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Some Consolation from Philosophy: Materializing the Self in Montaigne's Essais

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Some Consolation from Experience:
Materializing the Self in Montaigne's *Essais*

by

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B.A., College of William and Mary, 2013

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Some Consolation from Experience: Materializing the Self in Montaigne's *Essais*
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Christopher Braider

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Some Consolation from Experience: Materializing the Self in Montaigne's *Essais*

Thesis directed by Professor Christopher Braider

Using Michel de Montaigne's paraphrasing and quotation of the Epicurean philosopher and poet Titus Lucretius, this essay explores the way that self-materialization, through the writing of text, provides its writer with a consolation for the inevitability of death and the end of material experience. This essay analyzes Montaigne's writing about death, the body, philosophy, and history in order to theorize Montaigne's conception of personhood as dynamic and changeable according to the eventfulness of experience.

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Some Consolation from Experience:
Materializing the Self in Montaigne's *Essais*

The *Essais*, Michel de Montaigne explains, are works written in solitude, in quiet moments, and sometimes even in moments of self-doubt. Some essays he addresses to others, such as the essay “De l'affection des peres aux enfants,” in which he explains the instances of his writing as moments of solitary melancholy, but mostly the essays are written for Montaigne himself. He states many purposes throughout the *Essais* for his writing—to explore his understanding of the human condition using himself as a case study, to explain himself personally, to record the changes in himself as he ages—but, each time he seeks to explain his motives, he changes from answering *why?* to answering *how?*. The acts of reading and writing—or, more accurately, scribbling—are more compelling to Montaigne than giving answers. These are actions which materialize the self. This process includes rendering a person's individual experiences and judgments, into writing and books, and, for Montaigne, this process of materialization is more comforting to his sense of melancholy than finding answers.

Montaigne presents his melancholy as a state which is alien to his natural levity: “C'est une humeur melancholique, et une humeur par consequent très ennemie de ma complexion naturelle, produite par le chagrin de la solitude, en laquelle il y a quelques années que je m'estoy jetté, qui m'a mis premierement en teste ceste resverie de me mesler d'escrire” (M 404¹) [“It was a melancholy humor, and consequently a humor very hostile to my natural disposition, produced by the gloom of the solitude into which I had cast myself some years ago, that first put into my

1 All references marked M cite the Pleiade edition of Montaigne's *Les Essais*:
Montaigne, Michel De. *Les Essais*. Ed. Jean Balsamo, M. Magnien, Catherine Magnien-Simonin, and Alain Legros. Paris: Gallimard, 2007.
All English translation of Montaigne cited, marked by the word Frame, are by Donald M. Frame:
Montaigne, Michel De. *The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters*. Trans. Donald M. Frame. New York: A.A. Knopf, 2003.
Translations of Lucretius occurring within a quotation of Montaigne are by Frame.
All unmarked translations are my own, including translations of direct citations of Lucretius.

head this daydream of meddling with writing” (Frame 337)]. As Montaigne presents himself as a daydreamer, it is the interruption of the reality of death which causes his melancholic thoughts. The inevitability of death presents itself to Montaigne in the examples of two different men, both important to Montaigne, his father Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne and his close friend Etienne de la Boétie. Montaigne inherits his father's disease of kidney stones and feels the cause of his father's death to be a time bomb inside the makeup of his own person. This concern, or even fear, is not something that Montaigne is comfortable with inside of himself, and he notes that he always manages to find humor and levity in the world in spite of it: “J'entre desjà en composition de ce vivre coliqueux : j'y trouve dequoy me consoler, et dequoy esperer. Tant les hommes sont accoquinez à leur estre miserable, qu'il n'est si rude condition qu'ils n'acceptent pour s'y conserver” (M 797) [“I am already growing reconciled to this colicky life; I find in it food for consolation and hope. So bewitched are men by their wretched existence, that there is no condition so harsh that they will not accept it to keep alive” (Frame 697)]. Montaigne reconciles that his life is terminable, whether from the disease of kidney stones or from old age, but he cannot help but to find cures for himself better founded, in his opinion, than medicine. One such cure is writing or materializing a version of his mentality along with bodily experiences, in order to allow these experiences to live beyond his death. Montaigne's definition of living, however, is important to note, for mere existence is not enough for a form to be considered living, it must have change and process; it must constantly be recreating itself.

Montaigne draws this consolation from a reading of *De Rerum Natura*, which depicts an atomic theory and poetic portrait of the natural order of the world, in which forces of life and death allow constant change in each of the materials that make up the world. As thoughts, readings, and interpretations materialize, they change, and after the passing of the event, in

which an individual has read them or has written them, that individual's self changes as well, through the experience of this reading and interpretation. The changes are constant, and just as the eventfulness of each moment gives the opportunity for new experiences, each reading of a text gives a new experience of reading. By recording and analyzing the change in himself as text, Montaigne is able to see the constant death of the present moment and present experience, thereby inoculating himself to the finality of death. Part of the ability to see this change lies in the ability to see himself as material, knowing that in the rules of nature all material things break down and die. The sense of materializing the self is for Montaigne a primarily textual matter. He prints himself but does not let his printed version rest with any sole authority to explain himself. Similarly, he treats other printed matter as if it were bits of the dead to be analyzed by and reinterpreted by the living present.

This essay seeks to draw out that aspect of material and personal change, which Montaigne derives and replaces into his own writing from his reading of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*. It will look particularly at Montaigne's writings on interpretation, the materiality of literature, reading, representations of the past versus the present, experience and materiality, the body, and death in order to present the ways that materialization through writing himself provides Montaigne with a consolation for the inevitability of his death, or, in other words, the end of his experience.

I. Writing as an Act of Interpreting the World

In “Apologie de Raimond Sebond” Montaigne draws upon a verse from *Romans* 1:20² to discuss the value of examining the architecture of creation as a manifestation of the invisible

² *Romans* 1:20: Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been seen through the things he has made.

being that is God. He discusses the world in its material form as a machine imprinted with the hand of its architect. This machine is comprised of the processes of nature, including most notably the life processes of man. These works bring into view an image of their creator. The use of image here evokes the senses and the creative ability to materialize, through sensory perception, those things which are mental or intellectual. All knowledge begins in sensory perception, becomes the experience of the mind, and then may be rematerialized as such an image:

Aussi n'est-il pas croyable que toute ceste machine n'ait quelques merques empreintes de la main de ce grand architecte, et qu'il n'y ait quelque image ès choses du monde rapportant aucunement à l'ouvrier, qui les a basties et formées. Il a laissé en ces hauts ouvrages le caractere de sa divinité, et ne tient qu'à nostre imbecillité, que nous ne le puissions descouvrir. C'est ce qu'il nous dit luy-mesme, que ses operations invisibles, il nous les manifeste par les visibles. (M 467)

[And it is not credible that this whole machine should not have on it some marks imprinted by the hand of this great architect, and that there should not be some picture in the things of this world that somewhat represents the workman who has built and formed them. He has left the stamp of his divinity on these lofty works, and it is only because of our imbecility that we cannot discover it. It is what he says himself, that his invisible operations he manifests to us by the visible. (Frame 395)]

The workings of the universe are in this case not only the material manifestation of the intellect of God, but they also provide an individual, who is in and among these processes, with a sign by which the individual may piece together some image, (“quelque image,”) of the intellect of god. It is important to note here that Montaigne does not aim at deriving from nature the definitive image of God but rather some image, since the very architecture of the nature which he describes holds within its coding and framework the transience and mutability accorded to mortality.

The reading of these natural signs is comparable to the reading of a book, and indeed that

is one of the conflicts that citing the Bible poses. The Bible is made up of two conflicting literary realities. The first is eternal, immaterial, and subject to laws of necessity, since the Bible is the wisdom book of the Christian manifestation of God. However, the second locates the Bible in the material world, which is subject to change and contingency, as a book of laws and history. Montaigne finds conflict in the clash between the eternal form and the historical, because, according to the Catholic doctrine, the laws of the Bible are not subject to change and process; however, according to Montaigne, change and process are the only rules which truly govern the nature of the mortal world. Yet the question of the world as a book whose workings are subject to interpretation does not begin or end with the bible. Montaigne's own *Essais* provide an attempt to represent the world as a book, using himself as the subject of inquiry, as a microcosm, though not definitively so, of the nature of man. Within his *Essais*, Montaigne inscribes a particular and personal resonance with the poetry of Titus Lucretius, whose own epic, *De Rerum Natura*, comprises the world as a book from an Epicurean perspective, guiding within its pages an inquiry into Epicurean ethics for man as an individual and as a part of nature.

The poetry of *De Rerum Natura*, in addition to being an explanation of the Epicurean philosophy, is an interpretation of the world, which divides powers of creation and dissolution into, at times anthropomorphic, forces of love and strife. Love, represented anthropomorphically by the Roman goddess Venus, is that force which binds together all things. Strife, represented by the Roman god Mars, is that which dissolves those bounds and brings death into the world. Montaigne draws on Lucretius's poetic image of the love affair between Venus and Mars in “*Sur des vers de Virgile*”:

Ce que Virgile dit de Venus et de Vulcan, Lucrece l'avoit dict plus
sortablement d'une jouissance desrobée, d'elle et de Mars :
belli fera moenera Mavors
Armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se

Rejicit, aeterno devinctus vulnere amoris :
 Pascit amore avidos inhians in te Dea visus,
 Eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore :
 Hunc tu Diva tuo recubantem corpore sancto
 Circunfusa super, suaveis ex ore loquelas
 Funde³.

Quand je rumine ce, *reicit*, *pascit*, *inhians*, *molli*, *fovet*, *medullas*, *labefacta*, *pendet*, *percurrit*, et cette noble, *circunfusa*, mere du gentil, *infusus*, j'ay desdain de ces menues pointes et allusions verballes, nasquirent depuis. À ces bonnes gens, il ne falloit pas d'aiguë et subtile rencontre : Leur langage est tout plein, et gros d'une vigueur naturelle et constante. Ils sont tout epigramme : non la queue seulement, mais la teste, l'estomach, et les pieds. (M 915)

[What Virgil says of Venus and Vulcan, Lucretius has said more appropriately of a stolen enjoyment between her and Mars:

He who riles the savage things
 Of war the mighty Mars, oft on thy bosom flings
 Himself; the eternal wound of love drain all his powers;
 Wide-mouthed, with greedy eyes thy person he devours,
 Head back, his very soul upon thy lips suspended:
 Take him in thy embrace, goddess, let him be blended
 With thy holy body as he lies; let sweet words pour
 Out of thy mouth.

When I ruminate that *reicit* (flings), *pascit* (devours), *inhians* (wide-mouthed), *molli* (soft), *fovet* (fondles), *medullas* (marrow), *labefacta* (trembling), *pendet* (suspended), *percurrit* (runs through), and that noble *circunfusa* (blended), mother of the pretty *infusus* (outpoured), I despise those petty conceits and verbal tricks that have sprung up since. These good people needed no sharp and subtle play on words; their language is full and copious with a natural and constant vigor. They are all epigram, not only the tail, but the head, stomach, and feet. (Frame 806-7)]

Montaigne's reading of this passage of Lucretius highlights upon the physicality of the language which describes the relationship between Venus and Mars. Love in this case is a natural phenomenon, indicating the binding together of atoms, but it is also a material phenomenon, such that the relationship between love and strife is intertwined at all levels, from the individual atoms, to the material bodies they make up, to the historical events which these bodies bring

3 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, I.32-34, 36-40.

about. Montaigne's attention to the words indicating one force being poured into another, such as his mentioning "circunfusa," "infusus," which he takes from an earlier Virgil quotation, and ending his quotation with "funde," shows in his reading of these forces a sense of change that denies the concept of death alone or of creation alone, because the two are essentially enwrapped. Montaigne further betrays an interest in the pouring together of love and death in "De L'experience," when he writes, "La morte se mesle et confonde par tout à nostre vie : le déclin præoccupe son heure, et s'ingere au cours de nostre avancement mesme" (M 1152) ["Death mingles and fuses with our life throughout. Decline anticipates death's hour and intrudes even into the course of our progress." (Frame 1031)]. The root of Montaigne's "confonde" here is the same as "circunfusus" (a participle of *circunfundare*, literally to pour around) or "infusus" (participle of *infundo*, literally to pour into). "Confonde," the word that Montaigne takes from this intermixing of love and strife, then means literally to pour together, such that at each moment of progress one is aging or declining, and, conversely, at each moment of decline one is progressing. The movement of the *Essais* themselves are not a linear decline or progression, especially in light of the anachronistic edits made to each of the *Essais*, so that more often Montaigne indicates this intermixture of death and life as change, thus not placing moralistic comment on any one state of his experience. In this process, death is as constant as creation, so that each moment new springs from the old, and, since that is the inevitable process of the natural world, no one single death or one single event is more significant than another, unless made to be so in individual interpretation.

Lucretius's ability to make these abstract forces material characters provides a key for the way in which Montaigne reads material processes of the world through the lens of mankind. In the abstract, the forces of love and strife are the same throughout history; however, in the event,

they are unique. Nor is it insignificant that the final alluring action that Venus takes in Montaigne's quotation is that of speech, thereby creating through verbalizing, just like the poets whom Montaigne quotes and Montaigne himself. With these two forces ruling the interactions of all life forms, the dominant mode of the world's function is a constant creation and recreation from material which does not end but is, instead, reformed. However, here in Lucretius, Montaigne sees that this change or refiguration of the atoms is like the interpretation and verbalization of event. This view of the world in which the same atoms make up different forms influences Montaigne's take on the historical person. In Montaigne's estimation, individuals from the past may be better than Montaigne's contemporaries; however, they are no different on the level of human nature. In the passage above, Montaigne criticizes the taste for verbal rhetoric in his contemporaries over what he considers to be strong poetic expression due to an overvaluation of philosophical abstractions. He describes Lucretius's verses as full-bodied. Rather than just being rhetoric, poetic lines flesh out the most human parts of the body's experience, so that the list of head, stomach, and feet are not only a list of top, middle, and bottom, but also a list of the body's ability for movement and process in the material world. The head perceives, while the stomach which governs biological living, the feet carry the body among the experienced world. The poetry which Montaigne describes in this way is a poetry which can convey the experience of living. As gods, Lucretius's Venus and Mars are materialized and therefore part of the eventful nature of the world, but they are also not subject to stagnant roles in historical interpretation, since their union symbolizes the very nature of change and material process.

De Rerum Natura seems in some respects a puzzling choice for the development of a philosophy which would console an individual about the inevitability of death. It is an atomic

system that renders death omnipresent, as a force which takes part in minor material changes, not to mention the major material dissolution. The choice of Lucretius is furthermore puzzling, because, while it seeks to teach man ethics of living and dying well, it does not glorify him above other animals as something which specifically ought to be preserved. Montaigne draws upon this discussion of the ability of animals to live and die as well, if not better than man in “Apologie de Raimond Sebond,” capping his discussion with the assertion that while animals exhibit just as much intelligence as men, they are not available to mankind for experiential understanding the same way that the human condition is available to mankind's experience. Similarly, *De Rerum Natura*, being a book of physics describing the natural world, puts man in his place of not being able to effect the greater order of the world, nor even do the Epicureans think that man can understand natural order, and, furthermore, what man cannot understand he should not worry about. To an Epicurean who believes in the system built by this philosophy, the idea of not bothering with what you cannot humanly understand would be a comfort, yet Montaigne draws upon the philosophy while willfully disregarding and, in the person of Epicurus himself, disparaging the system it builds. His response to the question of the architecture of the universe is similar to his response to the question of the intelligence of animals. Man may not know anything definitive about the nature of the universe, but man may know more about himself through the judgments he makes about the universe.

The key to why Lucretius works for Montaigne as the source of a method of thinking and examining the world is the experiential perception of knowledge. While Lucretius's Epicurean physics seeks to build a system, and while this system is dominated by imperceptibly small atoms, each of Lucretius's claims is backed by an experiential metaphor, which renders the natural philosophy into a human perception or experience which can be duplicated, but which

nevertheless remains unique in its event. The effect of the changing of atoms is evident to Montaigne, without him having to see the atoms themselves, because he is able to witness the larger changes they cause in the world. These include big historical events as well as the personal and individual changes which one sees in one's own personality. Montaigne tracks these changes by exploring the difference in himself and particularly in his body and its functions and reactions as he ages. In this way, Montaigne's use of Epicurus in his reading of the world does not have to do strictly with Epicurean physics but, rather, with the dynamic world of change and reorganization which Epicurean physics allows in its reading of the world.

The reading of the world in this way inculcates interpretations of the bigger processes of the world into the individual's understanding of himself. The sense of this narrowing of the universe into the individual interpretation is not lacking in Lucretius, for, after the discussion of nature, Epicurean ethics seeks to tell man how to live and die well in the midst of the natural order. Similarly, Montaigne writes:

Le ciel, la terre, les elemens, nostre corps et nostre ame, toutes choses y conspirent : il n'est que de trouver le moyen de s'en servir : elles nous instruisent, si nous sommes capables d'entendre. Car ce monde est un temple tressainct, dedans lequel l'homme est introduict, pour y contempler des statues, non ouvrées de mortelle main, mais celles que la divine pensée a faict sensibles : le Soleil, les estoilles, les eaux et la terre, pour nous représenter les intelligibles. (M 467-8)

[The sky, the earth, the elements, our body and our soul, all things conspire in this; we have only to find the way to use them. They instruct us, if we are capable of understanding. For this world is a very holy temple, into which man is introduced to contemplate statutes, not statues wrought by mortal hands, but those which the divine thought has made perceptible – the sun, the stars, the waters, and the earth – to present to us intelligible things. (Frame 395-6)]

Wrapping up examples of the body and the soul into the larger picture of nature with its sky and lands, Montaigne discusses that the natural world instructs and helps to inform an understanding

of man's experience. Furthermore, the natural world gives the individual material on which to think, to create understandings, and to form images of the immaterial. For Montaigne, all the gained understanding leads back to the self, as containing within it the same nature as forms all other events and experiences of the world. By writing the judgments created by experience, the immaterial of the self, he is able to make this too material. Through writing and materializing his experience of the world in this way, Montaigne's *Essais* are part of the process of recycling material through the constant dissolution and recreation which characterizes change. In this way, change is not only in the immaterial self, nor does it only come at the final death of the individual, but, rather, it is a constant force in the world: “Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne : Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse, la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d'Ægypte : Et du branle public, et du leur. La constance mesme, n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant” (M 844-5) [“The world is but a perennial movement. All things in it are in constant motion – the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt – both with the common motion and with their own. Stability itself is nothing but a more languid motion” (Frame 740)]. Even seemingly stable forms are in the fluctuations of constant change due to the eventfulness of the material world and the contingencies which build into these events. Montaigne, by writing about this change, adds to it another layer which is the layer of judgment. By writing his judgments and thus materializing them, the writings themselves enter the discourse of constant change, so that the changing world is not only the material of nature but also the material of text or the materialized judgments of natural experience which Montaigne draws upon in the process of writing the *Essais*.

II. Lucretius and the Atoms of the Written

In regard to the question of interpretations, Montaigne explains that the true number of the variety of possible events is impossible to entirely conceive of, not only because those events change from moment to moment, but also because the varieties are infinite, based on chance rather than pattern. In a discussion of dissimilitude, he references “tous les mondes d'Epicurus” (M 1112) [“all the worlds of Epicurus” (Frame 993)] as an infinite quantity. He then explains the infinity of the possibility of experience, saying, “La multiplication de nos inventions, n'arrivera pas à la variation des exemples” (M 1112) [“Multiplication of our imaginary cases will never equal the variety of real examples” (Frame 993)]. The world that Montaigne describes here he derives from the changing of atoms from one material event to another. His conversation about these variations continues to the point that he openly discusses textual interpretation: “Il y a plus affaire à interpreter les interpretations, qu'à interpreter les choses : et plus de livres sur les livres, que sur autre subject : Nous ne faisons que nous entregloser. Tout fourmille de commentaires : d'auteurs, il en est grand cherté” (M 1115) [“It is more of a job to interpret the interpretations than to interpret the things, and there are more books about books than about any other subject: we do nothing but write glosses about each other. The world is swarming with commentaries; of authors there is a great scarcity” (Frame 996)]. Variation therefore is not only part of the experience of the mental world, but it also locates an experiential process in the act of reading. This aspect of written literature as material for interpretation not only denies an authoritative meaning, but it also allows the comparison between verbal structures and Epicurean atoms. Montaigne draws this comparison while discussing the fragmentation of original text into experiential interpretations: “D'un subject nous en faisons mille : et retombons en multipliant et subdivisant, à l'infinité des atomes d'Epicurus” (M 1114) [“of one subject we make a thousand,

and, multiplying and subdividing, fall back into Epicurus' infinity of atoms" (Frame 995)].

Montaigne notes here that the infinity of the Epicurean atoms is something that one is liable to fall into, implying the problem of losing the ability to have any knowledge because of the infinite variation of knowledge. However, his answer remains the same, that the knowledge of experience leads a person through life better than speculation. Experience bases itself off of previous material and builds from it, making new forms from the old.

The form of the old, in this case, from which Montaigne draws is the text of *De Rerum Natura*, in which the application of written literature to Lucretian atomic theory is founded.

Lucretius's theory of atoms reflects on the materials of its own text, when it compares the atoms in their abilities of building and creation to words:

quin etiam passim nostris in versibus ipsis
 multa elementa vides multis communia verbis,
 cum tamen inter se versus ac verba necessest
 confiteare et re et sonitu distare sonanti:
 tantum elementa queunt permutato ordine solo.
 (Lucretius 1.823-27)

[In fact, scattered everywhere about these very verses of mine, you see many elements common to many words. Still, though, it is necessary to concede that versus and words differ among themselves both in meaning [lit. thing, i.e. meaning in a material sense] and in their surrounding [echoing] sound. Elements are capable of so much through only changing the order.]

Here Lucretius admits that, just as the material formed by atoms is beholden to its echoes and surroundings, the surroundings themselves change the resonance of the original sound of a word.

The surroundings, in the case of the word, are not only the text in which the word is embedded, but also the individual who receives it and passes judgment upon it. The atom, like the text, is only the starting point from which refiguration and interpretation begin, and the interpretation which comes from it then becomes the starting point for a new interpretation. The old form

dissolves, and the new form is made from its material. Thus, just as the event of each moment ends and makes the material for creating the new moment, old interpretations become untenable as new interpretations are born from them. The text itself is inert material from which new interpretations spring. This process brings the awareness of death into the text, as both the physical text and the uttered word represent a passed event. However, there is consolation in a dead text, or a text which portrays past event rather than present passage, because in order for a new material to be made, the atoms of a prior material must break apart. In the same way the old text leads into new creations.

After establishing that nothing can be made “de nihilo” from nothing, Lucretius explains that once something is made by the atoms, it holds together until the point that some force dissolves it. Montaigne refers to this cycle of death and rebirth as change. Discrediting the “de nihilo” argument is crucial, not only to Lucretius's philosophy, but also to Montaigne's usage of it, because this denial that anything may be made from nothing justifies the necessity death as a recycler of atoms and a necessary measure of creation. Lucretius assures that upon a change, atoms do not become nothing, which would render them impotent, but instead return to materialize another thing:

at nunc, inter se quia nexus principiorum
dissimiles constant aeternaque materies est,
incolumi remanent res corpore, dum satis acris
vis obeat pro textura cuiusque reperta.
haud igitur redit ad nihilum res ulla, sed omnes
discidio redeunt in corpora materiai. (Lucretius I.244-9)

[For sure, though, because the bonds of the first-beginnings form differently amongst each other, and because matter is eternal, the objects remain unharmed in structure [lit. in body], until a force, discovered to be sharp enough, meets against the texture of each. Thus by no means does anything return to nothing, but all things, upon dissolution, return into the bodies of material.]

Montaigne makes a comment of this passage in his annotations, writing simply: “matiere aeternelle” (Screech 212) [eternal material]. Similarly, after a description of the animal and vegetal world which fruits from the dissolution of the atoms of other prior forms, Lucretius writes “haud igitur penitus pereunt quaecumque videntur, / quando alit ex alio reficit Natura nec ullam / rem gigni patitur, nisi morte adiuta aliena” (Lucretius I.262-4) [Thus by no means does anything that exists perish entirely, since Nature rebuilds one thing from another, nor does she allow that anything be born, if not aided by another's death]. In his copy, Montaigne completely underlines this last line, and on these lines, Montaigne makes the comment, “conclusion que rien / ne meurt tout se / change” (Screech 212-3) [conclusion that nothing dies, everything changes]. In this way, the natural language of birth and death used by Lucretius to illustrate creation and dissolution in the world, becomes through Montaigne's own words abstracted into constant change. Whereas in Lucretius, one thing must necessarily die for another thing to be born, for Montaigne nothing dies, but one form undergoes an abstract reformation into another without losing atoms and therefore without death. In the world of physical nature, Montaigne would be wrong, but the material world in which Montaigne labors is not the bucolic sphere of natural cycles; it is the textual sphere of literary interpretation and mutation. The exempla that Montaigne studies and presents are verbal representations, and this rings true with Montaigne's most important exemplum, his own experiences which he renders verbally and textually into the *Essais*. Montaigne makes this admission himself saying: “Je m'estudie plus qu'autre subject : C'est ma metaphysique, c'est ma physique” (M 1119) [I study myself more than any other subject. That is my metaphysics, that is my physics (Frame 1000)]. The material and materialized self is the subject of Montaigne's investigations of nature, and these remain, at least within the limited representation of the *Essais*, verbal and literary. The written word can change

without dying, it is perpetual material.

Lucretius's natural world does not work without death, but Montaigne is not drawing upon *De Rerum Natura*, because of its didactic or scientific quality. He draws upon Lucretius because it offers the great alternative of possibility, offering validation to the material world, to its pain and process, and the subsequent creation which comes from the inevitable death of these things. Lucretius's paradigms of life and death, once Montaigne applies them to the text and its permutations of interpretation, allows for ceaseless change and possibilities so complex in their combinations of eventualities that they are practically untraceable and unpredictable.

Montaigne's attention to the eternal nature of matter and its ability to make new objects and new forms even after death speaks to a desire for further experience and further dissemination even after death puts a stop to his material experience. Through the materialization of text, death is not the end of experience, because the seeds remain to be drawn upon by others for new experiences.

In the flyleaf his copy of Lucretius, Montaigne identifies himself by the letters of his name as if they were an atomic formula: “Ut sunt diversi atomorum motus non incredibile est sic convenisse olim atomos aut conventuras ut alius nascatur montanus” [Since the movements of the atoms are so varied, it is not unbelievable that the atoms once came together, or will come together again in the future, so that another Montaigne be born” (Screech *Montaigne's Annotated Lucretius* 134)]. Montaigne here recognizes both that the events which brought about his existence were chance, and following the same rules, there is the chance of an event which would rematerialize someone who resembles himself. Resemblance here is key, because even as chance would have it that the same atoms would materialize Montaigne again, this duplicate would be dissimilar, since the events of his life would be different. Montaigne's is only an

interpretation of Lucretius, but so is Lambin's commentary with which Montaigne engages. Gerard Passannante writes that even Montaigne's manipulation of his own name here is an imitation of the writer's signature: "That Montaigne is playing with Lambin's name in the commentary when he writes his own is typical ... of a deeper engagement—an attentiveness not only to the text of the poem, but to the commentator reading it" (Passannante 106). The suggestion here is that Montaigne's attachment to Lucretius is not merely to his poetry, but also to Montaigne's own material book of *De Rerum Natura*, in which he reads the poetry, and its commenter through whom the words are already filtered. Passannante claims that Montaigne intends to be reborn because of the writing of his name. However, Montaigne already has a complex understanding of the name as having an often incidental and material relationship to the self. In this case the reforming of the atoms of "montanus" may be more literary than spiritual, as Passannante suggests. "Montanus" may refigure through words or interpretation alone. After all, as he says this, Montaigne is dealing with a text copy of Lucretius's book, all its letters or literary atoms more or less intact.

While it would be a strong consolation for Montaigne to imagine a rebirth, the eventfulness of experience makes rebirth impossible. Regarding the relationship between a name and its referent, Montaigne writes, "Il y a le nom et la chose : le nom, c'est un voix qui remerque et signifie la chose : le nom, ce n'est pas une partie de la chose, ny de la substance : c'est une piece estrangere jointe à la chose, et hors d'elle" (M 655) ["There is the name and the thing. The name is a sound which designates the thing; the name is not a part of the thing or of the substance, it is an extraneous piece attached to the thing, and outside of it" (Frame 568)]. While the name is part of the experience of the self, it is only that through experience. The name has no claim to a naturalist essence of the individual in question, and when coincidences

make names significant they are only part of the events of the world. For example, Montaigne refers to his kidney disease frequently as “pierres” as well as “colique,” the stones being the material manifestation of the colic. Furthermore, in reference to how he inherited the condition from his father, Pierre, he discusses the “pierres” inside of him. One would wonder whether the name then for him would gain more significance than it ought, or conversely, whether the disease may seem to be some hereditary ghost of the father whispering its memento mori, each time Montaigne sat in his solitude to write about his experiences and found one of those experiences to be a kidney stone. Then Montaigne might feel himself to be a new figure of his father; the middle name, Montaigne inherited into his own name, the first name became materialized inside his bladder. Whatever the case, Montaigne does not recognize the name to be anything more than the material symbol of the person in question, nor does his own name carry any of his experience.

In his philological study of the word “figura,” Auerbach comments on Lucretius's leap from material forms to verbal forms:

He begins with the general concept of 'figure,' which can be found in all variations—from the actively three-dimensional (*manibus tractata figura* [a shape handled by hand], 4.230) to the purely geometrical outline (2.778, 4.503). He also takes the concept as it applied to the three-dimensional and visible sphere and uses it to refer to the acoustic realm, as when he writes of the *figura verborum* [the shape of words] (4.556). (Auerbach “Figura” 69)

This linkage of material and verbal is key for the allowance of a book both of the cosmic makeup of nature and also of the processes of man's experiences. Furthermore, Auerbach demonstrates that Lucretius uses the term “figura” for the complex relationship between an original and its copy. Auerbach argues that Lucretius makes this connection through the metaphor of the genetic connection between parent and child. Similar to the question of copy and original is the question

of experience, the thoughts which process experience, material experience and interpretative experience, and sequentially the verbal forms which then render and rematerialize these thoughts and experiences. As noted above, Montaigne's use of "quelque image" to describe an understanding or interpretation of the world allows the sense of an image which is singular or personal to the individual who holds it. The physical sensory experience itself, along with the mental processing, which for Montaigne are judgments of the soul, create an interpretive duplicate of the experience. Generally this distinction between the original experience and its mental duplicate would prove the copy false or erroneous. This falsity is especially complicated by the problem that the experience exists in time and is irretrievable as an experience, except through memory or a mental impression of it. Furthermore, the question of the memory as a stand-in for the original experience creates a similar problem, because rehashing the memory creates a new experience of it, contemporary to the act of recalling it. The nature of experience itself destroys the chance for a definitive reading of that experience. Auerbach writes that Lucretius uses the word "figura" for both the parent and the child, the original and the duplicate, eradicating the question of which is the original. Both are, in their way, a new or different figure, such that one is not true and the other an interpretation, but rather, a new original forms from the experience of the prior. Change and variation then is not limited in Lucretius to the working of atoms but to all levels of material existence. Thus an interpretation of a whole text comprises a refiguring of the material correlative to the changes which happen to a person from one moment to another, as well as the changes which happen in the material world.

III. Montaigne as a Reader

In his discussion, Montaigne argues against putting man in a privileged place in the natural order, arguing in “Apologie de Raimond Sebond” for the intellectual capacities of animals; nevertheless his own discussion focuses on man as the best exemplum for an examination of natural processes. This is because man and man's experiences are the only things that a man, such as Montaigne, can know for sure. Taking this skepticism a step further, Montaigne claims that his own self is the only thing that he can know for sure, and such knowledge he bases on experience.

Experience here is something rendered through the senses, mediating the divide between sensation and reasoning. One's experience of something is different from another's, because experience constantly happens on the basis of an unique combination of contingent factors. Among the more complex of these contingent factors is the way that an individual interprets events as they happen. The interpretation which is contemporary to the event itself is intrinsic to the experience, and not only has to do with individual idiosyncrasies of sensory perception, but also the mind's individual way of processing sensory information. Experience integrates sensation with thought and opinion, such that Montaigne experiences even intellectual endeavors by calling to mind not only his intellectual impressions of them, in the form of opinions and thoughts, but also the physical sensations comparable to the act of reading the work. At times this might also include physical sensations felt during the act of reading. Montaigne suggests this, when he says, “Les difficultez, si j'en rencontre en lisant, je n'en ronge pas mes ongles” (M 429) [“If I encounter difficulties in reading, I do not gnaw my nails over them” (Frame 361)]. In this case, Montaigne writes as if it were natural that direct physical reactions would accompany the act of reading, were the difficulty of the reading to make him feel anxious. From this, it is

possible to extrapolate that elsewhere, when Montaigne uses physical reactions to describe a passage of reading, these may have been physical sensations similarly experienced at some point during the act of reading.

Thus, For Montaigne, man is the only subject inquiry into an image of the world, because of his awareness that he too is made of the natural processes of the world, and as the manifestation of this will is material, man cannot know anything beyond the perception of his material senses. Therefore, Montaigne searches among that material which is most knowable to him, himself, his memories, reactions, readings, bodily processes, conceptualization of his bodily process, and his thoughts. Any exempla that Montaigne uses in his own writing from his reading do not tell him about other people of the world, but rather about himself, based on the way that he reads these examples.

Thoughts, opinions, and even the process of rendering material, empirical knowledge into verbal representation by means of memory, all call into question the written form of self-exploration. Just as the material world is the only world trusted to manifest and render to human experience “quelque image” of the world, Montaigne seeks to manifest the inner processes of his individual person as it resonates with these experiences through the written word, such that the *Essais*, more than thought represent an attempt to materialize the immateriality of thought and the mental processing of experience. Among the interpretations of Montaigne's own person that arise in the process of exploring and materializing his mentality, is the problem of self-contradiction which leads to change over time of one's personal opinions and conceptions without direct cause, since the cause would be an infinite constellation of contingencies. These changes occur individually and are most evident in the question of personal interpretation, which cannot make a one-to-one correlation between an individual's reading of the world and the world

as it is, since there is no definitive reading.

For example, in “Des Livres,” Montaigne describes a change in his opinion of Ovid, the cause of which has nothing to do with the text of Ovid itself, but rather Montaigne's changed reading of Ovid: “Je diray encore cecy, ou hardiment, ou temerairement, que ceste vieille ame pesante, ne se laisse plus chatouiller ... au bon Ovide : sa facilité, et ses inventions, qui m'ont ravi autrefois, à peine m'entretiennent elles à ceste heure” (M 430) [I will also say this, whether boldly or rashly, that this heavy old soul of mine no longer lets itself be tickled ... by the good Ovid: his facility and inventions, which once enchanted me, hardly entertain me at all now” (Frame 361)]. The question of whether or not one is tickled by reading Ovid, is here admittedly subjective, and material sensation implied by the word tickled allows the act of reading to bring about the sense perceptions of an individual experience. In this case, Montaigne does not seek to say that Ovid is definitively a young man's text, so much as a text which he, in his own experience, enjoyed more when he was younger.

This question of the experience of reading, and, moreover, the way in which the reader interacts sensually with the written word, and particularly written poetry in these cases, becomes emphasized when Montaigne speaks about the written eloquence of Lucretius and Vergil as they describe Venus. He discusses the language itself and its lack of concealing rhetoric, saying, “Elle est nerveuse et solide, qui ne plaist pas tant, comme elle remplit et ravit : et ravit le plus, le plus forts esprits. Quand je voy ces braves formes de s'expliquer, si vifves, si profondes, je ne dis pas que c'est bien dire, je dis que c'est bien penser. C'est la gaillardise de l'imagination, qui esleve et enfle les paroles” (M 916) [It is sinewy and solid, and does not so much please as fill and ravish; and it ravishes the strongest minds most. When I see these brave forms of expression, so alive, so profound, I do not say 'That is well said,' I say, 'That is well thought.' It is the sprightliness of

the imagination that elevates and swells the words” (Frame 807)]. Recollection here of the imaginary and the physical, not to mention in this case contextually sexual, sense of the word ravages creates a written and intellectual version of the the physical process described⁴.

According to Montaigne, the written and intellectual versions are not duplicates, as the imagination, and in this case it is a joyful one, indicating, already, a particular and individual reading, gives life to the words; nevertheless in proper poetry, unencumbered by flowery rhetoric, Montaigne says that he finds himself celebrating the author's thoughts, rather than his words. Furthermore, Montaigne describes the words as living and thus capable of reproducing themselves in the imagination of the reader. This connection between the physical response to the intellectual act of reading indicates the process of reading as an experience. The reading of poetry as an experience does not allow the individual poem to produce a definitive image of its own world, but rather it affects the reader's image in a way that, in Montaigne's estimation, is liable to call it into question and therefore to change it.

Rather than seeking poetic resonances from historical forms, roles, reputations, or rhetoric, Montaigne states plainly that he seeks only a writer's judgments, those things which best connect their written language to their thoughts: “Car j'ay un singuliere curiosité ... de connoistre l'ame et les naïfs jugemens de mes auteurs. Il faut bien juger leur suffisance, mais non pas leurs mœurs, ny eux, pas ceste monstre de leurs escrits, qu'ils étalent au theatre du monde” (M 435) [“For I have a singular curiosity ... to know the soul and the natural judgments

4 In “Apologie de Raimond Sebond” Montaigne discusses body language as being among the signs which prove that humans are not above animals in intellect or cosmic order, because much of our communication uses the body, just as animals do: “Il n'est mouvement qui ne parle et un langage intelligible sans discipline et un langage public : Qui fait, voyant la variété et usage distingué des autres, que cetui-ci doit plutôt être jugé le propre de l'humaine nature” (II.xii.181). The physical sensations which Montaigne accords to reading and the imagination, while they indicate an individual experience of the text, are part of the language of human nature according to the ways in which humans use their bodies in social ways, and therefore, these physical reactions to the written word are a communicative language, more so, in Montaigne's estimation, than theoretical or abstract language which does not bring into human experience the sensations of the body.

of my authors. We must indeed judge their capacity, but not their character nor themselves, by that display of their writings that they expose to the stage of the world” (Frame 366)]. Just as man's only avenue of knowledge is through his own experience of things, an individual cannot know more of a writer whose works they have read than that individual's own interpretation of those works. The writer as a person is dead, but their works live on, changing as they do. This is perhaps the reason Montaigne reports that he is less entertained by Ovid's word play and witticisms, for each of Ovid's works boast in reference back to the living poet and his living reputation, while his poetry itself only speaks to his own life in coded terms, all of which would confuse a reading of Ovid's judgments. Montaigne's readings of many different sources bring about images or readings of natural processes which call each other into question by means of conflicting judgments. The allowance of conflicting judgments in one's reading, the pairing of pagan writers with Christian writers, for example, and republicans with imperialists, serves as a reminder that the world has been in many cases read different ways. Each of these readings vie for their own claim to a definitive reading to the world, but Montaigne is unconcerned with what they define, so much as the particular way in which they relate their own human thoughts and judgments of the world, as he seeks to do in his own work.

IV. Distrust of Stagnation in History and Philosophy

Montaigne's skepticism of philosophy finds philosophy's biggest contradiction to be the distinction between the experience of the individual who lives a philosophy, and the tenets of the philosophy itself. Laboring under the assumption that no single philosophy can build an ordered system which would be able to categorize the infinite variety of experience, Montaigne uses philosophic exempla merely to construct points of a stagnant past, whose structures do not

convey the experiences he seeks to provide in writing his own passage. This essay draws on the way Montaigne's taste fluctuates between the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies, without ascribing to either school entirely. While Montaigne's stoic leaning is primarily traceable in his earlier writing, and his Epicurean leaning is primarily found as the insertions of his later writing, Montaigne finds both to be valuable in personal process and writing in general, for he does not excise the stoic sentiments even where he adds in an Epicurean ode to pleasure. Nor is Montaigne's usage of these two philosophies purely classical, for part of his understanding of stoicism comes from his neo-stoic contemporaries, and similarly, Montaigne himself updates Epicureanism to fit his ideal sense of experience. The outcomes of this which can be found in the *Essais* are representation of the two philosophies which have their own diachronic process and rebirth through interpretation. To this extent, Montaigne rewords the philosophies when he uses them, and interrogates their past representation. This reinterpretation allows Montaigne to use Epicureanism, the philosophy which he eventually draws upon more, to lead himself away from the fear of death toward the pleasure seeking inconclusively with which he characterizes his later life, without him having to subscribe to brittle philosophical systems.

For instance, Montaigne is skeptical of Epicureanism and the direct influence of Epicurus himself. While Epicureanism aims at pleasure, which Montaigne discovers to be his own aim as well, the search for pleasure within this philosophical school is strategic and still seeks to regulate the conduct of men in a systematic function. The Epicureans, while they embrace the material world, allow the goal of ataraxia to mediate and redirect them from experience into patterns. Among these patterns influenced by the tenet of ataraxia is the idea of concealing oneself, because revealing would engage one too much in the world of fears and other customs. Lyons argues that in the essay "De Gloire" Montaigne uses the example of Epicurus to negotiate

the hypocrisy between concealing oneself and revealing that oneself is concealed:

In “Of glory” (II.16), Epicurus's motto, Conceal Your Life, appears ironically not far from an example of how Epicurus staged his death. Dictating a letter shortly before dying, the philosopher permits his disciples to see his pleasure, supposedly internal, at the memory of the discoveries he made in philosophy during his life. Montaigne comments, however, that this pleasure concerned not only the memory that Epicurus had of his discoveries but the memory he hoped to leave among other philosophers. . . . Montaigne is surely right in seeing a contradiction between the doctrine of concealment and the availability of evidence of such a concealment in the example itself. (Lyons 133).

The distaste that Lyons exposes in Montaigne's discussion of Epicurus is similar to Montaigne's distaste for historical roles. Epicurus sets himself up as an example rather than an experience of Epicurean life. Montaigne's distrust of the systems built by the Epicurean philosophy does not extend to the experiences witnessed and assessed by the same philosophy as they are put forth in *De Rerum Natura*. That is to say, Lucretius is not Epicurus. Whereas Epicurus was deified by his followers, including Lucretius, Lucretius himself remains an unknown quantity, whose only history is to be found in the libel of St. Jerome. The distinction between the name of Lucretius the writer and Lucretius the man, or more abstractly between the text and the historical role played by its author, is in this case obscured. This allows Lucretius to be all material, or all text, as there is nothing of him left but the text of *De Rerum Natura*. The poetry of this text, furthermore, speaks to experience rather than dogma, through the usage of epic simile and natural explanation. Thus it is a record of the experience of reading the world according to a philosophy, rather than a record of that philosophy itself.

The question of creating a stagnant portrait through an example and a codified, systematic reading, versus materializing the changing self through experience, also arises in Montaigne in terms of verbally painting an image of the self or a portrait. Lyons explains that “There is a

strong link between exemplarity and the ontology of the 'image,' as Montaigne uses the term. Montaigne describes a textualized culture, in which there is an almost universal collaboration in producing consumable units of behavior in the form of examples of various qualities. ... It seems that historical figures often manipulate appearances to become examples” (135). This manipulation on the part of the one who is self-representing creates an image of the dominant representation of the individual, which forms the lesson of their example. This is the same suspicion which Auerbach locates in Montaigne's treatment of historians: “He feels that they present human beings too exclusively in extraordinary and heroic situations and that they are only too ready to give fixed and consistent portraits of character” (Auerbach *Mimesis* 302). Montaigne locates this trap of creating a stagnant figure out of what was once a human being in the treatment of Epicurus, who was, according to his own philosophy even, someone who should recognize the realities of constant change.

Montaigne draws upon the way that posturing for one's death is akin to attempting to write one's finalized version of history, by which all previous actions in life may be judged:

En tout le reste il y peut avoir du masque :Ou ces beaux discours de la Philosophe ne sont en nous que par contenance, ou les accidents ne nous essayant pas jusques au vif, nous donnent loisir de maintenir tousjours nostre visage rassis. Mais à ce dernier rolle de la mort et de nous, il n'y a plus que faindre, il faut parler François ; il faut montrer ce qu'il y a de bon et de net dans le fond du pot,
 Nam verae voces tum demum pectore ab imo
 Ejiciuntur, et eripitur persona, manet res⁵. (M 81)

[In everything else there may be sham: the fine reasonings of philosophy may be a mere pose in us; or else our trial, 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,

5 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* III.57-58.

The mask is snatched away, reality [material] remains. (Frame 66)]

Drawing upon masking and the posturing of an individual's countenance, those things which cover the face, in which one's role in life is lived, Montaigne's distrust for the way that individuals present themselves here relates to the opportunity that individuals have to mediate their actions and their personalities, through a systematic philosophy which would render the disparate and changing human person into a coherent mask and posture. The posturing ends at death when the individual must realize that they were always material. The singularity of a philosophic system or of a representational image of their personality is not sufficient for explaining the complex relationship between the material self and the mental self which comprises experience.

Montaigne says that they then speak French, the language of experience for Montaigne⁶, and the language of the changing and modernizing world, opposed to the neo-Latin of philosophers. He continues the discussion with a quotation from the Latin of Lucretius describing the telling of true words as the human "persona," a word comparable to Montaigne's usage of "masque" and "countenance" as it indicates an actor's mask, is snatched away, leaving behind the material to be changed and recycled. To a less than careful reading, "manet res" is liable to look like *manes* the Roman spirits of the dead which remain after the dissolution of the body, and the missing *manes* here is a notable lack, as there is no final image to withstand the material finality of death; there is only the voice, itself a material thing subject to loss and change. Yet the speaking of that final voice is exactly what Montaigne draws upon in his own writing. By attempting to put himself

6 In a comment on his own marginalia of the books he reads, Montaigne writes, "(car quelque langue que parlent mes livres, je leur parle en la mienne)" (II.x.135). Here, again, Montaigne does not make a distinction between writing and speaking, and furthermore he indicates an ownership over his own language, not only layering a French thought process into his experience of reading, but also reserving his particular French to speak for himself. This preference of language to represent oneself is part of the way that Montaigne attempts to materialize his person, with his scribbling marginalia and also with a language that he feels best corresponds to his experience.

always in the face of and awareness of the inevitability of his own material death, he hopes that he will be able to speak true words about his experience.

The question of how one's actions will be glossed after death relates to the afterlife of the text which represents these actions. On the one hand, this text could provide material to understand experience as Montaigne intends. On the other it could represent a historical role or pattern, arbitrary and based on custom, as Montaigne condemns. The method of forming patterns creates a stagnant image and example; the presentation of experience, however, proliferates. A text that represents change and a level of incoherence in the human condition, while it is dead as a printed object and differentiated from the present experience, being something that must be interpreted rather than something doing the interpreting, does not revert to nothing, just as Lucretius's atoms reform into new figures. The words become atomic seeds which allow new interpretations to arise, for Montaigne himself, as well as others.

Regarding his own image that he seeks to present, Montaigne intends to present an image which is not only inconclusive but also unceasing in its movement through time and change: “Or les traits de ma peinture, ne se fourvoyent point, quoy qu'ils se changent et diversifient” (M 844) [“Now the lines of my painting do not go astray, though they change and vary” (Frame 740)]. Montaigne draws upon the materialization of the person as a portrait of the image of the external person and their station. However, while portraits should display the status and symbols representing intrinsic qualities of the individuals which they portray, Montaigne seeks the portrait which his verbalized self calls to mind, to be one whose lines are liable to change based on his own passage and change. Montaigne speaks to this in the *Essais* by discussing his age as he ages, through discussing the changes in his body and mentality stemming from this difference of age. This aging self, the self that adapts to its passage is not

something that a single portrait can portray. Furthermore, Montaigne writes that the wavering lines of his word portrait “ne fourvoient point,” but rather they are always correct as long as they continue to be true to Montaigne's experience. The changing and varied lines come from movement through time and the process of mutating the self from one set of contingencies to another. To this point, Montaigne writes, “Je ne peinds pas l'estre. Je peinds le passage : non un passage d'agge en autre, ou comme dict le peuple, de sept ans en sept ans : mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute. Il faut accommoder mon histoire à l'heure” (M 845) [“I do not portray [paint] being: I portray passing. Not the passing from one age to another, or, as people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history needs to be adapted to the moment” (Frame 740)]. Here Montaigne recognizes that the image varies in time, but he does not limit this to the natural ages of man, which are youth, manhood, and old age, according to the Classical tradition, between which differences and changes are most noticeable; rather, he recognizes that each moment arises from new circumstances and contingencies. In Lucretian terms, this constant change would be the constant death of the moment, and therefore the constant death of the past self, which is passage. The need to update history to the hour and the distinction drawn between being, as a set and eternal mode, and passage, as the constant movement through different modes of being, allow that the self changes constantly with the moment. Furthermore, just as the moment dies constantly, different versions of the self die as well, so that the mental self is just as liable to death as the physical and material self.

V. Experience and Materiality

Much like the ruling of eternal change, Montaigne brings about the question of eventuality and the contingencies which lead to the inevitable outcome of death as something that is determined by the fact of birth. Montaigne is not satisfied with the Christian consolation of death, in which the spirit lives on, because, whether or not the soul perishes, death is the end of experience, and therefore the end of the dynamic life itself.

Furthermore, the way that a man dies forms a part of his narrative on earth, creating of that particular man's experience, a hermeneut for understanding some part of man's experience of the world. For Montaigne, the comfort of this hermeneut is a trap, which implants a false sense of stability regarding the way that the world works. The general rule remains the same, so that the way that a man dies is part of his contingencies; however, the way that the man approaches his death is a part of the experience of his life. His experience creates an example, and examples form causes from which new contingencies may spring. Nevertheless, during a discussion of medicine, predictions of death, and preventative measures, Montaigne says of examples, “L'exemple est un miroir vague, universel et à tout sens” (M 1136) [“Example is a hazy mirror, reflecting all things in all ways” (Frame 1017)]. The physical meets the philosophic in Montaigne's condemnation of medicine. The condemnation of medicine serves as a condemnation of those who apply a particular philosophy, the medical, to the changing nature and various experiences of the body. The body in this case is the location of all changes, since changes in the mind are reactions to experiences and sensations first rendered through the body. Precedents and examples may be similar to one's experience, but the ways that they are different far outstrip the ways that they are similar. Furthermore, the interpretations of the mirror of examples create from these examples new causes as well as new effects, which did not come into

play in the original example.

Montaigne addresses the question of the similarity of examples to experience earlier on in “De L'experience” when he writes that “La ressemblance ne faict pas tant, un, comme la difference faict, autre. Nature s'est obligée à ne rien faire autre, qui ne fust dissemblable” (M 1111) [“Resemblance does not make things so much alike as difference makes them unlike. Nature has committed herself to make nothing separate that was not different” (Frame 993)]. The contingencies which allow an experience to arise are the same things that differentiate that experience from a similar manifestation. In a world of change and contingencies complete duplication is impossible. This is especially true since experience moves through time. The changing of the moment disallows the next moment to be the same as that which preceded it. The passage of time in this way creates a constant death and constant rebirth of circumstances from which events arise, each moment bringing about different, though perhaps similar contingencies. For Montaigne, the death of the moment is not a death, but a symptom of constant change. Experience works in this same fashion, such that no two experience of a thing are exactly alike. The exact same text, read at different times in an individual's life, will bring about different experiences of the text. The text as a material representation changes with the changes of its reader.

In response to Montaigne's fascination with dissimilarity and his use of unusual exempla, John Lyons points out that Montaigne seeks to use as examples those anecdotes which shock or break out of their own governing structures. He calls Montaigne's principle for this selection “rarity,” writing that, “Montaigne recognizes that even the most ordinary kind of example is in fact an exception, not the rule” (Lyons 128). Since the examples come from those parts of experience that are written down, they are already, in their quality of being deemed worth

remembering, extreme. This highlights the example's ability to present the unique or the singular. At the same time, however, these examples become subject to Montaigne's experience as he reads them and brings them into the discourse of his *Essais*. As with all forms of reading and recording, the re-experiencing of the text renders it changed from whatever original it might have been. Not only are Montaigne's exempla rare, indicating a world that does not strictly follow man's artificial rules and philosophies, but also, by reforming these examples into his *Essais*, Montaigne makes them rarer still, by creating of them an experience which they would not have had in the original, even when each reading refigures that experience.

Montaigne explains that the written versions of his *Essais* were once essays of life, or in other words, the experiences and experimentation of his changing self: “En fin, toute ceste fricassée que je barbouille ici, n'est qu'un registre des essais de ma vie” (M 1126) [“In fine, all this fricassee that I am scribbling here is nothing but a record of the essays of my life” (Frame 1007)]. Here he describes his desire to materialize his thoughts, opinions and experiences through the physical act and material representation of writing, such that the experiential “essais de ma vie” become, through the intention of materializing the self, Montaigne's *Essais* in three books. Furthermore, the language used in the above description of the *Essais* themselves compares the final project to a meaty stew, and the writing and language itself are the stew's smears, which Frame charitably translates as “scribbling.” This image relates Montaigne's point that grease marks on a napkin after feasting are liable to tell more about a man's experience of the world than a well-reasoned philosophy, because those material smears pertain to the perishing contingency of the knowable world of experience; whereas the systems built by philosophies cannot hold together the too varied customs and behaviors of the material world, and crack under the strain of material possibility and dissimilitude.

The material aspect of the *barbouille* as “scribbling” emphasizes the manuscript quality of Montaigne's writing, and further highlights the organization of each individual essay, by which he circumvents broad themes and concerns of human existence without following a set rhetoric or specific goal of argumentation. Thus the material form of the *Essais*, that which is scribbled by hand, reflects the tangential form of the argumentation therein. Montaigne's written thoughts form contingently, based on passage through his occurrences of thought and explanations of the material he addresses, rather than referring to a system of some governing logic or reason. In the same way, the form which they take on the paper is, rather than a procession of uniform calligraphy, a product of this contingent passage of the hand. Furthermore, the scribbling nature of the writing provides an argument for how Montaigne is capable of presenting experience “pure nullement corrompue et altérée par art, et par opination” (M 1126) [“pure, not at all corrupted or altered by art or theorizing” (Frame 1007)]. At face value, Montaigne claims to present himself unedited and without ulterior motive.

However, the multiple edits of the *Essais* speak to, if not a process of editing, then a process of clarifying this work. This clarification and editing rarely changes the mode of the essay, but it does speak to another underlying part of experience which works all throughout the *Essais*. Montaigne's edits include, into the record of experience, the process of re-experiencing. The new attempts to explain therein do not seek to reform the experience into a governing system, as editing for coherence might do, but rather, illuminate Montaigne's contingent reactions to his own representations of his own experiences, highlighting thus upon the changing of the self which that experience describes and illustrates. In this way, Montaigne does not only exhibit change from the first essay written to the last, nor only through the duration of the first word of an essay to its last, but also diachronically within a single essay.

For example, in the opening of “Que Philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir,” Montaigne's revisions change the sense of dying well from a stoic acceptance of the rules of nature to an epicurean embrace of the pleasures, which the allowance of the knowledge of death into the actions of life can afford. Both the stoic and epicurean philosophies emphasize dying well, since dying is an inescapable inevitability, and acceptance of the inevitability of death allows one to live well. However, through the later inclusion of the epicurean school of thought, which Montaigne interprets as the man's goal of pleasure in life, the tone of living well through dying well changes, between the different editions of the *Essais*, mirroring the changed experiences and opinions of Montaigne's life. Montaigne opens the essay in the vein of stoicism, beginning his discussion by paraphrasing Cicero and moving quickly into Christian scripture. Before the revisions which Montaigne made after the 1588 publication of all three books of the *Essais*, he capped off a discussion, that all opinions in the world agree with the idea that living well means dying well, with the line “Voilà pourquoi toutes les règles⁷ se rencontrent et conviennent à cet article” (M 84) [“And that is why all rules meet and agree at this point” (Frame 68)]. Here the question of dying well is followed by an avowal by the rules of disparate philosophies, which affirm that seeking enjoyment in life and attempting to get rid of the fear of death is important. In the revisions made after the 1588 publication, marginalia hand written against the printed words of his own Bordeaux edition, Montaigne inserts between the introduction of the problem of dying well and exemplary rules by which he exposes responses to this need, a discussion of pleasure. He inserts into the first paragraph, regarding all the opinions of the world, “le plaisir est nostre but” (M 83) [“pleasure is our goal” (Frame 67)], and justifies his new appeal to pleasure calling all the dissent among philosophers regarding the attainment of pleasure in life

⁷ Note here that the word choice of “règles” is a later addition as well.

merely verbal or in other words rhetorical.

The epicurean influence of this change stands out with Montaigne's use of the word "volupté:" "Quoy qu'ils dient, en la vertu mesme le dernier but de nostre visée c'est la volupté" (M 83) ["Whatever they say, in virtue itself the ultimate goal we aim at is voluptuousness" (Frame 67)]. Montaigne takes the presence of "voluptas" (Lucretius I.1) or pleasure, an appositive for Venus in the first line of Lucretius's proem to *De Rerum Natura*, as another name for nature itself, that which brings forth life, such that virtue becomes, rather than asceticism and abstention, the seeking of pleasure itself. Only seeking pleasure justifies life and creates further experience and new figures of life. As material fruition is that which allows all things to be unique or dissimilar in manifestation and experience, the inserting of volupté here as pleasure not only inserts into the originally stoic discourse the physical, particularly bodily, dimension of experience, but also the allowance for diverse and contingent outcomes in the experience of life, in spite of the inevitability of death. Montaigne's revision here, from after his 1588 publication, which summarizes the goal of living as a goal for pleasure, speaks to an experience which the younger, already published Montaigne had not yet undergone.

Here Montaigne is not only interpreting philosophers, and reinterpreting them from a different time in his life than the time when he originally wrote about them, but he is also reinterpreting himself and adding new experiences and interpretations to the old. The hybrid quality of Montaigne's marginalia, his prolific manuscript set beside the printed versions of his own words, puts the Montaigne of present experience into dialogue with a Montaigne of past experience who has been rendered into an object of ink and paper. The printed quality of this Montaigne of the past, as well as Montaigne's own acknowledgment of change in human process, renders the past self essentially dead, like the other exempla whom Montaigne cites and

explains. By materializing himself, he allows his past to die, and thus his past experiences inform his present, as his present continues in its own experience. There is however, a difference in the way Montaigne uses himself as an exemplum and the way he dialogues with others whose works he uses. Montaigne is able to remember as he re-experiences his own words, the sense of those things which he intended to say, and thus, even as he contradicts his past self he clarifies the experience of the text.

Without markings within the text to indicate the different times in which Montaigne made his revisions and verbalized the various versions of his thoughts, the difference between these times and the process of change which brought them about would be opaque in the printed medium. Having a key of when these revisions took place preserves in the printed medium the simulation of a palimpsest of Montaigne's experience, so that the personal changes which manifest even within each essay are visible. Had the dating of the revisions not been preserved, the printed form of Montaigne's materialization would have obscured this understanding of the process, but that would not stop the *Essais* from becoming subject to reformation through the reader's interpretation, nor would it make Montaigne's process of revising any less part of his experience of personal self-materialization.

VI. Immaterial Philosophy and Material Death

In “Que Philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir” Montaigne discusses that the goal of a philosophy, which does not embrace experience as a mode of gaining knowledge, is to separate the mind from the body, thus dulling the vitality of life. As noted above, he begins this essay in a stoic discourse earlier in his life, and ends it, when he is older in an Epicurean discourse. Both philosophies agree, however, that all life ends in death, and, furthermore, that to live well means

to reconcile oneself with the knowledge that death is inevitable. In light of the eventfulness of Montaigne's world, in which patterns of event are due to human interpretation, but material circumstances are based on contingency, the moment of one's death is unpredictable. There are, of course, times in which one would be more likely to die than others, but that should present no comfort: “Et par consequent, si elle nous faict peur, c'est un subject continuel de tourment, et qui ne se peut aucunement soulager. Il n'est lieu d'où elle nous vienne. Nous pouvons tourner sans cesse la teste çà et là comme en pays suspect” (M 85) [“And consequently, if it frightens us, it is a continual source of torment which cannot be alleviated at all. There is not place from which it may not come to us; we may turn our heads constantly this way and that as in a suspicious country” (Frame 68)]. However, just as love and death are entwined in Lucretius, Montaigne takes the opportunity for death at every moment as a reminder of the possibility for life and pleasure at every moment. To abstain from pleasure in life because of the fear of death is the same as letting an abstract concept rule one's life.

Death becomes a theoretical constant, a philosophy; whereas in the life of experience, the more the body warns of death, the more the mind knows to understand life. Here already in the first book of the *Essais* Montaigne begins to distrust doctors for their philosophical approaches to the body: “D'avantage, pauvre fol que tu es, qui t'a estably les termes de ta vie ? Tu te fondes sur les contes des Medecins. Regarde plustost l'effect et l'experience” (M 86) [“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” (Frame 70)]. Listening to the predictions of doctors, who attempt to build a system similar to those of philosophies, allows one to forget that each life is unique according to its own track of contingencies. Montaigne returns to lambast the medical profession at the end of his *Essais* as well, in “De L'experience,” for the attempt to

preserve health causes death during life by forcing patients to abstain from experience: “Et plains plusieurs gentils-hommes, qui par la sottise de leurs medecins, se sont mis en chartre tous jeunes et entiers” (M 1132) [“And I am sorry for several gentlemen who, by the stupidity of their doctors, have made prisoners of themselves, though still young and sound in health” (Frame 1013)]. The doctors sever the body, the tool of experience, from the ability to experience due to untrustworthy predictions based on medical philosophies. Attempting to preserve the body from death creates in the lived experience a fear of death akin to being dead while living. When one does not experience due to the fear of death, one loses out on pleasure, severing the bond between love and death which allows the world to be creative.

Timothy Hampton discusses that in regard to Montaigne's exempla “the body emerges as the material signifier of the condition of the soul” (Hampton 171), such that in Montaigne's reading, the hero or philosopher in question has two faces. The first face remains at the level of the example's words of philosophy. The second face is that which happens to their body or their material form. The two may be in harmony, but Montaigne rarely shows them to be, and he picks exempla whose material forms undermine their philosophic interests, such as his catalog of clergymen who die while defecating. Such a concern for the distinction between verbal self-representation and material bodily form shines a light on Montaigne's own need to discuss his body and its reactions to his discussions, not only throughout the range of his essays, but also throughout the range of his age. Fully aware that his physical presentation could undermine his literary self-representation, Montaigne takes care to materialize this body and its physical experiences verbally as well as his thoughts and judgments.

When Hampton mentions the correlation between body and soul above, he is not ascribing to Montaigne the Medieval sense that a man's literary representation of his outer visage

matching his moral conduct. Such a characterization of the body would force it into a historical role, as a body which is ontologically correlative to a moral state does not have within its representation the processes of experience. Instead, the soul indicated here is a reflection of the individual experience, and the body is able to reflect it because it bears the markers of those experiences, whether that includes the passage of time, war, illness, or melancholy: “By focusing on the body, Montaigne brings the discussion of exemplarity from the realm of abstract narratives . . . , back into the domain of narrative as lived history” (172). The scarring that Hampton goes on to discuss as Montaigne's particular fascination in his exempla emphasizes a representation which settles these individuals in the past. One does not read of the process of their scarring; rather, one sees the scar upon the body and infers the possible experience undergone. Nevertheless, this is a past full of the kind of experiences which the medical profession vainly seeks for its patients to avoid.

As noted above, the various drafts and manuscripted edits of the *Essais* depict Montaigne's changes in personal judgment and opinion throughout his life. At the same time, these intellectual changes, must, according to Montaigne's own philosophy, be motivated by the material experiences which brings them to light. Often enough, the experience which Montaigne discusses are physical, such as his description of aging and the vitality of his desire in “Sur des vers de Virgile,” or his description of the contrast between pain and pleasure in regards to his kidney stones in “De l'experience.” As a self-identified old man, Montaigne discusses his proclivities in his old age as an inversion of the proclivities he had in his youth:

Je suis à present en un autre estat. Les conditions de le vieillesse ne m'advertissent que trop, m'assagissent et me preschent. De l'excez de la gayeté, je suis tombé en celuy de la severité : plus fascheux. . . . Les ans me font leçon tous les jours, de froideur, et de temperance : Ce corps fuyt le desreiglement, et le craint : il est à son tour de guider l'esprit vers la reformation. Il regente à son tour : et plus

rudement et imperieusement : Il ne laisse pas un heure, ny dormant ny veillant, chaumer d'instruction, de mort, de patience, et de pœnitence. Je me deffens de la temperance, comme j'ay fait autresfois de la volupté : elle me tire trop arriere, et jusques à la stupidité. Or je veux estre maistre de moy, à tout sens. (M 882)

[At present I am in another state. The conditions of old age warn me, sober me, and preach to me only too much. From an excess of gaity I have fallen into an excess of severity, which is more disagreeable. ... The years lecture me every day in coldness and temperance. This body of mine flees disorder and fears it. It is my body's turn to guide my mind toward reform. It dominates in turn, and more roughly and imperiously. It does not leave me a single hour, sleeping or waking, unoccupied with instruction about death, patience, and penitence. I defend myself against temperance as I once did against sensual pleasure; for it pulls me too far back, even to the point of insensibility. Now I want to be master of myself in every direction. (Frame 774)]

The body's age forces a restraint on the mind, which Montaigne consciously attempts to balance.

The mind attempts its control conversely with the body's nature, so that, when Montaigne is younger and his body is more likely to pursue pleasure, his mind is more drawn to the stoic influence. However, now that Montaigne is older and his body forces him to be more severe, seeking pleasure less easily and naturally, he masters his mind to remind himself that seeking pleasure itself is a virtue that allows the creation of new experience. This change as Montaigne ages from a mental proclivity for stoicism to a mental proclivity for epicureanism, discussed above in the material form of the *Essais*, is reliant on the physical changes of the body and the bodies experience of its change in age. As Montaigne draws closer to death physically, he seeks a philosophy that draws him more into life, such that the physical body is a necessary part of the mental process and a mental experience, not only for its ability to sense the outside world, but also for its ability to explain the self materially.

This loss of process in the past is something else of which Montaigne is aware and attempts to address in his own essays, allowing him to represent the changes and even scarring of

his own body in the process of these physical changes: “Je veux représenter le progrès de mes humeurs, et qu'on voye chascune pièce en sa naissance. Je prendrois plaisir d'avoir commencé plus tost, et à reconnoître le train de mes mutations” (M 796) [“I want to represent the course of my humors, and I want people to see each part at its birth. It would give me pleasure to have begun earlier, and to be able to trace the course of my mutations” (Frame 696)]. The ability to record the changes of his material body and its effect on his self makes the intellectual changes which result from these physical processes, melancholy in particular, a real experience. Without the writing of the self, the body's changes are purely physical and present, yet recording the way these changes affect the mind, allows the manuscript of the self to be a present experience rather than a historical role.

Montaigne follows this desire to describe himself as a present process with a statement of his physical health. This discussion confides a concern about the kidney stones that he suffers: “Ils ne m'en eussent sceu faire, que j'eusse en plus grande horreur, dès mon enfance : C'estoit à point nommé, de tous les accidens de la vieillesse, celui que je craignois le plus” (M 797) [“They could not have given me one [disease] that had had in greater horror since my childhood. It was precisely, of all the accidents of old age, the one I feared the most” (Frame 697)]. Here Montaigne admits to fearing something that could potentially cause his death. He is making his prediction based on his father's death:

Il est à croire que je dois à mon pere ceste qualité pierreuse : car il mourut merueilleusement affligé d'une grosse pierre, qu'il avoit en la vessie : Il ne s'apperceut de son mal, que la soixante septiesme an de son aage : et avant cela il n'en avoit eu aucune menasse ou ressentiment, aux riens, aux costez, ny ailleurs : et avoit vescu jusques lors, en une heureuse santé et bien peu sujet à maladies, et dura encores sept ans en ce mal, trainant une fin de vie bien douloureuse. ... Que les medecins excusent un peu ma liberté : car par ceste mesme infusion et insinuation fatale, j'ay receu la haine et le mespris de leur doctrine. Ceste antipathie, que j'ay à leur art,

m'est hereditaire. (M 801-2)

[It is probable that I owe this stony propensity to my father, for he died extraordinarily afflicted with a large stone he had in his bladder. He did not perceive his disease until his sixty-seventh year, and before he had had no threat or symptom of it, in his loins, his sides or elsewhere. And he had lived until then in a happy state of health, and very little subject to diseases; and he lasted seven years more with the ailment, painfully dragging out the last years of his life. ... Let the doctors excuse my liberty a bit, for by this same fatal infusion I have received my hatred for their teachings. The antipathy I have for their art is hereditary with me. (Frame 701-2)]

Montaigne is counting the time that his father spent in the throes of his illness, while knowing that such counting has no diagnostic applicability for his own life. Similarly he plays upon his father's name Pierre, with the description of his fatal disease as "pierreuse," as if recalling some diagnostic quality of fate, before having to banish it as well. Montaigne discusses that since his father's disease was unforeseen by doctors, and since it did not affect his father until late in his life, and therefore could not be predicted by the medical expertise of the day, the medical predictions are not trustworthy, being neither consistent nor based on experience. Montaigne's dealing with his own kidney stones is based on the experience of his father's disease, and therefore he realizes that his concern regarding whether he might also die from a kidney stone is both founded and unfounded at the same time. For on the one hand, experience tells Montaigne that he is liable to die from the same disease, but on the other hand, experience also tells him that such a death would be unpredictable, because the disease was such a surprise to his father and the timing of the disease lacked a sense of inevitability.

The question of being a new figure, a variation on the old, is not just true within the abstraction of text and interpretation. Just as Lucretius made his example with genetics, for Montaigne, it is a physical reality, as he finds himself resembling his father and even suffering his father's disease. The variation, and the uniqueness of the event, then, is the key, for, while

Montaigne suffers his father's illness, it is impossible that he would suffer also his father's death. Change and variation's ability to break patterns in this case consoles Montaigne, as does the realization that he cannot predict his own death based on a pattern. He would rather live with death each day and each moment than follow a pattern which would render his own death infertile and uncreative of new outcomes.

In order to combat the fear of dying, Montaigne uses the essays to track the changes in his aging process. This happens both bodily and mentally. For instance, Montaigne represents the passing of a kidney stone as a brief death, and finds the after effect, the rebirth to be ecstatic, characterizing the process as a “sudden change”: “Mais est-il rien doux, au prix de cette soudaine mutation ; quand d'une douleur extreme, je viens par le voidange de ma pierre, à recouvrer, comme d'un esclair, la belle lumiere de la santé, si libre et si pleine : comme il advient en noz soudaines et plus aspres coliques ?” (M 1141) [“But is there anything so sweet as that sudden change, when from extreme pain, by the voiding of my stone, I come to recover as if by lightning the beautiful light of health, so free and so full, as happens in our sudden and sharpest attacks of colic?” (Frame 1021)]. Montaigne emphasizes the suddenness both of the onset of the kidney stone and the relief of its passing. The suddenness of this minor approach to death is reminiscent of the suddenness of the onset of Montaigne's father's kidney stones, that they showed up for him in this midst of his perfect health. However, for Montaigne the stone passes and leaves behind it the exhilaration of a renewed awareness of life through his awareness of death. While these changes do not indicate for Montaigne when or how he might expect to die, they do allow him to see the inevitability of death as a blessing that brings forth new experiences in life. The constant change of the self, which is particularly motivated by the changes of the body, indicate a constant death and rebirth of the self even before the final death.

VII. Conclusion

Montaigne's decision to live in the present and record, in his writings, his present moment does not seek to escape death, as if death were something he could relegate to an unknown future; instead, it is a way of inculcating death into the present by seeing the constant fluctuation of the material world as it changes form. Change becomes a more comfortable word than death, because it infuses the death with the understanding of rebirth. In one of the later edits to the *Essais*, Montaigne, retroactively, states his purpose of representing presentness in a material form:

À faute de memoire naturelle, j'en forge de papier. Et comme quelque nouveau symptome survient à mon mal, je l'escris : d'où il advient, qu'à cette heure, estant quasi passé par toute sorte d'exemples : si quelque estonnement me menace : feuilletant ces petits brevets descousus, comme des feuilles Sybillines, je ne faux plus de trouver où me consoler, de quelque prognostique favorable, en mon experience passée. (M 1141)

[For lack of a natural memory I make one of paper, and as some new symptom occurs in my disease, I write it down. Whence it comes that at the present moment, when I have passed through virtually every sort of experience, if some grave stroke threatens me, by glancing through these little notes, disconnected like the Sibyl's leaves, I never fail to find grounds for comfort in some prognostic from my past experience. (Frame 1021)]

Again here Montaigne refers to his own handwriting and marginalia as if it were an extension of both his mental and material self. While he shuns the predictions of doctors, he trusts his investigations into his own experience as the only form of knowledge he can truly gain in the world. The writing of his experience is a comfort to him, not only materializing himself as a process, but also giving him some book form of his own interpretation of the world. Just as one might use a wisdom book to understand why things come to pass in the world around

themselves, Montaigne uses his own *Essais*, including, therein, his own interpretations of others' wisdom which he has experienced in his reading and has sought to preserve. Yet he calls his prognostics "feuilles Sybillines," as if even his own notations of his experiences are in actuality misleading riddles. Here he reminds himself that he cannot have faith in the prognostics of the *Essais* though he may find comfort there; the true consolation come from the passage, the ability to look back on one's present, if only by means of a paper memory, and add to that passage.

In change, Montaigne senses death in himself. The eventfulness of his person and its ability to adapt itself to its physical welfare remind him constantly that there is no one single death. The turn to theories of pleasure later on in Montaigne's life reveals an experience of personal sterility in physical form; however, he finds, in the experience of writing about this, that his judgments are still creative, and his processes are just as viable in old age as in life. The materialization of Montaigne's self, therefore, is not only a project of reclamation, it is also a present experiment with the changes of nature within the human condition. Montaigne seeks to see himself process, and finding the changes, or the minor deaths in the midst of that process, makes the prospect of future death easier to face.

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