cups, to pour
Onto the very tables their abundant gore

SILIUS ITALICUS

[^]and as the Egyptians, after their feasts, had a large image of death shown to the guests by a man who called out to them: "Drink and be merry, for when you are dead you will be like this"; [^]so I have formed the habit of having death continually present, not merely in my imagination, but in my mouth. And there is nothing that I investigate so eagerly as the death of men: what words, what look, what bearing they maintained at that time; nor is there a place in the histories that I note so attentively. ^cThis shows in the abundance of my illustrative examples; I have indeed a particular fondness for this subject. If I were a maker of books, I would make a register, with comments, of various deaths. He who would teach men to die would teach them to live. Dicaearchus made a book with such a title, but with a different and less useful purpose.

[^]People will tell me that the reality of death so far exceeds the image we form of it that, when a man is faced with it, even the most skillful fencing will do him no good. Let them talk; beyond question forethought is a great advantage. And then, is it nothing to go at least that far without disturbance and fever? What is more, Nature herself lends us her hand and gives us courage. If it is a quick and violent death, we have no leisure to fear it; if it is otherwise, I notice that in proportion as I sink into sickness, I naturally enter into a certain disdain for life. I find that I have much more trouble digesting this resolution to die when I am in health than when I have a fever. Inasmuch as I no longer cling so hard to the good things of life when I begin to lose the use and pleasure of them, I come to view death with much less frightened eyes. This makes me hope that the farther I get from life and the nearer to death, the more easily I shall accept the exchange. Even as I have experienced in many other occasions what Caesar says, that things often appear greater to us from a distance than near, so I have found that when I was healthy I had a much greater horror of sicknesses than when I felt them. The good spirits, pleasure, and strength I now

Book of death

enjoy make the other state appear to me so disproportionate to this one, that by imagination I magnify those inconveniences by half, and think of them as much heavier than I find they are when I have them on my shoulders. I hope I shall have the same experience with death.

^BLet us see how, in those ordinary changes and declines that we suffer, nature hides from us the sense of our loss and decay. What has an old man left of the vigor of his youth, and of his past life?

Alas! how scant a share of life the old have left!

MAXIMIANUS

^CCaesar, observing the decrepit appearance of a soldier of his guard, an exhausted and broken man, who came to him in the street to ask leave to kill himself, replied humorously: "So you think you're alive." "If we fell into such a change suddenly, I don't think we could endure it. But, when we are led by Nature's hand down a gentle and virtually imperceptible slope, bit by bit, one step at a time, she rolls us into this wretched state and makes us familiar with it; so that we feel no shock when youth dies within us, which in essence and in truth is a harder death than the complete death of a languishing life or the death of old age; inasmuch as the leap is not so cruel from a painful life to no life as from a sweet and flourishing life to a grievous and painful one.

^AThe body, when bent and bowed, has less strength to support a burden, and so has the soul; we must raise and straighten her against the assault of this adversary. For as it is impossible for the soul to be at rest while she fears death, so, if she can gain assurance against it, she can boast of a thing as it were beyond man's estate: that it is impossible for worry, torment, fear, or even the slightest displeasure to dwell in her:

^BThe fierce look of a tyrant brings no fright
To his firm mind, nor yet the south wind's might,
That drives the Adriatic on command,
Nor Jupiter's great thunder-hurling hand.

HORACE

^AShe is made mistress of her passions and lusts, mistress over indigence, shame, poverty, and all other wounds of fortune. Let us gain this advantage, those of us who can; this is the true and sovereign liberty, which enables us to thumb our noses at force and injustice and to laugh at prisons and chains:

"I'll keep you bound
Both hand and foot, in savage custody."
- "Whene'er I please, a god will set me free."
I think he meant: I'll die. For death is final.

HORACE

Our religion has no surer human foundation than contempt for life. Not only do the arguments of reason invite us to it; for why should we fear to lose a thing which once lost cannot be regretted? And since we are threatened by so many kinds of death, is there not more pain in fearing them all than in enduring one?⁴

"What does it matter when it comes, since it is inevitable? To the man who told Socrates, "The thirty tyrants have condemned you to death," he replied: "And nature, them."

What stupidity to torment ourselves about passing into exemption from all torment! As our birth brought us the birth of all things, so will our death bring us the death of all things. Wherefore it is as foolish to lament that we shall not be alive a hundred years from now as it is to lament that we were not alive a hundred years ago. Death is the origin of another life. Just so did we weep, just so did we struggle against entering this life, just so did we strip off our former veil when we entered it.

Nothing can be grievous that happens only once. Is it reasonable so long to fear a thing so short? Long life and short life are made all one by death. For there is no long or short for things that are no more. Aristotle says that there are little animals by the river Hypanis that live only a day. The one that dies at eight o'clock in the morning dies in its youth; the one that dies at five in the afternoon dies in its decrepitude. Which of us does not laugh to see this moment of duration considered in terms of happiness or unhappiness? The length or shortness of our duration, if we compare it with eternity, or yet with the duration of mountains, rivers, stars, trees, and even of some animals, is no less ridiculous.

^ABut Nature forces us to it.⁵ Go out of this world, she says, as you entered it. The same passage that you made from death to life,

⁴ Montaigne's argument is that not only reason but also nature urges us to accept death gracefully. The following three paragraphs, which interrupt his movement, are additions to the original version.

⁵ Nature's speech, which extends to "the last one reaches it" almost at the end of this chapter (p. 81), is largely a paraphrase of Seneca and Lucretius, and especially Lucretius.

without feeling or fright, make it again from life to death. Your death is a part of the order of the universe; it is a part of the life of the world.

^bOur lives we borrow from each other . . .
And men, like runners, pass along the torch of life.

LUCRETIUS

^aShall I change for you this beautiful contexture of things? Death is the condition of your creation, it is a part of you; you are fleeing from your own selves. This being of yours that you enjoy is equally divided between death and life. The first day of your birth leads you toward death as toward life:

The hour which gave us life led to its end.

SENECA

Even in birth we die; the end is there from the start.

MANILIUS

^cAll the time you live you steal from life; living is at life's expense. The constant work of your life is to build death. You are in death while you are in life; for you are after death when you are no longer in life. Or, if you prefer it this way, you are dead after life; but during life you are dying; and death affects the dying much more roughly than the dead, and more keenly and essentially.

^bIf you have made your profit of life, you have had your fill of it; go your way satisfied:

Why, like a well-filled guest, not leave the feast of life?

LUCRETIUS

If you have not known how to make good use of it, if it was useless to you, what do you care that you have lost it, what do you still want it for?

Why do you seek to add more years
Which too would pass but ill, and vanish unawares?

LUCRETIUS

^cLife is neither good nor evil in itself: it is the scene of good and evil according as you give them room.

^aAnd if you have lived a day, you have seen everything. One day is equal to all days. There is no other light, no other night. This sun, this moon, these stars, the way they are arranged, all is the very same your ancestors enjoyed and that will entertain your grandchildren:

^cYour ancestors beheld no other one, nor shall
Your nephews see another.

MANILIUS

^aAnd at worst, the distribution and variety of all the acts of my comedy runs its course in a year. If you have taken note of the revolution of my four seasons, they embrace the infancy, the youth, the manhood, and the old age of the world. It has played its part. It knows no other trick than to begin again. It will always be just this:

^bWe turn in the same circle, and never leave;

LUCRETIUS

And on itself the year revolves along its track.

VIRGIL

^aI am not minded to make you any other new pastimes:

I can contrive, to please you, nothing more;
All things remain as they have been before.

LUCRETIUS

Make room for others, as others have for you. ^cEquality is the principal part of equity. Who can complain of being included where all are included? ^aAnd so, live as long as you please, you will strike nothing off the time you will have to spend dead; it is no use; you shall be as long in that state which you fear as if you had died nursing:

So live victorious, live long as you will,
Eternal death shall be there waiting still.

LUCRETIUS

^bAnd furthermore, I shall put you in such a condition as will give you no cause for complaint:

Do you not know that when death comes, there'll be
No other you to mourn your memory,
And stand above you prostrate?

LUCRETIUS

Nor will you wish for the life you now lament so much:

Then none shall mourn their person or their life . . .
And all regret of self shall cease to be.

LUCRETIUS

Death is to be feared less than nothing, if there is anything less than nothing:

For us far less a thing must death be thought,
If ought there be that can be less than nought.

LUCRETIVS

^cIt does not concern you dead or alive: alive, because you are; dead, because you are no more.

^aNo one dies before his time. The time you leave behind was no more yours than that which passed before your birth, ^band it concerns you no more.

Look back and see how past eternities of time
Are nothing to us.

LUCRETIVS

^aWherever your life ends, it is all there. ^cThe advantage of living is not measured by length, but by use; some men have lived long, and lived little; attend to it while you are in it. It lies in your will, not in the number of years, for you to have lived enough. ^aDid you think you would never arrive where you never ceased going? ^cYet there is no road but has its end. ^aAnd if company can comfort you, does not the world keep pace with you?

^bAll things, their life being done, will follow you.

LUCRETIVS

^aDoes not everything move with your movement? Is there anything that does not grow old along with you? A thousand men, a thousand animals, and a thousand other creatures die at the very moment when you die:

^bNo night has ever followed day, no day the night,
That has not heard, amid the newborn infants' squalls,
The wild laments that go with death and funerals.

LUCRETIVS

^cWhy do you recoil, if you cannot draw back? You have seen enough men who were better off for dying, thereby avoiding great miseries. Have you found any man that was worse off? How simple-minded it is to condemn a thing that you have not experienced yourself or through anyone else. Why do you complain of me and of destiny? Do we wrong you? Is it for you to govern us, or us you? Though your age is not full-grown, your life is. A little man is

a whole man, just like a big one. Neither men nor their lives are measured by the ell.

Chiron refused immortality when informed of its conditions by the very god of time and duration, his father Saturn. Imagine honestly how much less bearable and more painful to man would be an everlasting life than the life I have given him. If you did not have death, you would curse me incessantly for having deprived you of it. I have deliberately mixed with it a little bitterness to keep you, seeing the convenience of it, from embracing it too greedily and intemperately. To lodge you in that moderate state that I ask of you, of neither fleeing life nor fleeing back from death, I have tempered both of them between sweetness and bitterness.

I taught Thales, the first of your sages, that life and death were matters of indifference; wherefore, to the man who asked him why then he did not die, he replied very wisely: "Because it is indifferent."

Water, earth, air, fire, and the other parts of this structure of mine are no more instruments of your life than instruments of your death. Why do you fear your last day? It contributes no more to your death than each of the others. The last step does not cause the fatigue, but reveals it. All days travel toward death, the last one reaches it.

^aSuch are the good counsels of our mother Nature. Now I have often pondered how it happens that in wars the face of death, whether we see it in ourselves or in others, seems to us incomparably less terrifying than in our houses – otherwise you would have an army of doctors and snivelers – and, since death is always the same, why nevertheless there is much more assurance against it among villagers and humble folk than among others. I truly think it is those dreadful faces and trappings with which we surround it, that frighten us more than death itself: an entirely new way of living; the cries of mothers, wives, and children; the visits of people dazed and benumbed by grief; the presence of a number of pale and weeping servants; a darkened room; lighted candles; our bedside besieged by doctors and preachers; in short, everything horror and fright around us. There we are already shrouded and buried. Children fear even their friends when they see them masked, and so do we ours. We must strip the mask from things as well as from persons; when it is off, we shall find beneath only that same death which a valet or a mere chambermaid passed through not long ago

without fear. Happy the death that leaves no leisure for preparing such ceremonies!

21

Of the power of the imagination

^AA strong imagination creates the event, say the scholars. I am one of those who are very much influenced by the imagination. ^CEveryone feels its impact, but some are overthrown by it. Its impression on me is piercing. And my art is to escape it, not to resist it. I would live solely in the presence of gay, healthy people. The sight of other people's anguish causes very real anguish to me, and my feelings have often usurped the feelings of others. A continual cougher irritates my lungs and throat. I visit less willingly the sick toward whom duty directs me than those toward whom I am less attentive and concerned. I catch the disease that I study, and lodge it in me. I do not find it strange that imagination brings fevers and death to those who give it a free hand and encourage it.

Simon Thomas was a great doctor in his time. I remember that one day, when he met me at the house of a rich old consumptive with whom he was discussing ways to cure his illness, he told him that one of these would be to give me occasion to enjoy his company; and that by fixing his eyes on the freshness of my face and his thoughts on the blitheness and overflowing vigor of my youth, and filling all his senses with my flourishing condition, he might improve his constitution. But he forgot to say that mine might get worse at the same time.

^AGallus Vibius strained his mind so hard to understand the essence and impulses of insanity that he dragged his judgment off its seat and never could get it back again; and he could boast of having become mad through wisdom. There are some who through fear anticipate the hand of the executioner. And one man who was being unbound to have his pardon read him dropped stone dead on the scaffold, struck down by his mere imagination. We drip with sweat, we tremble, we turn pale and turn red at the blows of our imagination; reclining in our feather beds we feel our bodies agitated by their impact, sometimes to the point of expiring. And boiling youth, fast asleep, grows so hot in the harness that in dreams it satisfies its amorous desires:

So that as though it were an actual affair,
They pour out mighty streams, and stain the clothes they wear.

LUCRETIVS

And although it is nothing new to see horns grow overnight on someone who did not have them when he went to bed, nevertheless what happened to Cippus, king of Italy, is memorable; having been in the daytime a very excited spectator at a bullfight and having all night in his dreams had horns on his head, he grew actual horns on his forehead by the power of his imagination. Passion gave the son of Croesus the voice that nature had refused him. And Antiochus took fever from the beauty of Stratonice too vividly imprinted in his soul. Pliny says he saw Lucius Cossitius changed from a woman into a man on his wedding day. Pontanus and others report similar metamorphoses as having happened in Italy in these later ages. And through his and his mother's vehement desire,

Iphis the man fulfilled vows made when he was a girl.

OVID

^BPassing through Vitry-le-François, I might have seen a man whom the bishop of Soissons had named Germain at confirmation, but whom all the inhabitants of that place had seen and known as a girl named Marie until the age of twenty-two. He was now heavily bearded, and old, and not married. Straining himself in some way in jumping, he says, his masculine organs came forth; and among the girls there a song is still current by which they warn each other not to take big strides for fear of becoming boys, like Marie Germain. It is not so great a marvel that this sort of accident is frequently met with. For if the imagination has power in such things, it is so continually and vigorously fixed on this subject that in order not to have to relapse so often into the same thought and sharpness of desire, it is better off if once and for all it incorporates this masculine member in girls.

^ASome attribute to the power of imagination the scars of King Dagobert and of Saint Francis. It is said that thereby bodies are sometimes removed from their places. And Celsus tells of a priest who used to fly with his soul into such ecstasy that his body would remain a long time without breath and without sensation. ^CSaint Augustine names another who whenever he heard lamentable and plaintive cries would suddenly go into a trance and get so carried

EVERYMAN,
I WILL GO WITH THEE,
AND BE THY GUIDE,
IN THY MOST NEED
TO GO BY THY SIDE

MICHEL DE
MONTAIGNE

THE
COMPLETE
WORKS

ESSAYS, TRAVEL JOURNAL, LETTERS

TRANSLATED BY DONALD M. FRAME

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY STUART HAMPSHIRE



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Those who have been well drubbed in some battle, and who are still all wounded and bloody – you can perfectly well bring them back to the charge the next day. But those who have conceived a healthy fear of the enemy – you would never get them to look him in the face. Those who are in pressing fear of losing their property, of being exiled, of being subjugated, live in constant anguish, losing even the capacity to drink, eat, and rest; whereas the poor, the exiles, and the slaves often live as joyfully as other men. And so many people who, unable to endure the pangs of fear, have hanged themselves, drowned themselves, or leaped to their death, have taught us well that fear is even more unwelcome and unbearable than death itself.

The Greeks recognize another kind of fear, which comes, they say, not from any failure of our reason, but without any apparent cause and by divine impulsion. Whole peoples are often seen to be seized by it, and whole armies. Such was the fear which brought incredible desolation upon Carthage. You heard nothing there but frightened cries and exclamations. You saw the inhabitants running out of their houses as at a call to arms, and charging, wounding, and killing each other, as if they were enemies coming to occupy their city. Everything there was in disorder and tumult, until, by prayers and sacrifices, they had appeased the anger of the gods. They call these panic terrors.

19

*That our happiness must not be judged
until after our death*

^No man should be called happy till his death;
Always we must await his final day,
Reserving judgment till he's laid away.

OVID

Children know the story of King Croesus in this connection, who, having been captured by Cyrus and condemned to death, on the point of execution cried out: "O Solon, Solon!" When this was reported to Cyrus, he inquired what it meant, and was given to understand that Croesus was now verifying at his own expense the warning that Solon once had given him: that men, however fortune may smile on them, cannot be called happy until they have been seen to spend the last day of their lives, because of the uncertainty and

variability of human affairs, which the slightest shift changes from one state to another entirely different.

And therefore Agesilaus said to someone who called the king of Persia happy because he had come very young to such a powerful estate: "Yes, but Priam at his age was not unhappy." Kings of Macedon, successors to the great Alexander, are made into carpenters and clerks at Rome; tyrants of Sicily, into schoolmasters at Corinth. A conqueror of half the world and emperor of many armies becomes a miserable suppliant before the good-for-nothing officers of a king of Egypt: so much did it cost the great Pompey to prolong his life five or six months. And in our fathers' time, Ludovico Sforza, tenth duke of Milan, whose will moved all Italy for so long, was seen to die a prisoner at Loches – and that only after living there ten years, which is the worst part of his bargain. °The fairest of queens,¹ widow of the greatest king in Christendom, has she not just died by the hand of an executioner? ^And there are a thousand such examples.

For it seems that, as storms and tempests are provoked to humble the pride and loftiness of our buildings, so there are spirits up above who are envious of grandeurs here below:

Such havoc on human things some hidden power wreaks,
Tramples the gleaming rods, fierce axes, all that speaks
Of human eminence, and laughs them all to scorn.

LUCRETIUS

And it seems that Fortune sometimes lies in wait precisely for the last day of our life, to show her power to overturn in a moment what she has built up over many years, and makes us cry out after Laberius: *Truly this day I have lived one day longer than I should have* [Macrobius].

In this sense Solon's good advice may reasonably be taken. But inasmuch as Solon is a philosopher, one of those to whom the favors and disfavors of fortune rank as neither happiness nor unhappiness, and grandeurs and powers are accidents of almost indifferent quality, I find it likely that he was looking further, and meant that this same happiness of our life, which depends on the tranquillity and contentment of a well-born spirit and the resolution and assurance of a well-ordered soul, should never be attributed to a man until he has been seen to play the last act of his comedy, and beyond doubt

1 Mary Stuart, widow of Francis II, decapitated on February 8, 1587.

last day of your life

play last act

prolong his life

S. Thero dety

the hardest. In everything else there may be sham: the fine reasonings of philosophy may be a mere pose in us; or else our trials, by not testing us to the quick, give us a chance to keep our face always composed. But in the last scene, between death and ourselves, there is no more pretending; we must talk plain French, we must show what there is that is good and clean at the bottom of the pot:

At last true words surge up from deep within our breast,
The mask is snatched away, reality is left.

LUCRETIUS

That is why all the other actions of our life must be tried and tested by this last act. It is the master day, the day that is judge of all the others. "It is the day," says one of the ancients [Seneca], "that must judge all my past years." I leave it to death to test the fruit of my studies. We shall see then whether my reasonings come from my mouth or from my heart.

¹I know of many who by their death gave their whole life a good or a bad reputation. Scipio, the father-in-law of Pompey, redressed, by dying well, the bad opinion that people had had of him until then. Epaminondas, asked which of the three he esteemed most, Chabrias or Iphicrates or himself, said: "You must see us die before you can decide." In truth you would rob a man of much if you weighed him without the honor and greatness of his end.

God has willed it as he pleased; but in my time three of the most execrable and most infamous persons I have known in every abomination of life have had deaths that were ordered and in every circumstance composed to perfection.

²There are gallant and fortunate deaths. I have seen death bring a wonderfully brilliant career, and that in its flower, to such a splendid end that in my opinion the dead man's ambitions and courageous designs had nothing so lofty about them as their interruption. He arrived where he aspired to without going there, more grandly and gloriously than he had desired or hoped. And by his fall he went beyond the power and the fame to which he had aspired by his career.

³In judging the life of another, I always observe how it ended; and one of my principal concerns about my own end is that it shall go well, that is to say quietly and insensibly.

20

That to philosophize is to learn to die

⁴Cicero says that to philosophize is nothing else but to prepare for death. This is because study and contemplation draw our soul out of us to some extent and keep it busy outside the body; which is a sort of apprenticeship and semblance of death. Or else it is because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world boils down finally to this point: to teach us not to be afraid to die. In truth, either reason is a mockery, or it must aim solely at our contentment, and the sum of its labors must tend to make us live well and at our ease, as Holy Scripture says. All the opinions in the world agree on this — ⁵that pleasure is our goal — ⁶though they choose different means to it. Otherwise they would be thrown out right away; for who would listen to a man who would set up our pain and discomfort as his goal?

⁷The dissensions of the philosophic sects in this matter are merely verbal. *Let us skip over such frivolous subtleties* [Seneca]. There is more stubbornness and wrangling than befits such a sacred profession. But whatever role man undertakes to play, he always plays his own at the same time. Whatever they say, in virtue itself the ultimate goal we aim at is voluptuousness. I like to beat their ears with that word, which so goes against their grain. And if it means a certain supreme pleasure and excessive contentment, this is due more to the assistance of virtue than to any other assistance. This voluptuousness, for being more lusty, sinewy, robust, and manly, is only the more seriously voluptuous. And we should have given virtue the name of pleasure, a name more favorable, sweet, and natural; not that of vigor, as we have named it. That other baser sort of voluptuousness, if it deserved that beautiful name, should have acquired it in competition, not as a privilege. I find it less free of inconveniences and obstacles than virtue. Besides the fact that its enjoyment is more momentary, watery, and weak, it has its vigils, its fasts, and its hardships, its sweat and blood; and, more particularly, its poignant sufferings of so many kinds, and an accompanying satiety so heavy that it is the equivalent of penance. We are very wrong to suppose that these disadvantages act as a spur and a spice to its sweetness, as in nature a thing is enlivened by its opposite, and to say, when we come to virtue, that similar consequences and difficulties oppress it, make it austere and inaccessible; whereas, much more than in the case of voluptuousness, they ennoble, whet,

how it ended